

EDWIN GINN'S WORLD PEACE FOUNDATION

By Ellen Knight¹

“We have before us a task that few comprehend. It is for us not only to institute the measures necessary to curtail this awful waste of life and property, but to bring conviction to the masses that this question cannot be handled successfully by a few people. It is a work for the whole world.”²

This was said in 1913 by Edwin Ginn, Winchester resident and founder of the World Peace Foundation.

Locally the name of Ginn survives in the name of Ginn Field, which he saved, along with some other property, as parkland for the town. It survives in the name of a road near where his magnificent home, Terrace of Oaks, with its Music Hall, scene of many concerts and community social events, formerly stood on Bacon Street across from Lakeview and Ravenscroft roads.



According to his friend Samuel W. McCall, “Ginn was a man for whom the people of our town had a great regard. He identified himself with the community, and he made himself one of the most useful citizens any community could have.”³

Ginn was not born either to Winchester or to affluence. Born in 1838, he was a native of Orland, Maine. At age nine he was working on his father’s farm, at 13 he was cooking for a crew at a logging camp, and at 14 he went to the Grand Banks as a fisherman, reportedly to benefit his health.

At 16, Ginn’s father gave him \$50 and the time to get an education. For the next five years he spent winters at school and summers on his father’s farm and at the Grand Banks. At 21, he entered Tufts College.

After college he engaged in the business of school text books, soon entering into the publishing business. His firm developed into one considered foremost in educational works. This profession fitted well with Ginn’s interests in promoting peace since he believed education was a key to peace.

To a convention of the Universal Peace Union in 1902 he sent a letter in which he reportedly said, “I intend to devote much time and a large part of my fortune to the educational side of peace work.”⁴

One of his peace efforts, undertaken about that time, was to publish peace literature at cost. He

also promoted education, both at home and in school, “for with educating comes new enlightenment and new ideas,” he is reported as saying.⁵

Ginn began speaking about peace in 1901 at a Mohonk Conference on International Arbitration, which conferences he had been attending since 1897. Once begun, he continued speaking. He spoke at the International Peace Congresses in Boston in 1904 and Lucerne in 1905, at the New York Peace Congress in 1907, and many other occasions.

“He called upon the press, he called upon the church, he called upon the schools, he called upon business men, he called upon the young men of the community, to do their work for the cause, and urged the peace friends of the country to organize and the business men of the country to see that the organization was backed up,” his friend Edwin D. Mead said in a memorial address.⁶



According to Mead, Ginn saw two great obstacles to the peace cause, the lack of mutual confidence among the nations and the great armaments. The first, Ginn believed, was to be removed by education and the gradual development of cooperation and the latter by the gradual supplanting of rival national armies by an international force.

The cause, Ginn realized, required financial support. In his 1901 speech, he called upon businessmen to contribute to a fund of \$1 million and pledged a tenth of the fund. In the end, he donated the whole sum.

In 1909, he announced that he would contribute \$50,000 annually to the peace cause and that upon his death \$1 million would be made available. In 1910, he founded the International School of Peace in Boston, converted that same year into the World Peace Foundation.

Its purpose was to educate “the people of all nations to a knowledge of the waste and destruction of war and of preparation for war, its evil effects on present social conditions and on the well-being of future generations and to promote international justice and brotherhood of man,” according to foundation literature.

“It is my aim,” Ginn was reported as saying, “to unite the business men of the world in a great permanent association which shall have for its object the suppression of war. Until now men have organized to kill one another. This organization that I propose will aim to keep men from killing each other.

“It is not our desire at present to bring statesmen or politicians into the fold. With the money I shall give and whatever others may add I hope we shall be able to arouse enough interest to bring the governments of the world to our point of view. When the business interests of the

world demand peace, the governments will yield.

“When we have won over the governments we shall have one international army to preserve the peace of the world. And as the nations gain confidence in this international army the independent forces will be gradually decreased until there remains about enough to do police duty.”⁷

According to his obituary, “The plan calls for the maintenance of a world army organized by contributions of men and arms from each nation equivalent to one-tenth of its individual armament, the whole to be organized into one great force under the command of officers appointed from all nations of the world.

“No attempt was advocated to establish the machinery of a great world peace upon the written agreements of individuals representing nations. Even providing every nation on the face of the earth signed a compact which compelled arbitration of international quarrels, Mr. Ginn would not advise disarmament on the strength of such a compact. ‘Not until the millennium is reached will man ever be able to submit to government wholly without physical force,’ he used to say.”⁸

Ginn was overly optimistic about the international army, and that part of the plan was not realized as part of his foundation. However, the World Peace Foundation still exists as an educational and research organization in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Its focus lately has been examining the causes and cures of intrastate conflict.

“The war against war was an integral part of his life. He knew that we are in a great fight, a fight with the devil in the saw pit,” Mead said.⁹ “He was in the conflict always courageous, and he was always buoyant, optimistic, and confident.

“Among our servants of the cause there is none who will be remembered for more definite, devoted, or fruitful service than that rendered in these latest years by Edwin Ginn.”¹⁰

¹ This article © 2019 is a revision of an earlier article by the author, Ellen Knight, published in the *Daily Times Chronicle* on Sept. 28, 2001. This revision supersedes all previous articles.

² Address at the Mohonk Conference on International Arbitration, May 14, 1913, quoted in *The World Peace Foundation: Work in 1913*, World Peace Foundation, III:12 (Dec. 1913).

³ Hon. Samuel W. McCall, “Memorial to Edwin Ginn,” *Journal of Education*, Oct. 29, 1914.

⁴ L. A. Maynard, “Mr. Edwin Ginn and his Work for Peace,” *Concord*, August 1903, p. 126.

⁵ *The Winchester Star*, Oct. 15, 1909.

⁶ Memorial Address March 1, 1914, printed in Edwin D. Mead, “Two Great New England Peace Workers,” *New England Magazine* LI:3, May 1914.

⁷ *The Winchester Star*, Oct. 15, 1909.

⁸ *The Winchester Star*, Jan. 23, 1914.

⁹ Mead, Memorial Address.

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