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1. Introduction

1 To the Poles in 1919, the name Woodrow Wilson spelled freedom, while “the name Herbert Hoover spelled life.”1 Herbert Hoover first became involved in organizing relief for Poland in 1915. During World War I, volunteer Polish organizations, both in German-occupied Warsaw and in the United States, appealed to Hoover as chairman of the Commission for Relief in Belgium to provide aid in food and clothing similar to that which was made available to enemy-occupied northeastern France. The first effort to assist Poles living under German occupation came in November 1915 when Hoover, with German acquiescence, sent his senior associate, Dr. Vernon Kellogg, to assess the severity of the situation.2

2 Hoover wrote to Sir Edward Grey, the British Foreign Secretary, on December 22, 1915, a formal proposal to help the Poles by allowing foodstuffs to be imported into Poland via Rotterdam. Although he received a negative reaction from Secretary Grey on February 6, 1916, Hoover, with the cooperation of Frederick C. Walcott of the Rockefeller Foundation, arranged a plan to feed four million destitute people in Polish cities. United States Ambassador Walter Hines Page submitted the project to Grey on February 21, but prolonged negotiations with the Germans and the British bore no results. In early April 1916, Hoover again made an appeal to Grey on behalf of Poland. A scheme was drafted between the American relief societies and the German government by which America would feed Poland until the next harvest. However, on April 20, Sir Cecil Spring-Rice telegraphed that “Germany could not accept the demand of His Majesty’s government that Polish foodstuffs should not be used for the army of occupation.”3 Germany was also
certain that it could maintain the population on a subsistence level until the next harvest. The British-American plan to feed the Poles while living under German occupation thus completely failed, but Hoover did not quit. He continued to press the Allies to come to an agreement with the Germans, but the Allies, especially the British, argued that they could not send food into enemy-occupied territory for it would nullify their plan to use the naval blockade to starve the Germans into peace.

2. The U.S. Enters the War

The entrance of the United States into the war against the Central Powers in 1917 destroyed all chances for Hoover’s intercession. Immediately after the US entrance into the war, Berlin informed the Rockefeller Foundation that they could admit no relief under American control into Poland. Soon after, Viscount Grey was approached by the Comite General de Secours pour les Victimes de la Guerre en Pologne in neutral Switzerland with another appeal to allow the importation of foodstuffs from America into Poland via neutral Switzerland. Yet on July 29, 1917, the Swiss committee was informed by the British government that the importation of food into German-occupied territory could not be permitted until the Germans ceased requisitioning food in Poland. The German government promised to stop requisitions but, according to the British, never fulfilled this promise.

Viscount Grey claimed that a trustworthy informant indicated that the German soldiers in Poland had orders to “take away the last piece of bread and the last head of cattle from their legitimate owner.” Grey further made the argument that besides the usual wholesale requisitions of foodstuffs behind the armies as they advanced, the establishment of bodies such as the German Import Company, which imported Polish food into Germany, plainly showed the German intention to methodically exhaust Poland of its food supplies and make use of its control of these stores to pilfer money from the Polish people.

Viscount Grey pointed out that the evidence for his suspicions was conveniently summed up in the statement made to the German Reichstag by the German Deputy Minister of War, General von Wandel: “We owe it in great part to the skillful and untiring activity of the economic committees that our soldiers in the field are fed as well as they are, and that large stocks, which have made it easier to feed our people, have been brought from the occupied territories into Germany. The officers who co-operate in this work have rendered a great service to the Fatherland.” As Grey revealed, the German leadership ordered their soldiers to take from the already hungry Polish people. The British figured that if the Germans stole from the Poles then they would not hesitate to take the food the Allies sent to Poland. Furthermore, the British held that it was the German responsibility to feed the occupied Polish population but instead of relieving the Polish need, the Germans were causing more need. The British concluded that if Allied food was sent to the Polish population it would in effect help the German war effort.

Even with the armistice in 1918, the Allies still deferred from making a decision on sending aid to the Poles. In the meantime, the Polish population was starving, and British troops complained that German children were also starving. The need for relief was there, but the Allies would not act, for fear of a resurgence of German aggression. The British, French and Italian governments objected to all relief proposals. Therefore, Hoover and the United States instituted relief without Allied support. Aware of Poland’s...
urgent needs, Hoover chose to act immediately after the November 1918 establishment of an independent Polish government. The easiest way to do so was via the relief organizations he had already established to feed the people of Belgium during World War I.

The major problem, besides lack of Allied support, facing the relief mission was that American food had to be delivered to the port of Danzig (Gdansk), which required speedy implementation of the “free and secure access to the sea” clause of Wilson’s Thirteenth Point. The political position of Danzig following World War I was a major cause of tension between the Germans and Poles. After the signing of the Treaty of Versailles, Danzig (a city ruled by Germans for centuries) became a “free city” under protection of the United Nations, essentially splitting the Prussian state of Germany in two to give Poland access to the Baltic Sea. Kellogg wrote on January 6, 1919:

While the Poles seem to be in possession of Dantzig itself, and British and American War Ships are in the harbor, the country behind Dantzig up to Polish frontier is in hands of Germans and no movements of supplies or personnel between Poland and Dantzig can be made without definite arrangement of the Armistice Commission.

Nevertheless, Hoover was determined to persevere with a plan for food relief.

At that time emergency situations existed in the city of Lwow (south-west Poland), which was being besieged by the Ukrainian Nationalist Army, and in the south western coal-mining area of Dabrowa Gornicza, where clashes were occurring between Poles and Germans over land rich in natural resources. As a result Herbert Hoover, without Allied support, arranged for special children’s milk shipments by rail from Switzerland during the first week of February 1919. By February 17, the first three ships filled with food, financed by the Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) and the Polish National Department of America, arrived in Danzig loaded with wheat flour. By February 19, the flour arrived in Warsaw.

On February 24, 1919, an executive order by President Wilson created the American Relief Administration (ARA), under Hoover’s directorship, and authorized an expenditure of $5 million from Wilson’s discretionary funds to employ the US Grain Corporation for the purchase and transportation of supplies from American to European ports. By March 17, 1919, Hoover had ARA inspectors in Poland examining the food situation. They confirmed the existence of very serious conditions in Poland due to lack of proper food for children. According to Herbert Hoover in a letter written to the first ARA director in Poland, Colonel William R. Grove, investigations indicated “that in the cities and industrial centers not only is it impossible for working men and women to obtain the food which is required to maintain their children in such health as to insure growth into strong man- and woman-hood, but the mortality among these children is reported to be so large as to warrant the sympathy and active aid of the entire civilized world.” This prompted the ARA to establish a Children’s Relief Bureau at its headquarters in Paris, and they prepared to assign personnel to assist the Polish Government. The ARA proposed during the months of March, April, May and June 1919 to donate, on credit, $200,000 a month for the purpose of feeding children in Poland. Part of the fund came from the $100 million US congressional appropriation in the form of credit for relief of Europe. The ARA also looked to the Polish Government and the Polish people for considerable financial support. The money value of the American allotment, together with funds donated by the Polish Government, was converted into cocoa, sugar, milk, flour and fats suitable for children; the supplies were imported into the country by the ARA and then distributed.
3. The Goals of the ARA

The ARA’s plan was to provide relief to Poland until the country recovered from the destruction of World War I, which they thought would be in a relatively short period of time. Hoover and the ARA organizers intended to wrap up ARA services by August 1, 1919; however, relief was still necessary after that date. Therefore, the ARA sought to transfer gradually the responsibility to an ARA created Polish relief organization named the Polish Children’s Relief Committee (CKPD) to operate and maintain the work until normal life in the country was re-established. In the first few months, the ARA donated and shipped foodstuffs for children from America to Danzig. Later, the food was supplied on credit. The Polish Government was to provide rail transportation for supplies from Danzig and from the various railroad stations in Poland to the points of final distribution. Local relief committees established by the CKPD were to provide the necessary facilities for supplying the food to the children, including kitchens, dining rooms, fuel and other equipment.

Local committees were established in each city, industrial centers and many villages. The committees were drawn from the local population, and every member devoted personal service to the work. The ARA provided experts as were needed to assist in the work and used inspectors to make sure that the food was distributed and cooked to ARA requirements. The ARA established standards for food preparation, for they had scientifically worked out how many calories each child needed to receive each day. The soups had to have the correct water-to-ingredients ratio, the bread had to have the specified amount of flour, and the milk had to be diluted in equal amounts of water. The ARA wasted nothing and organized a system that made certain that the local committees worked by the same standard.

One meal a day was provided for destitute children. When possible these meals were furnished in school buildings. This practice meant an additional incentive to the parents to keep their children in school and contributed materially to the re-establishment of normal life in the cities and industrial centers. When schools were not available, the ARA used army barracks, orphanages, homes and even dugouts when nothing else was available. Special canteens were laid out for infants and nursing mothers.

The general plan that originated in Paris for Poland, as well as for the other European countries receiving ARA relief for children, included the following:

With the ARA donation as a nucleus, first national, then regional, then local governments should be made to share as large a part as possible in the relief. It is suggested that the money from the ARA and the national government be employed for imported foodstuffs only, whereas the local committees would stand the expense of installation and maintenance of milk dispensaries and soup kitchens for children.

Private resources should be called upon as far as possible, both in money and in services. All members of national, regional and local committees should be volunteers. The women who preside at the school kitchens and who actually serve soup to the children should be volunteers. While making use of the volunteer help to the fullest extent possible, the relief work should be run on clear cut business lines. Paid directors, inspectors and clerks should be judiciously distributed so as to give the system permanency and insure its operation in an efficient and economical way.

The desire of the American Relief Administration is that we should aid the children of the countries in distress, not only during the present emergency but that the
organization formed now should persist in the form of a permanent Child Welfare Board supported by the national government. To this end, the Children's Relief work should be carried on under one of the Ministries, preferably that of Public Health. At the same time, the organization should have the greatest possible freedom and initiative, and should not be tied up with any government bureaucratic system, which might hinder both its speed of getting under way and its policy of expansion. While the Ministry is the general guide, the organization still must be thoroughly "popular."

At the time the children's relief work is started with the American gift as the foundation, request should be made that all organizations now caring for children and mothers combine so as to work together in the same direction. If, for instance, there are societies for furnishing milk to babies, or for feeding needy children in schools, or for care of orphans and so on, these should be united nationally, regionally and locally by representatives from these various societies who will become members of the national regional and local committees. In general, three principles should be laid down for the formation of committees, they should be as small as possible, should consist only of persons actively participating in the work and should include when possible a physician.21

Hoover made sure that all relief organizations inside and outside the United States were running their relief through the ARA. The American and Russian Red Cross units in Poland distributed supplies through the ARA; and the Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), the YMCA and YWCA were all connected with the ARA. The Polish government had instructions that all relief from the United States, whether monetary or material was to be channeled through the ARA organization. In 1920, the Polish government attempted to raise relief funds outside the American Mission. Hoover wrote the following in regard to this attempt:

Any other appeal will completely confuse [the] situation and largely reduce expected donations. We want to make it quite clear to [the] Polish government that unless they cease these periodic independent efforts we cannot expect to meet child feeding requirements and will withdraw.22

Hoover believed that the relief of Poland would not be efficient if different organizations were working separately from each other. Hoover envisioned the ARA as the master relief organization working with other relief agencies to provide aid to Poland without confusion or delay.

One rule that Hoover specifically expressed was that members of the ARA were to “Keep entirely out of politics. There are political missions assigned to political work, and we should forward to them any matters of interest in their work, or to the advantage of Poland in the general Allied cause, but your work is entirely that of relief.”23 Hoover’s main purpose in providing relief to Poland was to supply during the period of emergency one daily meal to the neediest children. These meals were composed of food especially adapted to the nutrition of children, and each one had an energy value of 500 calories.24 Hoover also wanted to develop a permanent Polish child welfare organization which would provide for the needy children of Poland after the ARA departure.25

Although the ARA’s fundamental mission in Poland was children’s relief, because of the horrible conditions, it was necessary to feed adults too. This was accomplished primarily through the food draft system, which was food bought by friends and family members outside of Poland for the relief of the people inside Poland. American residents could buy food drafts to send to relatives at twenty thousand banks in America. They could pick either a $10 dollar draft for 24 ½ pounds of flour, 10 pounds of beans, 8 pounds of bacon, and 8 cans of milk, or a $50 dollar package with 140 pounds of flour, 50 pounds of beans,
16 pounds of bacon, 15 pounds of lard, 12 pounds of corned beef, and 48 cans of milk. For the Jewish population there was also the option of buying a kosher package that substituted the meat with cottonseed oil. The needy Poles received a ticket for food in the mail. The addressee could take the food draft to any ARA warehouse and receive the food immediately after confirmation. A small profit was made by the sale of these drafts which was used to help continue to feed the Polish children through the ARA.26

During the winter and spring of 1919-1920, the ARA mission in Warsaw brought into Poland over 300,000 tons of American foodstuffs, which were furnished on credit to the new government of Poland. In the beginning of operations, the distribution of these foodstuffs was accomplished only rapidly enough to supply relief to the neediest industrial centers. Outside the distribution of food, the ARA worked to reestablish rail and telegraphic communications between neighboring countries so as to restore their previous economic relations as rapidly as possible.27

4. The Creation of the American Relief Administration Children’s Fund

We see very few children playing in the streets of Warsaw. Why were they not playing? The answer was simple and sufficient: The children of Warsaw were not strong enough to play in the streets. They could not run; many could not walk; some could not even stand up. Their weak little bodies were bones clothed with skin, but not muscles. They simply could not play.28

When Vernon Kellogg sent this report to Herbert Hoover describing the conditions of Warsaw in 1919, the description of the children touched Hoover’s heart and led to a particular concentration of his efforts on behalf of the suffering children.29

The ARA, under the leadership of Colonel Grove, provided relief to Poland for the amount of time allocated and in July 1919 began to wind down its activities, placing the relief in the hands of the Polish Welfare organization, the CKPD. The Paris office of the ARA withdrew the larger part of its American personnel from Poland during the month of July. The American personnel of the Mission were gradually released beginning July 10. On July 20, only three associates remained, Lieutenant Maurice Pate, Lieutenant WS Johnson and Lieutenant HC Walker. On July 14, Colonel Grove, Chief of the ARA Mission to Poland, having terminated all matters of general food relief, left Warsaw.30

Under pressure from the Polish Prime Minister, Ignacy Paderewski, the reports by inspectors, and the obvious need created by Poland’s extension of its control to eastern territories previously under Bolshevik and Ukrainian control,31 Hoover decided to continue relief for an unspecified amount of time in Poland, but under a different name. On July 12, Edgar Rickard, Joint Director of the ARA, announced the formation of the American Relief Administration European Children’s Fund (ARAECF), which would continue as an American charitable organization, distinct from a governmental organization, continuing the work of child feeding begun in Europe by the American Relief Administration.32 The funding of the ARA was simply transferred to the ARAECF.32

During August 1919, Hoover visited Poland, where he carefully inspected the children’s need for food and clothing at the ARA kitchens. He travelled to the eastern frontier of Poland where he saw first hand the effects of the war in Poland upon agriculture and industry during the past five years. By the time of Hoover’s visit, over 500,000 children were benefiting daily from the supplementary ARA meal. For the ARA to discard these
children to their fate at a time when there was still a severe food shortage in Poland. Hoover therefore advised that the relief action continue through the winter and spring of 1920. However, since the credits appropriated by the US Congress were then already exhausted, the work had to proceed through the charity of the American people. According to a pamphlet issued to the ARA stockholders, the mission in Poland had primarily the following tasks:

- the building up of a native organization for the distribution of the relief material sent from America, as well as of that contributed locally in Poland,
- the distribution of food in Poland during 1920 and a part of 1921, through the “food draft” system,
- the distribution of miscellaneous relief gifts to needy persons of the intellectual class, to university students and professors, and in 1920, at the time of the Bolshevik invasion, to refugees,
- [and later] serving as one of the communication links between London and the ARA operation in Russia, as well as arranging for the transport across Poland of a part of the relief supplies destined for Russia.4

After Grove’s departure, Lieutenant Pate remained in charge of the relief effort, and, from the middle of July on, the American Mission carried out its work. At the same time, Colonel Carlson, the General ARA Inspector for Children’s Relief work in Eastern Europe, undertook an inspection trip to the southwestern part of Poland. As a result, more personnel were hired to combat the problems of shipping and feeding in the plebiscite areas, difficulties which could be overcome with more Americans in Poland.46

Another aspect of change due to Hoover’s visit was the institution of a child clothing relief program by the ARA. According to a promotional pamphlet, “The sight of 25,000 children in bare feet, winding their way over Warsaw’s pavements to Mokotowski Park for a demonstration of appreciation to the American people … convinced [Hoover] of the necessity of taking prompt action in furnishing clothing and shoes to safeguard the life and health of these children.” Thus, a program was created for shipping clothing supplies to Poland, textiles that would create 700,000 overcoats, pairs of shoes and pairs of stockings.48

In late September 1919, Walter Lyman Brown, ARA Director for Europe, and William Palmer Fuller, Jr., Assistant ARA Director for Europe, visited Poland to determine just how many children needed clothing and food during the winter. The men proved to be the backbone of the Polish mission from the fall of 1919 to the midsummer of 1920. Fuller stayed in Poland after the visit and took over as Chief of the ARA mission to Poland. He left Poland only after contracting polio in late July of 1920, when Warsaw was thought to be in imminent danger of Bolshevik invasion.49 After Fuller’s retirement, PS Baldwin was made Chief of the ARA activities in Poland, eventually to be succeeded by Captain JC Quinn.

Fuller’s and Brown’s “recommendations for relief were submitted to the head office in New York, where it was definitely decided to provide rations through the winter and spring for the feeding of 1,200,000 children and to provide clothing to 700,000 children.”50 Several months later, as the Polish army moved farther east and the extent of the need in these areas was made aware to the ARA staff, they increased the number of children to be fed to 1,300,000.51 The feeding and clothing operation was carried on over the entire territory occupied by Poland, except Posnania, near the north western German border, where need did not exist.
From the beginning, the ARA Mission in Poland arranged for the importation of foodstuffs and other material for children’s relief and transmitted the aid to the CKPD for distribution. They supervised the CKPD by a system of American inspectors and, on the basis of local receipts, made a complete accounting of all material furnished either by the ARA or by the Polish government for the relief action. For inspection purposes, the Americans were assigned to districts and traveled extensively to see that the primary principles were adhered to. At the outset of the operation, the following essential conditions were established by joint agreement between the ARA and the Central Polish Committee: “that foodstuffs be distributed only to the neediest children in Poland without regard to religion, nationality, politics or any other factor except the physical condition of the child; that each child and nursing mother should have the right to receive one ration of food daily, and that rations be served in prepared form and be eaten by children and nursing mothers at the kitchen.” At the height of the ARA mission in Poland during the summer of 1920, 28,000 Poles assisted the American organization in the vast feeding effort and because of this use of native employees and volunteers, the overhead expenses of the ARA were under 1.5 percent.

5. Activities of the Polish Organization

The State Children’s Relief Committee (CKPD) was established at a meeting on March 23, 1919 between representatives of the ARA and Prime Minister Ignacy Paderewski, to be under the protection of the Polish Ministry of Health. Colonel Grove, referring to Mrs. Ignacy Paderewski’s profound interest in philanthropic work, proposed that she accept the presidency of the CKPD. A committee of nine members was created at once, composed of members of various philanthropic and social circles in Poland. The Minister of Health, Mr. Janiszewski, instructed the Director of the Children’s Welfare Department in the Ministry, Dr. W. Szenajch, to organize the Polish mission in close cooperation with the representatives of the ARA. In June 1919, the organization changed its name to State Children’s Relief Committee (Panstwowy Komitet Pomocy Dzieciom), and in January of 1920, it was renamed the Polish-American Children’s Relief Committee (Polsko-Amerykanski Komitet Pomocy Dzieciom) or PAKPD. The Poles asked to include “Amerykanski” in the name because the name American commanded truth and respect.

The immediate task of distribution throughout the country was carried out through a system of volunteer committees. According to an ARA promotional pamphlet, “Parallel to the system of volunteer committees it was agreed that there should be constituted a commercial organization of distribution and control, this part to be conducted in a purely business way in Warsaw and throughout the provinces by salaried businessmen giving their whole time to the work. In this way the idea was to combine the three elements: (1) permanency; (2) popularity and the full support of the local society; and (3) efficiency and economy.”

The Central Polish Relief Committee, in cooperation with the American Mission, created an arrangement by which a very small price was fixed for the ration. This small charge varied on a sliding scale for different areas of Poland. The American mission delivered food at no cost in the parts of the eastern districts that were devastated by the war, while in sections of Congress Poland that were a little better off, a nominal price was arranged for the ration in the case of those children’s parents who could pay. The reason for charging the parents a fee was that, while the United States and the Polish Government
donated their foodstuffs entirely, the administration and transportation of the relief 
effort needed to be self-sustaining from the funds collected by the sale of rations. 50

On April 24 1919, ten Polish organizers, under the American delegate, Captain Nowak, and 
the Polish delegate, Count Zabiello, traveled to Brest-Litovsk and Bialystok to organize 
children’s relief committees in the towns and villages of that district, and to establish the 
operation of kitchens and milk stations. The first American foodstuffs to reach the 
children under the new Polish organization were given out to 2000 children through 
kitchens opened at Brest-Litovsk at the end of April, 1919. “Thus this burned and ruined 
town, which had passed through all the sad vicissitudes of Russian, German and Bolshevik 
occupation, and known the world over for the Russo-German peace treaty signed there in 
1918, was the starting point of the feeding of children in Poland through the American 
donation.” 51

The second part of the Polish group was the organization of general administration, 
distribution and inspection. In the spring of 1919, the Polish organization was supposed 
to take over the foodstuffs received at Danzig and arrange for their distribution through 
regional warehouses and committees, and transport the food eventually to the kitchens. 
At the same time, through a system of inspectors, the PAKPD was to insure that the 
foodstuffs were used as the ARA directed. 52

In the early part of 1919, however, circumstances in Poland were not favorable for the 
swift construction of an efficient relief organization throughout the country. In the early 
days of the Polish republic, all the governmental agencies in the country were faced with 
a shortage of manpower to carry out their activities. 53 The PAKPD was undermanned and 
the personnel were underskilled. In response, the ARA had to increase its numbers and 
perform the tasks first planned for the PAKPD to perform, from organization to 
distribution, from the ports to the kitchens.

The first temporary organization of the Central Polish Relief Committee was unable to get 
supplies out of Danzig with any measure of promptness, and the organization of the 
committees in the different districts of Poland were slow in development. On May 22 
1919, the ARA temporarily took control of the distribution of the foodstuffs and 
continued this work until after the Polish-Bolshevik War. Also, the ARA, with the help of 
Prince W. Puzyna (Secretary of the Polish Children’s Relief Department), took the matter 
of creating an organization of distribution and inspection on the Polish side in hand. 54

During this period of re-organization, Mr. Oscar Saenger, a businessman of Warsaw, and 
Colonel Grove selected Mr. Gawlikowski as director for the PAKPD and fixed the principal 
departments at that time as follows: Distribution, Inspection, Financial, Accounting, 
Statistical, Extraordinary Revenues, Medical, Sanitary Supplies and General. The Polish 
office was established in ten rooms at the Hotel Bristol, and under Mr. Gawlikowski the 
newly reorganized committee began to function on June 6 1919. 55

The new and improved PAKPD divided Poland into twenty districts; for each one, the 
committee appointed an inspector, and in the weeks following, organized the local 
committees as quickly as possible. Parallel to the Polish inspectors, fifteen American 
inspectors (who were all demobilized army officers) worked in the provinces making sure 
the work was proceeding according to plan. In cooperation with the Polish inspectors, the 
oficers visited each town of importance by automobile, instructing the committees and 
organizing the work in the provinces. 56
June 1919 was an arduous month both for the Polish and the American organizations. In most districts, the children’s food relief was received with enthusiasm; in others, even where the need was very great, the Polish and American inspectors encountered problems. In many cases, the rural populations did not understand the importance of the requirement of receiving foodstuffs only in cooked form and at the kitchens. The people wanted the food immediately in raw form but the ARA would not supply the food in this method because the American mission wanted to make sure that only needy children were receiving the food and that others did not profit from the American aid. In some cases, it took all the efforts and patience of both the American and the Polish inspectors to convince the people and the local committees of the necessity for this condition. In some towns, food depots were attacked by mobs who insisted on distributing the food immediately and in raw form. This occurred mostly in the eastern borderlands of Poland. After living through the Czarist retreat, the German invasion, the German retreat followed by the Bolshevik invasion and the Bolshevik retreat, and, finally the Polish invasion, the rural populations in the eastern borderlands had little trust in any groups of foreigners who came to their localities. They therefore did not trust the Americans in the beginning.

Eventually, the ARA inspectors were able to persuade the different town populations throughout the country to understand the logic of the ARA principles, and the months of June and July 1919 marked a large step forward in the establishment of kitchens. During the month of June and the beginning of July, virtually every significant town in Poland was visited by ARA inspectors, and according to the statistics gathered on July 1, foodstuffs were issued to 476,000 children. In Western Poland, efforts were made to get the Children’s Relief work under way in the Polish-occupied plebiscite area of Cieszyn in the early part of June, and in the middle of July, the work spread to the German occupied plebiscite area of Katowice. The situation in Katowice on account of the pending Paris Peace Treaty was complicated. Berlin would not authorize food relief because of the uncertain relations between Berlin and the Katowice plebiscite territory. In mid-July 1919, the American Mission received a report on the severe condition of the children in Katowice, and soon afterwards, a shipment of ten cars of foodstuffs was delivered to Warsaw and sent to the frontier. Through a local arrangement at the frontier, the Mission succeeded in getting the cars to Katowice – without consulting Berlin. In Katowice, the ARA formed a Commission consisting of an American chairman (Captain JA Stader), two Poles and two Germans, all of whom immediately started relief work in the Silesian territory. The Committee carried on its work in a very fair way, feeding the neediest children without question of politics or nationality.

During the month of July 1919, the relief work followed on the heels of the Polish Army into the eastern districts where the need for relief was greatest. “The feeding spread eastward from village to village as fast as the Bolshevik troops retreated. Kitchens were often established before the arrival of Polish civilian authorities and where railway facilities and horses were lacking, motor trucks were pressed into service.” In many instances, the American ration was the only meal children received. Two days after the capture of Minsk by the Polish Armies in the middle of August, American inspector Lieutenant Walker was in the city, and four days later, children’s kitchens were operating. The ARA and PAKPD found that the further to the east they went, the more serious was the famine and the children’s needs. By the end of the relief effort, in
addition to the persons regularly employed in the child relief operation, over 14,000
volunteers worked in 7,600 institutions and kitchens located in 3,222 towns throughout
Poland.  

6. Classifying Need

In the larger cities, members of the ARA and the PAKPD would designate who was in
physical need of relief but in the rural areas the function of classifying children was
entrusted principally to the local and village advisory committees. Knowing the
conditions of each family in the community, the committee was intelligently able to
select those children in greatest need of relief. In the bigger cities, the method of
selection was more difficult, and it was therefore necessary to formulate more
mechanical methods. Special stations were created for the physical and medical
examination of children in larger centers; the method of physical examination used in
these cities was the Pelidisi system originated in Vienna. “This system used the ratio of
the sitting height to the weight of a child as a measure to determine the physical
condition. Frequent measurements were made, so that children who had sufficiently
recovered could be replaced by those more in need.” This task of picking who received
food and who did not was difficult on the relief workers. Mrs. Adeline Fuller, inspector
and organizer in Warsaw and wife of WP Fuller, remarked on her experiences in 1920:

Nothing is more heartbreaking than to go through the schools to pick out the worst
cases. Those who are not on the extreme edge of starvation are left behind. To hear
them sob when they find that they are not picked for the meal a day makes one
doubt the existence of supreme right and justice.

The local committees and, in larger towns, municipal social welfare centers were not only
required to engage in the difficult task of finding out which child needed the rations, but
also of deciding which children should receive their daily meal entirely free of charge and
which children's parents were required to pay. In around 85 percent of cases, the parents
could afford to pay for their child's meal which averaged 1/8 of one cent per meal. The
remaining 15 percent of meals were distributed chiefly to war orphans or to children of
widows, free of charge. Meals were served six days each week. The age limit, at first was
15 but eventually raised to 17. The following is a sample menu of food that might have
been served at an ARA kitchen.

Monday—rice with milk, sugar and bread.
Tuesday—rice and pea soup with cocoa and bread.
Wednesday—dumplings with bacon.
Thursday—soup with beans and noodles.
Friday—cocoa and a double ration of bread.
Saturday—dumplings and beans.

Of all the children fed by the ARA in Poland, 29 percent were Jewish. Even though the
1921 census of the population classified Jews as only 10.5 percent of the population, the
larger figures of Jews being fed arose from the fact that the greatest need and most
intensive relief operations had been in cities and towns in eastern Poland where the
Jewish population varied from 20 percent to 80 percent. Therefore, the ARA arranged for
the use of Kosher fats and the preparation of food by orthodox hands in special kitchens
in order to meet Jewish religious requirements. Kosher foods such as meats, oils, and
7. Distribution

The ships would first arrive at the Free City of Danzig (Gdansk) harbor on the Baltic Sea carrying from America foodstuffs for Polish children. The products from these ships would then be loaded into either the warehouses in Danzig or onto trains, cars or barges, and then sent into the interior of Poland. However, the shipment of food by rail was difficult due to the disorganization in the rail system and the limited number of cars available. During the Polish-Soviet War the military heavily taxed the rail system with troop and supply shipments to the eastern front. To assist in shipping, PAKPD employees were placed at eight food distribution depots. These employees made shipment of food to the local committees more efficient.

From the trains, cars and barges, the cargo would be loaded into regional warehouses of the PAKPD, located originally in eleven and finally (with the consolidation that went along with the retreat from the Bolsheviks and the gradual reduction of the relief) in three strategic points, where the goods were sorted and packed by paid Polish laborers working for the PAKPD. Each month, according to the fixed daily ration and the number of children to be fed in each district, shipments of food from the regional warehouses were sent in amounts varying from one to fifteen carloads to the district warehouses (which were all located on railways). From these stations the manager of each kitchen within the district came monthly to draw supplies for 30 days. “The haul from district warehouse to kitchen varying up to 120 kilometers, was generally made by horse transport with the exception of some of the swamp districts in the East where small boats plying on the streams were used.”

The ARA had in its possession “ten Cadillacs, including one limousine and one sedan, fifteen Fords, one Fiat, two Dodges, and one White.” By the end of the relief effort, the fifteen Ford trucks furnished by the American Joint Distribution Committee were available for transporting food, but available or not, when people were hungry they would do just about anything for food. It was not uncommon for Poles to transport the food on their backs to get it to the kitchens. For the purpose of organizing and inspection, each regional office was equipped with one light passenger car (principally the Cadillacs). The district offices in the East were provided with horse and bicycle transportation; a total of 41 horses and 43 bicycles were used for this purpose in 1921.

8. Start of the Grey Samaritans

The food relief effort in Poland appealed to hundreds of young American women of Polish descent. In 1919, Laura de G. Turczynowicz envisioned the idea of creating an organization to make use of them; through the Polish Reconstruction Association she organized willing women for the relief cause and through the operations of the YWCA utilized them in Poland. She made a donation of $1000 toward the cause of training the Polish women in America and making them knowledgeable about reconstruction services in Poland. From more than 500 volunteers, 300 women took courses in medical related subjects through the cooperation of physicians in Cleveland, Detroit, Milwaukee, Rochester, and St. Louis. Out of the 300, ninety of them qualified for scholarships in the
Polish Grey Samaritan School, which opened in New York in October 1919. Seventy-five graduated in June 1920 and 30 eventually served the Polish cause. Because of the color of their YWCA uniforms, the young Polish-American women were called the Grey Samaritans.  

In June 1920, Lois Downs of the American YWCA arrived in Warsaw to make advanced plans for placing in Poland an initial 20 Grey Samaritans who were to help with the task of food relief. It was approved with Madame Paderew ska, president of the Polish Children’s Relief Committee, that the young women upon their arrival to Poland would enter the Children’s Relief work as instructors for children’s institutions and serve on committees. According to YWCA secretary and the first Grey Samaritan Director Martha Chickering, Herbert Hoover, as head of the ARA, “warmly endorsed the plan to bring a unit of Grey Samaritans to Warsaw.” The first group of Samaritans left for Poland on July 31, 1920, on the French liner, Rocheambeau. ARA representative Barber wrote:  

These girls, young and unspoiled, combined in a remarkable way the emotional enthusiasm and devotion of the Pole with the efficiency and persistence of the American ... They aided tremendously in the feeding program undertaken under Hoover, especially as department inspectors since they spoke both English and Polish. Carrying out the Hoover policy of self-help, fifteen of these girls took on as understudies fifteen young Polish college girls so that when the Grey Samaritan must finally return to America, there would remain in Poland a body of trained workers of practical experience in child welfare work.  

All of the young women could speak the Polish language and some of them could even remember their country of birth before they emigrated. The women would help teach the people of Poland the value of bathing and were exceptionally important in the education of pregnant women about birth, even assisting in delivery. Martha Chickering remarked in the beginning of the Grey Samaritan Mission:  

There is an appalling amount of eye-infection and tuberculosis among the children. Out of two thousand school children examined, practically all had tuberculosis in one form or another. In the case of these diseases, our girls will attempt to teach the victims the simpler rules of care and prevention.  

These young women had been thoroughly trained to do relief work and were placed by the YWCA at the disposal of the ARA, to form an element of the American inspection system. In the beginning, the Greys were used in the distribution of clothing in Poland. The clothing operation that was in the hands of the PAKPD was badly organized and not working efficiently at all; the Greys were an immense help in getting the clothing to the needy children. After completion of the first clothing distribution, the Grey Samaritans were then utilized in the inspection of kitchens and institutions all over Poland. During the Polish-Bolshevik War, some of the Greys worked in nurseries at refugee camps, camps that had over 100,000 people pass through them during the war; others visited the families of Polish soldiers to report “acute cases of want.” To help with transportation, the ARA equipped the Greys with Fords and chauffeurs, which the Greys utilized to transport food and to move about the country during inspection trips. The Grey Samaritans worked under the ARA district inspectors, reporting the progress or setbacks of the feeding operations. The objectives of the Samaritans in the war-bled capital of Warsaw were:  

(1) to set a standard for child welfare work for Poland, and (2) build up a scientific social service based on the case work method. (Statistics were frowned upon under Russia, so a survey is difficult to make but, as nearly as [they] could find out, the death-rate of children in Warsaw seemed to be about twenty-five percent.)
By the end of the operations, the number of Samaritans was gradually reduced and most women were located in the eastern districts of Poland, helping feed the children and reporting to the district inspectors. The Samaritans often lived in hotels without running water or reliable electrical power. Yet, they were especially dedicated to their work, for they were rebuilding the country of their birth. Their task was to feed and clothe the future generation of Poland, to help establish orphanages and schools, to assist in refugee camps by creating activities for the desperate people, and most of all, to give hope to the people of Poland by showing them through their actions that with hard work Poland could become strong. A report by a Grey Samaritan says it best:

Each girl is working in the east of Poland with a Ford car as her means of conveyance... when the Ford goes: if not, otherwise and often, traveling by methods as primitive as two hundred years ago. A region perhaps as large as the state of New Jersey, is her hunting ground, to seek for abuses in the operation itself, for the education of people in the use of food and for the caring for children.

9. Conclusion

Poland was reborn at a time when large forces of enemy troops were inside its borders, and, except in the South where the Tatry Mountains offered some protection, practically the entire extent of Poland’s frontiers had to be defended by the Polish Army. The drain by the army on Poland’s resources caused the government and the people the utmost difficulties. By October 17 1919, Poland was spending 600,000 million marks a month on the war with the Bolsheviks.

In their time of need, the American Relief Administration led by Herbert Hoover, stepped in and gave the Poles the crucial relief they desperately required. The ARA staff fed hungry people; they helped restart the industries; they helped in rebuilding commerce; and they provided clothing and care for children. The ARA aid played an important role in bringing about stability in the newly independent state of Poland through food aid and technical advice in industry and governmental administration. Herbert Hoover took many bold though calculated steps to arrange food relief in Poland, including the establishment of the Polish relief organization and the introduction of the young Polish-American women into the field. The ARA effort was tantamount to Poland’s survival during the Polish-Soviet War; a war which had wide ranging consequences for Europe and the world. The spread of communism was defeated at the gates of Warsaw.

During the year the war was waged, the ARA fed millions of people in war-devastated areas. As the front moved, the ARA had to move. They fed the populations on the eastern borderlands as the Polish Army moved eastward. As the Polish advance stalled the ARA was given the task of evacuating of tons of food and supplies away from the approaching Bolsheviks. However, Bolshevik control did not mean the ARA would cancel food operations. Soon after the war the relief organization in Poland reached out to the Soviet leadership and secured an agreement on August 21, 1921 to continue the relief effort in Soviet Russia. Soon after the U.S. Congress appropriated $20,000,000 for Russian famine relief. At its peak in Russia, the ARA employed 300 Americans, more than 120,000 Russians and fed 10.5 million people daily. The ARA’s Russian operations functioned from November 1921 to June 1923.

With the end of the Polish-Soviet War, the ARA in Poland concentrated its efforts on Polish refugee relief, focusing on providing food, clothing, and treatments against typhus.
for displaced persons and returning refugees. The ARA therefore provided relief to Poland during two wars up to 1921, thereby assisting the Polish people to create the Republic they longed to have.

NOTES

4. Lerski, 5.
5. Ibid.
6. “Why the Plan for Relief in Poland Failed.”
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
10. Ibid., 9.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid., 10.
15. Ibid., 172
17. Dziennik Powszechny, March 17, 1920, “America For Polish Children,” ARA Europe, Box 602, Hoover. See also A Brief History of the ARA Children’s Relief Operation in Poland, May 28, 1920, W.P Fuller Papers, Folder 2A, Hoover, 1, 10.
18. Grove, 176-172.
19. Ibid.
20. Amy Tapping, “The First American Peace Corps,” draft, Polish Grey Samaritans Collection, Box 1, Folder “June 1964,” Hoover, 7. See also Frank M. Surface and Raymond L. Bland, American
In 1918 the German Army was the most powerful force on the eastern borderlands of the newly established Polish Republic. At the Treaty of Versailles the Entente asked the Germans to stay there to keep order and peace in an otherwise lawless and volatile land. However, the dispirited Germans abandoned much of Poland and conflicts arose between local authorities created by the Germans, other independent forces that challenged their authority, and the Bolsheviks, who hoped to gain advantage and expand the control of Soviet Russia. As a result the situation was confused and unstable in the area of today’s Byelorussia, and the situation in Ukraine was even more complicated, with Ukrainian forces divided between Nestor Makhno’s anarchists, the communists, the White Russians, various authorities across Ukraine, and the renascent Polish Army, all of which were fighting each other. The situation was made even more complex when self-defense forces formed in the newly created states of Lithuania, Estonia and Latvia. Nearly all of Eastern Europe was in chaos. However, within six months of the end of World War I, a large Polish Army was created through the efforts of General Józef Piłsudski. The Polish Army moved east, disregarding warnings from the Entente, in an attempt to regain territories Poland had lost at the time of its last division between Austria, Germany and Russia in the late 19th century. The ARA followed in the wake of the Polish Army, providing relief work in the war-ravaged eastern areas of the newly enlarged Polish territories.
established Poland as a sovereign state based on the prewar eastern territories of Germany, thus creating disputed areas between the two countries. After negotiations, it was agreed that a plebiscite would be held in Upper Silesia on March 20, 1921. However, before the plebiscite could take place, violent uprisings occurred which fuelled further tension between the new Poland and the defeated German nation.

37. Ibid., 13.
38. Ibid.

39. The Polish Army’s movement east was eventually halted at Kiev and in Byelorussia by a counter attack from Soviet forces. The Southern Soviet Army led by feared cavalry leader Simion Budenny forced the Poles out of Kiev and into a disorderly retreat westward. The Northern Soviet Army led by Russian General Tukhachevsky drove the Poles further back. Just 20 miles outside of Warsaw, Pilsudski halted the Soviet advance by cutting the lines of Russian communication and forcing the Russian forces to retreat back into Byelorussia and Ukraine. The Polish counter attack would be named “The Miracle on the Vistula.”

40. “American Relief Administration European Children’s Fund Mission to Poland (continued),” W.P. Fuller Papers, Folder 2, Hoover, 1. See also “American Relief Administration European Children’s Fund Mission to Poland,” 10; “A Brief History of the ARA Children’s Relief Operation in Poland,” 5. The standard ARA ration per meal consisted of 62 grams of flour (226 calories), 35gr of beans (126 cal), 20gr of rice (71 cal), 22gr of milk (37 cal), 10 grams of fats (88 cal), 15 grams of sugar (62 cal), and 3 grams of cocoa (14 cal), totaling 167 grams (624 cal) a meal. There was a special ration for infants: 20gr of flour (70 cal), 10 grams of rice (33 cal), 100 grams of condensed milk (300 cal) totaling 403 calories a meal.

41. “American Relief Administration European Children’s Fund Mission to Poland,” 1.
42. “American Relief Administration European Children’s Fund Mission to Poland,” 11.
43. Ibid., 10.
44. ARAECF Publicity, December 1920, ARA Europe, Box 602, Hoover.

*.” From this point on the Polish Relief Committee will be referred to as the PAKPD.
47. Lerski, 18-19.
48. Ibid.
50. Ibid., 5-6.
51. Ibid., 6.
52. Ibid.
53. Ibid., 7.
54. Ibid., 8.
55. Ibid.
56. Ibid.
57. Ibid., 10.
58. Ibid., 11.
60. “A Brief History of the ARA Children’s Relief Operation in Poland,” 12.
62. Ibid., 31.
63. Grove, 177.
64. “Red Curse Over Poland: Bolsheviki Cause of Country’s Misery, Says Relief Worker [Adeline Fuller],” The New York Times, December 24, 1920, ARA Europe, Box 605, Folder 1, Hoover.
66. Grove, 177.
67. Ibid.
68. “American Relief Administration European Children’s Fund Mission to Poland,” 12.
70. “American Relief Administration European Children’s Fund Mission to Poland,” 29.
71. Ibid.
72. R. Ligowska, Report on ARA and PAKPD relief to agriculturers in territories of the Polish Republic destroyed by the Bolshevik invasion, September 10, 1920, ARA Europe, Box 106, Folder 1, Hoover.
74. Lerski, 23.
77. Lerski, 23.
78. Coningsby Dawson, Draft of an article numbered “16 Brest-Litovsk” created for the ARA publicity department. This particular article is about the work of the Polish Grey Samaritans in Poland. January 1921, Polish Grey Samaritans, Martha Gedgood and Amy Tapping Collections, Box 3, Folder 2, Hoover, 3.
80. Ibid., 23.
81. “American Relief Administration European Children’s Fund Mission to Poland (continued),” 2.
82. Chickering, 25.
83. “Polish Grey Samaritans,” Reports and Experiences of Polish Grey Samaritans, October 1921, Polish Grey Samaritan Papers, Box 3, Folder 1, Hoover.

ABSTRACTS

Poland, recreated after the armistice of 1918, was confronted at its rebirth with four very severe challenges: welding together the separate sections of the dissected country, which for many decades had been under the rule of Prussia-Germany, Austria and Russia; creating a functioning administration and military force for the country; ensuring the recovery of agriculture, which, during World War I, had seriously declined; and restarting industries destroyed or closed during foreign military occupation. Even under the valuable leadership of the first Prime Minister of the new Polish Republic Ignacy Paderewski and Marshal Jozef Pilsudski, the Poles could not accomplish the goal of rebuilding a strong Poland without outside help. The American Relief Administration (ARA), founded and led by Herbert Hoover, offered their help. The ARA, with its food aid and provision of economic assistance and expertise, played an important role in bringing about stability in the newly independent state of Poland. This paper examines the many
steps Herbert Hoover had to take to arrange food relief in Poland and will outline the organization of the ARA, including the establishment of the Polish relief organization and the introduction of young Polish-American women, called the Grey Samaritans, into the field.

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