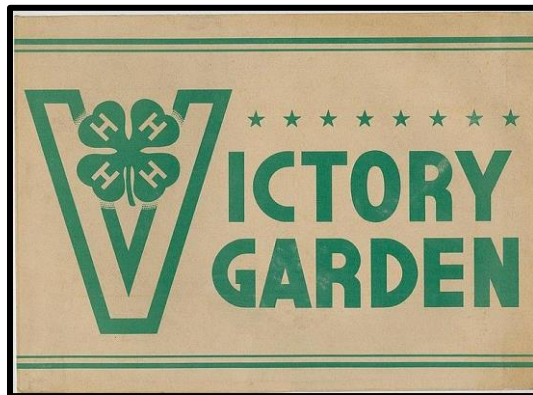


The Week in Saratoga County History

4-H Clubs Helped Win WW II

Submitted by Paul Perreault September 13, 2023

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First promoted during World War I, War Gardens or Victory Gardens provided American citizens an opportunity to assist with the war effort. Americans were encouraged to produce their own food by planting vegetable gardens in their backyards, churchyards, city parks, and playgrounds. According to the 1919 pamphlet *War Gardening and Home Storage of Vegetables*, the War Gardens of America produced food “which helped establish the balance of power between starvation and abundance” in Europe during the final two years of the war.

Charles Lathrop Pack, head of the National War Garden Commission, coined the term “Victory Garden” as World War I was nearing the end. More upbeat than “War Garden,” the term was so popular that it was used again during World War II, when victory gardeners sprang into action once more.

From the beginning of the war, the Saratoga County 4-H clubs, under the direction of the County Farm and Home Bureau, took up the challenge. In January 1942, less than a month after the attack on Pearl Harbor, *the Saratoga County 4-H Club News* gave specific instructions on how clubs could play their part in a “Victory Program”. In addition to “increasing garden production”, members were encouraged to collect papers, preserve food, learn first aide, and cooperate with other community organizations.

From that time until near the end of the War, many articles were devoted to both the need for and the role that 4-H members were expected to play in the movement. The February 1942 issue instructed members to “Plan Your Victory Gardens Now” explained that a lack of transportation and civilian farm workers would require more volunteer production in each community. Subsequent issues gave both encouragement and tips on how to manage a Victory Garden and in the July issue, members were treated to the following :

Weeds are like Germans
Bugs are like Japs
If you get rid of these
You’ll have a garden perhaps.

The September 1942 issue summarized the accomplishments of the program and encouraged young members to spend the winter months making plans for next year’s garden and raising money for the Army-Navy Relief Fund.

The January 1943 edition of the *4-H Club News* reminded the members of their good deeds of last year by announcing that George De Ridder, Jr. of Ballston Spa was selected as the Victory Gardener Champion of the County by raising enough to both feed his own family and sell \$205. He was awarded a \$25 War Bond and a gold medal. The following month members were informed that “the need will be even greater than 1942” and not only farm families but anyone with suitable land should participate. Each subsequent issue from March until August 1943 contained information about successful practices or motivational items like the following:

Victory Gardens (to the tune of Tramp, Tramp, Tramp)

Plant, Plant, Plant our Victory Garden
Plow the furrows deep and true,
We will seed and weed and hoe
Make our Victory Gardens grow
We will keep the “chow” a-rolling over there

The August issue reported that the New York Victory Garden program had produced enough food to feed 2,000,000 soldiers for a year. 4-H members who may have had an older brother or sister in the service, must have been very proud of their accomplishments.

Almost the entire issue of the February 1944 *4-H Club News* was devoted to the subject of Victory Gardens. “Your 1944 Garden”, written by Frank Englehart, Jr., the 1943 New York State Victory Garden Champion, instructed members to reflect on their successes and failures from last year as they planned their gardens for the upcoming season. “To Your Battle Stations” was a call to arms comparing the club members to the crew of a battleship and “Nutrition Goals for 1944” suggested the most nourishing crops that the young farmers could plant. Members were also reminded of the daily Victory Garden program broadcast on WGY radio.

Any member not inspired by the February issue would certainly be stirred by the message printed in March, as it came from the Commander-In-Chief, President Franklin Roosevelt. He first reminded them that 4-H Mobilization week was to be held on March 4 to 12 and then pointed out that the Country was counting on them, the “shock troops of the food production front” more than ever to give that extra impetus to the war effort so essential to ultimate victory.

While each issue encouraged the young gardeners, some were more creative than others. For instance, the May 1944 issue shared the following:

Vegetables for Victory

We'll have to raise a bumper crop
To put the Nazis on the hop
It's vegetables for Victory
We'll have a lot of peas,
So we can fight those Japanese

For the rest of the year, there was little direct mention of the program but instead general tips on good gardening. However, in November 1944, the *4-H Club News* proudly announced that for the second year in a row a member from the County, George De Ridder, Jr., from Ballston Spa had been chosen the New York State Victory Garden Champion for 1944, following Frank Englehart's 1943 selection.

Starting in June 1945, a definite change can be detected in the *News*. For the rest of the year the magazine focused more traditional and fun activities: the upcoming County Fair to be held in August, the dangers of fires on a farm, poultry and dairy judging contests. With victory in sight, the youngsters of America wanted to get back to living a normal life, as did their parents. So, without fanfare, without self-congratulatory editorials, the *Saratoga County 4-H Club News* and the members it served started to enjoy the peace they had worked so hard to achieve. As the years passed; they could look back proudly on the role they played as part of the Greatest Generation.

Wendy McConkey, Executive Assistant, Officer Manager and Records Management Officer of the Saratoga County Cornell Cooperative Extension, generously provided the issues of the Saratoga County 4-H Club News for 1942 to 1946, as well as the Victory Garden sign.