



**AMERICA
WE THANK YOU**
An Armenian Tribute to Near East Relief

CALIFORNIA
**FACT
SHEET**

California was a staunch supporter of Near East Relief (NER), the American-led campaign that quickly sparked an international response with its unprecedented humanitarian endeavor mobilizing all segments of American citizenry including elected officials, celebrities and laypersons alike, to help rescue victims of the Armenian Genocide in Ottoman Turkey from 1915-1930.



An Armenian orphan with a box of California figs (1923)

- California had two regional headquarter offices, one in Northern California located at 333 Mills Building in San Francisco and the other in Southern California located at the Wright & Callender Building on 405 Hill Street in Los Angeles.

- Three-term member of the U.S. House of Representatives from 1911-1916, William D. Stephens served as the 24th Governor of California from 1917-1923. During his tenure as Governor, Stephens issued a Proclamation in 1920 acknowledging Near East Relief's incorporation under Congress and urged Californians to donate generously to its efforts noting that "suffering is acute" and declared, "I join in the appeal that California do her part, as she always does."

- Santa Monica native Adelbert Bartlett was a commercial photographer and served as NER's regional director in Los Angeles, working for the office's news bureau. Bartlett traveled extensively throughout the Near East as one of NER's official photographers capturing thousands of photographs of the orphans from their most destitute and impoverished days, as they braved starvation and disease, throughout their eventual rehabilitation facilitated by NER missionaries, doctors and volunteers. These photographs accompanied the marketing and promotional material NER used to convey the urgency of relief funds needed to tend to the millions of refugees and orphans under NER's care.

- On August 20, 1920 the *San Francisco Chronicle* published the story, "California leads in Near East Relief," noting that "California now stands at the head of all states of the Union in generous response to the Near East appeal."



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- On September 14, 1922 Oxnard's *Press-Courier* reported on the correspondence offered by Frank R. Buckalew secretary of Northern California's NER office as he recounted his visit with Armenian orphans overseas. Buckalew wrote, "American relief workers are fighting hunger with California beans and dried fruit" (see photo above)...they [relief workers] have done wonders here in not only saving lives of children but in teaching them trades."
- Sponsored by Mayor James Rolph, Jr. and Mrs. Rolph of San Francisco, a grassroots committee was formed for gathering canned products of the orchards and fields of California, resulting in a 300-ton consignment being sent to the Near East. A novel feature of the plan was the "Glad Morning" program, where on a designated day, all persons bringing a can of food to the theatre were admitted free to a performance. Approximately 5,000 cans were collected.
- On April 26, 1923 the *Santa Ana Register* publicized Southern California's upcoming "Bundle Day" on May 8 with its goal of 25 tons of clothing. "Bundle Day" campaigns spearheaded by NER to collect blankets, warm clothing and shoes to be sent to refugees and orphans overseas in advance of the harsh winters were observed nationally.



- San Francisco contributed 25 tons to the 3,820,458 pounds of clothing donated by the American people throughout its "Bundle Day" campaigns in 1923. Judge Curtis D. Wilbur, then Chairman of the California State Committee (later Secretary of the Navy) was one of the many supporters instrumental in California's impressive contribution.
- On March 3, 1924 the *Oakland Tribute* reported on California's NER Condensed Milk Drive, through which over 1,000,000 cans of condensed milk that were shipped overseas to NER orphanages were collected. Miss Alys Murrel, (photograph on left as printed in referenced article) led the canned milk drive.
- The Girls' Civic League of Long Beach High School collected 3,000 cans of condensed milk for NER.
- In response to NER's annual Christmas appeal, the children of Berkley, California raised \$22,000.



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- San Francisco contributed 25 tons to the 3,820,458 pounds of old clothes donated by the American people to the NER in 1923. Judge Curtis D. Wilbur, Chairman of the California State Committee (later Secretary of the Navy) was one of the many supporters who led this initiative.
- In 1924, the Near East Relief launched the “Children’s Crusade,” wherein every school child in the United States was encouraged to participate in collecting donations, clothing and non-perishable food for shipment to children overseas. Jackie Coogan, the most famous child actor of the 1920’s, and arguably Hollywood’s first humanitarian, piloted his “Milk Train” across the United States which made stops in every major U.S. city to collect the cans and cases of milk, boxes and packages of food, and money raised, which totaled over \$1 million for shipment overseas. Jackie Coogan’s tour received unprecedented media coverage in the U.S. through newspapers, magazines, and newsreels.



- As part of Coogan’s promotional tour, “Jackie’s Circus” convened in Hollywood, California and was attended by over 7,500 people who donated over \$3,500 worth of food and clothing to enjoy the features at the circus. The photograph with young Coogan standing on the piles of clothing was featured in NER’s official publication *The New Near East*, which boasted a monthly readership of over 100,000 persons.

- In the city of Fresno and surrounding communities, \$70,000 in cash and 30 tons of raisins were donated by local community organizations. Churches throughout Fresno donated cash in sums that exceeded their annual church budget.
- Carloads of food and clothing were packed and delivered to NER centers in Northern and Southern California, in caravans called “California Canned Sunshine.”





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California, We Thank You!

Thanks to the generosity of the Near East Relief, its participating organizations and entities, the U.S. Government and State Governments, and especially the American people at large, over 1,000,000 refugees and 132,000 orphans of the Armenian Nation and other Christian minorities were rescued, fed, clothed, and educated. We have survived, thrived, and prospered from the horrors of Genocide at the hands of Ottoman Turkey.

For your unwavering support and unprecedented generosity in donating to Near East Relief's humanitarian efforts, California, We Thank You!



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