

NEWS LETTER

OCTOBER 1945

ARRIVAL: "We arrived at the American Farm School last evening (Sept.22) just two years and ten months from the time we were taken to internment camps in Germany." This is the way Mrs. Charles House begins her first letter ... "and you can imagine how wonderful it was, - the first joyful welcome". The GRIPSHOLM which brought Mr. and Mrs. House to the United States after their release in March 1944 took them back to Greece with 193 boxes of clothing and supplies arriving in Piraeus at sunset on September 13th. (We would like at this time to thank all those who so generously responded to our needs for bedding and clothing which went into these boxes.)

In spite of all warnings, Mr. and Mrs. House were deeply touched by the extent of destruction and desolation which they saw in Piraeus and Athens, and also along the road to Salonica which they travelled for three days in a small UNRRA truck. Of the first sight of Piraeus Mrs. House writes:

"Oh such contrasts! The pinky, lavender light on the almost white sandy rocks, the jagged bare mountains with a few little trees here and there, silhouetted against the sky, and the blue, blue sea - breathtaking in their beauty. And then, in the foreground, the miserable little shacks, the ruined buildings, the piers and warehouses roofless, with broken concrete pillars, great piles of twisted iron - formerly cranes, ships everywhere about, standing on end, tipped over on their sides, their smoke stacks half sticking out of the water, the ragged sailors in their shabby little boats, children salvaging bits of board and boxes thrown overboard with the garbage from our boat - a desolate scene."

"Of course, the Greeks always have a warm welcome for their friends, but never like this time ... all day friends kept coming to see us. Everywhere, people stopping us. How they found out so quickly is a mystery..." "As we turned into the school road, back in Salonica, instead of deep ruts we found a good smooth road." (One of the few assets of the German occupation.) Along the road they met one and another of the school family and all walked together back to the School. Anyone who has been to the School and knows what the School means to its community can picture the full significance of this home-coming. Of course, the first thing was to make a tour of inspection of the farm with Mr. and Mrs. Sydney Loch, Mr. Theodor Litsas and Mr. Demeter Hadjis - to all of whom the American Farm School owes a lasting debt of gratitude. "Everything looks in surprisingly good condition but, of course, sadly in need of paint, - but clean and tidy. Charles has not yet had time to examine carefully James Hall. The big bomb that blew up the south wing still lies there, split open, in the basement, - an ugly looking thing." "The horses are beautiful and so are the cows, pigs and chickens, and the stables and pens have all been whitewashed. The farm machinery and tractors are pretty rickety, but Mr. Hadjis, Pericles and Argirios have done a wonderful job in spite of that."

PREPARATION FOR OPENING SCHOOL AFTER FIVE YEARS: Princeton Hall has been prepared as a self-sufficient school building for a limited group of boys and it is practically ready for the opening of school. "The dining room in the basement where it has always been, has been painted and the former fine heavy tables and benches are there. Emanuel had hidden them behind quite a mountain of broken furniture and 'junk' and so saved them. The kitchen, with the equipment which we brought back with us will be in order. The British, during their occupation had built a stage in the playroom

so that is ready for the boys. Boyden Hall, the assembly room, has been patched up although the panelling and floor are in very bad shape and all chairs gone, it can be used." (In this connection, we are happy to announce that Mrs. John Finley and her brother, Mr. Boyden, have made it possible to restore Boyden Hall as soon as supplies can be obtained.) "There is a room ready for receiving parents and students, three sunny classrooms with desks repaired and ready, teachers' desks are being made in the carpentry shop, and another room has been cleared and readied for the School office and records. The dormitories have been cleaned out, and what beds and lockers that have been salvaged from the occupation are being repaired. The classrooms have some maps and pictures but we need many more, as well as school books and supplies. The chapel is freshly painted but we are minus the chairs. The south wing opposite the chapel will be the library. Most of the books were saved as they had been moved out of James Hall before the Germans took over the building, but they are in great disorder and we will have to get tables, chairs and bookcases. The typewriter, presented to Dr. House by Miss Mary Mathews, was hidden in the ground in a nearby village through the occupation, so that has been saved." ... "I met five boys out in front of the house this morning who had walked out to find out when school is going to open - nice looking boys." "The matter of the cost of food will have to be settled first, but within a fortnight these matters can be cleared up and we will have the first class started since School was closed almost five years ago." The British Society of Friends are planning to resume their scholarship aid, which will enable the School to take twenty-four boys this first year.

PREVENTORIUM: To the British Friends Relief Service we also owe much gratitude for the "Preventorium" which was established at the School last summer in the huts, which the Germans erected to house the School staff when they took over the School cottages. Hundreds of undernourished children have come for a period of three weeks in the hope that pre-tubercular conditions may be caught in time. Mrs. House described her visit to see the group at the "Preventorium" at the time of her arrival:

"I have just come back from the dairy where some hundred little boys and girls were sitting under the trees, drinking their morning milk from big tin bowls. Their lips were all milky and they were having a VERY happy time. They had walked up from the barracks. This work is under the direction of Mr. and Mrs. Sydney Loch, aided by the British Friends Relief Service and UNRRA. On Sunday we walked over to see the children as they lined up for dinner. They sang us a welcome song as well as many others with much gusto. They are a heart-warming sight. The barracks are connected by a large open shed roofed to keep the hot sun off, but getting all breezes. It is an ideal place for children."

With the approval of the Trustees of the American Farm School a new and very interesting plan has been worked out by the British Friends Relief Service for the use of these huts during the coming winter. Under the direction of Mrs. Sydney Loch they propose that these huts should be adapted to serve as a residential camp school where fifty village girls may receive training in domestic economy and village agriculture. The staff will be mostly Greek but will include two members of the Friends Relief Service. It is anticipated that UNRRA will provide the basic food rations. It is our hope that this will eventually develop into the girls' school for which we have been hoping so long.

MR. and MRS. SYDNEY LOCH: From the General Secretary of the Friends Relief Service comes this appreciation of Mr. and Mrs. Loch in which we of the American Farm School wholeheartedly join:

"In Salonica are Joyce and Sydney Loch, veteran relief workers of two wars and the chaotic period in between. Speaking Greek and knowing Macedonia well, tireless and full of resources they have made their home at the American Farm School a natural

center for the whole neighbourhood. The senior Greek officials, senior Army officers, padres, doctors and UNRRA regional chiefs all regard the Lochs as a chief source of help, advice or just plain home peace . . . Bad though physical conditions in Greece are, the moral deterioration has been greater. Joyce and Sydney Loch are the sort of people who can give direction and incentive to work of this type."

VISITORS: "We have had many visitors - among them Mr. Gwinn, the American Consul and his wife; Mr. Rapp, the British Consul General and his wife; Mr. Moulton, the new Y.M.C.A. secretary; Mr. Singleton, Chief of the Macedonia area of UNRRA (in Mr. Carl Compton's place); Dr. and Mrs. Riggs of Anatolia College; Major Niblack, in charge of health work and Colonel Somerhaze, the Chief British Army Medical officer for this district."

In connection with visitors to the School we want to speak of Mr. Lehman's visit last summer. Herbert H. Lehman, Director General of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration, writes that - "During my recent visit to Greece, Mr. Compton took me to visit the American Farm School, which greatly interested me. I am glad to know that Mr. and Mrs. House have arrived in Greece. I am sure that their welcome must have been a warm one, as the school and its management are obviously held in high regard by the Government and the people of Greece."

Mrs. House also reports that Baba Mara, who has often appeared in our News Letters in the past, is still alive (100 years old) having survived the occupation and some rough treatment. She is still busy doing kind and healing services for all who come to her little one room hut in the city of Salonica.

BOY SCOUT AND GIRL GUIDE TRAINING CAMPS: Mr. Theodor Litsas has made an outstanding contribution to the morale of the youth of Macedonia, and indirectly the adults as well, through his training camps which he has held on the School grounds for the past six months. Since the end of the occupation, he has trained hundreds of Boy Scout leaders and Girl Guides. These boys and girls have come from all parts of Macedonia and Thrace. "On Tuesday evening," writes Mrs. House, "we had a wonderful camp fire out in front of our house toward the pine grove. There must have been several hundred boys and girls here, most of whom had camped out here during the summer for further Scout training. Many guests came from out of town for the occasion. Four Scouts walked in and were given lighted torches with which they lighted the camp fire as the Scouts and Girl Guides gave the Scout oath and sang. Then there was an address of welcome to us to which Charles replied, telling of his encouragement over the hard work of the villagers in getting their fields cultivated and expressing to them his hopes for the future of the Greek people. There was a splendid program by the various groups and much fine singing,- a grand evening and much enthusiasm. I can imagine so well what these first camp fires here at the School meant to the people after the years of tragedy and suppression. Charles and I are both fine, and oh! so thankful to be 'on the job' again."

Ethel H. Bliss  
Executive Secretary