



by Douglas H. Frazer

Helen Van Dyke, British War Relief, and The Most Excellent Order of the British Empire



HELEN VAN DYKE may have been an unlikely candidate for an activist.

Born Helen Buttrick, she came from an important Revolutionary War family; her ancestor, Major John Buttrick, commanded soldiers at Lexington and Concord. She married William D. Van Dyke, Jr. of Fox Point, a member of the Milwaukee family that, for many years, helped lead Northwestern Mutual Life. The Van Dyke home on North Bridge Lane was built in 1926 on the bluff overlooking Lake Michigan along with a gorgeous ravine traversed by a 292' foot-bridge. They had three children, Helen, Olive "Cissy," and Bill.

Helen was an anglophile; she found much to admire about the British people, and English society and institutions. Even better, Helen's younger sister, Olive, married Englishman Alex Carruthers, affording her the opportunity to spend a month most summers visiting them in England.

When England entered the Second World War on September 1, 1939, Helen was moved to act and in doing so led by example. She assumed a leadership position in the Milwaukee chapter of the English-Speaking Union and spearheaded the local British War Relief effort headquartered on Wells Street. Helen devoted much time to raising money and supplies for Britain, at times gathering women to machine weave heavy wool socks for British seamen. She even personally funded the purchase of an ambulance for service to the British people.

Helen's hard work did not go unnoticed. She and her family were subjected to threatening letters from individuals opposed to her efforts, sometimes left under their front door, to the point that the FBI instructed the family in safeguarding evidence, including the opening of documents with tweezers to preserve fingerprints. Bill and his sister Cissy (Bryson) recall that their father actually had iron shutters installed over their bedroom windows.

On December 7, 1941, the FBI called the house around lunch time informing them that the Japanese had attacked Pearl Harbor and that President Roosevelt would be addressing the nation. They told the Van Dykes that they would no longer have to worry about their personal safety: America was now in the war against Germany alongside Great Britain.

Perhaps Helen's most notable accomplishment during the war years was her involvement in the Milwaukee branch of the United States Committee for the Care of European Children. This organization facilitated the transfer of British children to the U. S. for safety and protection. Accompanied by her daughter Cissy, Helen traveled to Boston in August, 1940 to escort five British children to Milwaukee to live with foster families. These children included John and Peter Cleaver,



6 and 7, who lived with the Henry G. Wild family in Whitefish Bay; Christopher Ennion, 6, who lived with the Jackson Bruce family at East Apple Tree Road in Fox Point, and his brother David Ennion, 4, who went to the nearby home of Dr. and Mrs. O.A. Sander on Lake Drive; and Jayne Jaffé, 9, who lived with Mr. and Mrs. Willis G. Sullivan on Thorne Lane in Fox Point.

Jayne Jaffé, now Jayne Jordan, returned to the area after the war, settled in Whitefish Bay, and never left. She was the subject of a feature article in the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* on April 20, 2013, by Jim Stingl, and a book published in early 2013 about her experiences called *This Token of Freedom* by Jon Helminiak.

Jayne recalls that during the war Helen checked in on her from time-to-time. She remembers Fox Point as being a lovely, largely rural community with close-by amenities at the Fox Point Club. Jayne attended the Fox Point School (now Stormonth School) under the leadership of Principal Peter Stormonth.

His Majesty, King George VI, recognized Helen's commitment to the British people by appointing her to the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire in 1946 – the only individual in Wisconsin to receive this high honor. (The British government awarded W.W. Coleman, also of Fox Point, the King's Medal for Service in the Cause of Freedom.) The decoration, however, did not arrive until 1949 due to metal and manpower shortages following the war.

Helen Van Dyke passed away in 1970. Her substantial contributions and service in support of the WWII war effort will live on through her family and will always be a source of pride for the Village of Fox Point.



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11 Decorated By British

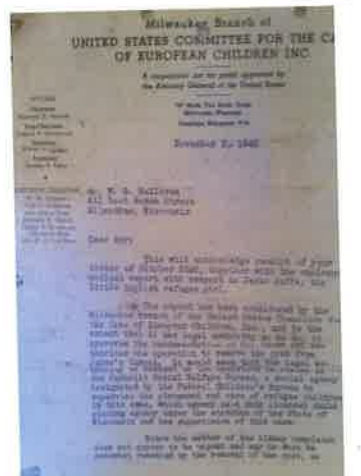
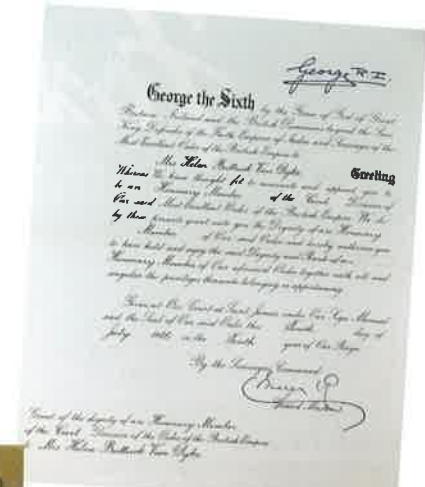
WASHINGTON, July 14—(AP)—The award of British decorations to 1,277 Americans, including 11 Wisconsin residents, for wartime services was announced today by Lord Inverchapel, the British ambassador.

Mrs. W. D. Van Dyke Jr., 324 E. Wisconsin Av., Milwaukee, was named a member in the Order of the British Empire. The decoration was awarded in the name of the King of England.

Ten other Wisconsin residents were awarded the King's Medal for "service in the cause of freedom." They were:

- W. W. Coleman, 1101 N. Marshall St., Milwaukee
- Clifford P. Morhouse, editor, The Living Church, Milwaukee
- Mrs. W. Z. Sturat, Neenah
- Miss Lena Miller, Neenah
- Miss Helen Wells Gray, Manitowoc
- James Hill, Kenosha
- Mrs. John Holden, Kenosha
- Mrs. William Howells, Madison
- Mrs. J. J. Huber, Racine
- Mrs. H. A. Bradt, Williams Bay

Recipients of the awards are being notified by mail. The ribbons of the decorations will be sent them shortly, but the medals themselves will not be available for some time because of metal and manpower shortages in Britain.



Douglas H. Frazer is a trustee on the Fox Point Village Board. The views expressed are his own and not necessarily those of the Village, the Village Board, other Village Board members, or Best Version Media, LLC.

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