

ARMENIA RELIEF FUNDRAISING BADGE


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Noubar Nick Pezikian, Sydney, April 2015

This is the story of a little tin badge issued in Melbourne, Australia in 1917 and its connection to the Armenian Genocide and Australian history. As a badge collector, I knew about the badge, but as the centenary of the Armenian Genocide came closer my curiosity led me to research its history. 

Over the course of the past hundred years the Armenian Genocide has been documented thoroughly and extensively by Armenian and non-Armenian sources. Information on the Genocide has been provided by the eyewitness accounts of genocide survivors, foreigners working as diplomats or missionaries and Australian soldiers engaged in WWI.

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News of the atrocities affected Australians so deeply that the Armenia Relief Fund was established in December 1915 to raise funds for the starving and homeless Armenians. The support continued through the initiative of the Lord Mayor of Melbourne, Sir David Hennessy to have April 22, 1917 designated 'Armenia Day' for fundraising.

In November 1917, to further assist the fundraising drive, an official badge was commissioned by the Commonwealth Button Fund. The badge was designed by Frances Woolcott. It featured a colour illustration of a desert scene, with palms, white buildings and people riding camels. It also had 'Servia (Serbia), Syria, Armenia' printed in red letters. Though primarily designed to provide relief for the Armenian survivors in northern Syria where many of them ended up after their deportations from their homeland, the badge also helped raise funds for the Serbians in the aftermath of the Balkan Wars.

In January 1918 the Governor General of Australia was advised by the Lord Mayor's Armenian Fund Committee in London to jointly designate Feb. 3, 1918 as fundraising day for the Armenian people in both countries. The day coincided with the release of the special badge across Australia. Interestingly, other countries also issued badges to assist with their fundraising efforts for the Armenian refugees.

Two versions of the same badge exist--a 22mm and a larger 33mm version. The larger badge was

possibly made for another fundraising event in the 1920s. The badge image is a mystery as there is no depiction of the anguish and horror of the region at the time. Perhaps the designer wanted to portray a scene of tranquility and peace rather than the sad truth.

Relief for Armenian refugees from Australia continued for more than a decade, including the establishment of the Australasian Orphanage in Beirut which housed up to 1,700 children at any one time from 1923 to 1929. Several hundred thousand pounds were raised by Australians and their government. The world-wide relief movement saved many Armenians and Ottoman Christians from starvation and destitution. Furthermore, in the young country of Australia it provided a catalyst to a society advocating humanitarian aid and social justice.

The little badge, in its own special way, represents a tangible symbol of a time when Australians demanded justice and believed that genocide had been inflicted upon the Armenians by Ottoman Turkey and its successor republic. Today, 100 years after the Armenian Genocide, Australia's official stance is sadly very different.

The author is looking for other collectors of Armenian Relief badges and pins. You may contact him at [Victory Badges](#).

