

NEW

YORK

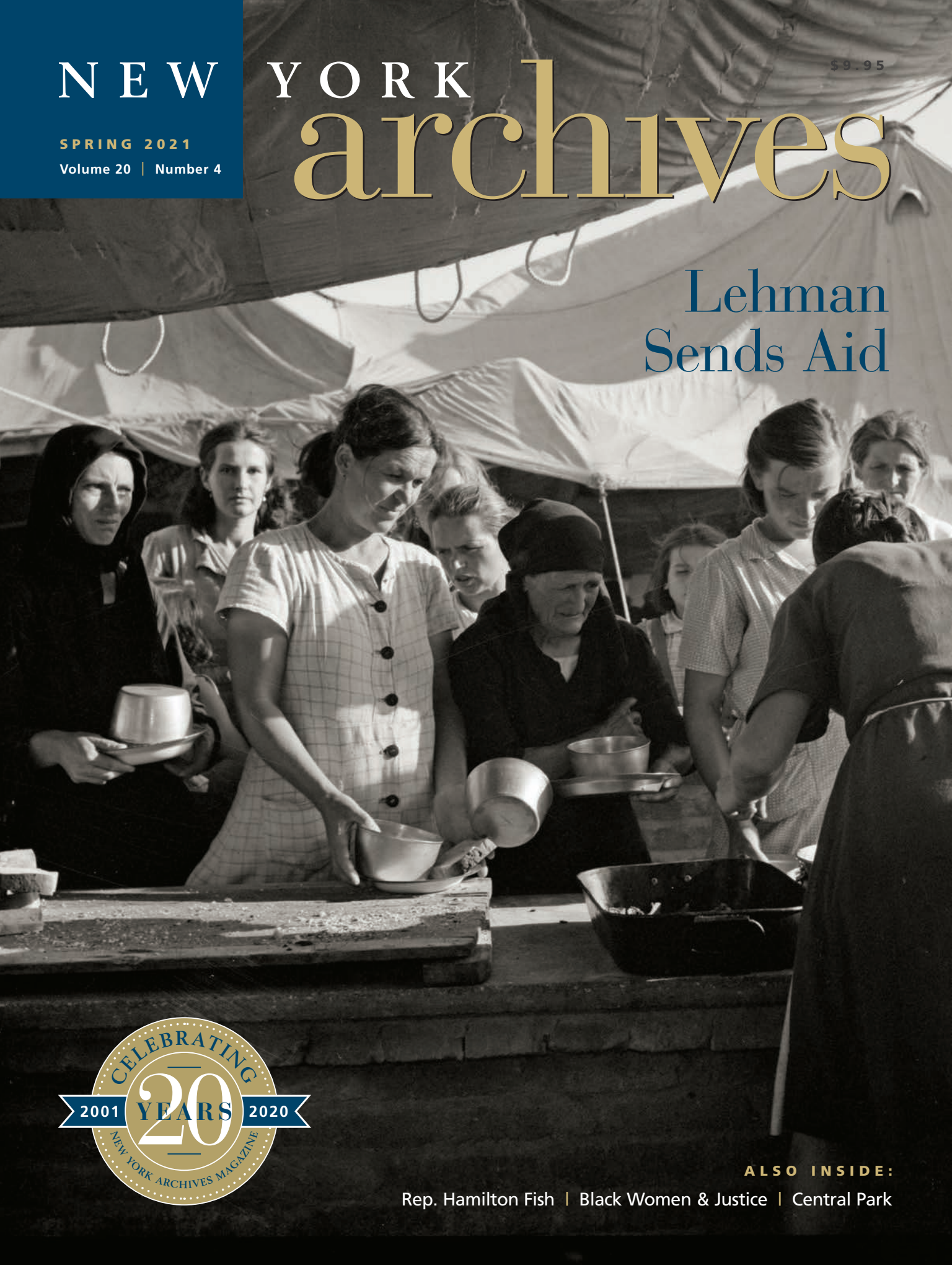
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# archives

## Lehman Sends Aid



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# QUICK ASSIS

BY ALEKSANDR GELFAND





# TANCE

ALLIED COUNTRIES DEVASTATED BY WWII  
RECEIVED PROVISIONS FROM UNRRA.

UNRRA

potatoes  
ESTIÉU-ZEMANU

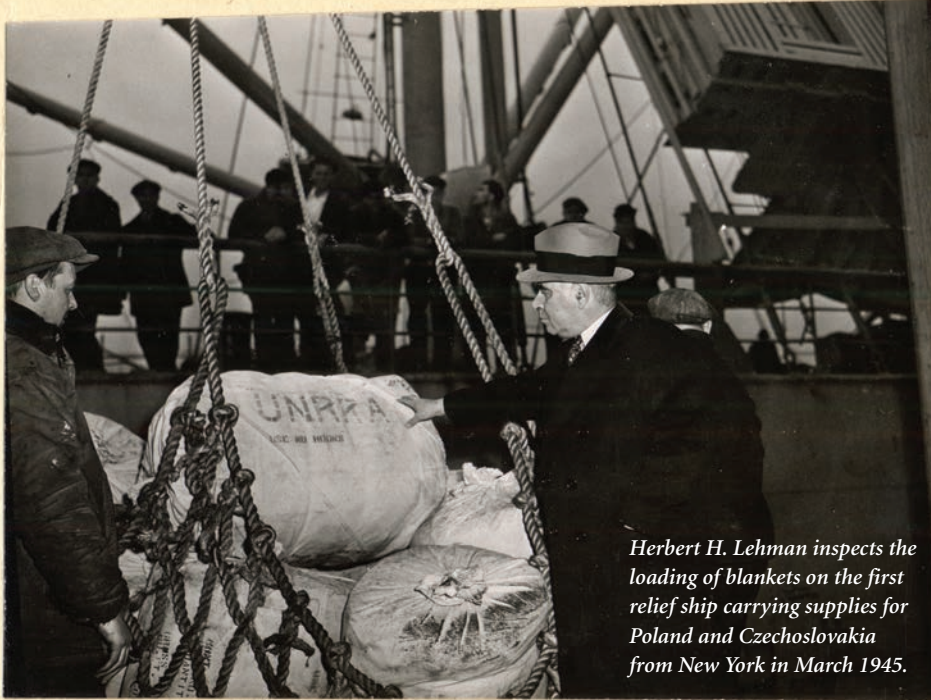
*Quick distribution of food was one of the most important problems facing the Austrian government as non-existent stockpiles meant virtual starvation for the people of Vienna. This entire load of UNRRA potatoes arrived at the wholesaler's and was distributed in two days.*

**AT** the beginning of 1944, Herbert H. Lehman had a difficult task before him. The former New York governor had recently been appointed director general of a newly created international organization called the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA), which was tasked with providing aid to the Allied countries invaded by Axis powers. The organization, made up of forty-eight nations, was to become the largest international relief effort up to that point in history. In January 1944, however, Lehman was its only official employee and he was struggling to build it from scratch. Testifying before the US Congress, he stated:

“UNRRA is ... the first great test of the capacity of the present world partnership of the United Nations and associated governments to achieve a peacetime goal. It represents a first bold attempt of the free peoples to develop efficient habits of working together. It is now up to all of us to prove that it is not only for war and destruction but also for help and healing that nations can be united to act for the common good. Then will peace have her victory no less than war.”

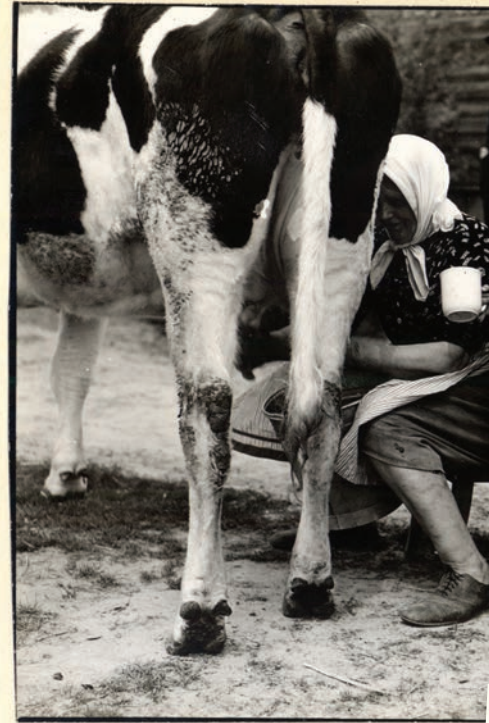
Unlike other large, multifaceted organizations, this one did not have the luxury of being developed gradually; human needs and the devastation





*Herbert H. Lehman inspects the loading of blankets on the first relief ship carrying supplies for Poland and Czechoslovakia from New York in March 1945.*

*Milking a UNRRA cow on a farm near Gdansk, Poland.*



wrought by the war called for quick action. Aid was to take the form of food, medicine, shoes, clothing, and assistance to restore agricultural and industrial production, restoration of essential services, assistance to displaced persons, as well as the provision of a myriad of other services.

#### **Goal of Relief**

While the war was still raging in Europe and Asia, UNRRA's members started to plan its operations and develop strategies to get them off the ground. How was food to be distributed? How should a large, complicated bureaucracy operate? How would UNRRA address the problems of a large and diverse population? Lehman found a ready-made example in New York City. Early on, UNRRA officials visited or interviewed staff from such New York institutions as the Henry Street

Settlement, New York School of Social Work, Bureau of Child Welfare, State Department of Welfare, and Camp LaGuardia in Westchester County, paying particular attention to workflows and procedures. They observed that

**"... the goal of relief must be the guide at all times. The goal is to help people become self-maintaining, self-motivating, independent, individual, and self-respecting. Care must be taken to guard against dependency, against prejudice, against the inability to say no, against a begrudging attitude. A positive plan can best be made with the individual, not for him."**

In 1945, with the war finally over, tons of supplies flooded the seventeen nations, including Italy, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Ethiopia, China, Korea, and the Philippines. Tens of thousands of trucks, many bought from Army surplus, were rushed to the impacted areas before winter. Converted Liberty and Victory ships, cargo vessels mass-produced by the United States during the war, delivered thousands of farm animals, with other specially built ships transporting entire locomotives. Planes filled with emergency medical supplies and insecticides were dispatched in haste. As one of the major entrepôts of North America, New York played an important part in this supply chain. Thousands of tons of produce streamed into the city from as far away as Venezuela and as close as New Rochelle, which had sent 1,042 cartons of dry soup powder on





*Milton J. Bluestein (center) boards the British warship that will land at Split, Yugoslavia, to work with UNRRA in distributing relief supplies in connection with Yugoslav relief officials.*



*Corn donated to UNRRA by the Argentine government being loaded aboard the S.S. Pelorum, which sailed from Buenos Aires to Genoa, Italy, in May 1946.*

November 10, 1944. The products were stored in warehouses in the Bronx, Manhattan, and Brooklyn until ready for shipment. Among the produce kept in the Bronx warehouse in April 1945 were one million pounds of semolina (a type of wheat) and two million pounds of peas. During most of 1946, UNRRA was the largest single exporter in the world, shipping more than one million tons in each of the first eight months of its operation.

New Yorkers were on the ground to oversee the distribution of many of these products, making sure that they were reaching areas that needed them most. Milton J. Bluestein, a former City College of New York student who joined UNRRA as a supply and distribution officer for Yugoslavia, toured that country to evaluate the situation on the ground. Bill Morrell, a fellow member of UNRRA who



*F.H. LaGuardia, Director General of UNRRA, receives a token bag of flour from Dr. Armand Hammer, President of the United Distillers of America, Inc. who contributed one million pounds of flour to UNRRA's food program.*



*Dr. Herbert K. Abrams, a major in the United States Public Health Service, and UNRRA nurse Dorothy Doyle examine a blind Chinese war veteran in a CNRRA camp in Tsingtao.*



accompanied him, reported: "We watched food being unloaded from a Liberty ship in Dubrovnik, and in the country districts we saw food from earlier shipments being carried away to the village distribution centers by truck, mule, donkey, and (as was often the case) on the backs of women and girls, and I think the most striking impression I received as far as public information is concerned is that we have an enormous and urgent job to do in making known the needs of this country." Bluestein was soon joined by William T. Harris, a former Wall Street lawyer who had previously worked under the appointment of the Supreme Court of the State of New York, who became deputy chief of the Yugoslavia mission.

Bluestein and Harris were not the only New Yorkers working in the field. Under Lehman's successor, Fiorello LaGuardia, UNRRA reached its zenith, with almost 25,000 staff members spread out across the seventeen countries in hundreds of offices on every continent except Antarctica. New Yorkers of all ages felt the call to serve and could be found in various positions, especially those in medicine. Alvah Strong Miller was a seasoned doctor at age sixty when he left his practice in Rochester to work in China, establishing the National Wuhan University Hospital and Medical School. He was joined by Dorothy Doyle, a nurse from East Harlem, who left to serve as a clinical nurse in China. Irvin M. Lourie, a graduate of NYU, was attending medical school in Scotland when the war began, returned to the United States to do his residency at the Triboro Hospital for Tuberculosis in Queens, and joined UNRRA as a fresh-faced doctor in 1945 to work with tuberculosis patients in Greece.

## THE ARCHIVES CONNECTION

Throughout most of its existence, UNRRA did not keep a properly organized archive, each office keeping its papers as they saw fit. When its termination became imminent, efforts were made to preserve its records and document its history. An Office of the Historian was established to write the history of UNRRA, publishing a three-volume overview. In 1948, the records of hundreds of offices were assembled at UNRRA's headquarters in Washington, DC, to be sorted and organized. Afterward, more than 50 million pages of records estimated to be left were donated to the recently created United Nations, which was then based in Lake Success on Long Island. When the UN moved to its permanent headquarters in Manhattan, the records were transferred there. Over the following decades, the collection was reappraised, with parts disposed of, microfilmed, or reorganized. Today, more than 3,000 linear feet of UNRRA records are stored at the United Nations Archives in New York, including approximately 10,000 photographs and negatives, and remain one of the most heavily used collections. Via partnerships with institutions such as the United States Holocaust Museum in DC and internal efforts, more than 750,000 pages of UNRRA records have now been digitized and made available to researchers online and may be accessed using our website at [search.archives.un.org](http://search.archives.un.org).



*Rachel Greene, Director of UNRRA Children's Center at Aglasterhausen, plays with four orphaned babies before their departure for the US.*

### Vulnerable Populations

As part of its mandate, UNRRA inherited the administration of displaced persons camps and assembly centers in the Middle East, Germany, Austria, and Italy from the military authorities. With the concept of social work as a profession still new in much of the world, New York was at the vanguard of the field and provided a large share of experienced personnel to work with the camps' vulnerable populations in the areas of child-care, psychiatry, and nutrition.

Rita S. Morgan, a teacher and director of community activities working for the New York Board of Education, left to work in the displaced persons camps in the Middle East to care for the thousands of refugees displaced by the war. Once there, she worked to acquire recreational and educational materials she felt were needed for their development and entertainment, requesting items such as musical instruments, art materials, and sports equipment.

Traffic from New York to nations impacted by war was not just one way. The city was designated as host of the Central Location Index, the national tracing bureau for the United States, Canada, and South America. It acted as a conduit with the UNRRA Central Tracing Bureau, which operated in Italy, Germany, and Austria, for people looking for friends and family members

with whom they had lost contact during the war. Although its original mandate called for repatriation of displaced persons to their countries of origin, UNRRA staff on the ground actively assisted the large number of stateless individuals and those that had relatives in the United States to immigrate there; frequently New York was their first port of call.

By the end of 1946, with a lack of additional funding, it was decided to terminate UNRRA. In 1947, all country missions were closed and UNRRA itself liquidated in 1948. In less than five years of its active existence, UNRRA had shipped over twenty-four million tons of relief supplies to nations in need. It was replaced by several international organizations, including the World Health Organization, the Food and Agriculture Organization, the International Refugee Organization, and UNICEF, which received the bulk of UNRRA's assets, enabling it to continue the work championed by the professional social workers from New York. ■



For more about the creation of the United Nations, see "Capital of the World" by Charlene Mires, Fall 2014