

The War Years on the Home Front

By Missy Cox Jones

I can see an old movie from the war years and there will be a mention at the end of the movie about buying war bonds. U. S. Savings bonds, called "War Bonds" was sold all over the country. Lots of movie houses would have people on stage during intermissions urging people to buy bonds. Also, there was a program for "War Stamps", for school students. I think that these could be bought for maybe 10 cents each, and pasted in a little book. When the book was filled, you could exchange it for a savings bond; I cannot remember how much a bond would cost. I used to have a little stamp book with a few stamps in it, and it has been lost over the years.

There were lots of bond drives. Movie Stars and other important people would help to head these up, and people were encouraged to buy bonds to support the war effort. Communities would have scrap metal drives, and paper drives. Pictures remain from the Comanche Chief of that time, of scrap metals being shipped in railroad cars. And there were no silk stockings. Those were being used to make parachutes. Ladies would buy leg "make-up", and would use a pencil to mark the "seam" down the back of their legs, to look like the seam on their silk stockings. Remember, there was no panty hose; ladies wore silk stockings, or maybe nylons, with a seam down the back of their legs. People everywhere were encouraged to grow "Victory Gardens". City people were encouraged to plant a garden on vacant lots, in flower beds or any place they could find. We always had "Victory Gardens" where we lived in the country, so this was nothing new for us. We were fortunate to live in the country, and we continued having big gardens, just like we always had.

Food was rationed, sugar in particular. I remember that the Gustine School, Paul Whitten, Superintendent, sent out information on sugar rationing. I have one of the forms from that time at the Museum. You were required to be at the school on a certain date to sign up, and to declare how many pounds of sugar you had on hand. You were issued with a ration book with little stamps that would have been torn out when you bought sugar at the grocery store. And these little stamps all had numbers on them. People so used to having plenty of sugar for jams and jellies were just out of luck.

Grocery store owners would have to count and have ready these different kinds of stamps when they bought their grocery supplies. And that was a job. These little stamps were sized about less than 1/2 inch, to about less than 1 inch, and were different colors.

People were encouraged to have "Meatless Mondays", or any other day. There were so many people in the world that were suffering from being in a war zone, and were starving to death.

Also, coffee was rationed. People resorted to substituting many different things for coffee. Coffee was grown in the South Pacific area, maybe Java and Borneo. And so much of that area was controlled by the Japanese.

There were lots of black market operators. For a price, they would supply you just about anything you wanted. My Mother and Daddy never bought anything on the black market. I know that for a fact.

Gasoline was also rationed, and we have some gasoline ration books from that time at the Museum. A family was allowed so many gallons a week. People had to save their gasoline stamps if they wanted to go somewhere. My brother, Wilburn Cox and his wife Effie Mae lived in Brownwood during this time. She said they would save up their stamps for several weeks, in order to be able to buy enough gasoline to go from Brownwood to Comanche and Gustine to visit their families, and back home to Brownwood.

I remember once that I had to make two trips to the Dentist in Comanche. And the Dentist asked if daddy needed gasoline stamps for the extra trip to Comanche. Shoes were also rationed. That didn't affect us very much. We got a new pair of shoes when school started and maybe a pair of sandals in the summer. We went bare footed during the summer months, but each family was only allowed so many pairs of shoes a year.

Tires were rationed. At that time, tires were made of rubber, and that came from islands in the South Pacific. Since the Japanese controlled so much of that area, our government rationed tires. I can't remember any details of this.

Many soldiers started smoking during their wartime service. I remember ads for cigarettes, "Lucky Strike Green has gone to war". The thought being that smoking cigarettes would be calming for men under pressure. And, at that time, cigarettes were advertised everywhere. Also, I remember just what cigarettes smelled like in the 1940's and the 1950's and later. They really smelled good, like burning tobacco. Now, there are so many chemicals added to them, they smell terrible.

Another thing that I want to mention was the flags that were placed in windows of families that had sons in the service. The flag was small, probably less than 12 inches and about 5 inches wide. It had one star, blue, and the star was on a white background, with a red band around the edge. There was a gold cord for hanging it up, and I think a gold border. When a member from a family was killed in action, that family was entitled to a flag with a gold star on it. That signified that a son had been killed in action. These flags were known as "Gold Stars" and a mother would have been called a "Gold Star Mother".

In later years, Jimmie Tucker who owned the "Owl Drug" along with his wife, told me that during the war years the Owl Drug had a Western Union machine and telegrams were coming in about service men being killed in action. It was Jimmie's job to deliver these to the families. He said he always took a relative of the family or maybe a neighbor with him to deliver the telegram. He didn't want to just knock on the door, hand them this terrible news and walk away. Jimmie was a wonderful man. I thought so much of him and his wife. In a small town like Comanche, Jimmie knew lots of people and where they lived, and this was so thoughtful of him.

Owl Drug was also a bus station, in addition to Western Union, they had a soda fountain and they served hamburgers and lunches. Mr. and Mrs. Tucker were just fine people. Lots of times on Saturday nights, they, my date and I and several other couples would leave Comanche after they closed, about 10:00 pm and drive over the Dublin to the Sunset café. That was a great place. They made homemade pies on Saturday night for the next day (and they were so good), and we would drink coffee, eat a slice of warm pie and talk for a long time. Great memories! I can see this bus station in my mind's eye. It was on the corner, the east corner of the south side of the square. The greyhound buses and others, would drive to the light, thru south on hwy 16 and pull up by the sidewalk by the bus station. Can just hear Mr. Tucker calling out," Brownwood, Bangs, Rowena, Miles, San Angelo".

If you are interested in this, please come by the Comanche Historical Museum. We can show you several of the gasoline ration books, and also the information concerning the sugar rationing at Gustine School. Also, no one can imagine how many men and women from Comanche County served in WW II. We have books and will be glad to share this information with you. Did you have family members or neighbors in service then? If so, we have lots of information on this sad time in our county history.