

# Emilie Blackmore Stapp

and her

## Go-Hawks Happy Tribe



### A World War I Children's Crusade

by Louise Rosenfield Noun

**D**uring an era in which welfare reformers struggled for child labor laws, muckraking journalists blasted private and corporate greed, and an American president urged neutrality as Europeans slaughtered each other, an Iowa journalist with the nickname "Happy" inspired and organized a national movement of children helping other children. Reflecting the optimistic side of the Progressive era, she created a niche in war-relief work that would win her national recognition and give comfort to thousands of children.

Emilie Blackmore Stapp, the fourth of five children of Carrie Blackmore and David Wilbur Stapp, was born in Indiana in 1872. The family moved to Des Moines in 1883. From her school days, Stapp's ambition was to become a writer, and by her mid-twenties, the *Des Moines Capital* reported, she was already known in local circles as "the well known authoress whose works of fiction have attracted great attention."

Her first book, *Bread and 'Lasses: Sketches of Child Life*, published in 1902, consisted of short pieces in which she featured children's cute sayings, many of which had been previously published in various midwestern newspapers. This book was so successful, the *Des Moines Register* later reported, that Stapp's friends "were compelled to take her as she takes herself, seriously."

In 1904 Stapp became associate editor of the *Mail and Times*, a weekly Des Moines paper that featured club and social news, literature, and the arts. Among her numerous contributions to this paper were book reviews, club notes, dramatic criticism, fashion stories, and a weekly household column published under the pseudonym "Polly Pinkerton." Stapp also edited special editions of the paper, including a Thanksgiving book edition that led the *Register* to call the *Mail and Times* the "most creditable literary and social weekly Des Moines has ever had." The *Mail and Times*

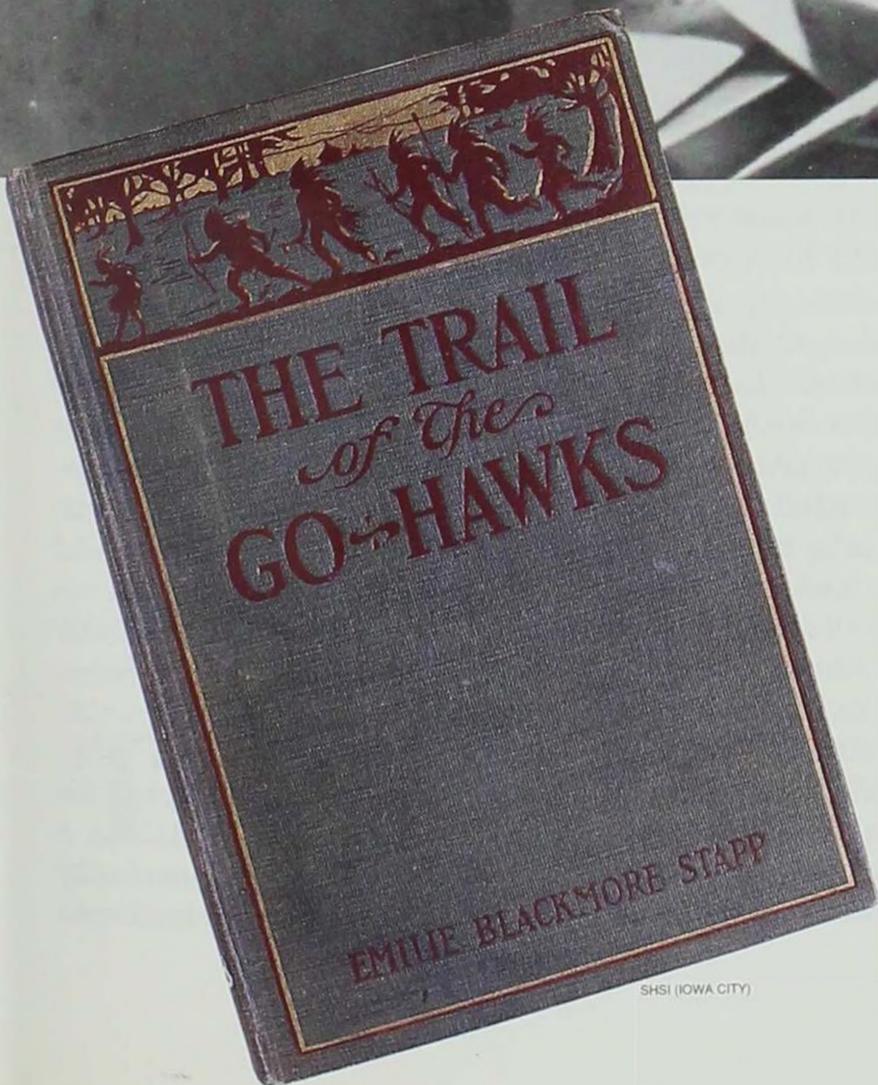


DE GRUMMOND CHILDREN'S LITERATURE COLLECTION, UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI

**N**icknamed "Happy," Emilie Blackmore Stapp sits amidst Go-Hawks mail. To the left, her 1908 novel that began the Go-Hawks movement, and (far left) a membership button.

was on a shaky financial basis, however, and it folded early in 1908. Soon after this Stapp became literary editor of the *Des Moines Capital*, where she would truly win acclaim.

Meanwhile, Stapp was also busy writing children's books. *The Trail of the Go-Hawks* was published in 1908; *Uncle Peter Heathen* would follow in 1912. The first book relates the misadventures of ten boys and two girls who form a club called the "Go-Hawks Tribe" and "play Indian." In the second book, the two girls, Patience and Prudence, give up the company of boys and devote themselves to missionary activities. Yet it would be *The Trail of the Go-Hawks* that would



SHSI (IOWA CITY)



Fashioned from crepe paper, feathers, and tassels, these headdresses were part of the Happy Tribe costumes. Boys and girls wore Go-Hawk shoulder sashes (below) over fringed tunics adorned with embroidery, beadwork, and cast-off rhinestone jewelry.



ALL PHOTOS AND ARTIFACTS FROM SHSI (DES MOINES) UNLESS NOTED. ARTIFACT AND COPY PHOTOS BY CHUCK GREINER

launch a far greater movement of benevolence than Stapp's characters "Patience" and "Prudence" could ever have envisioned.

The movement began, according to Stapp's own account, with a fan letter from an ardent reader named Jimmie. Stapp visited the ten-year-old New York boy, who was disabled and terminally ill and who longed to run around and "play Indian," as Stapp's characters did in *The Trail of the Go-Hawks*. She suggested that the two of them form a tribe of their own. It would be called the "Happy Tribe" because, Stapp explained, "Everybody wants to be happy." Those who belonged would earn arrows for performing good deeds that made others happy; they would wear membership buttons; and they would select a famous person to be "Big Chief." At Jimmie's request, Stapp contacted James Whitcomb Riley, whose idyllic, sentimental poems of childhood, small towns, and the simple life had endeared him to mainstream America. Riley accepted this honor in February 1914, and he worked with Stapp to promote the Happy Tribe until his death two years later.

Stapp never explains in *The Trail of the Go-Hawks* why she chose the name Go-Hawks. But using the motif of an Indian tribe for a children's club was certainly capitalizing on the intense enthusiasm for popularized notions of Native American customs and culture. Much of this enthusiasm could be traced to the work of Ernest Thompson Seton. An artist and naturalist, Seton "was heavily influenced by the standard romantic conventions as set forth by Rousseau, Longfellow and Thoreau" and his own passion for the environment, the outdoor life, and the "noble Redman," writes H. Allen Anderson in *The Journal of American Culture*. In 1902 Seton organized camp-outs on his Connecticut farm for local boys and taught them nature lore and moral lessons.

At the same time Seton began a "boys' department" for *Ladies Home Journal*, from which developed his *Birch Bark Roll of the Woodcraft Indians*, an activities manual for "tribes" and "councils" of boys. Seton promoted the idea through his Chautauqua lectures, even adapting it for the urban poor. The idea spread quickly. President Theodore Roosevelt—himself an outdoorsman—gave it his approval. By 1910, 200,000 American boys belonged to Seton's tribes, and Seton included his woodcraft emphasis when he wrote America's first Boy Scout manual that year.

In Iowa, Emilie Blackmore Stapp also co-opted the popular motif of "Indian tribes" and "chiefs" as a structure for her Go-Hawks Happy Tribes. Some lucky members would even wear costumes of feathered



Although not all Go-Hawks had costumes, Howard Petrie and Hus (?) Shaney posed proudly in their elaborate outfits.

headdresses and beaded tunics. But Stapp's goals were not to teach woodcraft or nature lore, or to champion romanticized versions of Native Americans. Her similarity with Ernest Thompson Seton was that she intended membership in her "Happy Tribe" to be a character-building experience. Members, she said, "would rather make other folks happy than themselves."

**T**here is no record of the early months of the Happy Tribe, but it was soon evident that the idea appealed to children. By May 1914 over a thousand girls and boys in Des Moines were wearing the Go-Hawks Happy Tribe buttons, and the move-

ment was spreading over Iowa and even into other states.

The *Capital*, where Stapp worked and which up to this time had regarded Stapp's project as a mere pastime for her, was so impressed with the response that it established a Happy Tribe Department. On May 10 the paper ran a front-page story asking youngsters to send two cents to cover postage for a Happy Tribe button and instructions on how to start a tribe in their communities. Members were sent a certificate that read, "I promise to do at least one act of kindness every day. I will do all in my power to protect birds and all wild animals." The Tribe's motto was "to make the world a happier place." When Go-Hawk membership in any community reached a hundred, the reward was a large photo of "Big Chief" James Whitcomb Riley.

Stapp encouraged her young readers to recruit other members, and membership soared, with as many as 56 letters received in a single morning's mail. Youngsters looked forward to seeing their names in print, and Stapp's columns brimmed with earnest dogoodism. "I will try very much to be a good girl and do many kind acts every day," wrote Mildred Gates of Cross Timbers, Missouri, in a typical response.

An idealist, Stapp even described herself as one "who still down deep in her heart believes in fairies." But she was also a savvy reporter, and she knew how to market an idea. Consider the contest she launched in May 1914, in which she offered a prize for the longest list of cousins submitted by a Go-Hawk. Her young readers saw it as a way of winning the first prize of \$200. Stapp saw it as a way of identifying and reaching potential members. "We not only want you to belong to the tribe but we want your cousins no matter where they live," she wrote. "Send us a list today giving their names and addresses."

Would second and third cousins count, her readers wondered. "Yes," she answered, "all cousins count if you know them well enough to have their correct addresses." On June 16, when she announced that Mabel Shideler of Van Meter was the winner with her list of 282 cousins, she gently explained that although Henry Frye of Garrison had sent in a promisingly long list, she could not count those names he had marked as "not living." "It is true 'live' cousins were not specified as a condition for the contest," Stapp admitted, "for it was thought it was understood that they must be located where happy trails could reach them."

Stapp was obviously establishing a lot of trails. Entire classes and Sunday schools were now joining. Members were bringing in more members. Young Ardelia Gladstone promised, "I expect to get my sister

to join and my cousin and my neighbor's little girl." Stapp replied, "This is as we hoped it would be." And Stapp was enlisting the support of influential adults; in June she announced that the popular children's author Rudyard Kipling would be the "Chief of The Happy Tribe of England."

The *Capital* was pleased with her success. Children—like adults—loved to see their names in print, and surely this sold more papers. Yet her sincerity convinced many that profit wasn't the goal. Colonel Henry Mann, described as a "soldier under Custer, author, [and] editor," soon endorsed the Happy Tribe, explaining, "The tribe originated under the wigwam of the clever *Capital* in Des Moines and has become as popular in the west as the Boy Scouts. Although a chief for New York has been selected only a few weeks, hundreds of children, women and men [there] are already wearing the Go-Hawk button. This, I am glad to say is not an advertising scheme nor an organization to make money, but an exposition of pure benevolence."

The Go-Hawks' first public philanthropy, Stapp reported, was initiated by Jake, a small, bare-footed boy in a faded blue shirt who came to Stapp's office one day in June 1914 and asked, "How much does it take to save a baby?" Stapp replied that it would take ten cents a day to buy milk, ice to refrigerate it, and some nursing care. Jake gave Stapp six cents and asked her to find a baby who needed help. She soon located Mabel, a sickly infant whose family lived near the Roadside Settlement house in Des Moines. Promising to supply her with milk and other needs for the rest of the summer, Stapp established a "Good Deeds Fund for Needy Children" and asked Happy Tribe youngsters to start sending pennies.

In mid-July Jake donated more pennies himself: "Dear Happy Editor, I did errands for a man—I wiped the dishes Picked some berries and wheeled our naybors baby and here is the money to save her." Stapp published the letter and reminded her readers that surely loyal Go-Hawks wouldn't leave the entire burden for Mabel on Jake and his friend Sam. Pennies rolled in.

A few weeks later Jake suggested that the Tribe adopt a baby boy, and so he and Stapp, accompanied by a staff photographer, went to the baby clinic where they found Wesley, "the sickest, thinnest baby you ever did see." In a few weeks Wesley had gained weight and was no longer crying constantly. Four other infants were helped by the Happy Tribe during that year.

Such children's projects dovetailed nicely with



**Hazel and Thelma Petrie model Go-Hawks costumes.**

what the *Capital* called its "annual charity work among the poor." In May, the same month the Go-Hawks column was launched, the *Capital* reported almost daily on its "Save the Babies" campaign to raise funds for milk and fresh-air clinics for poor children in Des Moines during the hot Iowa summer. Such reform projects were typical early in the century, as American social workers worked through settlement houses such as the Roadside Settlement in Des Moines.

That May the *Capital* also gave front-page coverage to Chimmie McFadden, New York's "king of the newsboys," whose series of speaking engagements in Des Moines helped fund the *Capital's* annual outing for its newsies and the "Save the Babies" campaign. In his colorful speeches, he described his childhood as a Bowery newsboy and "admonished the newsies to strive for better things, and to 'cut' the 'gangs,'" the

*Capital* reported. This, too, fit into new views of welfare. Social reformers concerned with child labor on the street as well as in the factory were now refuting the Horatio Alger image of the American newsboy as "plucky" and "enterprising," writes historian Robert H. Bremner, and warning instead that children's street work—such as selling papers—led to adult pimping, thieving, and gambling. Stapp herself would befriend many a newsie who sold papers for the *Capital*. Yet her columns did not portray them as needing charity but rather as prime movers in Go-Hawk campaigns to help other needy children.

**N**ews of tensions and hostilities in Europe began to fill the *Capital's* pages as the summer of 1914 continued. "Austrians Bombard Belgrade," the *Capital* blared across the front page on one day; on another, "Trenches At Liege Filled With Dead." The war invaded the *Capital's* inside pages, too, with short stories on Isadora Duncan becoming a French army nurse, photos of "Servian Women Being Trained to Fight the Austrians," and editorial cartoons of grim reapers climbing over skulls and peasant gleaners harvesting death.

Two weeks after Germany declared war on Russia, the first hint of the war appeared in the Happy Tribe column. "Jake Fears that War May Interfere with Happy Tribe," the August 14 column announced. Stapp explained that the boy who had started the milk fund was now worried about the war's effect on the Go-Hawks. But after reading that morning's mail from loyal Go-Hawks, Stapp reported that Jake had said, "I guess if the whole world gets to fightin' the Happy Tribe will stick together." Indeed it would.

Because of Germany's ruthless invasion of Belgium in violation of treaties and its subsequent invasion of France, there was great concern about the plight of children made destitute by the fighting. Stapp, whose entire focus was children, was surely distraught. In September, she announced that the *Capital's* Happy Tribe was joining 14 other American newspapers in a relief effort sponsored by the *Chicago Herald*. They would solicit gifts and raise funds to purchase clothing for refugee children. The materials would be sent on a chartered "Christmas Ship." "Six thousand children are members of *The Capital's* Happy Tribe," Stapp reported, and "are now called upon to play their part in one of the great world movements of the day." In her front-page story next to a map showing "How the Armies Are Lined Up Near Paris," Stapp minced no words, begging readers to remember

European children whose Santa Claus "fell dead on the battlefield when father dropped with a bullet in his heart."

In her "Happy Tribe" column that day, she spoke more gently to her younger readers, urging them to donate money or make gifts, to send "toys of which you are tired, clothes you have outgrown." She offered encouraging, comforting images: "You can help load the sleigh and you can shut your eyes and feel the reins in your fingers and drive the reindeer up and down the lanes of England, lined with the thatched cottages, through the vineyards of France and the stubble fields of Belgium, over the hills of Austria and along the frozen Danube to the Servian peasants' huts."

Young readers responded enthusiastically. In her journal Stapp recounted, "A vacant room had been given to us for all donations and Sammy [a newboy and ardent Go-Hawk] has chalked off every country—giving large space to Russia." By October 23, Stapp and other *Capital* staff, with the help of Sammy and other newsies, had packed and shipped 4,000 gifts in large boxes, each box marked with the name of the country for which it was destined.

Helping war orphans appealed to Stapp's young followers, and individual acts of charity filled her column. "I am sending ten cents that I hope some day will help some poor little starving girl or boy whose father has gone away never to return," wrote Harriet Chamberlain from Panora, Iowa. "I read about the Happy Tribe every night in *The Capital* and am much interested in it."

In another column, Stapp recounted, "It was about time to start home when suddenly from behind the desk stepped a little boy, so thin he looked as though he might blow away."

"I knew this was the Happy Tribe corner because the fellers said there were kids all over the walls and there are," he told her. "I brought you a cent."

"Brought me a cent," said Stapp. "What do you want me to do with it?"

"It is to buy a roll for a kid like me in Belgium," he responded. "I'd give more but that is all I've got. Can I get into the Tribe?" Stapp gave him a warm welcome.

In looking for a means of distributing the funds being raised by the Happy Tribe, Stapp contacted the Reverend S. Stuart Starritt of London, head of the Presbyterian Churches in England and a member of the Belgian Relief Committee of London. He suggested sending funds for Belgian children temporarily housed in the Alexandria Palace in London. Members of the Go-Hawks Happy Tribe contributed enough



**B**elgian orphans find shelter and food in London in 1914 (above and right). Stapp forwarded Go-Hawks funds to the Belgian Relief Committee there. (War orphans were defined as children who had lost one or both parents.)

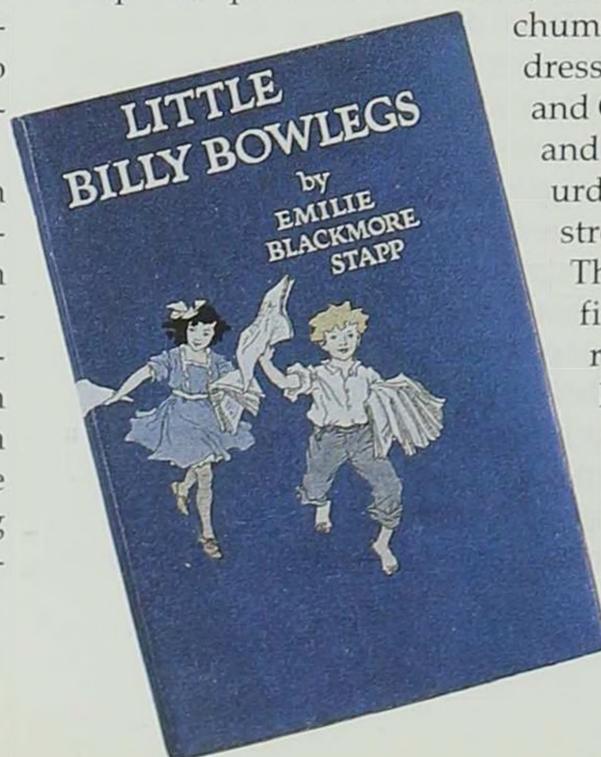
pennies to buy shoes and stockings for 200 of these children.

Stapp's Happy Tribe was soon receiving national recognition through publications such as *The Christian World*, *National Magazine*, and *Today's Magazine*. Memberships were now increasing by over a thousand a month. From New York came a hundred pennies from author and drama critic Stephen Fiske, who also bought 50 memberships for local newsboys. In Montana, a thousand boys from Helena joined, thanks to YMCA secretary Earl Roberts (formerly from Oska-loosa, Iowa).

The relief fund grew at a steady but slow pace, on some days only a few pennies at a time. Never discouraged, Stapp began another fund drive in March 1915. "More food must be provided at once for Belgium—hundreds of tons of it—or thousands of children will die before summer comes. This is the reason that our Happy Tribe has pledged itself to fill with [canned] milk a generous sized corner of the children's relief ship," she wrote. She asked her young contributors to send short messages to Princess Marie-

José, the nine-year-old daughter of Belgium's King Albert, who was to meet the ship in person. Almost \$500 worth of milk was contributed for this project.

In 1916 Stapp continued recruiting new Go-Hawks, encouraging donations for both war orphans in Europe and needy children in Des Moines. Her book *Little Billy Bowlegs* was published that year. To help her promote the book, two of her newsboy chums, Sammy and Mike dressed up as Uncle Sam and George Washington and spent an entire Saturday parading the streets of Des Moines. The book comprises five sentimental stories based on the lives of newsies who belonged to the Go-Hawk Happy Tribe and their friendships





with newspaper reporters. Go-Hawk themes run throughout. In one chapter, reporter Betty Wadsworth worries, "Snowing in Belgium! Women and children freezing and starving! I wish I could make people want to give a million dollars." Stapp dedicated the book's royalties to war orphans.

**T**he entry of the United States into the war in April 1917 heightened Stapp's efforts and the public's interest in the Happy Tribe. Stapp noted in her journal that month: "Kind Deeds Fund was merged into Little Patriots Fund and works expanded for Europe." Later she would write in the journal (characteristically in third person): "Idea for the Happy Tribe Million Penny War Fund was born to Happy June 18, 1917."

She launched the million-penny drive three days later, despite skeptical friends who thought Stapp's goal of raising \$10,000 was unrealistic. They may have underestimated Stapp's ability to reach children—and influential adults. Proclaiming July 4th as the official starting day for the Million Penny campaign, Iowa governor William L. Harding said, "The big folks of Iowa have shown a splendid patriotism and self-denial in their recent Red Cross contribution. You boys and girls of the State can do better according to your means than they." Governors of Alabama and Texas issued similar proclamations and announced state donation centers and state coordinators titled "Miss Happy." By August 1917 the *Birmingham News* had forwarded Stapp a check for \$650; by the next February, the *Houston Chronicle* sent \$1,737.91.

Stapp's office was packed every day with local children bringing in their pennies—many earned by giving "shows" for the benefit of the cause. Her journal is replete with names of children who participated, and her scrapbooks are particularly rich in photographs of events involving Des Moines Go-Hawks. (Apparently she took a photographer everywhere.) Many of the events in Des Moines bear the stamp of the early-20th-century love for pageants, dramatic skits, and festivals. Educators saw these as effective vehicles for teaching citizenship and history, patriotism and community values. Although her goals were building character and helping war orphans, "Happy" probably also approved of the pure fun children and adults had at many of these events.

The chance for proud parents to see their costumed children perform in plays and pageants also attracted adults to Go-Hawk events. An astounding 2,000 guests attended the Go-Hawks' Mother Goose Festival in September 1917 on the lawn of Alice and Frederick Weitz's home on 42nd Street south of Grand Avenue in Des Moines. A goose donated by an East Side family appeared in a chariot and entertained the guests with her continuous squawking. Presumably the goose was silenced in the evening when the First Iowa Infantry Band played.

The goose festival was followed a week later with a goose dinner at Younker's Tea Room. Lots were drawn for ownership of the goose and the winner presented it to the Happy Tribe. "Mr. Joe Schwartz then rose and offered to give 5,000 pennies," Stapp noted, "if Mr. James Davis would invite the goose to be his guest for one week at his home on Grand Avenue and

ROSABEL STOCK COMPANY NO. 1894  
Capital Stock 50,000 Pennies--2000 Shares 25 Cents each



This picture does not do Rosabel justice. She is much more handsome, and an orderly housekeeper.

INCORPORATED in the Land of Kind Hearts among Big Felks who wish to help the Go-Hawks' Happy Tribe build its Penny War Fund for the fatherless children of France and Belgium.

The owner of this certificate is the willing possessor of one share in the "Rosabel Stock Co." Every share sold of this handsome patriotic pig, at twenty-five cents each, means two and one-half days' food for a hungry child "over there."

Rosabel will become the property of the stockholder whose number corresponds with the one which will be chosen by chance and attached to Rosabel's tail when the designated number of shares are sold. The date of the big event announced later.

(signed)

Happy

**A**nother Go-Hawks project was the formation of the Rosabel Stock Company to sell "shares" in a pig named Rosabel, donated by four-year-old Dean Murray of St. Marys, Iowa. Numbered stock certificates were issued, with photos of Rosabel. The winner of the drawing gave Rosabel to the Des Moines Children's Home, where she no doubt provided a meal for the young residents.

feed Isabel every afternoon at 4:00 o'clock on his front lawn. Mr. Davis accepted the challenge and Isabel rode home with him." During the next week numerous friends gathered each afternoon to watch these "goose teas." Eventually the goose was returned to her original owners, where she soon flew over her fenced enclosure and disappeared.

As the fall and winter of 1917 set in, Go-Hawks in Des Moines staged more fund raisers to help reach the goal of a million pennies. A Happy Tribe orchestra and a Happy Tribe Stock Company performed at the Orpheum Theater. Thanksgiving, which was promoted as "Penny Day," brought in a harvest of pennies. Newsies Mike and Sammy, along with two boys from more prosperous families, worked all day collecting, counting, and wrapping pennies to be delivered to the safekeeping of Iowa National Bank. In mid-December Stapp wrote in her journal: "Office full of soldiers and wide-eyed children bursting with patriotism." Go-Hawks also prepared to sell hundreds of Christmas candles, packed carefully in thread boxes donated by a department store. To every candle they had attached a white and green paper cross that read across, "MY LIGHT WILL SHINE," and down, "LIGHT ACROSS THE SEA."

The million-penny campaign continued. In January 1918, the Camp Dodge regimental band gave two fund-raising concerts at Plymouth Congregational Church. In February a lecture by John Masefield netted \$50. By early May, the million-penny goal was clearly in sight and excitement was riding high. "May 2, 1918—Dorothy Holdoegel, a little Rockwell City girl, has captured 7,300 pennies for Fund," Stapp wrote. "With such work it looks as if we might go 'over the top' next week and reach our goal of One Million Pennies." Undoubtedly alert to publicity angles and thinking of the new national holiday established just five years earlier, she noted, "Wish we might make the goal by Mother's Day."

"May 9—Interest deepening and children in wild state of excitement bring in their pennies," she wrote. "Grown-ups are offering little old banks containing pennies belonging to beloved children of days long



**Identified only as "Betty Cole, with her sack of pennies," this little girl does her part for the Happy Tribe.**

ago whom they had lost but never before could bear to give up their little banks. They now felt the healing touch of the world's great need for suffering innocent children."

She arranged that when the goal was met, the word must reach Go-Hawks immediately. A telegram would notify "any city or village" where children were participating, and factory whistles would be blown. Church and school bells were to be rung immediately after the noon recess, and the children would rise and sing "America."

On May 10—two days short of Mother's Day—the millionth penny arrived. Claire Newport, a farm boy who donated 1,150 pennies earned from the sale of an old buggy that his father had given him, won the honor of sending the drive over the top. On hearing the news, excitement was so intense that in many communities school was dismissed for the rest of the day. In Des Moines, all the pupils from Irving Elementary School, which Stapp had attended, headed downtown. In true Go-Hawk spirit, the older boys carried a disabled student all the way from their

school, at Tenth and Pleasant, to the street below her office, where they all serenaded her with "America."

Even after Stapp's goal was reached, pennies continued to pour into her office, and the children's interest remained at high pitch. On May 13, Stapp chimed, "More pennies—the building full of soldiers and sailors and—my face—children! Children! Children!"

**S**tapp personalized relief efforts by getting the names, addresses, and photos of French and Belgian orphans, and assigning them to schools or individuals for adoption. The sponsors could now identify more closely with the children they were helping. For instance, that spring Elizabeth Werblowsky's dance classes gave a recital at the Orpheum Theater for the benefit of Maria Robert, the Belgian orphan whom they were supporting. Although Stapp never talked about her personal generosity, she adopted several war orphans herself, to whom she regularly sent contributions.

Despite Stapp's success, there were pressures to merge her work with that of the Junior Red Cross,



**P**lays and pageants (like this one at Westchester Gardens in Des Moines) meant donations for war orphans and good times for Go-Hawks. Below: Stapp poses with Go-Hawk Dorothy Holdoegel of Rockwell City at the "Glory to France" day.



which in 1918 was launching a liberty bond and thrift stamp drive. Newspapers that had helped with the million-penny drive now announced that they intended to switch their support to the bond drive, and Stapp was urged to do the same. She did make an effort to interest her young followers but, as she expressed it, "They politely but firmly refused. They agreed to do what they could to help," she said, "but insisted they be permitted to continue supporting their own

plans." Stapp determined that even if she had to work alone, she would continue with Go-Hawks projects: "I must in no way close this wonderful channel opened through the love of little children." She carried on, her "office crowded all day with children all quietly working out plans."

It is easy to understand the enthusiasm of Stapp's young followers. Their correspondence with individual orphans gave them a personal relationship with children in the war-devastated areas, and Stapp's projects stimulated their imaginations and creativity. In comparison, saving money to buy a war bond or thrift stamp held few attractions.

In the summer of 1918, as huge infusions of American troops strengthened the Allied front against Germany, Stapp wrote in her journal: "Have a brand new idea." This was to celebrate French Independence Day on July 14 with a "Glory to France" fête. Izanna Chamberlain agreed to the use of Westchester Gardens, the grounds of her home on Grand Avenue in Des Moines (now the location of Wesley Acres, a retirement community). The event turned out to be a

brilliant success, with 3,000 people paying a ten-cent admission. The grounds were colorful with French and American flags, and soldiers in uniform attended. A military band from Camp Dodge and the Veterans' Drum Corps of Des Moines played, and girls in French peasant costumes roamed the grounds selling ice cream cones. The main event of the day was a "Joan of Arc" pageant, in which Katherine Van Evera in a suit of mail made a grand entrance, riding a white horse and waving a French flag.

Successful pageants and social fêtes aside, Stapp never lost sight of destitute children across the sea. A few days after the "Glory to France" event, she noted in her journal: "Little stories written by Belgian children are now drifting in. Most pathetic." Stapp's ability to maintain the interest of Happy Tribe members was due in large measure to the inventive ways she found to dramatize even the projects in which the youngsters were engaged. For example, when it became patriotic to save tinfoil to help the war effort, Stapp designated two "Happy Tribe" orphans—Joseph from Belgium and Jeanne from France—as "tin-



In colonial costumes, Margaret Jean Verran and Jane Jarnigan sell "Martha Washington Cherry Tarts" on Washington's Birthday. Lydia Bayliss, who ran Younker's Tea Room in Des Moines, donated a thousand tarts. When sales reached 995, a young assistant, Heinie Weitz, bought and consumed the remaining five tarts "for the sake of the war orphans."

## Memories of a Former Go-Hawk

I was one of thousands of children who joined Emilie Blackmore Stapp's Go-Hawks Happy Tribe during World War I. Fond memories of Stapp (known to us as "Happy") led me to look for information about her activities during this period. I was rewarded by finding in the collections of the State Historical Society of Iowa in Des Moines her handwritten journal, six scrapbooks, many photographs of Go-Hawks and war orphans, and other memorabilia. These materials indicate that Stapp wanted the story of her war work preserved. It seems fortuitous that I would find them some 80 years later, long after she had been forgotten except by those of us old enough to have been her devoted followers when we were young.

The Stapp family seemed to have a special place in their hearts for children. I remember David Stapp, Happy's father, as a dignified old gentleman with a white beard who walked to Greenwood School with neighborhood children, bought them treats, and took them to Saturday matinees. When he died, Greenwood pupils planted a tree on the school grounds in his memory.

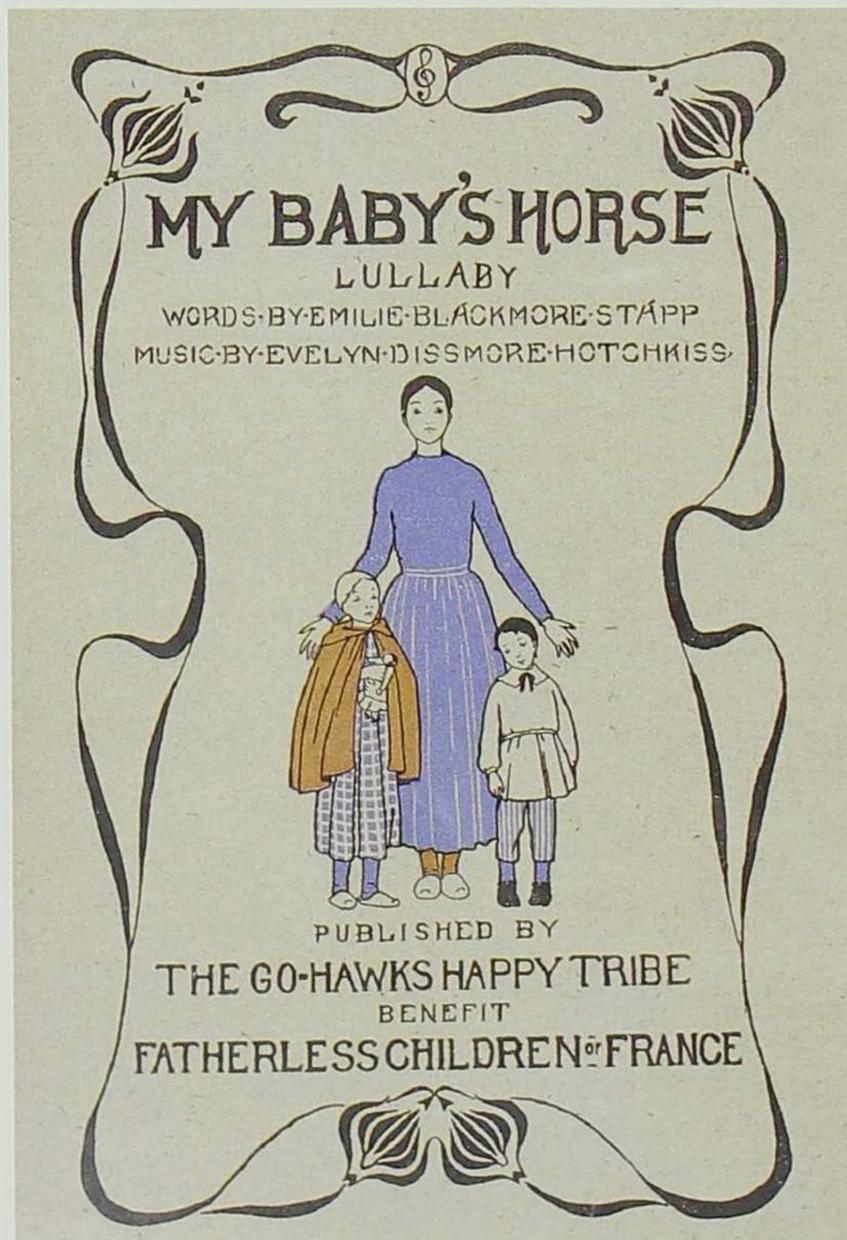
While researching this article, I enjoyed looking at the photos and reading the names of my Des Moines childhood companions who also were Go-Hawks. Occasionally I ran across my own name or was reminded of my role in the various events. At the Glory to France fête in July 1918, for example, I sold ten-cent boutonnieres to help the war orphans. I don't remember being in the cast of 80-some children for the Mother Goose pageant in October, but I am listed as playing the part of a maid. (Perhaps if I had been given a more glamorous part, I would have some memory of this occasion.) And according to Happy's journal, I was also one of the youngsters who helped put strings into the tags in preparation for the tag day sale in June 1919.

A few weeks later Happy noted in her journal, "Found a basket of apples on my desk from Louise Rosenfield 'to help poor children' who wander in." This kind of "lady bountiful" charity makes me very uncomfortable today, and it is with reluctance that I report this good deed. However, it was certainly the accepted method of charity during my Happy Tribe days. A more generous bit of charity was my giving the Go-Hawks the money I had received as a birthday present. I remember Happy praising me for this gift, but, alas, I can't find the column in which I was mentioned.

—Louise Rosenfield Noun

foil babies." They were to be supported from the sale of tinfoil that youngsters brought in. The "tinfoil" man who purchased the foil from Stapp was dramatized as a skinflint who resisted paying a penny more than he had to. Newsies Mike and Sammy were on hand to defend her against this "Shylocks." Sufficient funds were raised to feed and clothe the tinfoil babies for three years.

Not long after influenza had hit the Western Front, the epidemic reached Des Moines. Stapp noted in late October, "Children flocking to office for schools are closed on account of flu. Trying to keep them all busy." By early November, Go-Hawks in Des Moines had a place of their own—the Wig-Wam, a room on the third floor of the *Capital* building where a stage had been constructed for plays, story hours, concerts, Happy Tribe orchestra rehearsals, and benefit shows produced by the children themselves.



Stapp wrote the words for this lullaby, published in October 1918 for the benefit of the "fatherless children of France."

On November 11, the day the Armistice was signed, Stapp noted in her journal, "Wild excitement in town." But the end of hostilities did not dampen her determination. "No matter what others think," she wrote in early December, "I feel the children in the war zones will still need help for some time." She reported that a constant stream of youngsters came to her office begging to go on with helping the children overseas. Letters from American soldiers stationed in rural France told of visits to Happy Tribe orphans in the area. They sent word that these children still needed help.

She was not alone in understanding that the work was far from over. In January she noted, "Was given the opportunity of speaking on behalf of the French orphans before Jewish women of the city today. Am not much of a speaker but when one has a great cause at heart it speaks for you." And in May, she "met the Belgian consul by request and had a fine interview." "He is very eager that I broaden greatly the scope of my work to make it national." She was soon appointed "organizing president" of American school children for the Belgian Orphans Fund. Through the *Capital* pages, she kept the fund in the public's eye. A full page in the March 1920 rotogravure section was devoted to photos of Stapp, Go-Hawks, and war orphans, and explained that Stapp's responsibility was "to organize the school children of America into a definite working force for the children of Belgium." This meant more than funneling donations to Belgium: "To build an enduring friendship between the children of the two nations, to establish an unbreakable bond of understanding and sympathy thru the interchange of letters and other courtesies, this is to be the great underlying principle of the movement."

Enthusiasm about the Happy Tribe remained high during 1919 and 1920. Easter "Penny Day" brought in \$500. In June, a tag sale (where children solicited donations and gave small tags in return) yielded \$3,285. Individuals and schools donated smaller amounts, but all were diligently noted. As funds accumulated, she forwarded them to Europe—\$1,000 as an "Easter gift to be used for the maintenance of 20 orphans for another year"; \$3,500 to the Belgian Consul General in December.

Meanwhile, Stapp was aware of needs closer to home. For the third consecutive holiday season, Stapp distributed a hundred dolls to Iowa girls who then dressed them as gifts for poor children at Christmas. On the same day that she wrote, "Sent off more quilts to Belgium & France," she noted, "Altho working with all my heart to relieve conditions among children



**From Stapp's scrapbook: "Belgian refugee children being fitted with shoes bought with money sent by Iowa Go-Hawks."**

abroad, I feel we must not forget those at home. Have arranged a special Christmas party for Little Blind Paul." In April 1920 the Go-Hawks sent Easter baskets to every child in Des Moines's hospitals and institutions. The activities and events seem endless.

**S**tapp's journal for 1921 ends after only a few entries. On March 16, the *Capital* announced: "Miss Emilie Blackmore Stapp, children's editor of the *Capital* and known to thousands of children all over the country as 'Happy,' has accepted a position with



Coverlet or banner bearing the words "Iowa" and "Happy Tribe" and signed "Francis Hol" forms the backdrop for names, addresses, and photos of war orphans. Iowa girls knitted squares that were then sewn together and made into coverlets. Fifty were sent to war orphans. By acquiring names and photos of orphans, Stapp helped Go-Hawks identify with the children they were helping. Page after page of addresses fill one scrapbook, and there are hundreds of photos of European children.

Houghton-Mifflin publishing company, of Boston. Miss Stapp will . . . become children's editor of the Houghton-Mifflin syndicate sometime next month. Miss Stapp and her Happy Tribe department in *The Capital* have won national recognition and it was due to the success of this department that the publishing

company selected her out of all of the children's editors throughout the country."

In a farewell editorial the *Capital* admitted that "here in the *Capital* office we were too close to recognize fully [Stapp's] ability. She knew her field better than most of us and cultivated it more thoroughly."

And she knew her audience. At the time of Stapp's resignation the Happy Tribe had a membership of over 40,000. Some sources say that during the war, membership was twice that.

**M**y last day of work in Des Moines," Stapp noted on April 3. "My little brown office crowded all day with children saying goodbye. Have gone over the top with the Million Penny War Fund four times and fund closes today with 4,300,892 pennies, supporting 800 children. The Happy Tribe Trail now leads to Boston."

In her new position Stapp edited a full-page weekly feature named "Happyland," which appeared in the *Boston Sunday Herald* and other newspapers, with a total readership of over a million. The page contained a variety of materials appealing to children. In addition to promoting the Go-Hawks Happy Tribe, she featured recipes for girls, workshop instructions



"Still the pennies come for the war orphans," Stapp titled this 1919 photo of a Des Moines newsboy monitoring donations.



Margaret Cummins, Marion Watrous, Virginia Fitzhugh, and Doris Hunnel staff a Happy Tribe shop in Des Moines that sold knitting bags made out of paper shopping bags decorated with cutouts from magazines.



for boys, her own plays written in verse for children, and reprints of children's literature, including *The Trail of the Go-Hawks* and other books in this series. A column called "Little Friends Across the Sea" presented correspondence from youngsters in foreign countries being helped by the Happy Tribe. By early November 1921, the *Herald* reported that the Happyland page was "the talk of the children of New England. . . . Pretty soon from all indications every child in the North East will be a Go-Hawk."

In response to an appeal by the American Red Cross for books for European countries where children were learning English, Stapp assembled collections of carefully selected children's books and sent these "Happyland" and "Go-Hawk" libraries to France, Belgium, Poland, Albania, Italy, Yugoslavia, and Hungary. In one thank-you letter, a grateful teacher signed off with "a big Whoop, PROFTE SHKO-SQYFTERA! Albanian, for Hurrah for the Go-Hawks."

The trail of Stapp's Go-Hawks is harder to follow after the early 1920s. Did the growing economic depression have some effect on even "Happy" and her vision of helping one another? Did the idea lose appeal among American children? Or are there scrapbooks from this period, too—in which Stapp proudly pasted her columns and correspondence—that have yet to surface? In 1938, Stapp, in her mid-60s, resigned from Houghton-Mifflin in order to do free-lance writing. Two years later she published *Isabella, the Wise*

*Goose*, the first of a six-part series of "Isabella" books for children. Stapp used her first "Isabella" book as the focus of a mailing campaign for the sale of war bonds during World War II.

Stapp and her younger sister, Marie (who had moved with her from Des Moines to Boston), now relocated to a farm near Wiggins, Mississippi, where they built a Cape Cod-style house on a farm developed by their brother, Fred. Their home was called the "Doll House" because of some 400 dolls they had collected over two decades. They opened their home for two hours every Friday afternoon to the many visitors who wanted to see the doll collection. The Stapps were also instrumental in establishing a clubhouse for women's organizations in Wiggins, as well as a public library, one of the first in the vicinity. Emilie and Marie were well known for their generosity to the community. Marie Stapp died in 1960, and Emilie two years later.

**E**milie Blackmore Stapp's war-relief efforts pale when compared to those of another Iowan, Herbert Hoover, who coordinated millions of dollars of relief for Europe. Yet Stapp, in her own way, worked tirelessly to reach those she seemed to know best—children. And she inspired and implemented one of the more unusual war-relief efforts—mobilizing children to help other children. At a time when a



loaf of bread cost a dime, and a dozen diapers a dollar, she raised thousands and thousands of dollars for children whose wage-earning fathers had been killed in World War I. She focused on the needs of both war orphans and Iowa's own children—perhaps not in ways that would help them end their poverty and solve their problems (then the new goal of social work), but in ways that did bring momentary comfort.

In terms of the billions of dollars needed for war relief, her goals were small. But so were her donors. Much of the money raised came in the unit children understood well—pennies. "It probably plays a big part in the everyday life of most children to go without some desired penny treasure, especially when the penny is an available asset," wrote a Texas reporter about Stapp's work.

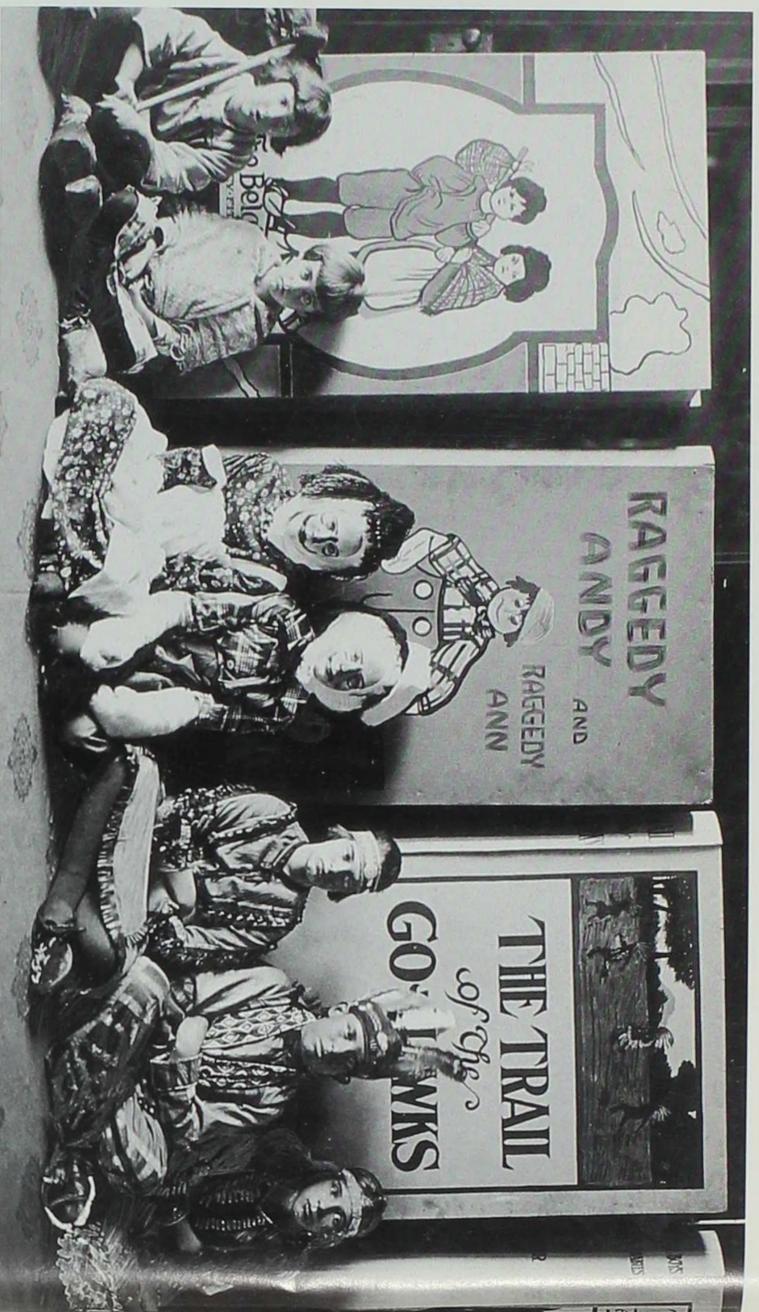
To those children who sacrificed their pennies and their time, she gave something in exchange. She gave working-class newsboys positions of esteem (a September 1919 journal entry reads: "Sammy is now the leader of a group of Four Minute speakers for the Belgian orphans"). She gave a little fame to children from all parts of Iowa, indeed, the nation, who sent in their pennies and letters to her office in Des Moines, and who then read their names in her column.

And at a time when American reformers pointed to the chasm between America's poor and America's wealthy, she gave children of privilege the benefit of the doubt. Soon after the Go-Hawks were launched,

**Dressed as favorite characters, children stepped out of giant books at the "Children's Book Shelf" tableau at the 1920 Harris Emery Department Store book fair in Des Moines. Youngsters packed the auditorium to watch the tableau and honor Stapp on "Emilie Blackmore Stapp Day." Below: Anita and John Packwood sent Stapp paper dolls with pennies tucked in tiny sacks. (Another Packwood doll is on page 145.)**

she commented in her column: "It has long been a popular bit of fiction that little children who live in certain aristocratic sections of the city must all be selfish because of their environment. If so, then how are we to account in this instance for the [children's] thought of the birds' comfort all summer, the daily act of cheering a woman who they quaintly fancy needs them and how about the good deed each remembers to do every day. These





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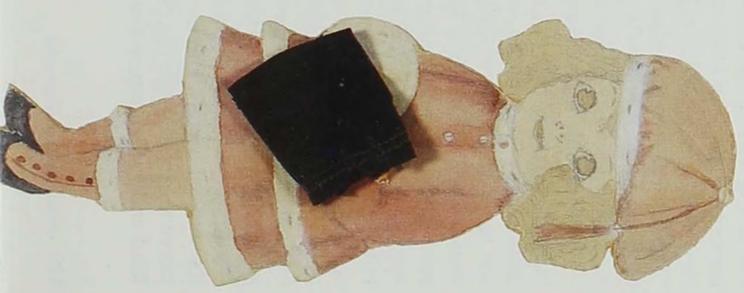
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**Stapp distributed dolls to Iowa girls and asked them to dress them and then donate them to the poor. This photo, from Stapp's scrapbook, is captioned: "We each dressed a doll for a little poor child at home."**

facts prove that Happy Tribes flourish in one part of a city as well as another."

Stapp's success lay in her understanding of children. "Everywhere children love organization, and the feeling that they are a part of something of enough importance to be of interest to other people," wrote a New England reporter in 1921 about the Go-Hawks. "The rest is left to the children, who are never at a loss, with the help of Happy's suggestions, to form plans and activities for themselves."

Responsible for earning her own living and making her own way in a largely male occupation, Stapp instinctively knew how to write a heart-wrenching sob story and how to parlay a good situation for her cause. Although she and her writings may be considered saccharine and sentimental by today's standards, she nevertheless cajoled thousands of Americans to witness a war across the ocean in personal terms. Despite the anti-German hysteria that swept through Iowa, she never wrote with rancor about the enemy, but only with compassion for the victim. Working in journalism a decade after Theodore Roosevelt had chastised journalists for going too far in muckraking the evils of society, she used another approach to improve the world—giving people the opportunity to be kind and to feel happy about it. ❖

*Louise Rosenfield Noun is the author of Strong-Minded Women; More Strong-Minded Women; and Journey to Autonomy. She has written about Carrie Chapman Catt, Nellie Verne Walker, and Harriet Ketcham for this magazine. She invites readers with memories of or materials from the Go-Hawks to contact Iowa Heritage Illustrated.*

#### NOTE ON SOURCES

In 1932, at the suggestion of J. B. Weaver, a Des Moines lawyer and former neighbor, Emilie Blackmore Stapp gave the records and memorabilia of her work during World War I to the Iowa Department of History (now State Historical Society of Iowa) as a memorial to the thousands of children who helped care for the war orphans. These materials are housed in the SHSI archives and museum in Des Moines. Her other papers, and those of her sister, Marie, and their doll collection, are in the de Grummond Children's Literature Collection, University Libraries and McCain Library and Archives, at the University of Southern Mississippi in Hattiesburg. Although Stapp's birth year is usually given as 1876, the 1885 Iowa census lists her as age 13, which would make her birth year 1872.

Besides Stapp's novels, materials from the de Grummond Children's Literature Collection, the *Des Moines Capital*, *Des Moines Register*, and *Mail and Times*, other sources are *Christian World* (Jan. 28, 1915); *National Magazine* (Jan. 1915); Frank Moorhead, "Here's the Happy Tribe," *Today's Magazine* (Aug. 1915); and Marjorie Ash's story in the *Boston Herald* (Nov. 6, 1921). Other sources include H. Allen Anderson, "Ernest Thompson Seton and the Woodcraft Indians," *Journal of American Culture*, 8:1 (Spring 1985), 43-50; and Robert H. Bremner, *From the Depths: The Discovery of Poverty in the United States* (New York University Press, 1956). Annotations to an earlier version of this article are in the *Iowa Heritage Illustrated* files. Jodi Evans, SHSI registrar, assisted Chuck Greiner in photographing Stapp artifacts.