

RESCUING THE DESTITUTE

The Salvation Army in Spokane, 1891–1920

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On the evening of August 22, 1891, the Salvation Army marched down the streets of Spokane promptly at 7:30. Brass music penetrated the ears of the idle migrant laborers relaxing and playing poker in the saloons. Women and children began to peer through windows and cracked doors of wooden shacks. Slowly people emerged and began following the band until it stopped at the corner of Riverside and Howard. To their surprise the band was composed of three women in blue uniforms and a solitary man in a red shirt. A few words were spoken and then their march proceeded to a rented meeting hall at Howard and Main. Intrigued, the people followed them into the cramped, poorly ventilated building. The Salvation Army then "opened fire" and launched into an evangelical meeting. By the end of the meeting two people had accepted Christ, and the Salvation Army had set its foot in Spokane.

The Salvation Army started in England in 1865 as a reaction to the growing disparity of wealth created by the industrial revolution. The organization quickly grew and spread to other countries, including America. Between 1879 and 1899 an average of 29 new churches, called corps, were opened each year throughout America. In 1891 three trained ministers, Ensign (Adjutant) McAbee, Captain Long, and Lieutenant Tilden were commissioned in Seattle to open a new corps in Spokane. Initially, these three women were ignored or threatened by local inhabitants after they marched into Spokane in August 1891. In a year-end summary in 1892 the newspaper recounted the city's reaction: "A year ago a forerunner of the Salvation Army...attempted to establish barracks in Spokane and was driven out of the city." The group did not leave and tensions continued to grow. The conflicts provoked in Spokane from 1891 to 1920 by the Salvation Army's attempts to rescue the destitute provide a glimpse at the difficulties involved in creating an organization amidst class animosity. While the middle class despised the Salvation Army's tactics and the labor unions vehemently disagreed with its message of salvation, both groups eventually accepted and supported the Salvation Army in Spokane.

Class Conflict in Spokane

In 1891 Spokane faced a number of problems, including a growing class conflict. Prior to the 1889 fire the downtown district was filled with saloons, gambling establishments, female boardinghouses, hotels, banks, shops, and stables that served the migrant laborers searching for entertainment between employment in the fields, mines, and forests. For many of the upper class citizens who resided outside of downtown, Spokane Falls was the epitome of "sin city." When the fire of 1889 destroyed this district the middle class saw an opportunity to reconstruct Spokane both physically and morally. They started by shortening the name to Spokane. They made it difficult for "sinful" establishments to obtain permits to reestablish themselves and

prohibited the construction of wooden buildings of any kind. Consequently, most gambling houses, single men's residences, and employment offices were forced upriver. The red-light district moved to a shantytown near the railroad tracks and then farther upriver.

Despite these legal successes, a few civic leaders called upon the mayor, chief of police, and city council to purge the city "of the dangerous classes.... They are a clog in the wheel of progress and impart to the city an air of 'toughness' that repels many intending investors." In January 1890 a self-appointed citizens' group started the Law and Order League in a vigilante effort to deal with the situation. When league members began nighttime raids, social chaos ensued.

This climate was the backdrop for the Salvation Army's entrance into Spokane, yet the city was idealized in the organization's publication, *War Cry*, on September 12, 1891, "The Salvation Army has invaded Spokane.... It is one of the finest cities of the northwest. The people have long been praying for the Salvation Army to come to Spokane. The Lord has answered their prayers and we are here."

The key to solving the problems of downtown Spokane, according to the Salvation Army, was to deal with the root causes. If people would accept salvation, they would be transformed from the inside out. The key to solving poverty was evangelism and love rather than labor unions or economic development.

Pounding drumbeats were interspersed with a blaring horn and a clanging tambourine. Up and down the street they marched, trying to attract the attention of crowds to lure them into an evangelistic meeting. Minstrel shows and circus routines were used to attract attention. Instead of liturgical services the soldiers of salvation combined music, exhortation, personal testimonies, brass bands, and skits. People in the crowd spat tobacco on the rental hall floor and prostitutes socialized near the door.

Middle class Christians adamantly opposed the "desacralized" and "secularized" evangelical tactics of the Salvation Army. They feared that the Salvation Army would unleash civil disorder by disturbing the peace and obstructing the streets, and that the passionate and enthusiastic worship would unleash uncontrollable sexual desires. For many, the Salvation Army's worship music and entertainment were tools of the Devil.

While these techniques were intolerable to some, they were successful among working-class men and women. During its first two years in Spokane the Salvation Army enlisted 200 members. The combination of music halls, saloons, and camp style meetings appealed to people who had been rejected by other Christians because of their lack of propriety and riches. One edition of the *War Cry* explained the philosophy behind the organization's approach to evangelism. "It ought not be forgotten that the Army is composed of a very peculiar class, drawn from the lower strata of society, and that it is on this same class they are striving to operate." While the Salvation Army could win over those who were economically distressed, legal powers were in the hands of its opposition.

The city government of Spokane repeatedly condemned the Salvation Army's tactics. In February 1892 the group's bass drum was declared a nuisance and barred from the streets. The Salvation Army was also instructed to avoid Howard Street because one sick person on the street was annoyed at the noise created by the band. In the same year an article appeared severely criticizing parents who allowed their children to participate in the Salvation Army's marches. After a bold and provocative essay by J. Rushford defending the Salvation Army against these attacks, the public debate about the organization disappeared from the local

papers. In the meantime, however, an incident occurred that would plaster the name of the Salvation Army on the cover page of the *Spokesman Review*.

On May 5, 1893, Captain Ida Bennett was preparing for a routine visit to the Spokane County Jail when David Hoskins murdered her. According to a subsequent article in the *War Cry*, "The infatuated man was in love with the Captain and because she refused to encourage his suit, he killed both her and himself it is thought in a fit of insanity." Bennett became venerated throughout the Salvation Army as a martyr and a model for serving the poor. For a short period of time Spokane mourned with the Salvation Army over the loss of a dedicated minister and her work was admired in community publications.

In 1897 another conflict erupted between the city and the Salvation Army. The city passed an ordinance prohibiting any activity that would frighten horses or interfere with traffic flow. One clause forbade public musical performances without prior permission from the mayor. On July 1, 1897, police officers arrested members of the Salvation Army who were holding an outdoor meeting at their usual location. All the way to the police station the Salvationists sang and played music, trailed by hundreds of spectators. Eight band members were charged with disorderly conduct, and their trial was scheduled for the following week.

Ensign Barnes was outraged at the way the city was trying to drive the organization out by minimizing its work and vowed to fight the ordinance all the way to the nation's capital. Six days later the city council proclaimed its support for the ordinance by unanimously voting to revoke the monthly appropriation of \$15 to the Salvation Army Rescue Home. If the group would not follow the rules, it would not be supported. The Salvation Army wavered in its opposition. The street corner was not as important as community support for social programs. Brigadier Howell composed a letter to the *Spokesman Review* in which the Salvation Army agreed "not to attempt again to use the disputed corner of Riverside Avenue and Howard Street for religious services, whether they won or lost in court." All cases were dismissed, and the issue of public meetings was closed until 1909.

Despite periodic legal problems with the city, the Salvation Army managed to serve the poor and destitute in Spokane. It was famous for its creed of "Soup, Soap, and Salvation." The Salvation Army believed that the Gospel could not be preached to a person who was dying of hunger. In 1897 they opened a food and shelter depot at 709 Front Avenue called "the Haven," which provided sleeping accommodations for 50 men. The cost was 10 to 20 cents daily depending on the quality of the room. Meals were provided at the starting price of five cents. For those who could not afford the inexpensive prices, work was available in the adjacent wood yard. One of the administrators of the building explained the Salvation Army's principle in putting aid recipients to work. "In this institution we aim at disposing charity without pauperizing those who receive it. One of the things we insist on here is that applicants for rooms show a willingness to work.... A man who refuses to work gets nothing here."

The Haven was almost self-sustaining, contained a free employment agency, and received only a five dollar grant from the county every month. In 1897 the Salvation Army began providing a free Christmas dinner to the poor at the Haven. People received clothing, extra food, and gifts to brighten their Christmas. That first year some 500 people attended the dinner. The number dropped to 400 in 1898, but in the following years it steadily grew as more people discovered the Salvation Army's programs. The organization was beginning to establish its presence, and mainstream churches began to accept the Salvation Army as a powerful provider of social services.

The Salvation Army also opened Liberty Home, a residence and maternity hospital for women who were pregnant out of wedlock. One of the leaders of the city, E. M. Hepburn, declared,

All good Christians look with delight and thankfulness upon the wave of purity, self sacrifice, and love that follows the Salvation Army everywhere. A rescue home necessarily forms a part of city life, and we are proud to see those amongst us who, like Christ, consider themselves lowly and of no reputation that they may help the fallen.... This aggressive work is undoubtedly the ideal kind of Christianity.

In 1911 a fire destroyed Liberty Home, forcing the Salvation Army to relocate the service to a rented building at 13th and Perry Streets. Residents of this upper class neighborhood did not approve of having in their backyard what had earlier been lauded in the press as an ideal Christian work.

Liberty Home quickly became a thorn in the side of the South Hill community. In September 1911 the Liberty Park Improvement Club filed a suit against the home and provided notification that the Salvation Army must vacate the premises. The club asserted that the "class of inmates are objectionable to the residents." Two months later the suit went to trial. A number of residents testified to the negative impact the home had on the area, and the judge agreed with them. The home annoyed the residents of the area and depreciated the neighboring property. Upon handing down the judgment that the Salvation Army must move, the judge commented on the reasons for his decision: "The cries of women in agony and the wails of -infants in distress have been wafted over the neighborhood; that women awaiting maternity move around the porches of the house and in the yard, in plain sight of all who pass." The residents of South Hill did not wish to find themselves in the company of those the Salvation Army was ministering to.

Free Speech Fight of 1909

Despite the Salvation Army's ministry to the working class, labor unions felt threatened. Both the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) and the Salvation Army fought for control of the workers' souls in downtown Spokane. These two groups advocated different approaches to social change. The IWW taught that violent methods must be adopted immediately to improve working conditions. In contrast, the Salvation Army promoted the virtues of meekness and humility. Listeners were instructed to accept hardship in this life for the promise of a reward in heaven. These conflicting messages eventually led to a confrontation between two bands during the Free Speech Fight of 1909 in Spokane.

In 1908, in response to growing protests by the Wobblies against employment agencies, Spokane passed an ordinance forbidding street meetings in business districts. The Salvation Army complained that once again it was being forced off the streets, the avenue central to its work. The city then amended the ordinance in the summer of 1909 to allow the Salvation Army to preach and hold street meetings. The Wobblies howled in protest and started a band of their own. They took the lyrics of a few of the Salvation Army's most popular songs and changed them to fit their own perspective. Harry McClintock, a Wobbly song leader, wrote a song with the following lines to mimic the Salvation Army's song, "Revive Us Again."

*Why don't you work like other folks do?
How the hell can I work when there's no work to do?
Hallelujah, I'm a bum, Hallelujah, bum again,
Hallelujah, give us a handout to revive us again.*

Another song mocked the Salvation Army's focus on eternal rewards rather than the union's immediate goals of better working conditions and higher wages. Joe Hill wrote the following lines:

*You will eat, bye and bye
in that glorious land above the sky;
work and pray, live on hay,
you'll get pie in the sky when you die.*

The Wobblies also adopted a strategy of non-violent conflict to protest the city's suppression of free speech. Some 600 Wobblies from throughout the West were mobilized to join the Free Speech Fight in Spokane. The tussle continued for four months, during which time 1,200 people were arrested at a cost of \$250,000. The cost outweighed the benefits. On March 4, 1910, the City of Spokane released all of the prisoners and the governor pardoned all of those held on conspiracy charges. Anyone—Salvationist or Wobbly—would be free to speak on the streets. Ironically, the Wobblies, who had spited the Salvation Army's goals, solved the public assembly problem that had tormented the evangelists for 20 years. After the Free Speech Fight of 1909, the Salvation Army faded from the headlines.

Shifting Opinions

In the first decade of the 20th century the Salvation Army began to purchase property and construct permanent structures in Spokane. By 1905 national corps populations were stabilizing, the first generation of members was bequeathing substantial inheritances to the organization, and many of its leaders believed that property ownership was an essential step in becoming a stable, respectable force in America. Eventually, in 1919, the Salvation Army was able to break ground on a central services building at Main on Trent Street. The first floor of the building contained two auditoriums. The second floor housed the headquarters for all branches of the Salvation Army's work in the region, including a free clinic and a lawyer. The third floor was a workingman's hotel. Furnished, comfortable sleeping quarters were available at a nominal cost. The Spokane community donated funds for this building in the wake of increasingly positive national publicity and the international prestige the organization garnered during World War I.

The turning point in national public acceptance for the Salvation Army came in 1906. In the aftermath of an earthquake and fire in San Francisco, the organization provided large-scale, systematic emergency relief. The public was impressed with the self-sacrifice and compassion the Salvation Army demonstrated and responded by enthusiastically donating to the red kettles placed throughout the city. In 1911 Theodore Roosevelt declared, "There are few serious thinkers nowadays who do not recognize in the Salvation Army an invaluable social asset, a force for good which works effectively in those dark regions where, save for this force, only evil is powerful."

Later that decade 30,000 trained Salvationists worked for the Red Cross in Europe during World War I. Female Salvationists (called Lassies) provided medical services, held religious support and evangelistic meetings, and baked a variety of sweets for the soldiers in huts near the front lines. The most notable baked good was the fried doughnut. The troops fell in love with the services and the sincere love demonstrated by the Lassies. Letters home praised the Salvation Army, and after the war veterans became some of its firmest supporters.

In Spokane the Salvation Army led a community fund-raising campaign to send ambulances to France. The citizenry rallied behind the Salvation Army's program by engaging in a number of

fund-raising pursuits. More than 100 musicians marched along Riverside Avenue and collected over \$300. A group of women collected \$900 in one day from downtown businesses. A number of companies, spurred on by a generous contribution from Weyerhaeuser, made substantial contributions of their own. The Elks put on a parade, musical shows, and a dance. This campaign is significant in the history of the Salvation Army in Spokane because in earlier years such a drive would have been met with suspicion and, perhaps, malice. Overall, the 1919 national "Home Service Fund" raised \$13 million to finance the organization's services, pay off existing debts, and construct new buildings.

After World War I the Salvation Army achieved a place in the hearts of Americans, including the citizens of Spokane. Its war service moved it to the front of all American philanthropies. While the Salvation Army gained popularity as a social service, this came at the expense of its identity as a strong evangelistic force, and it was now less threatening to labor unions. In Spokane the conflict over ministering on the street in 1897 was one of the first signs of evangelistic decline. Protecting and expanding social services dampened the fire of street corner ministry. The Salvation Army was still at war with the evils of society, but it minimized active proselytization.

Amidst class animosity the Salvation Army was able to establish itself as the city's leading provider of social services. In a summary of the work it performed in Spokane in its first 50 years, Joel E. Ferris proclaimed,

The Salvation Army is the greatest element for good in the entire community.... The story of the Salvation Army's work over the last 50 years would fill volumes with altruistic achievement in the city's realm of social service work. It has been on the job 365 days and nights a year, rain and shine. It has been the city's pioneer cornerstone in social service work and achieved a record of practical Christianity with its crusade of "soup, soap, and salvation" that no other agency has approached.

Today the Salvation Army continues to provide for the needs of the unfortunate in Spokane. Its visibility is most apparent during the holiday season when kettles are still employed to gather donations for those in need. The Salvation Army in Spokane currently provides a number of services, including a family shelter, foster care receiving program, community center, family services, thrift center, summer camp, Christmas shopping for children, and an annual Thanksgiving turkey distribution. Although it is no longer a zealous evangelical force, the spirituality of the organization is demonstrated by the works and services it renders to the community.

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