

AMERICAN RELIEF IN THE FIRST REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA 1918-1920

Wherever the American Y[MCA] representative went, he was taken by the soldiers and by the people as a symbol of the generous friendship of the American people. Two Y men kept in operation the Caucasus relief measures that saved thousands of lives, using the plants and credit of the Armenian Relief Commission, whose workers had been compelled to withdraw.

The International Committee of the Young Men's Christian Associations, 1920



John Elder, 1915



James O. Arroll, 1918



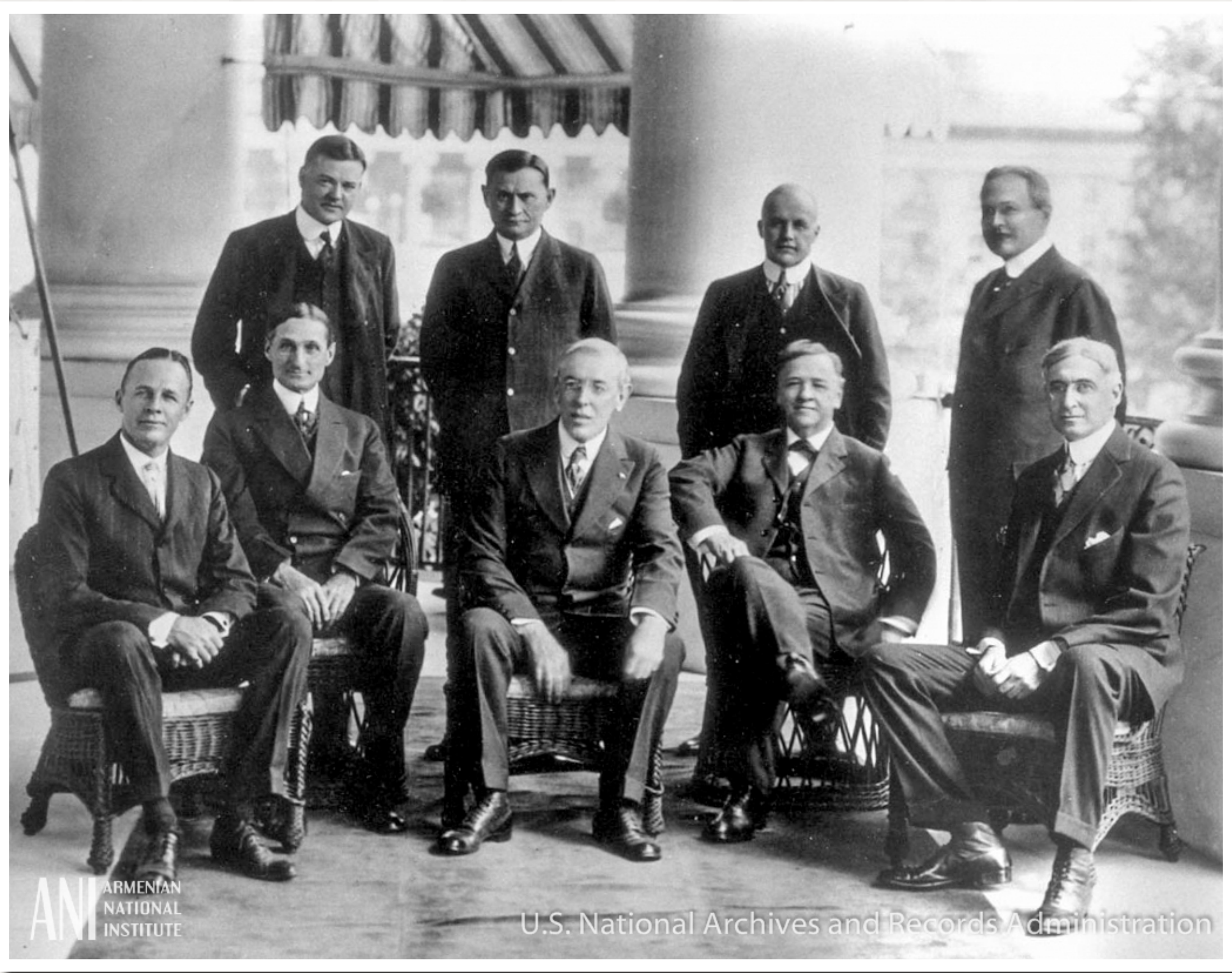
JOHN ELDER AND JAMES ARROLL IN YEREVAN, GYUMRI, SEVAN & ETCHMIADZIN

John Elder and James O. Arroll arrived in Yerevan, Armenia in January 1918 to open a YMCA center, which they did on February 11. They had not anticipated being stranded as the only Americans left in the country's capital city with all communication to the outside world cut off when the frontline faltered. World War I was still raging at the time and Allied forces were in retreat on this front. The November 11 Armistice that ended the global conflict was many months away, crucial months during which the very existence of the Armenian people hung in the balance. By the time they left Yerevan in August 1919, John Elder and James O. Arroll had become responsible for the entire operation set up by U.S.-based charities that had earlier sent emergency aid and volunteer workers to Armenia. As John Elder wrote on January 16, 1919: "One year in Yerevan and what a year it has been. Had anyone told me a year ago that in addition to running a YMCA, I would be in charge of factories employing 7,500 people, orphanages with 350 children and a 120 bed hospital, I would have thought them crazy."

This exhibit reconstructs the story of the near superhuman efforts undertaken by John Elder and James O. Arroll to rescue Armenians from the many perils they faced during the 1918-1920 independent Republic of Armenia. The exhibit relies upon John Elder's own words from his published journal, along with original records that he personally saved from the time of his service, and the photographs that he made and captioned. Elder and Arroll arrived as two enthusiastic young men dedicated to the purpose of sustaining morale among soldiers enduring long campaigns and treacherous conditions as the Great War kept grinding on, year after year, without end. They departed as two celebrated heroes who stood by the Armenian people at the fateful hour. John Elder wrote on May 26, 1918, as Ottoman Turkish forces advanced to the outskirts of Yerevan: "You never can tell what may happen. Just as the end seems at hand the pendulum swings the other way... After a two-day battle at Sardarabad, the Turks have been completely routed." With the decisive battle won, two days later, on May 28, 1918, Armenia declared independence.

The only Americans in Yerevan at the time, Elder and Arroll witnessed momentous events and the unfolding of a heart-wrenching humanitarian disaster as the ravages of war were revealed once the fighting stopped. A year elapsed before a new crew of relief workers reached Armenia to lighten the burden they shouldered. In the meantime, their efforts and accomplishments had become legend among admiring Armenians and fellow Americans at home.

THE YMCA IN THE GREAT WAR



The War Council in 1918 consisted of (seated from left) Assistant Secretary of War Benedict Crowell, Secretary of the Treasury William G. McAdoo, President Woodrow Wilson, Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels, Chairman of the War Industries Board Bernard Baruch; (standing from left) Food Administrator (and future president) Herbert Hoover, Chairman of the United States Shipping Board Edward N. Hurley, Chairman of the War Trade Board Vance McCormick, and Fuel Administrator Harry A. Garfield.

On October 24, 1914, U.S. President Woodrow Wilson addressed the Young Men's Christian Association's Celebration in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The Great War in Europe had broken out three months earlier. While the United States would not enter the fray for another three years, the global conflict was in the back of his mind when he said: "I believe in the progress of moral ideas in the world; and I do not know that I am sure of anything else."

By 1914, John Elder, a student at Washington & Jefferson College in western Pennsylvania, was already involved with the YMCA and the associated Student Volunteer Movement. Wilson's own father, a Presbyterian minister, had attended the very same school. The president began his speech noting that "by long association with the men who have worked for this organization I can say that it has enlisted my deep affection." He aimed to inspire his audience by exhorting: "Be militant! Be an organization that is going to do things!"

His concluding remarks already gave expression to the ideals that would guide his policies in war and peace: "But no man can look at the past of the history of this world without seeing a vision of the future of the history of this world; and when you think of the accumulated moral forces that have made one age better than another age in the progress of mankind, then you can open your eyes to the vision. You can see that age by age, though with a blind struggle in the dust of the road, though often mistaking the path and losing its way in the mire, mankind is yet—sometimes with bloody hands and battered knees—nevertheless struggling step after step up the slow stages to the day when he shall live in the full light which shines upon the uplands, where all the light that illumines mankind shines direct from the face of God."

WILSON
TAFT, ROOSEVELT and other NATIONAL LEADERS

Indorse YMCA work

TO "Keep the Home Fires Burning" in the hearts of our soldier boys, the Y.M.C.A. has pledged its service to the Government.

A National War Work Council of 200 leading citizens has been organized to help direct Physical, Educational, Social and Religious activities among enlisted men.

Wherever American troops gather, and among French, Russian and Italian soldiers, and in Prisoner-of-War camps, the Red Triangle of the Y.M.C.A. goes to help safeguard the home ideals. For the gravest danger of this war is that our boys may not keep true to these home ideals.

500 huts have been built—warm, cheerful centers of friendliness where the soldiers find pleasant social recreation and relief from the hard, cold, camp life.

The cost of carrying on this work is tremendous. Already \$5,000,000 has been used. But the amount is insignificant compared to the unique service rendered and the present need.

\$35,000,000 needed
At Least to Conduct this work to July 1st 1918.
YOU CAN HELP

National Campaign
November 11-19

WRITE FOR FREE ILLUSTRATED BOOKLET
GIVING FURTHER INFORMATION

UNITED WE SERVE

Y.M.C.A. Y.W.C.A.
National Catholic War Council-K.of C.
Jewish Welfare Board
War Camp Community Service
American Library Association
Salvation Army

United War Work Campaign
\$170,500,000.



John R. Mott

The President of the United States of America, authorized by Act of Congress, July 9, 1918, takes pleasure in presenting the Army Distinguished Service Medal to Mr. John R. Mott, Y.M.C.A., a United States Civilian, for exceptionally meritorious and distinguished services to the Government of the United States, in a duty of great responsibility during World War I, as General Secretary of the National War Work Council of the Young Men's Christian Association of the United States.

John R. Mott (1865-1955), who for many years served as General Secretary of the International YMCA Committee, was in Constantinople in 1895 as General Secretary of the World Student Christian Federation, where he witnessed "the reign of terror, which characterized the first week of October...I refer to the almost unbelievable atrocities perpetrated upon the Armenians of the city." When on September 3, 1915, U.S. Ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, Henry Morgenthau, wrote to Secretary of State Robert Lansing, proposing the formation of a "committee to raise funds and provide means to save some of the Armenians" from the unfolding genocide in Ottoman Turkey, he suggested four names: Cleveland Dodge, Charles Crane, Stephen Wise, and John R. Mott. A month later, the *New York Times* reported on October 4 that along with Dodge, Crane, and Wise, Mott was already serving on the "Committee on Armenian Atrocities, a body of eminent Americans which for weeks has been investigating the situation in Turkish Armenia, [and] issued, a detailed report of that investigation, in which it is asserted that in cruelty and in horror nothing in the past thousand years has equaled the present persecutions of the Armenian people by the Turks."

Former U.S. President William Howard Taft, writing as chairman of the editorial board that prepared in 1922 an account of the YMCA during the Great War, described Mott as "a great agent in the progress of civilization" and added that it was for "John R. Mott, to whose initiative, genius for organization, and inspiring executive leadership the work of the Young Men's Christian Association in this War is chiefly due." Uplifting the spirit of fighting men with civilian support services behind the lines, as well as with assistance to those confined to prisoner-of-war camps, Mott even organized YMCA efforts in Russia. Inspired by Mott's example and appeal, John Elder and James O. Arroll were headed to central Russia when the Bolshevik Revolution diverted them to Armenia where remnant forces of the Russian Army on the Caucasian front were still facing the war machine of the Central Powers, Turkey and Germany.

Mott continued his ecumenical efforts after the war. Besides his continuing service at the helm of the YMCA, he was also chairman of the executive committee of the Student Volunteer Movement. Although a Methodist layperson, Mott played a major role in the formation of the World Council of Churches. Like President Woodrow Wilson in 1919 who was recognized by the Nobel Committee for promoting an inclusive post-war peace, in 1946 John R. Mott too was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. He was praised for contributing "to the creation of a peace-promoting religious brotherhood across national boundaries."

AMERICAN COMMITTEE FOR ARMENIAN AND SYRIAN RELIEF



Rev. Ernest A. Yarrow

The Russian Government gave a bread ration for a while, but it was the American Committee for Armenian and Syrian Relief that organized permanent and really efficient relief in this congested district. It sent there Mr. Richard Hill, late in 1915, and soon after Dr. Samuel Wilson from Persia; both were American missionaries. Dr. F. W. MacCallum of the Constantinople Mission and Mr. George F. Gracey of Ourfa went there early in 1916 and were joined some months later by Dr. George C. Raynolds and Rev. and Mrs. Ernest A. Yarrow, formerly of the Van Mission, who had left Bitlis for their furlough in May 1915.

The Americans immediately began to organize industrial relief. Crude wool and cotton were brought and cleansed, carded, spun, woven and made into garments and blankets by refugees, for refugees. Refugees made spinning-wheels, handlooms, sandals and, later, farm implements. Every dollar of relief money was thus made to do the work of two. Every individual employed supported a family averaging five or six members. The aged, infirm and helpless were given money and needy widows with children to support were given a small sum monthly for each child. Children were taught trades; a small hospital was opened and a daily clinic held by Dr. Kennedy, who had been sent out by the Lord Mayor of London's Committee for Armenian Relief. Another Englishman who worked with the American Committee most efficiently was Mr. Thomas Dann Heald of Bristol, while Mr. Backhouse and Mr. Catchpool of the Lord Mayor's Committee cooperated with it in friendly and effective fashion. In 1917 Messrs. Compton, Elmer, Partridge, James, White, Williams, Mrs. White, Mrs. Compton and Miss Orvis were sent from America to assist in the work which had reached proportions beyond the strength of those who had originally organized it. Had not their Armenian superintendents been men trained in the mission work of Van - educated, capable, trustworthy men, filled with the spirit of service and cooperation, the task of the Americans would have been an almost impossible one.

Russia's separate peace with Germany spelled catastrophe to the relief work. The American consul at Tiflis, Mr. F. Willoughby Smith, sent the American workers away. Wrote Mr. Yarrow later:

"The following argument put forth by the consul, I think appealed to us all and it was on this ground that we decided to leave. It seemed most likely that the Germans had designs on the Caucasus and if they sent even a small force from Odessa there was nothing to oppose them. Then our being with the Armenians would do them more damage than good. We would immediately be interned, our equipment confiscated and probably the activity of the Committee be entirely stopped. On the other hand, if we should withdraw and leave the work of the Committee in the hands of the local Armenian committees the Germans might allow them to continue. And the consul assured us that he could arrange for the transfer of funds through the Swedish consul or some other neutral agency. I think it was harder for us to come away than it would have been to stay, but we tried to weigh the question calmly and logically and I still believe we decided wisely. The situation was entirely different from the one we faced in Van three years before. We were warned then of what was to happen and with our eyes open we decided to stay and share the fate of the people with whom we had lived and worked for so many years, but now our position was entirely different. We were in a land foreign to ourselves and to the refugees to whom we were ministering. We had given them all our strength and intelligence, but new conditions over which we had no control made it impossible to help further; on the contrary, our presence with them might be a real element of danger to their security, and with heavy hearts but free consciences we left the work to which we had been giving the best that was in us."

The party left Erivan March 19th [1918]. The chance of getting anywhere with a whole skin seemed very uncertain; the train was searched at every stop by the Tartars [Azeris]; the stations were almost all destroyed and villages were burning all along the way.

Mr. James Arroll and Mr. John Elder, two young Americans, had been doing Y.M.C.A. work among the soldiers in the Caucasus for a short time. They secured consent from the district secretary to remain a while at least. Mr. Heald remained for a few days in Erivan to complete the transfer of the work to the Armenian Committees aided by Mr. McDowell of the Persian Branch of the Relief, then in British service, and Mr. Gracey who had become a captain in the British army. Mr. Heald left Tiflis on the last train allowed to pass by the Tartars, Mr. McDowell was ordered to Alexandropol and Captain Gracey to Tiflis. (He was afterward made prisoner by the Bolsheviks and not set free till late in the spring of 1919.) One of the two Y.M.C.A. men became very ill, the other cared for him; on his recovery they divided the relief work between them.

So the industrial relief at Erivan was never discontinued, the orphanages and hospital never closed, throughout all the changes that took place in that harassed region during the next few months.

From American missionary Grace Knapp's account *The Tragedy of Bitlis*, 1919.



CRISIS - APRIL 1918



Government feeding station, Yerevan

News comes today that Erzerum has fallen into Turkish hands. Capt. Gracey considers this very serious and disappointing...Consul Smith advises all Americans to leave at once, on a special train which may be the last. With considerable difficulty secured permission to stay for the present. Arroll staying also, and there are three members of the Gracey Mission. The next day the others all left, 24 in all. (Elder, March 14, 1918)

The fall of Sarakamish that might have created a panic, seems to have been the making of the country...We are getting into the relief work in earnest. There are about 13,000 homeless orphans on our lists, 500-10,000 spinning women in the clothes factories. Altogether I suppose we must be relieving 50,000 people a month. (Elder, April 15, 1918)



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ALEXANDROPOL/GYUMRI INVADED-APRIL 1918



ANI ARMENIAN
NATIONAL
INSTITUTE

Elder Photo Collection

Refugees grazing at Alexandropol

Word from McDowell that Kars is to be surrendered has brought me up to Alexandropol to dispose of our supplies before this place falls. Arrived in bitter cold at 3:00 A.M. The Station was a pathetic sight. Every inch on the inside was packed with refugees, floors, benches, window sills, with hundreds more on the platform outside... Went out in the morning to watch the refugees coming in. A heartbreaking sight. As far as the eye could reach up the valley towards Kars the valley swarmed with thousands of sheep, cows, horses and water buffaloes...All day long an endless stream poured through the city, some on horseback, some on oxen or oxcarts, many on foot. (Elder, April 30, 1918)

The names of many of the towns and cities mentioned by John Elder were changed during the course of the 20th century. The border separating Russia and Turkey also changed and some of the places mentioned as part of the Russian state are now in Turkey. That border divided historic Armenia into two. Eastern Armenia under Russian rule emerged as the Armenian Republic upon the breakup of the Russian state with the advent of the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917. The Armenian Republic was subsequently occupied and partitioned by Kemalist Turkey and Soviet Russia in 1920.

- Alexandropol = Gyumri, formerly Leninakan in the Soviet era, Armenia
- Darachichak = Tsaghkunk, on Lake Sevan, Armenia
- Davalu = Ararat, Armenia
- Erivan = Yerevan, the capital of Armenia
- Etchmiadzin = Etchmiadzin, the seat of the Armenian Apostolic Church near Yerevan, Armenia
- Tiflis = Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia
- Igdir = Igdir, presently in eastern Turkey, occupied in 1920 and no longer inhabited by Armenians
- Kamarlu = Artashat, Armenia
- Karakilise = Vanadzor, Armenia
- Kars = Kars, presently in eastern Turkey, occupied in 1920 and no longer inhabited by Armenians
- Novo Bayazid = Gavar, formerly Kamo in the Soviet era, on Lake Sevan, Armenia

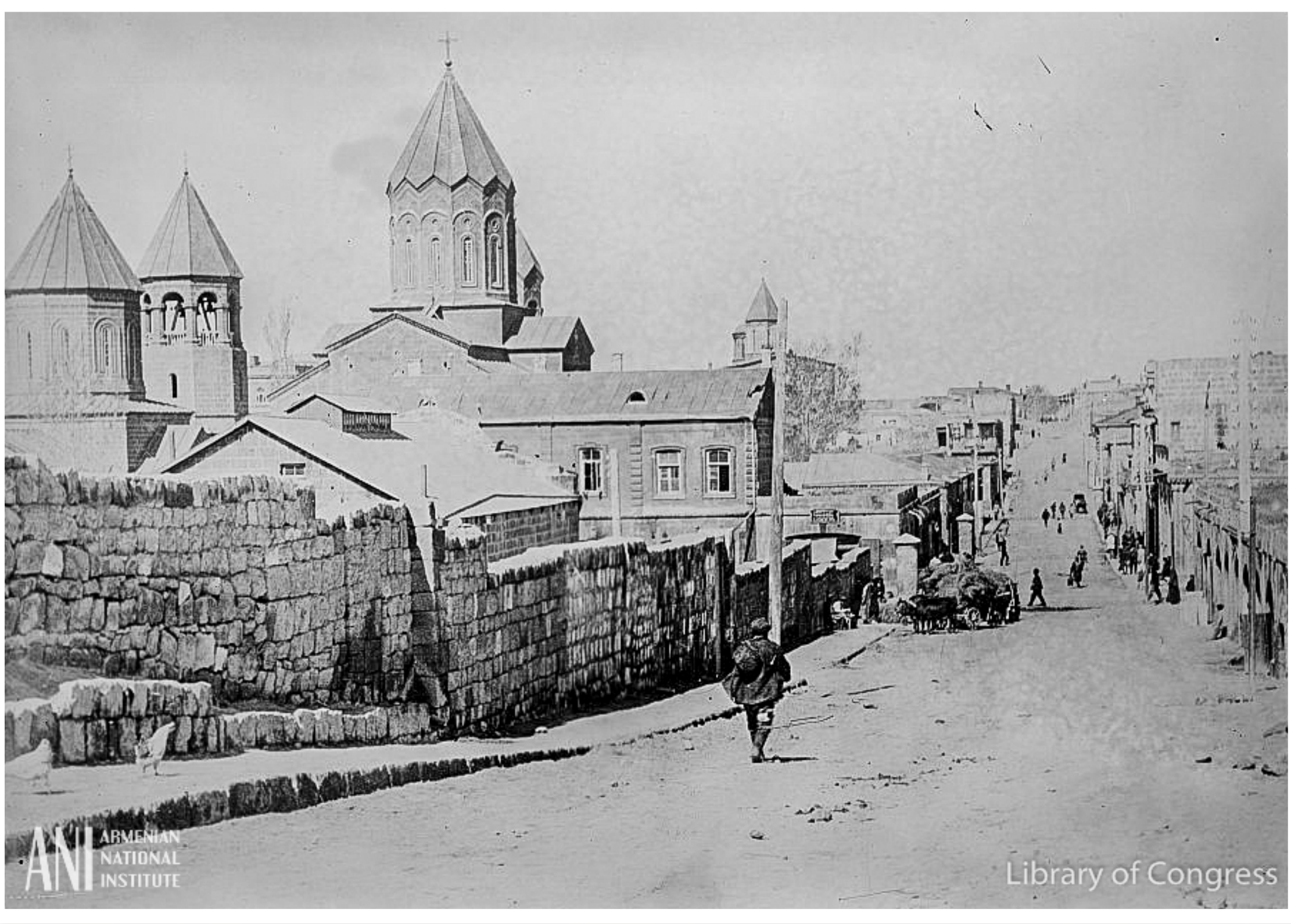


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NATIONAL
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Elder Photo Collection

Kurdish refugees at Alexandropol

ALEXANDROPOL/GYUMRI FALLEN-MAY 1918



Has the end come at last? Official telegrams report that the Turks are bombarding Alexandropol...The Turks have cut the railroad on both sides of Alexandropol, which means we are cut off from funds. (Elder, May 16, 1918)

Alexandropol has fallen. The Turks demand the railroad to Julfa in order to transport their troops, and the Armenians are prepared to give it. All our stores in Alex[andropol], reported lost. For a time we were worried about McDowell, but he turned up last night with the latest news. The Turks bombarded Alexandropol entirely without warning or ultimatum, and continued all one day. Bob spent a good part of his time in the trenches, and the soldiers say he fought heroically. He reports that the soldiers and civilians fought heroically but that most of the officers only fought each other in a mad scramble to get out of danger. In the evening, the city was stormed and captured. Bob walked most of the way to Karakalis on foot and came from there by car. (Elder, May 21, 1918)

As he [U.S. Consul F. Willoughby Smith in Tiflis] indicated there are still funds; that settled it for us. We are staying. (Elder, May 21, 1918)

American Consular Service
Tiflis, April 29, 1918.

Mr. John Elder,
Erivan.

Dear Mr. Elder:-

I am in receipt of your letter of April 24th acknowledging the 100,000 roubles sent to you on April 23rd. I am sending you by Hovhannes Beanoony and Dickran Abaghtian further 100,000 roubles. I am afraid to send more not because the men are not trustworthy but because they can be robbed on the way.

In regard to your ~~issuing~~ cheques I am strongly against your issuing any drafts of the kind named as you have no authority to do so nor have I the authority to sanction it. Our drafts are sold in Sterling exchange and not in dollars. We also sell them in fairly large sums and to people we know in order to minimize the danger of forgeries. If people in Erivan wish to buy pounds or dollars in fairly large sums they can through you obtain drafts from this office or they can give you the cash and you can give them an order on me for a draft on London in pounds. Our present rate of exchange is 50 rbs. to the pound Stg., though we have been selling as low as 45 for large sums.

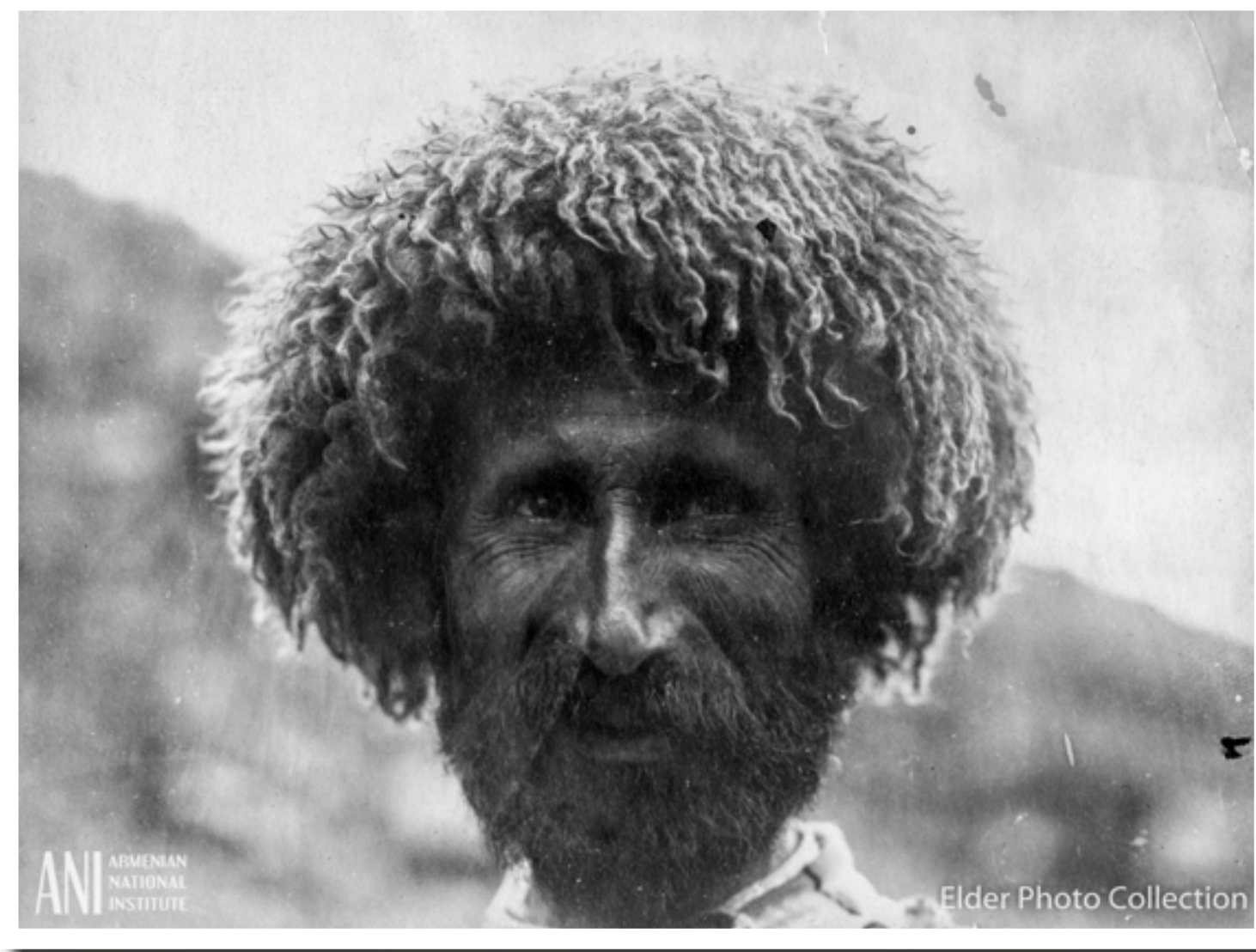
I strongly recommend you and Mr. Arroll on receipt of this letter to proceed to Tiflis or Kara-Kilisse. By staying in Erivan your retreat may be cut off. Alexandropol is safer but there is a possibility of its being captured.

Sincerely yours,
F. Willoughby Smith

FWS/JNL.

Sum sent is 150,000 rbs.

The bearer has just brought me a letter from you saying not to send money. I am sending you fifty thousand as you might require it for immediate needs. FWS



AMERICAN COMMITTEE FOR ARMENIAN AND SYRIAN RELIEF
Office 2200 Broadway, New York City

July 3, 1918

American Consul Paddock,
Tehran, Persia,

Dear Mr Paddock,

As Mr. McDowell has no doubt informed you we have found it necessary to sell orders on the New York headquarters for English and American money in order to keep up the relief in this district.

The bearer of this letter, Hovhannes Kasparian, has one of these orders which he will show you, and we have promised him that this order will be honored by you in Tehran, as we know that Mr. Eldrid has been purchasing 50,000 roubles a week there for us. We have told this man that he can collect from you English gold, and as the sum is not great are confident that you can make good the promise. However as we do not know how hard it may be for you to get gold, we will not promise it to any others.

To date we have sold something over 3,000 pounds at rates varying from 45 to 60 rubles a pound. I will send you under a separate letter the list to date of the checks issued. Of course no checks before the date of the last on this list not on said list will be valid, but I think there is no danger of counterfeiting.

I hope that the way will be opened soon so that we may come down and talk the financial situation over with you.

Sincerely yours,
John Elder

Alexandropol
Dear Arroll & Elder,
April 26, 1918

I am wondering what plans you chaps have in case of a break up. As you probably know the Tiflis government has ordered the Armenians to retire from Kars. If they do this every thing is up. The Turkish Armenians of these regions will most of them flee up toward Lori, east of Tiflis, going thru Kara Kilisse. Others of them are determined to fight their way thru to Persia. Andranik expects to take two or three battalions with him and join the Syrians. With reference to the refugees going thru Kara Kilisse don't you think it might be a good idea to store some flour there for their use. The Kars people are going thru here now. The exodus from Alexandropol will begin the moment they hear that Kars is lost. I have here is fifty roubles a pood now and Garabed thinks he can get a quantity. Some flour in Etchmiadzin would help those going toward Julfa.

As to my own plans I am somewhat up in the air. With all of my heart I want to stay to the last and then go out with Andranik. But Pike has ordered me to hold myself ready to go out with them any moment. They will probably go out thru Vladikaucaus. I have gotten Andranik to wire Pike asking that I be ordered attached to him. I am still hoping that I can pull the wires sufficiently to enable me to go out with head up, not tail down.

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I am wondering if Consul Smith intends to try and stay on after peace is declared and continue relief work. If I am permitted to stay, while you chaps have to go to Tiflis I shall be glad to buy all of your horses. If Smith would authorize you to proceed with the refugees going toward Julfa, taking funds with you it would be a great thing for the people – also good sport.

About the horses – Gracey thinks he paid for the pacing horse out of relief funds so it is yours. I paid for the brown horse, bought from that officer out of my own money so it is mine. If things do finally go to smash I should like to have Yarrow's horse. As you know he gave it to me but I felt that if relief work continues it ought to remain in relief work. With my own money I bought eight saddles and had some halters made. Did Gracey sell his saddle with his horse? If you are sending a horse to Garabed here you might send that brown horse along. If Gracey did not sell his saddle please send it & its two pair of saddle hoops along. Otherwise Mr. Yarrow's saddle.

I hope things work out so that we three get to go Julfa way. It will be great sport – and also, to my notion safer.

Excuse this scrawl,

Sincerely

Robert McDowell

Alexandropol
April 26, 1918

YEREVAN - MAY 1918



Street in Yerevan

[I] went around with Mr. Yarrow to see the relief work they are carrying on for the refugees. The method they employ is splendid. Instead of giving outright relief, they give employment to the older people, making the clothing which is given to the orphans. Starting with raw wool they wash it, card it, spin the thread, dye it and then weave the cloth. They employ many as carpenters and builders and use others as tailors making clothes. Orphan children are card indexed and given \$1.00 per month allowance, and clothing sent from time to time in bundles, each containing one complete outfit. At present they are short of money. Went around to see the hall they have in mind for my work. It looks good. (Elder, January 17, 1918)



Well, you never can tell what may happen. Just as the end seems at hand the pendulum swings the other way and the terrible Turk is in full retreat... After a two day battle at Sardarabad, the Turks have been completely routed... It is great the way the people are rallying to the cause... News is that the soldiers are fighting valiantly and slowly pushing back the Turks toward Alexandropol. (Elder, May 26, 1918)



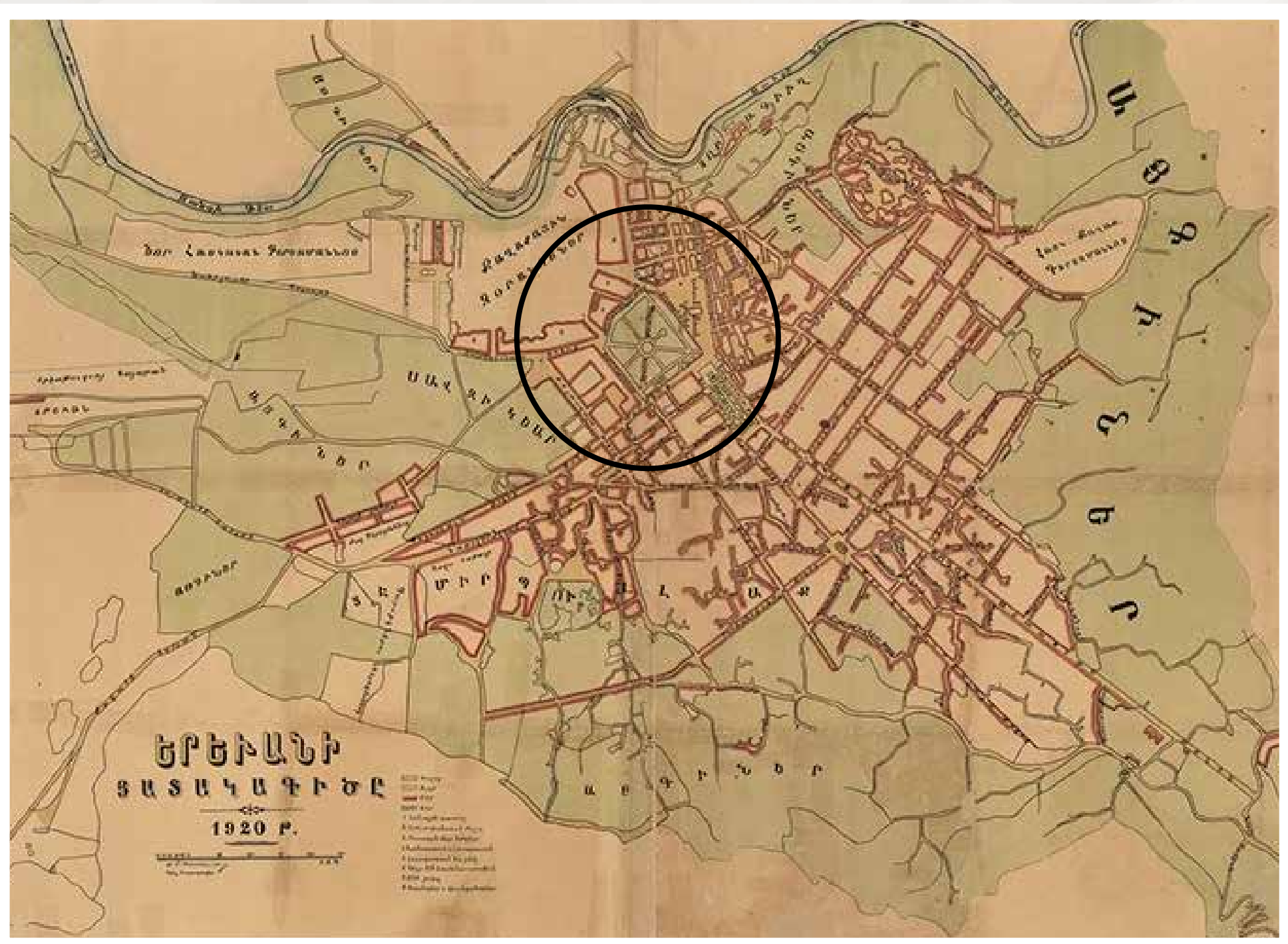
The Church of Saint Gregory the Illuminator, seen in the picture taken by John Elder, was demolished by the Bolshevik authorities after the Sovietization of Armenia.

From the back porch, 35 Tsarskaya Street, Yerevan

In the recaptured territory, the bodies of many slain are found, and we hear terrible stories of atrocities, ears and noses cut off and eyes gouged out. (Elder, May 26, 1918)

I had the thrill of attending the opening session of the Parliament of the Republic of Armenia. What an exciting time it was. A free and independent Armenia for the first time in 600 years or more! There was a great crowd present, and through an interpreter I gave an address of congratulations on the historic occasion. (Elder, August 11, 1918)

A telegram was read out saying the United States were sending relief supplies... Friday we attended the meeting of Parliament again and watched them pass unanimously and without debate the bill to loan us one million rubles for three months, the first bill they tell us that was ever passed that way. (Elder, November 9, 1918)



The English Garden in Yerevan mentioned by Elder



Rug factory, Yerevan



STREAM OF REFUGEES - JUNE 1918



Refugees on the Igdır road



From all sides we hear that people are starving to death...We're flooded with requests every day, applicants for work stand all around the office, crying, kissing our hands, holding up the children for whom they have no bread - and we can do nothing. (Elder, June 1, 1918)

We learn that the American consul has left Tabriz also which is the worst yet, for that cuts off the last outlet for funds. (Elder, June 11, 1918)

Peace seems to be accepted fact, though no one trusts the Turks and all expect them to strike again whenever it suits them. (Elder, June 11, 1918)

We hear the Germans have reached Tiflis, have been enthusiastically welcomed by the Georgians and have recognized the State of Georgia as under their protection. We hear they have their officers in every station to the second from Alexandropol. (Elder, June 11, 1918)

This week, the relief work going at full strength again. The sale of New York drafts keeps up well. The Etchmiadzin work is re-opened, and we have a milk distributing station at Dilijan. We need to get work started at Novo Bayazid where we hear people are desperate. (Elder, June 30, 1918)

Passed constant stream of refugees. Armenia is a nation on fourgons.* What in the world will they do or live on?

(Elder, June 11, 1918)

*Fourgons are long covered wagons typically used to transport baggage or supplies.

The Igdır road served as the principal highway for traveling north to Etchmiadzin and Yerevan. Because of its location just inside the Russian, and Armenian, border, it was the first destination for refugees fleeing Turkey. As the town changed hands during WWI, Armenians also fled Igdır in advance of the Ottoman armies. Today Igdır is located on the Turkish side of the nearby border and is no longer inhabited by Armenians.



Igdır road - refugees

HUNGRY DAYS AHEAD - NOVEMBER 1918



ANI ARMENIAN NATIONAL INSTITUTE

Elder Photo Collection

Refugee

The fall of Constantinople has sent the Turks rushing back to defend their homeland, and although they are burning, looting and killing on the way, Armenia is saved... But the Turks are slow to evacuate completely, and while they delay, tens of thousands of refugees camp in the bitter cold waiting the word that will permit them to go back home. For weeks I have not gone to work without hearing the heartbreaking sobs of children, grimy, half naked, freezing and starving by the wayside. The English Garden is a village of tents. One constantly sees a bare two wheeled cart draw up by one or the other of them, wan parents placing within it the still form of the one who was once the joy and pride of their hearts. There is no service and there are no mourners...Noisily the cart rattles away leaving behind a desolate benumbed couple to face the bitter weary hungry days ahead with aching hearts. More and more we are receiving patients in our hospital too weak to stand, so weak they merely fade out of life. And while the Turks grow fat on the wealth of the Arax valley, shipping westward tons of wheat, barley, rice and grapes, those who have sown them starve within sight of their rightful homes. (Elder, November 9, 1918)



ANI ARMENIAN NATIONAL INSTITUTE

Elder Photo Collection

Arax River Valley

UTTER DESOLATION - JANUARY 1919

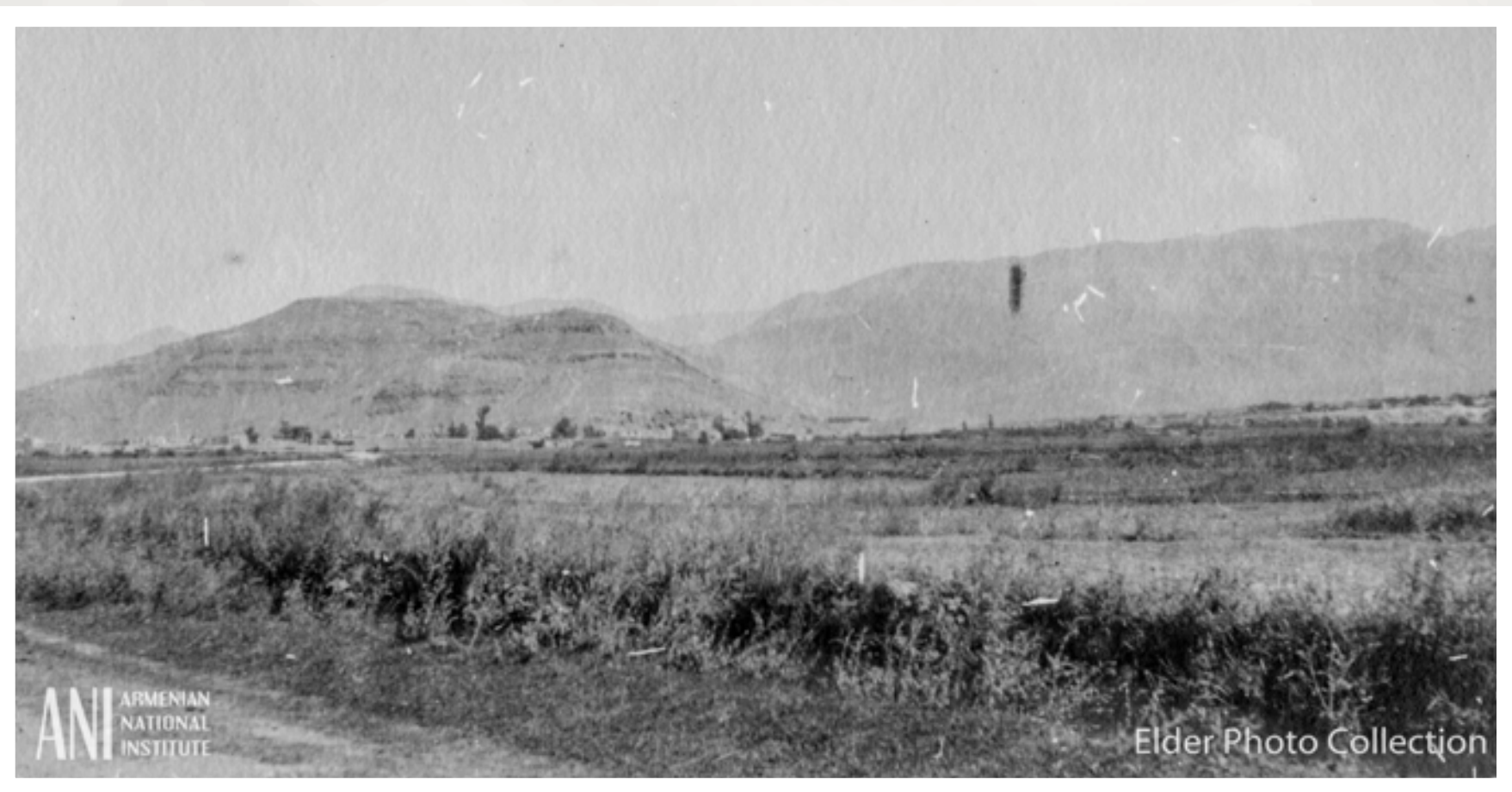


Yerevan, bath for the Ford

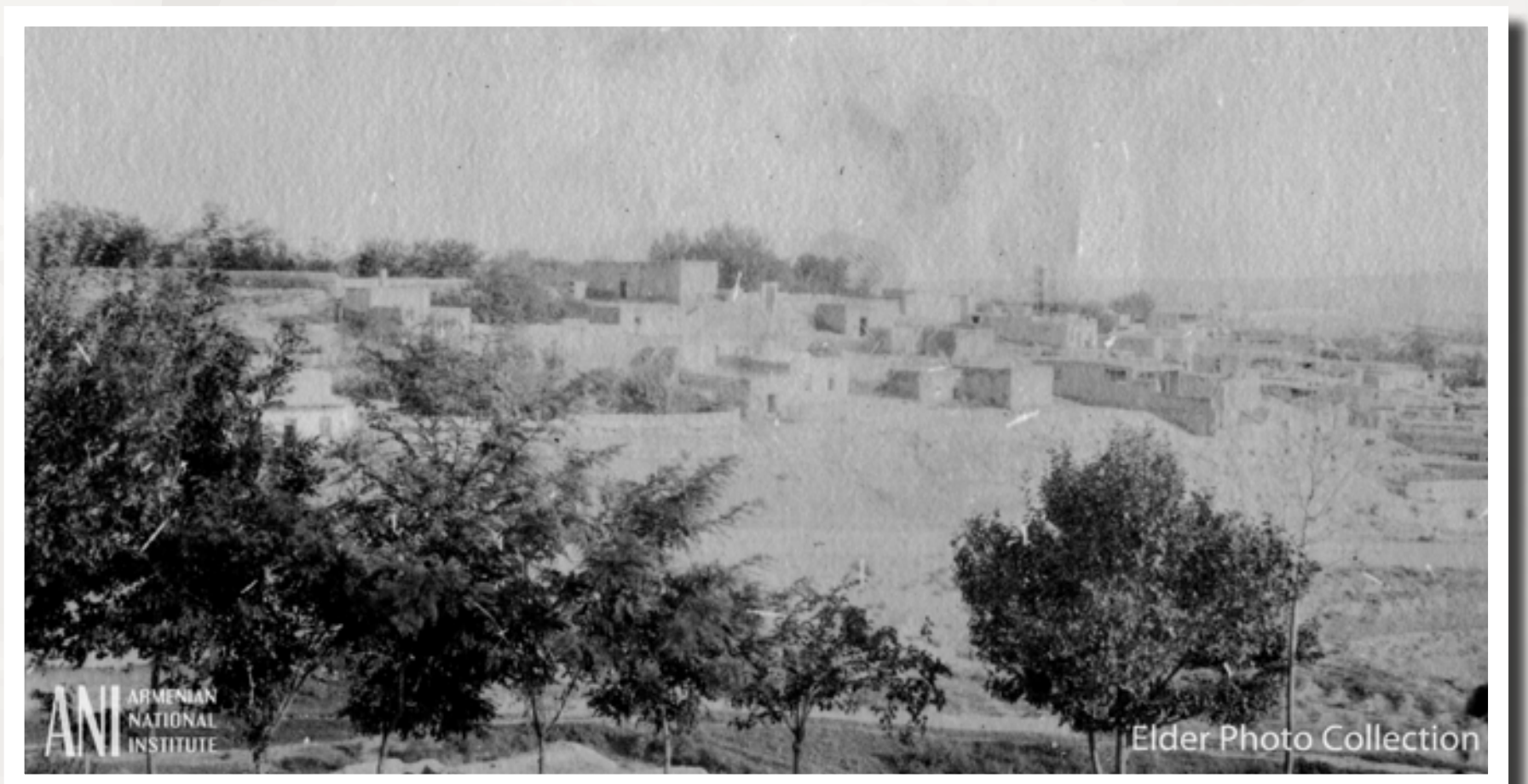
In Kamarlu, we opened an orphanage at the request of the government for 100, but before we took over, the government had accepted 300...In my heart is a great ache that hurts all the way through and tears are always on my eyelids at the sight of the dirty, trembling, starved waifs wandering everywhere on the streets. Typhus is raging with deadly fury. One tenth of Erivan is stricken and the strains of the funeral march are heard daily, the chant of the priests and the sound of their passing footsteps hourly.

I went back with the refugees returning to Kamarlu...One saw the same hungry faces, the same shivering figures, the same burdens as before, but there was a difference. This time they were going home, and there was a difference. This time they were going home, and there was hope and joy where there had been only despair...Quietly they moved into their houses as twilight fell. Silently they filtered out into the side streets, each family finding the home that it had left so hastily months before, to rebuild the hearth fires so long dead under the invaders hands. They came back in hope. Surely their troubles were over, now they were home again. But they were speedily disenchanted. The district had been swept clean. The few remnants of food left by the Turks doubled and trebled in price the first week and was soon gone. In many a village nothing of the slightest value remained.

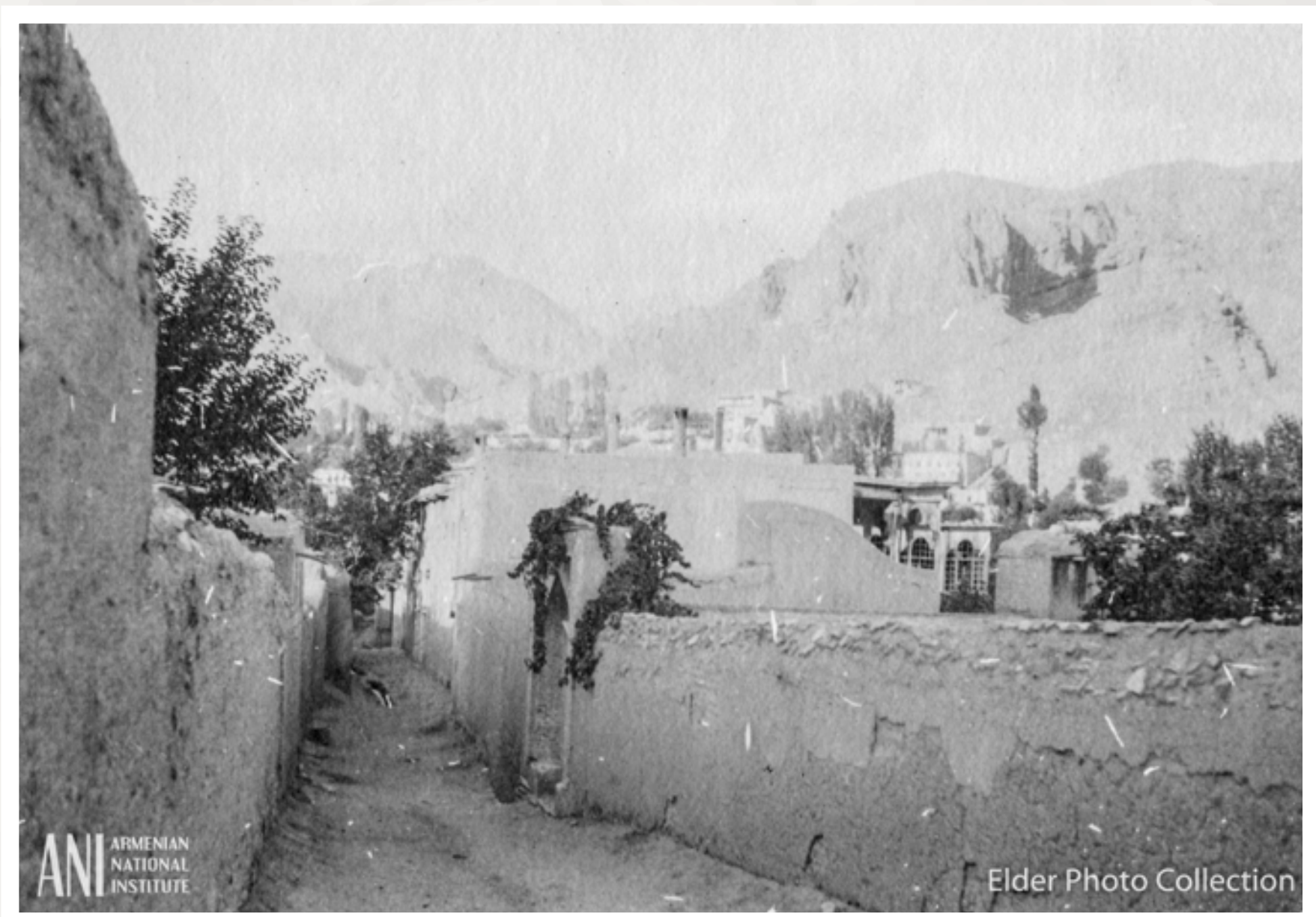
I shall never forget the utter desolation of Davalu. Furniture, doors, windows, everything of the slightest value had been stripped away, the gaunt abode ruins standing open to wind and rain, No wonder that immediately typhus started its deadly work. Famine has walked the streets, and thousands found in their old homes, their tombs. (Elder, January 5, 1919)



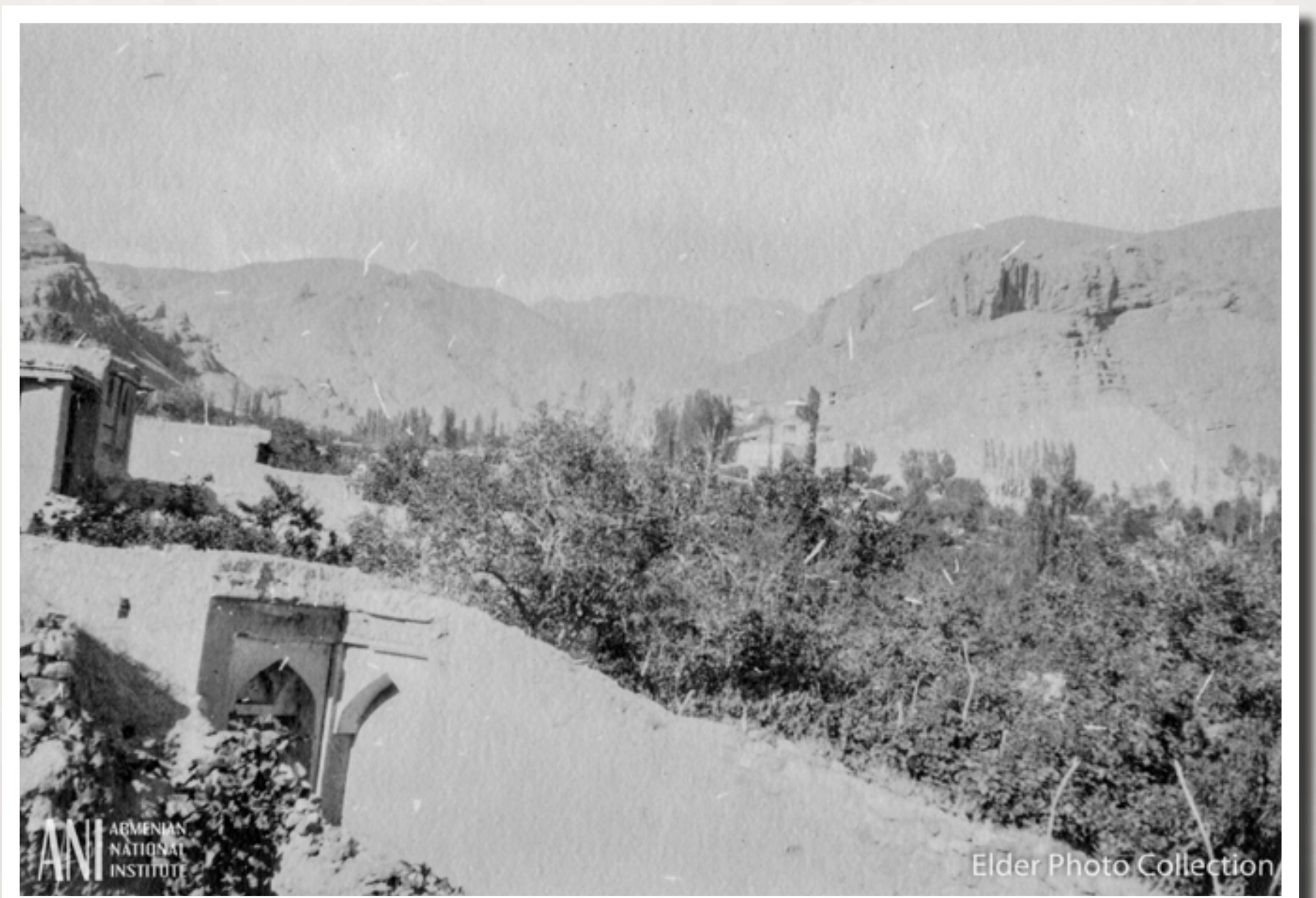
Arax River - near Kamarlu



Arax River Valley



Kamarlu



Kamarlu

FAMINE - FEBRUARY 1919



ANI ARMENIAN NATIONAL INSTITUTE

Elder Photo Collection

Graveyard at Igdır



ANI ARMENIAN NATIONAL INSTITUTE

Elder Photo Collection

Dr. Main, graveyard at Igdır

Spreading famine throughout the land...Typhus continues to wreak terrible havoc. Scarcely a house in the city has escaped it, and in many - two, three and even five members have died.

(Elder, February 11, 1919)

In the meantime, the war with Georgia had added one more load to the awful burden of misery. The Armenian government treasury was in Tiflis, and all of its funds were seized on the outbreak of hostilities. It has crippled all the efforts the Armenian government has been making to meet the appalling need. We now have five soup kitchens in the Kamarlu district and two in Igdır. At each point we have male nurses who give their time to the free distribution of medicines and the care of the sick. The degree of hunger is beyond description. One man was found dead with a piece of his leather sandal in his mouth from which he was trying to get nourishment. (Elder, January 5, 1919)

Dr. John H. T. Main [person in uniform walking in picture above], President of Grinnell College in Iowa, who served on the national board of the American Committee for Relief in the Near East (ACRNE), arrived in Armenia in March 1919 to assess conditions in the region. The graveyard in the border town of Igdır containing an entire section of freshly-dug graves, where Dr. Main is seen walking, was photographed by John Elder to document the high death toll in the refugee population.

I have photographs of graves that had been opened at night and corpses that had been dug out and the bones picked bare.

(Elder, April 24, 1919)

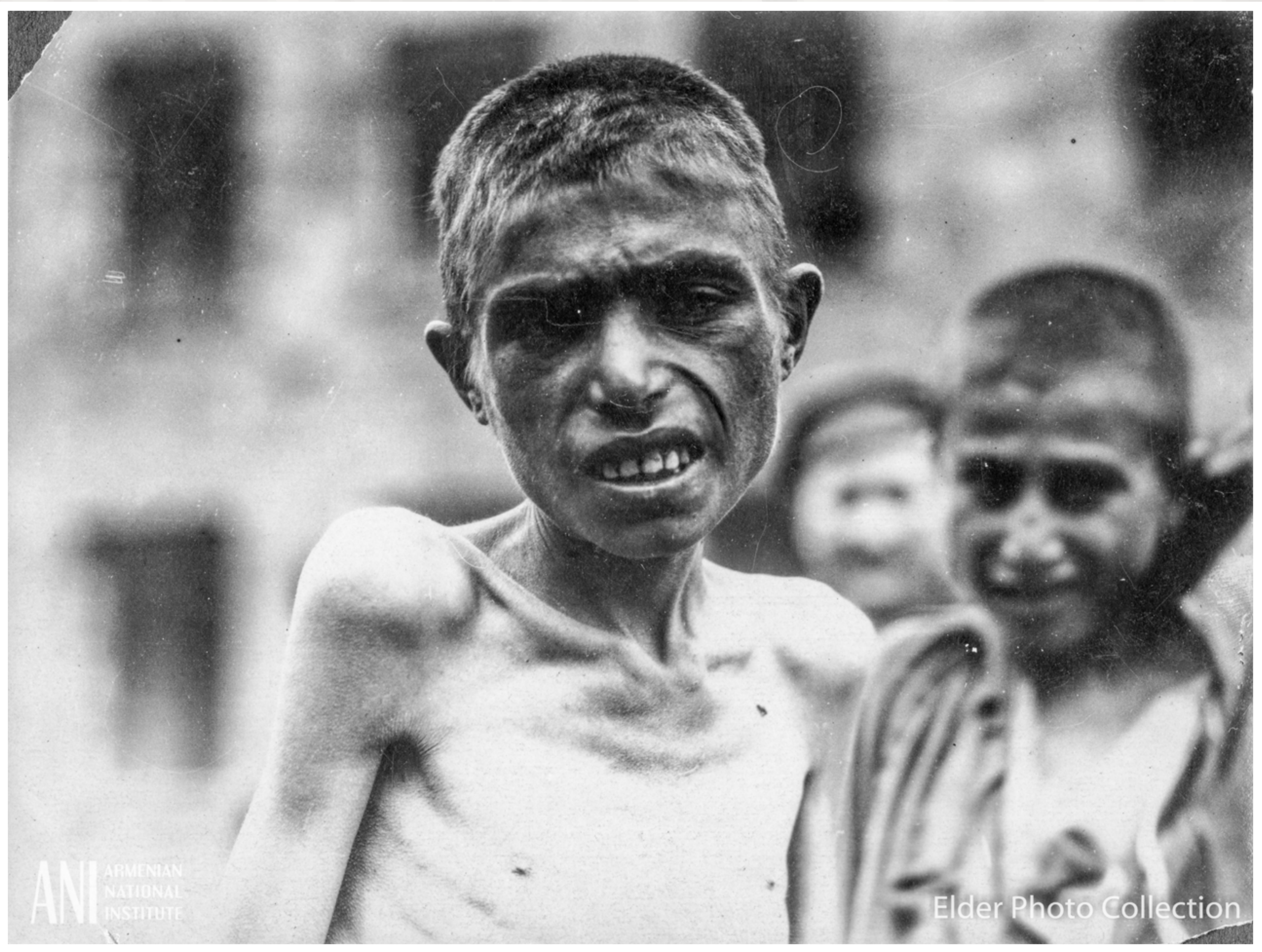


ANI ARMENIAN NATIONAL INSTITUTE

Elder Photo Collection

Refugee graveyard in Igdır

ORPHANAGES - FEBRUARY 1919



I went in to see Dr. Sahakian, the head of the government orphanage. He was gloomy in the extreme. He has 2,000 orphans under his control and that day had given them the last bread in their storeroom. He said they had potatoes enough for one day, rice for three days, and then - nothing but starvation to offer. The thought of having to watch his 2,000 boys die of starvation was driving him nearly crazy. (Elder, February 11, 1919)



A refugee orphan, Yerevan 1918



Yerevan orphanage

John Elder photographed several disturbing scenes in Armenia including skeletal remains of human beings cannibalized by the starving, and war-ravaged parts of the country. The photograph he labeled "Yerevan orphanage" is the most enigmatic picture he made and a difficult image to understand. It depicts only an empty room illuminated by two side windows. Upon closer examination, ghostly figures can be discerned along the walls in sitting or reclining positions. There is not a stick of furniture, an implement of any sort, any item that might have been utilized to feed or comfort the orphans. That was the point of the photograph John Elder created. What passed for an orphanage in Armenia often was little more than a barren shelter from the elements. For many destitute children, that shelter meant the difference between life and death. Dr. John H.T. Main, who was in Armenia in early 1919, observed similar conditions: "No bread anywhere. Government has not a pound. Forty-five thousand in Erivan without bread. Orphanages and troops all through Erivan in terrible condition. Not a dog, cat, horse, camel or any living thing in all Igdirdir region. Saw women stripping flesh from dead horses with their bare hands today... Another week will score ten thousand lives lost."

ALLIED INTERVENTION - FEBRUARY 1919

GENERAL THOMSON IN ALEXANDROPOL



Reception for General Thomson, Alexandropol

Major-General William Montgomerie Thomson of the British Army served as the senior officer of the Allied forces that entered Transcaucasia to implement the terms of the November 1918 Armistice and to oversee the evacuation of Turkish and German troops from the region.

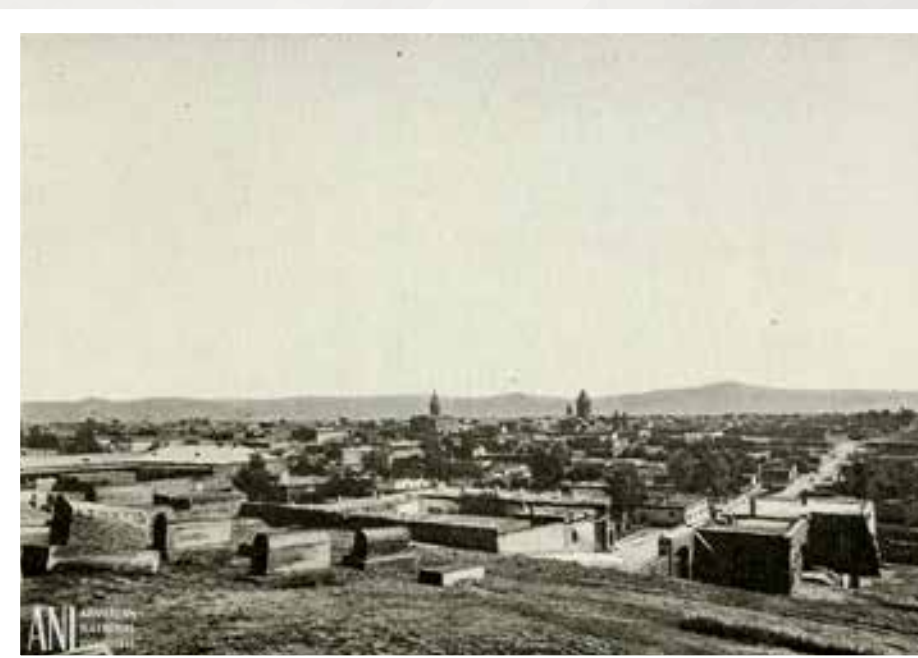
At Alexandropol, the misery beggars description. The Station platform and station are swarming with the half starved refugees, little more than walking skeletons. (Elder, February 11, 1919)

Jim Arroll is back from his trip to Persia where he was able to send cables to America to let the Committee know that the work was still going on and that we need money. Now that the British are in the Caucasus they are shipping in large supplies of wheat, and we are the distributors at this end. Gen. Beach is in charge of the operations. He will turn the wheat over to Jim in Tiflis, they will send it to us with Sikh guards to keep it from being stolen en route, and the Committee will distribute it in Armenia. Mr. Maynard has arrived, and then left for Tabriz to get funds, so I am alone again. The flour is already pouring in and will save tens of thousands of lives. It's about the happiest job I ever undertook. (Elder, February 23, 1919)

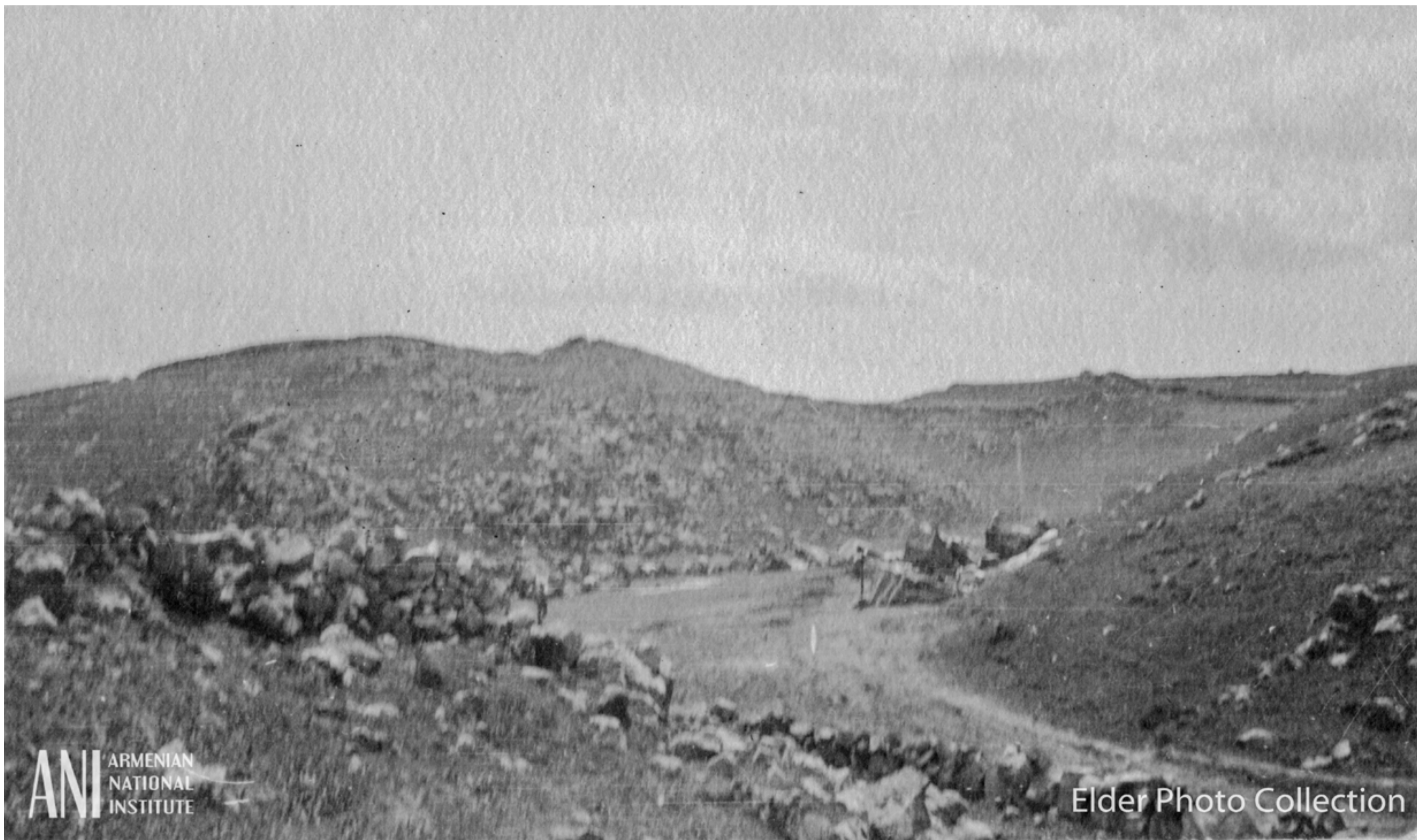
I have photographs of graves that had been opened at night and corpses that had been dug out and the bones picked bare. People just can't believe that things like this happen, until they see it. In spite of all our letters and telegrams, Gen. Thomson, the British commander said: "Why, there can't be people starving to death." It was only when he came to Alexandropol and saw them actually lying dead and dying on the street that he really believed it. (Elder, April 24, 1919)



Reception for General Thomson, Alexandropol

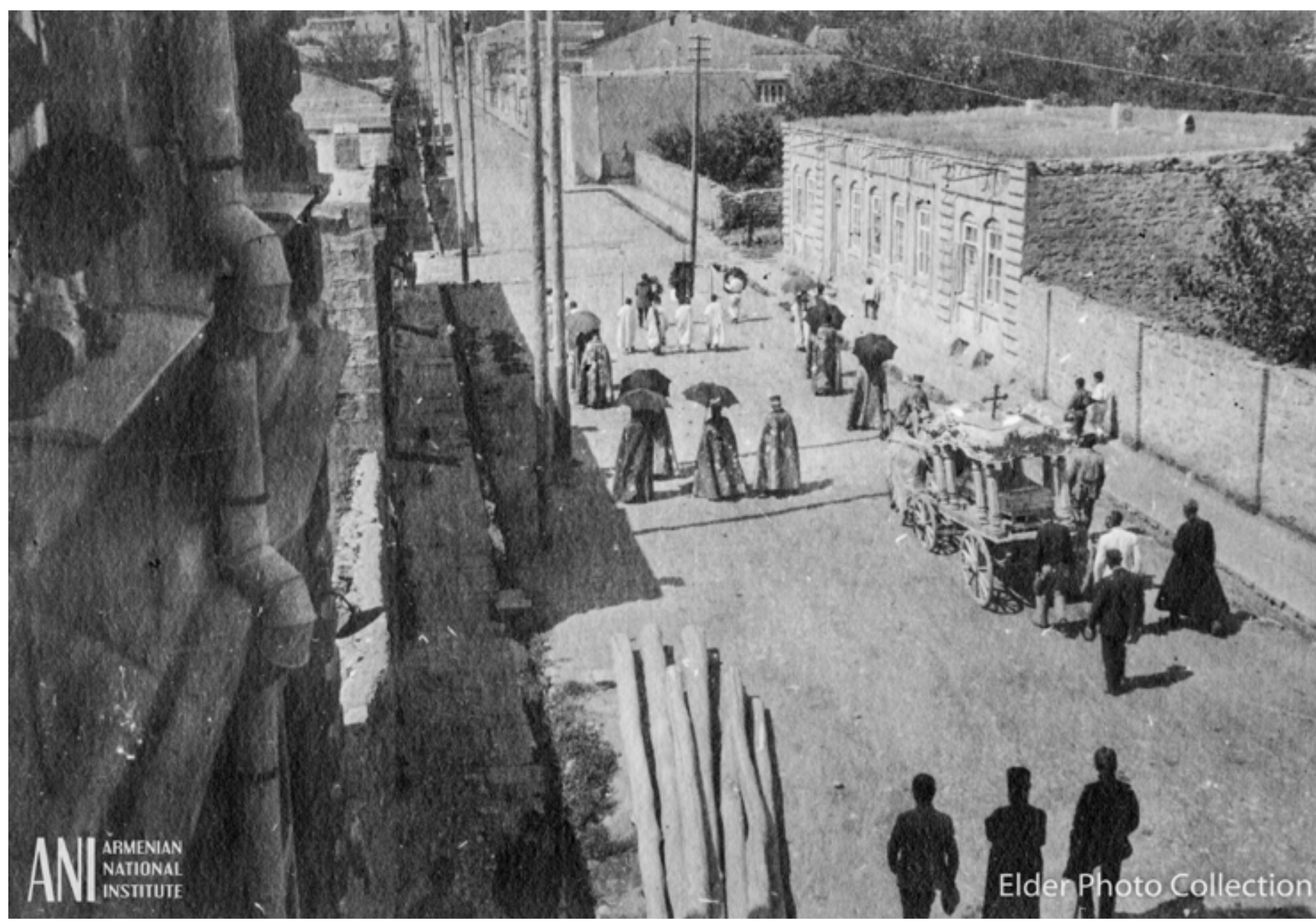


THE GRAVES OF ETCHMIADZIN-MARCH 1919

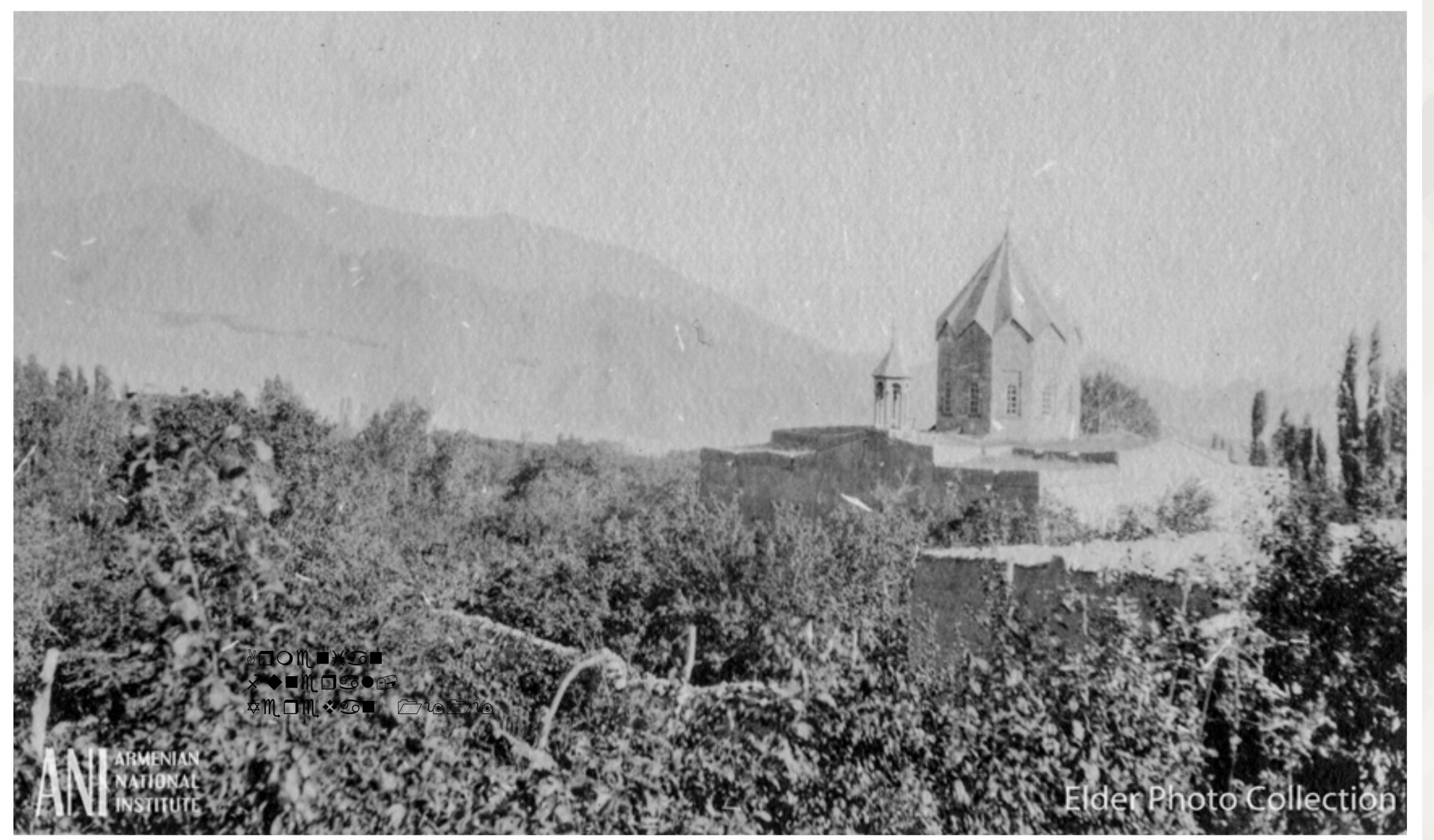


A few days ago, I went to Etchmiadzin. On the way, we passed the carcass of a horse by the roadside, so common that for miles one is not out of the smell of their decaying bodies. But in this case we saw three peasant women tearing off the flesh with their bare hands to prepare themselves a meal. We stopped for a moment at the cemetery to watch the grave diggers at work. They showed us that day's grave, eighteen corpses piled in one huge grave, little more than skeletons, so thin that every bone seemed exposed. The day before the toll had been 30. And so it goes in every village and hamlet and city throughout Armenia. I don't know how much of this a human being can stand, moaning children on the doorsteps, starving people dying on the street, famished mobs at the office door fighting for a place in the direct relief line. I've sympathized till my nerves are numb and there is nothing left but a dumb resentment against the whole awful situation. (Elder, March 2, 1919)

Skeleton in the Etchmiadzin road

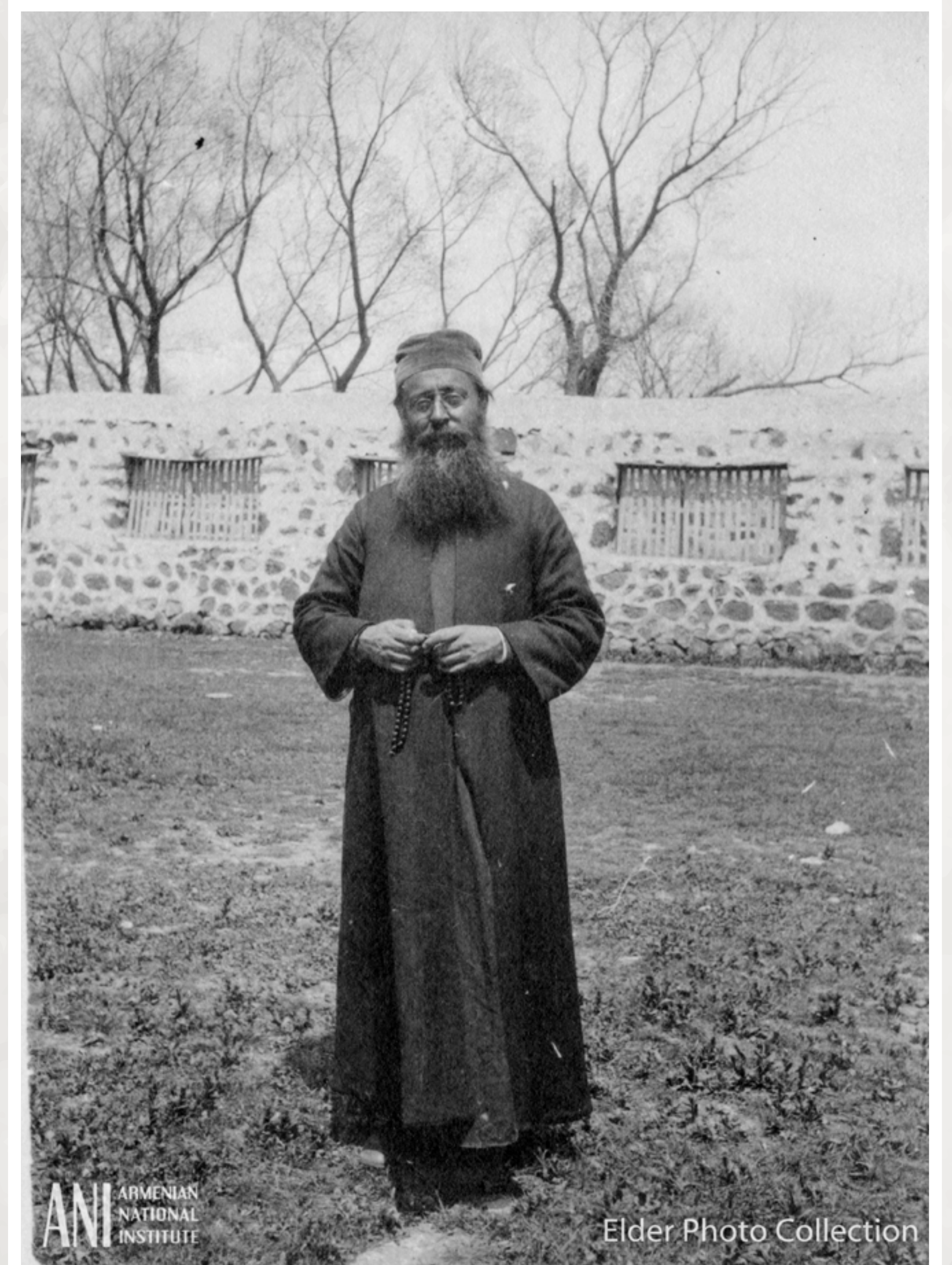


Armenian funeral, Yerevan 1919

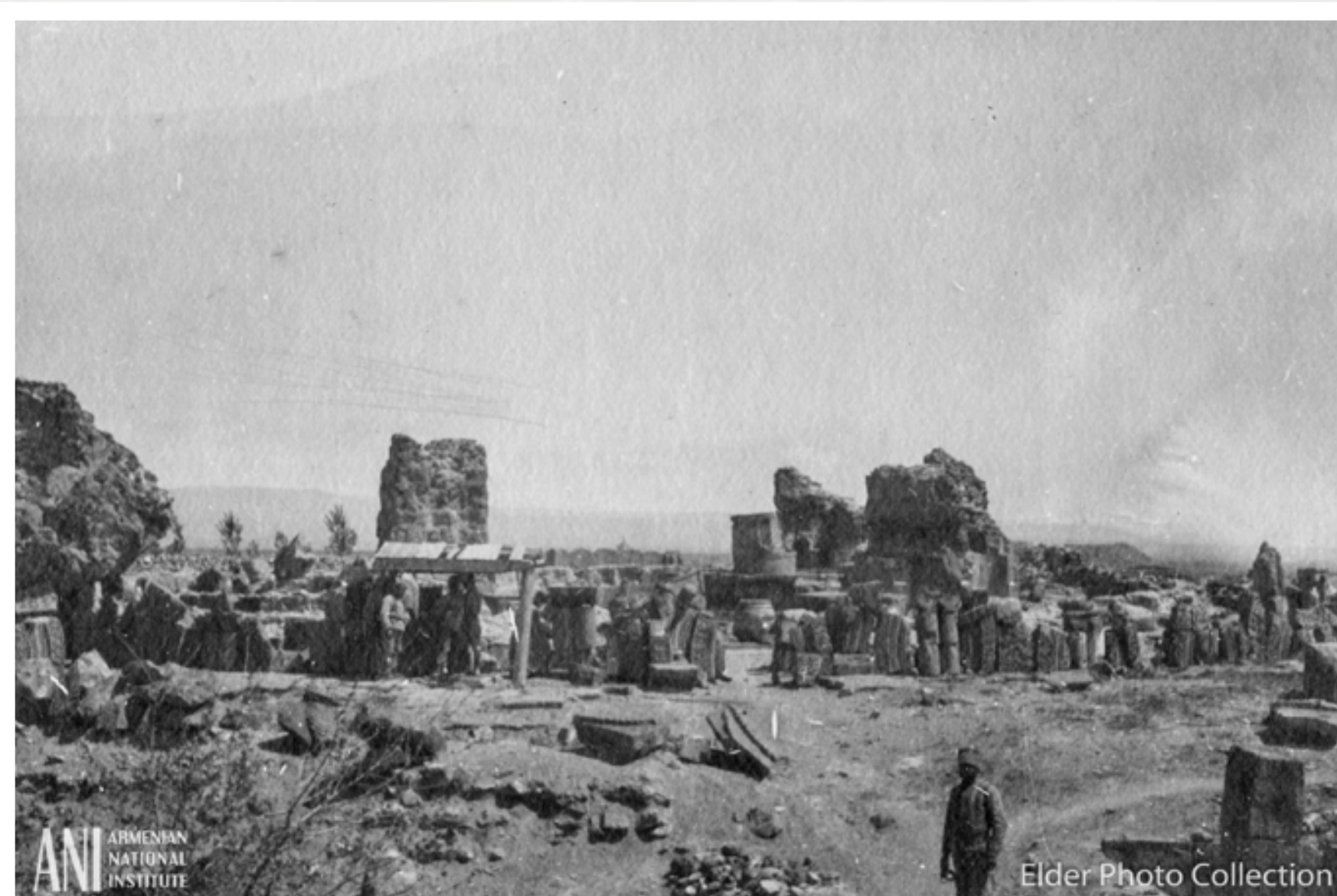


Mislabeled Etchmiadzin, the photograph depicts the Church of Saint Shemavon in the town of Agulis in the district of Nakhichevan, now part of Azerbaijan. The church no longer exists and Armenians no longer inhabit Agulis.

The past month has witnessed a cholera epidemic in Yerevan. For a time it was terrible. Every day going to work through the English Garden I have seen dead or dying refugees. Even on the main streets they would be seen at times dying unattended. We did what we could. Hired a doctor to devote full time to the refugees, put a squad of men to work in cleaning up the English Garden, bought individual drinking cups for employees and for a time closed the spinning shops entirely. We hired a squad of grave diggers to go around and gather up the corpses off the street and bury them. Now the worst is past, as the cooler weather has checked it. We heard of one priest who conducted 33 funerals in a single day, and at the last, himself dropped dead of the disease. (Elder, September 8, 1918)



Armenian priest



Labeled Etchmiadzin, the photograph depicts the nearby remains of the 7th century Cathedral of Zvartnots



Near Etchmiadzin
Cuneiform tablet

THE FACE OF HUNGER - JUNE 1919

The country cannot possibly support itself without such supplies, despite the decrease of the population by the thousands who have starved. (Elder, June 30, 1919)

I went to the Ministry of Refugees to talk about repaying the one million rubles we had borrowed from them. The Minister seemed very much surprised at suggesting such a thing. "Has any one asked you to return it?" he asked. When I said no one had, he said "Then forget about it. The money has been spent well, as we all know, and for our own people." So that is that. (Elder, July 27, 1919)



Foraging

John Elder's attention and energy remained focused on the vast humanitarian disaster unfolding in front of his eyes as the armies of Ottoman Turkey brought the ferocity and the atrocities associated with World War I to the doorstep of Eastern Armenia. That part of Armenia under Russian rule had become a place of refuge for tens of thousands fleeing the fate every Armenian was destined to suffer when caught in the web of deportations and massacres. Russian Armenia too was now subjected to the policy of indiscriminate killing that underlined the genocidal objectives of the Young Turk regime in control of Ottoman Turkey. With fervor and determination, John Elder and James O. Arroll confronted every challenge created by the spreading horrors of flight, famine, epidemic, ruin, and mass death.

To address these challenges effectively, Elder established strong working relations with the political authorities in Armenia. Beyond the regular association with the local commissioners for refugee affairs who looked after the welfare of the orphaned, the homeless, and the starving, Elder appealed directly to Aram Manukian, the Dashnak party leader upon whom the administration of Armenia had been thrust with the breakdown of the Russian state as revolution spread across the vast empire. He wrote admiringly of Manukian's personal courage in the face of the hazards confronting Armenia with all the stresses of war, unrest, and economic hardships. By his vigor and dedication, Elder earned the complete trust of the local authorities. As the nascent Armenian state struggled under the weight of new political responsibilities, they appealed to Elder and Arroll to assume a sizable part of the growing burden of caring for refugees, and especially the orphans whose numbers only increased as their parents perished from privations.

A decidedly optimistic person, Elder nevertheless admitted in his journal his constant concern about developments on the warfront and exhibited a clear understanding of their implications for the survival of the Armenians. This grasp of the broader picture and the currents shaping it are witnessed by the photographs he took, not just of calamities, but also of the critical moments when the arrival of Allied missions held out the hope of calming the unrest and restraining the disturbances across the Caucasus. Elder even chased down General Andranik to obtain a first-hand understanding from the man who played a critical role in resisting the Ottoman scourge about to sweep across Eastern Armenia after having wiped away the Armenian people living under Turkish rule in Anatolia.

Aside from his occasional comments in his journal privately contemplating what unknown future awaited an uprooted people, the captions to some of his photographs also betrayed his dismay at sites of despair. He took more than one picture depicting a person bent over engaged in what he described as "foraging" and "grazing." Typically, such language describes how animals go about feeding. Human beings obtain nourishment by eating. The dehumanization of the hundreds of thousands made stateless and homeless impressed upon him the depth of the degradations being endured. By the time help arrived in the form of a fresh team of relief workers, he was past the point of exhaustion. Although the situation would unravel again in coming months, Elder departed content with the knowledge that he had saved multitudes of lives. The steady confidence of the Armenian government in his integrity and humanity was demonstrated by its dismissal of the loan he had taken out, his attention to that final detail itself an unflinching testament to his unblemished character. Celebrated in Armenia, John Elder and James O. Arroll returned to the United States as unsung heroes in a country barely aware that two young YMCA volunteers had exhibited courage and decency beyond any call of duty to conscience and humanity.

The typhus epidemic is taking a terrible toll and many of my best friends have gone. Among the refugees it has been a holocaust. (Elder, January 16, 1919)

ALLIED INTERVENTION - MAY 1919

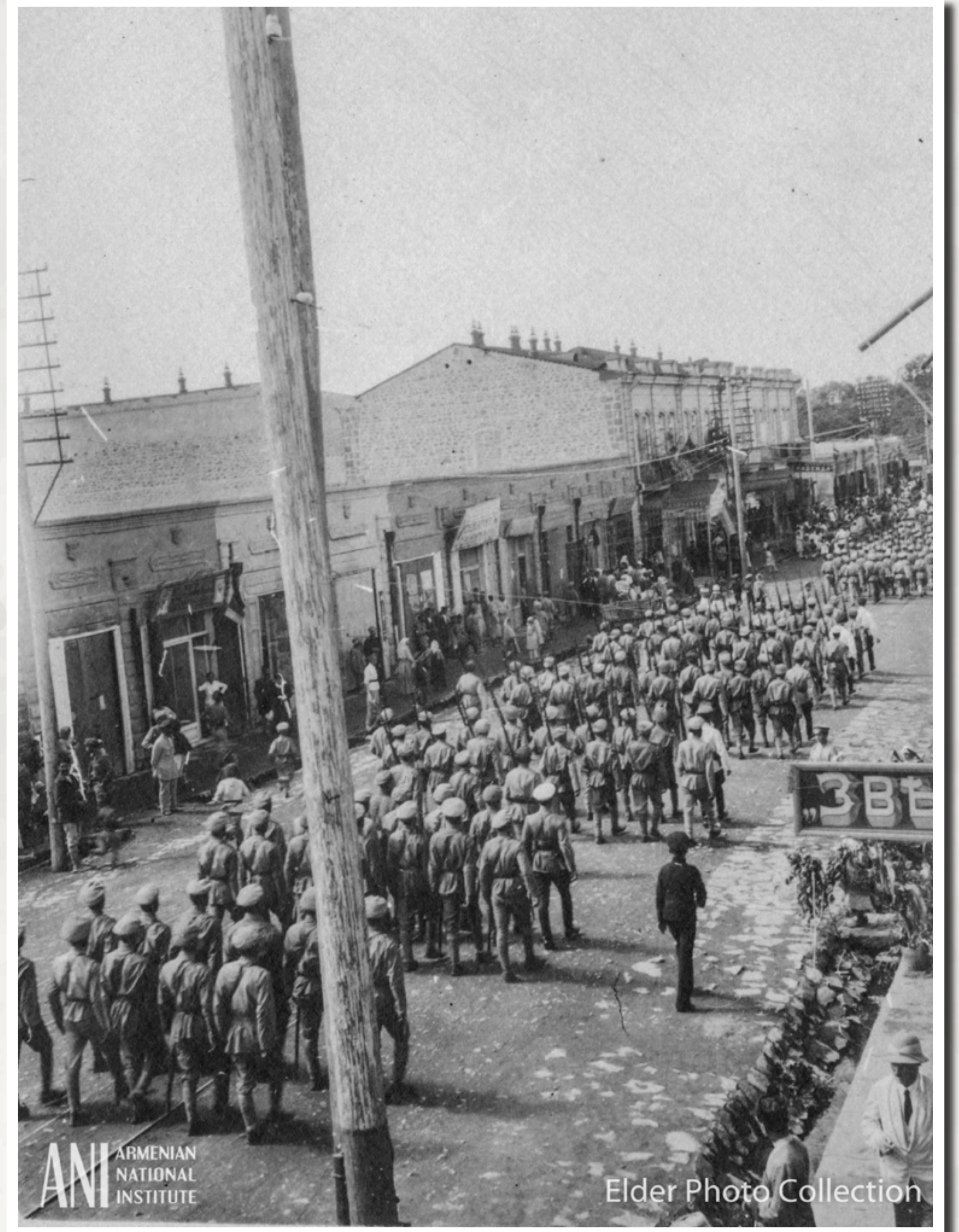
GENERAL MILNE IN YEREVAN

Lieutenant-General George Francis Milne held the Allied command headquarters in Constantinople after the Armistice. The zone of his responsibility as chief of the British Army of the Black Sea included the Caucasus.

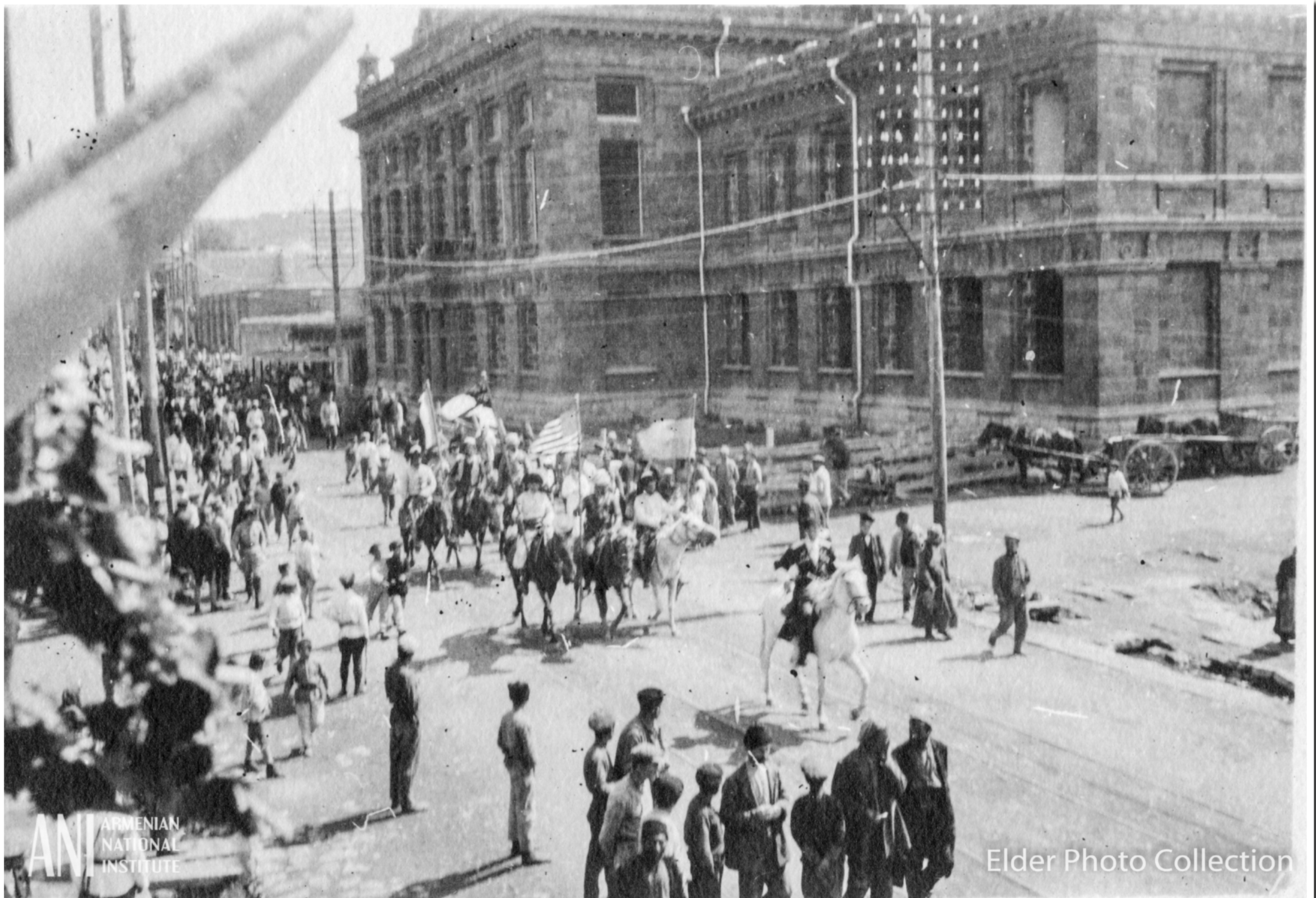


Arrival of General Milne, Yerevan

Then Wednesday, General Milne, commander of the British troops from Constantinople east paid us a visit. There was an elaborate parade, a long line of cars with an escort of cavalymen each carrying the flag of one of the allied nations. I rode in the first car with the Commandant of the city and the Minister of Charities to outline the route of march. They visited many orphanages and went over our relief centers with greatest interest.
(Elder, May 4, 1919)



Yerevan, going to meet General Milne



Going to meet General Milne

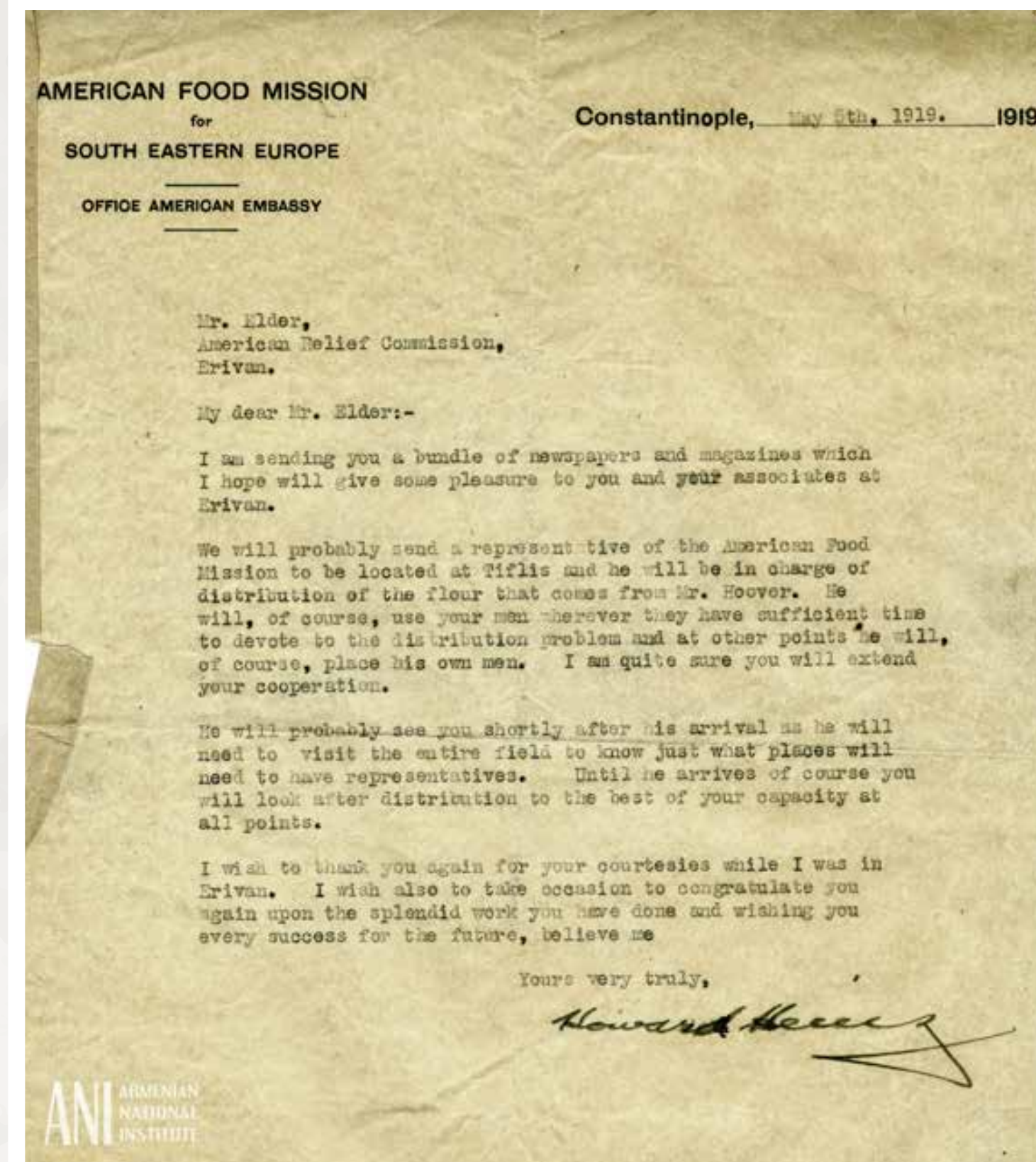
ALLIED INTERVENTION - MAY 1919

THE AMERICAN FOOD MISSION,

HOWARD HEINZ & ABA PRESIDENT SMITH



Howard Heinz



Walter George Smith

Described as one of the great American business leaders of the 20th century by Harvard Business School, Howard Heinz (1877-1941) was president of the Pittsburgh-based H.J. Heinz Company. Upon the conclusion of the war, Heinz was called to service by Herbert Hoover, then Director of the U.S. Food Administration. The agency was set up to address the food shortage in all the war-torn countries of Europe and Asia. From his base in Constantinople, Heinz traveled to Armenia in his capacity as Director-General of the American Relief Administration for Southeast Europe and Asia Minor.

Walter George Smith (1854-1924), President of the American Bar Association in 1917, and national board member of the American Committee for Relief in the Near East, traveled to the region with Howard Heinz in order to streamline relief efforts in view of the required expansion of the undertaking. After his tour, moved by the scale of the distress across the country, he pled the case of Armenia in front of the American Commission to Negotiate Peace in Paris and organized the Armenia-America Society upon his return to the United States. A Philadelphia native, Smith was married to Elizabeth Drexel, the sister of Katharine Drexel, the second American raised to sainthood by the Papacy. Their uncle, banker and philanthropist Anthony Drexel, founded Drexel University. Smith became the most vocal American Catholic advocate of the Armenian people and dedicated the rest of his life to finding a just resolution of their predicaments.

We have been having some distinguished visitors. One was Mr. Howard Heinz, the head of the great Heinz Pickle factories, head of food conservation in Pennsylvania, and with him Mr. Smith, president of the American Bar Association. I took them down to Igdır and what they saw they will not forget in a hurry. We just went from house to house asking how many lived there and how many there had been when they first came back shortly before. Not a house had less than two dead, some had eight or ten. The Monday they visited our cloth factories and other industries where we now employ around 11,000 people. It was wonderful to me how Heinz sized up the situation, outlined the best methods for organization and pointed out the defects in the Caucasus work. (Elder, May 4, 1919)

Food is arriving in increasing quantities, and it is a thrill to see how the gaunt little orphans are beginning to fatten up; I could hardly had believed it, but actually when they first came to us they had forgotten how to smile. But as their health slowly comes back and color returns to their cheeks they begin to take an interest in life again and learn to laugh and play like normal kiddies. But for some reason, new swarms of waifs are appearing on the streets. We have opened a soup kitchen where 1,900 a day are being fed. The first day, fifteen of them died at the kitchen and there are about 100 sick lying around it now. We have put a squad of keepers on the job so that now the death rate is lower but their condition is pitiful in the extreme. Their clothing is nothing but filthy rags.

(Elder, June 22, 1919)



Elder Photo Collection

Children in the government orphanage

THE AMERICAN VOLUNTEERS

Fred Tredwell Smith, who had done seven years of service as a missionary in Turkey as part of the Student Volunteer Movement, was a Harvard graduate who went on to become a Rhodes Scholar at Oxford. Later associated with the Columbia Teachers College, he worked with African-American and Jewish groups toward the improvement of race relations in the United States. He spent 20 months touring 15 countries in Europe and Asia before returning to America in September 1919. He reported his experiences to Rear Admiral Mark Bristol, U.S. High Commissioner in Constantinople, who forwarded the following report to the Department of State on September 20, 1919, which subsequently Assistant Secretary of State William Phillips presented to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in subcommittee hearings:

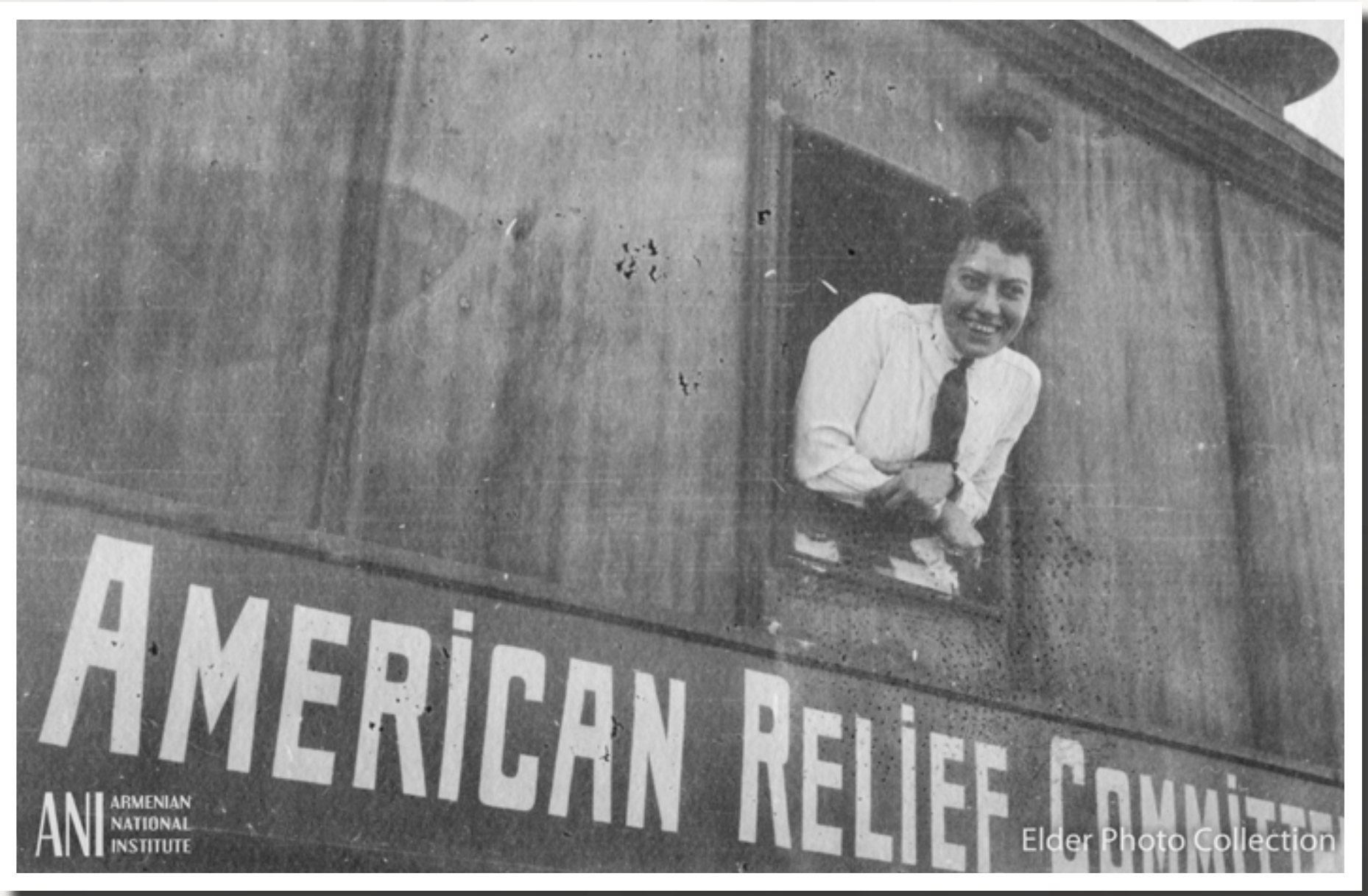
“F. Tredwell Smith of the American Persian Relief Commission passed through here yesterday after varied experiences in Erivan and Nakhichevan and Tabriz and Urumia. When about August 25th he crossed the Tartar

[Azeri] line via Nakhichevan to Tabriz [in Persia] for the second time the atmosphere was completely changed, and a Britisher’s life was no longer safe because the British had no troops, and Americans were also in danger. The Tartars [Azeris] opened battle on the Armenians in Nakhichevan July 20th and after a three-day battle drove out the British along with the American relief workers and began a massacre of Armenian men, women and children, estimates of the victims varying between 6,000 and 12,000. Smith had the testimony of the Americans that when they crossed the bridge at Julfa into Persia the [Arax] river was full of mutilated and headless corpses. On Smith’s return along this river in Russia, corpses still were seen along the river banks. At the present time Halilbey,* formerly in command of the Turks on the eastern front, now in command of the Tartars, is bringing Osmali [Ottoman] Turks over the narrow gauge railroad from Bayazid via Maku in order to attack Erivan.”

*Halil Bey, also known as Halil Kut, was a general in the Ottoman Army during WWI. Halil, along with his nephew, Ismail Enver, the Ottoman Minister of War, were the officials primarily responsible for the implementation in Western Armenia of the genocidal policies of the Young Turk regime, effectively wiping out the Armenian population of those historic districts. He publicly claimed to have overseen the slaughter of 300,000 Armenians. With the Armistice, he relocated to Azerbaijan and rallied local forces in order to continue implementing the Young Turk program for the complete eradication of the Armenian people.



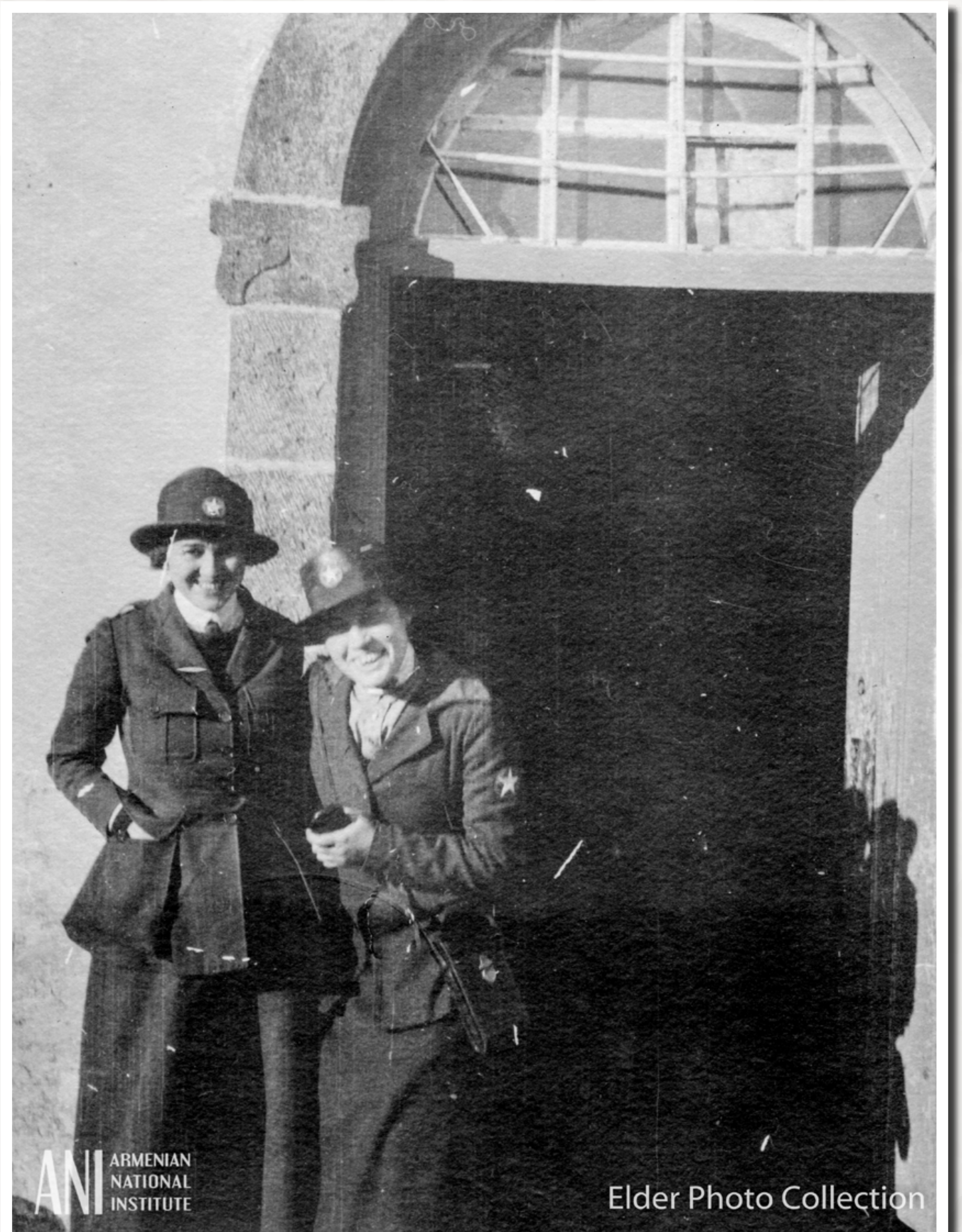
John [Elder], Tredwell Smith, and Billy, - 35 Tsarskaya [Street] balcony [Yerevan]



Mabel Farrington



Yerevan Station,
Billy and Mabel



Mary Kifer and Mabel Farrington

THE SPIRIT AND ROMANCE OF SERVICE

BILLINGS GIRL WEDS NOBLEMAN

CHARM OF RED CROSS NURSE
TOO MUCH FOR THIS ITALIAN
MARCHESE

Instead of Returning to Billings to Take Up Her Duties in the Public School She Will Go Back to Italy and Queen It in a Castle; Romance of the Great War.

Here's a pretty war romance. The other day Miss Mary Kifer of Billings was married to the Marchese Degli Albizzi, an Italian nobleman whom she met in Armenia while she was in the Red Cross service as a nurse. The wedding was celebrated in a New York church, and the girl who was Miss Kifer, instead of returning to Billings and resuming her duties as a teacher in the public schools, will go to Italy and live all her days in a castle.

The story of the romance has been received here from the following in the New York World:

"Mary Kifer is the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. William A. Kifer of Sioux City, Iowa. Through her college career she was prominent in social and dramatic activities at the University of Iowa. After her graduation in 1913 she continued dramatic work at Northwestern university, in Evanston, Ill., with the idea that she would be a playwright and possibly an actress. Eager to begin earning a livelihood, she took a position as teacher of elocution and English in the high school at Billings. She left there to enter the Vassar training camp for nurses, all other ambitions being side-tracked for war service. She nursed in New Haven during the 'flu' epidemic, then served in Lowell house in that city until she was sent overseas two years ago with a party of workers for the near east relief.

"In the city of Erivan, capital of the Armenian republic, Miss Kifer was made director of four orphanages in which were 4,000 children. She also had supervision over distribution of clothing to Armenians and Turks in that district.

Romance on Skis

"The young American first met her nobleman at a skiing party on the snow-clad hills outside Erivan. Miss Kifer had been too busy to go to a dinner party given by the hostess in the near east personnel house in honor of the titled visitor on a December night in 1919, but later they met at what will always be to them a very memorable and merry party.

"Mary Kifer had prided herself on the way she could ski down snow-covered slopes, but, except at a tournament she once attended, she had never seen anything to compare with the expertness of the Marchese Albizzi. Besides, he is six feet two inches tall and good looking.

"Although the girl from Iowa had never so much as suspected the existence of the gallant young officer until she was invited to meet him at that party, Lieutenant Albizzi often had seen her, and she was the particular American in Erivan he desired very much to know.

"It happened that they had much in common to talk about. While she was taking care of half-starved and diseased refugees, he, as a member of the Italian military commission in the Caucasus, had been defending the rights of the oppressed little republic."

A War Hero

"Lieutenant Albizzi has a brilliant war record. Three times he was awarded the Italian medal for valor, twice the Italian military cross, and once the cross of the crown of Italy. Once on the field he was promoted for gallantry. Because of his acquaintance with Russia, having attended university there before the war, he was placed in command of an Italian battalion at Archangel.

"He is a cousin by marriage of Prince Borghese, head of the Sieneze Borghese family, into which Napoleon Bonaparte's sister married.

"The marchese and his bride have left for Tiflis, where he is attached to the Italian military mission. The Marchesa degli Albizzi will continue her work with the near east relief in the interest of Armenian refugees who have fled to Tiflis."

Dillon Examiner, April 13, 1921



Mabel Farrington, Mary Kifer, Mr. Arsen Khachigian in the latter's home in Novo Bayazid



Mary Kifer, Lake Sevan



Hovhannes Buznooni, Yerevan 1918



Mr. Mardiros

Arsen Khachigian, Hovhannes Buznooni [Bznuni], and Mr. Mardiros were among the local managers of the many institutions Elder and Arroll were overseeing. The Armenian managers were critical intermediaries in assisting Elder and Arroll, as well as other relief missions, to distribute aid, provide oversight of the facilities, and address the needs of the local communities.



Marquis Nicolò degli Albizzi

Mary Kifer from Iowa was among the new team of volunteers that arrived in Armenia in the spring of 1919 much to the relief of Elder and Arroll who had no rest for over a year. Armed with a sense of humanitarian commitment to aiding peoples in war-stricken areas, the fresh group of young American

workers revitalized relief efforts. In a not uncommon experience for relief workers who meet their future spouses overseas, Mary Kifer found herself swept up in a romance and became engaged to a colorful figure of Italian background stationed in the Caucasus. Their marriage soon after made hometown news. Her husband, a captain in the Italian Army and a nobleman by birth, the Marquis Nicolò degli Albizzi (1891-1975) was descended from an ancient family that played a prominent role in Florence before the rise of the Medici in the 15th century. In less than a year their happiness was cut short by tragedy. Albizzi and Kifer were staying at the Villa Borghese-Cavazza on the family's private island in Lake Garda in northern Italy, when they went boating.

FORMER SIOUX CITY WOMAN DROWNED IN LAKE GARDA, ITALY

(By The Associated Press.)

Sioux City, Iowa, July 22.—The Marchesa Dilgia Albizzi, formerly Miss Mary Kifer, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. W. O. Kifer, of Sioux City, Iowa, was drowned in Lake Garda, Italy, according to a cablegram received in Sioux City today by the parents.

Miss Kifer sailed from New York city, January 25 for Tiflis as the bride of Marchese Dilgia Albizzi, who at that time was a member of the Italian commission to the Caucasus with the rank of lieutenant. Miss Kifer married the Italian nobleman a few days before sailing.

Miss Kifer and the marchese met in 1919 in Tiflis, the capital of the Georgian republic, where the former Sioux City girl was doing relief work.

A sudden storm capsized the vessel. Mary drowned despite her husband's effort to save her life, while Nicolò himself nearly succumbed also. Albizzi, whose sportsmanship had caught Kifer's attention, went on to develop a number of ski resorts in the United States and Canada, never remarried and was buried next to his wife in the cemetery facing the island.

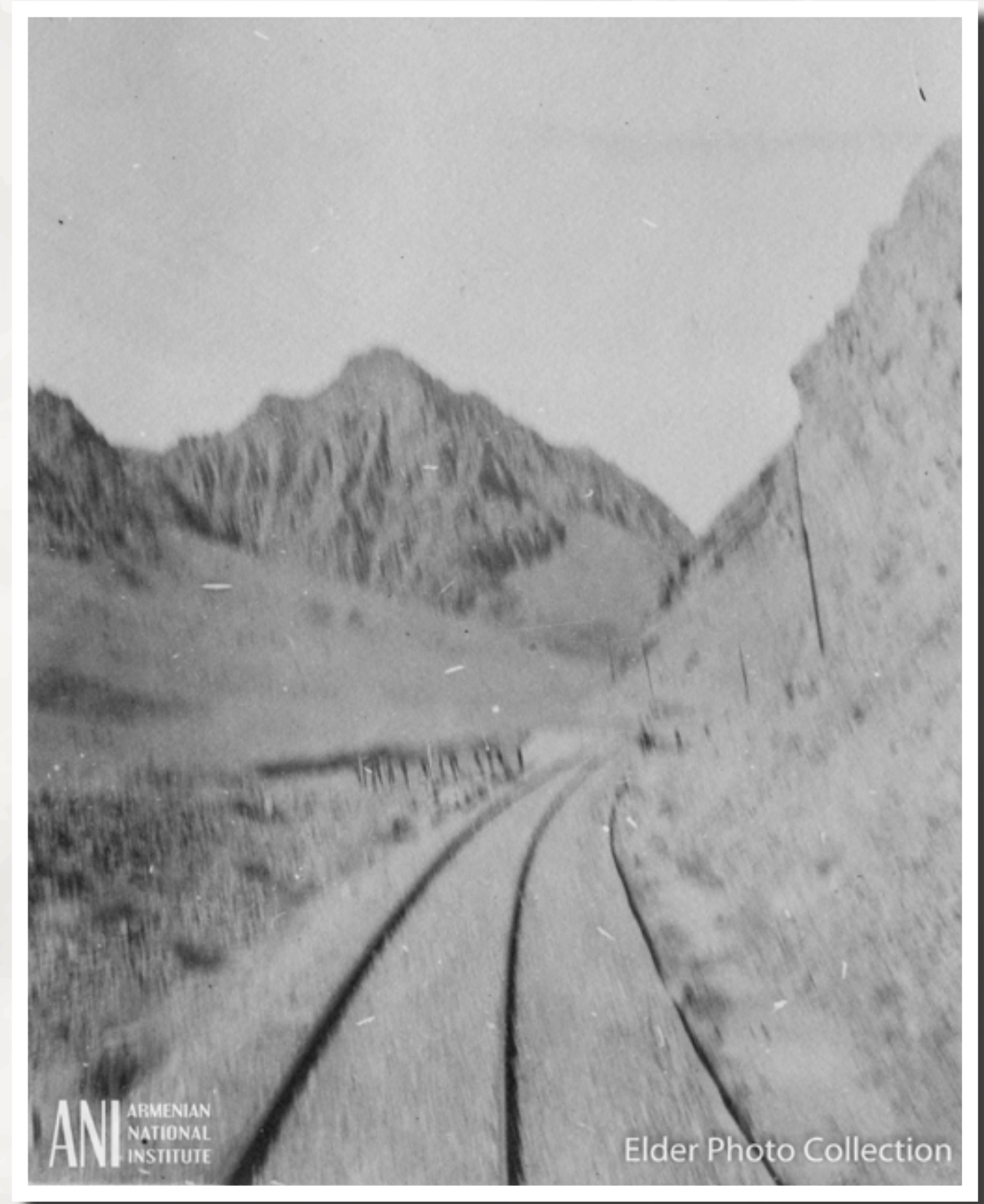
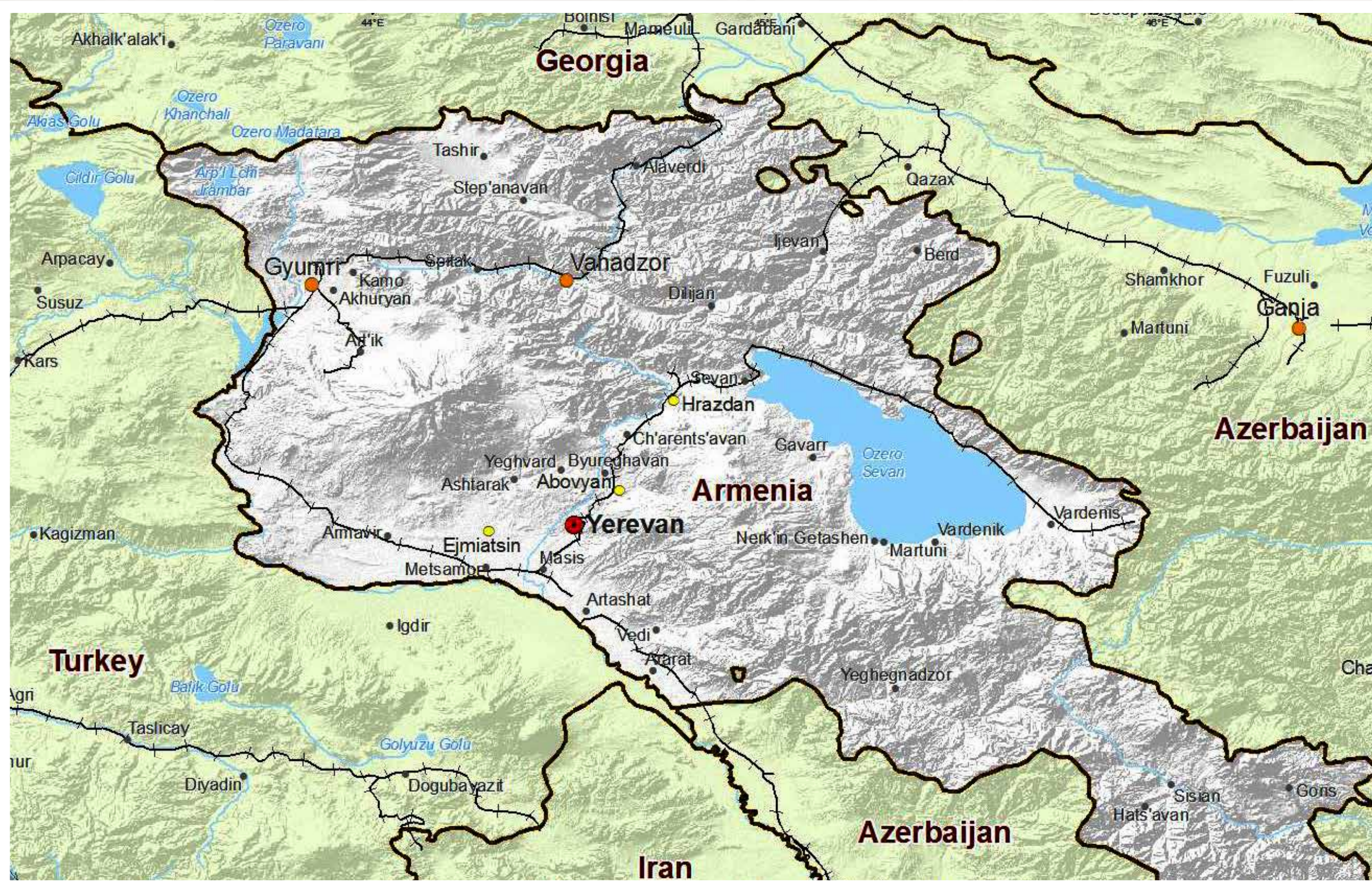
THE RAILROAD LIFELINES



Yerevan Station

[U.S. Consul F. Willoughby Smith in Tiflis] expressed himself as willing and able to keep the relief funds coming and gave me 200,000 rubles to take back with me...Collected the 200,000 rubles, got needles and thread and sewed it inside my coat. Left Tiflis standing on platform between [train] cars, got inside before morning and a chance to sit down at about 9 o'clock. Reached Erivan at 2:30 A.M. (Elder, May 5, 1918)

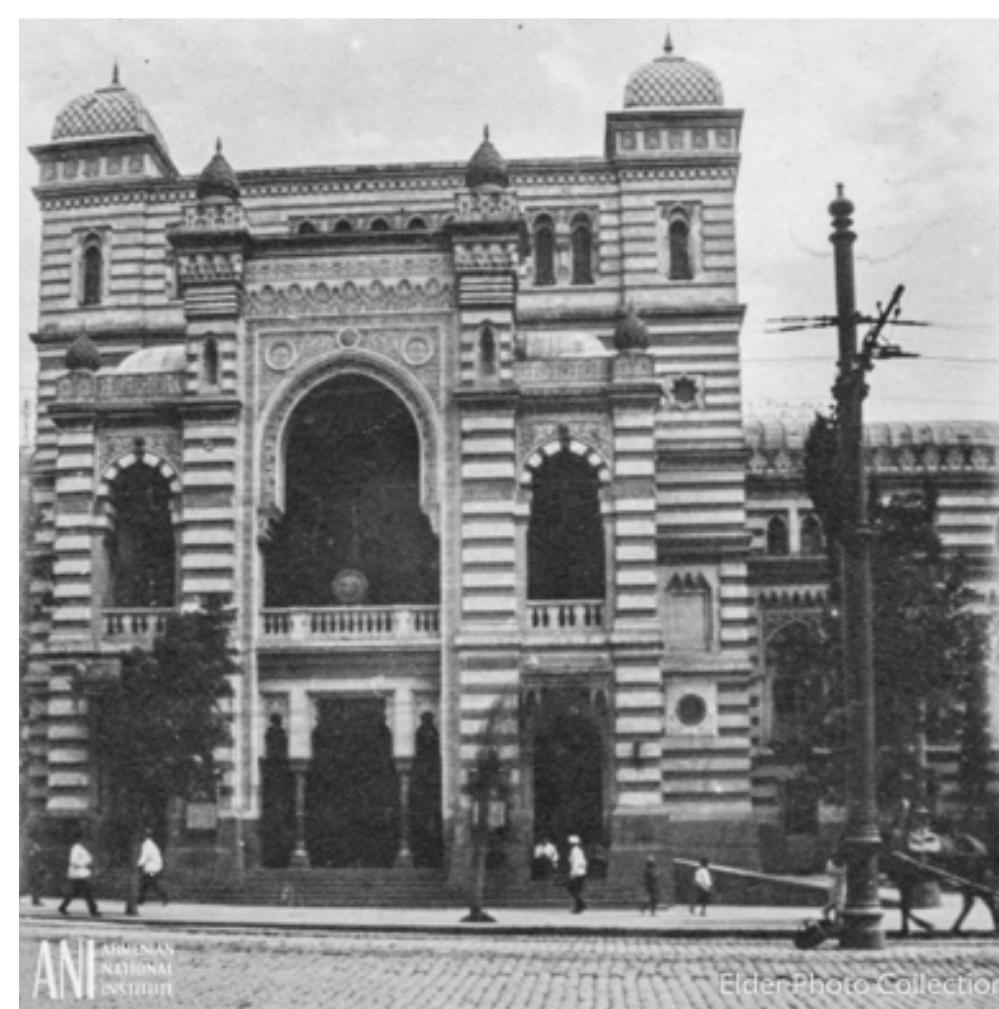
A landlocked country, in 1918 Armenia depended on a single lifeline, the railroad that connected Yerevan with the rest of Russia. Much of the relief supplies, as well as the American volunteers arrived over the same rail line. A single line ran north from Yerevan, through Etchmiadzin and Alexandropol/Gyumri, to the hub in Tiflis/Tbilisi, Georgia. The main line continued north to Russia, while a spur to the Black Sea port of Batumi connected the region to international shipping lanes. Elder and Arroll traveled over this line several times to oversee the delivery of critical supplies.



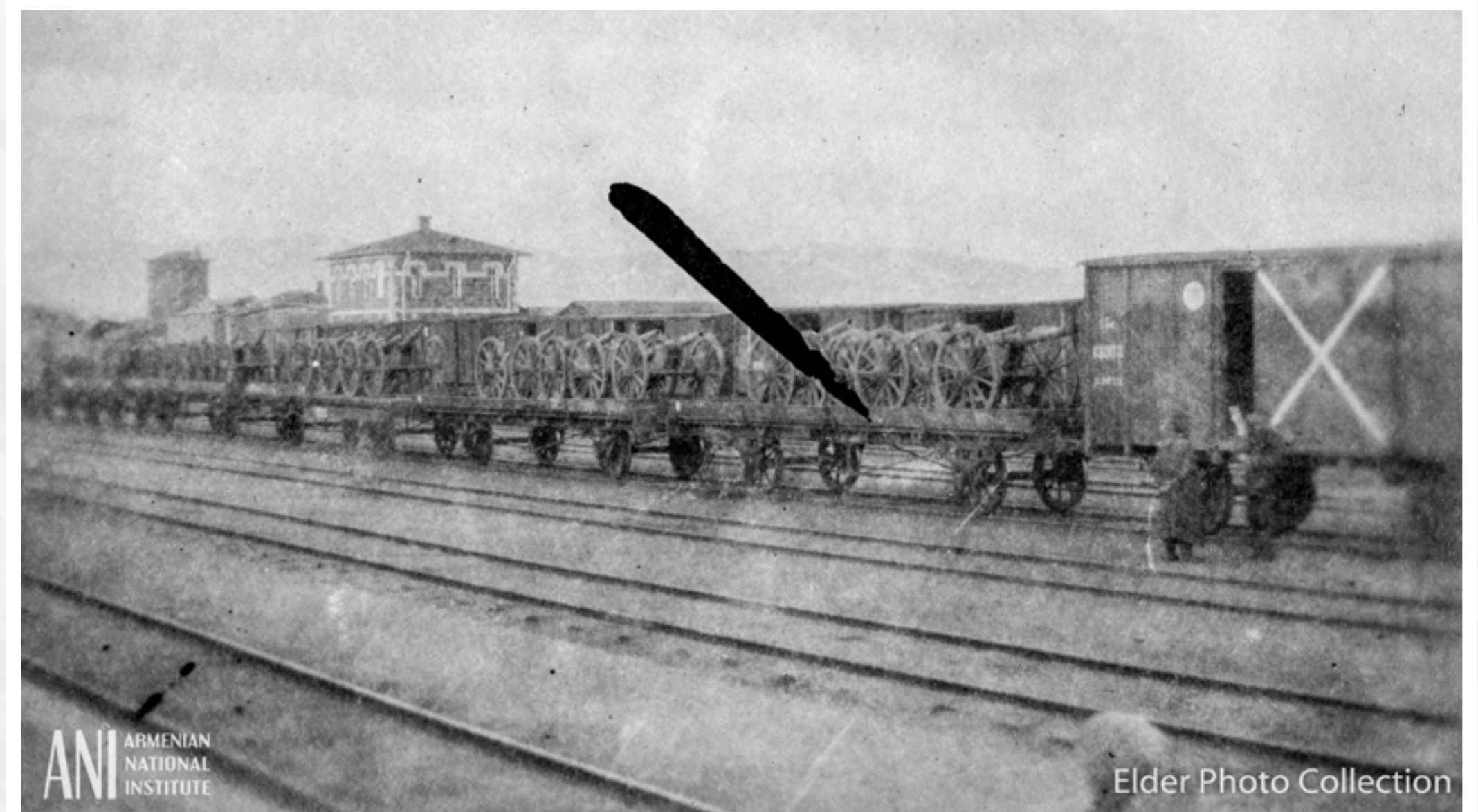
Yerevan railroad



Tiflis School



Tiflis Theatre



Military stores at Alex[andropol]



Gertrude Pearson of Chicago spent 14 months in Armenia as a member of the field staff of the American Committee for Relief in the Near East.

When we arrived in the early spring of 1919, we found that Erivan, a city of normally 40,000, had become a moving population of over 100,000. We found several hundred refugees with scanty clothing, and those in rags, huddled together in one room, alive with vermin and covered with open sores and skin diseases, gradually freezing and starving to death. On the streets you would have thought you were moving about amongst living skeletons.

When we first arrived and before we had been able to get settled in the personnel house, we were forced to use our back porch as a dining room. At each meal the porch was surrounded with creatures, pitifully holding out their arms or leaning on a long stick, crying in their agony, "Mother, Mother! Bread! Bread! Most of them were too weak to say more.

The people had been living on grass and herbs, anything that they could get hold of. In our hospitals many people were brought to us who were unconscious (they were principally children) and whom we discovered had been feeding on the poppies in the fields. They were completely doped.

Each morning the dead wagon, as it was called, a little two wheeled cart, went thru the streets and about the town picking up the bodies, dead since the day before.

For a long time, we could find nothing which would accommodate more than 100 to 150 children and finally, when we did find one large school building holding six hundred, we were delighted. Before we knew it, we had 28 orphanages and three hospitals on our hands with 6,000 children to clothe and feed. It is estimated that in the whole of Armenia the organization was taking care of 110,000 children. (Gertrude S. Pearson, January 12, 1921)

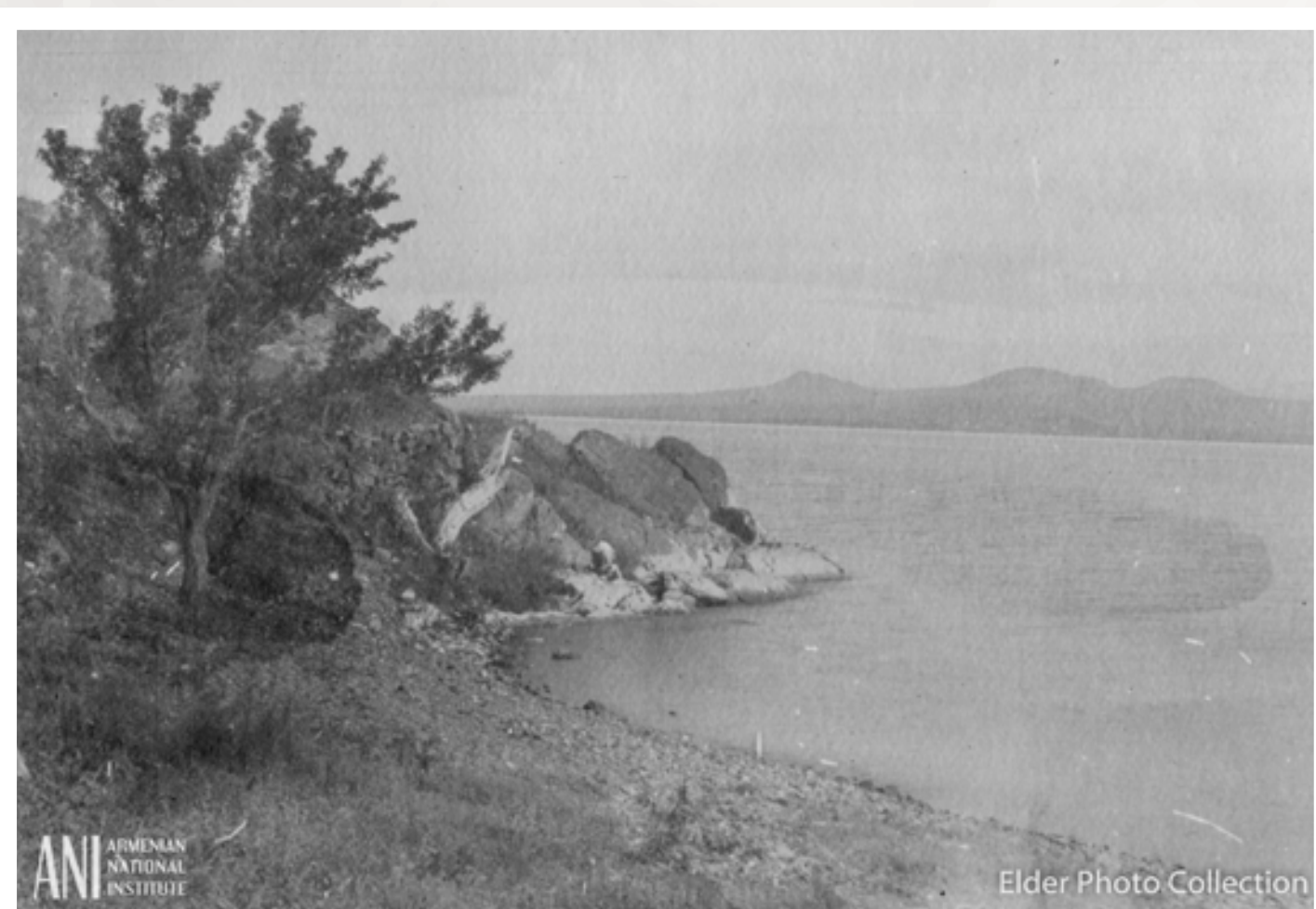
ON LAKE SEVAN, FOURTH OF JULY 1919



Church on Island on Lake Sevan, about 13th century



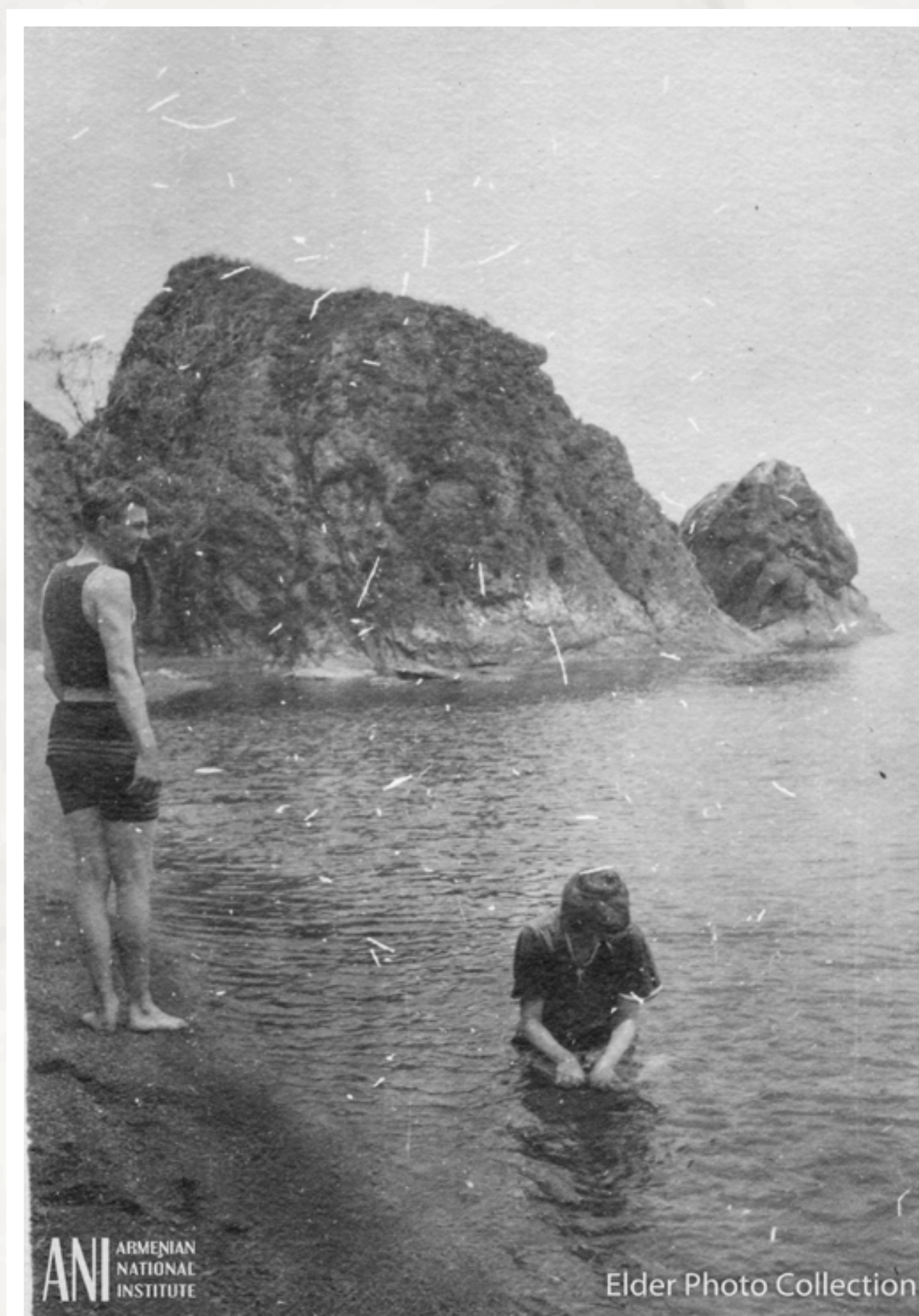
Lake Sevan Island where cloister is built



Lake Sevan



The Island [on] Lake Sevan, Caucasus



Lake Sevan, Ed Perry [standing left]



Mary Kifer and 'Smiles,' Lake Sevan



On the shore of Lake Sevan



On the shore of Lake Sevan

We had a fine break and a bit of rest the week end of the 4th of July. Most of the workers went up to Lake Sevan Friday morning, the rest of us coming up Saturday afternoon... [We] crossed out on the lake to an island monastery half a mile or so from the shore. It is an ideal place for a rest. The Monastery is located on a good sized rocky island in crystal clear Lake Sevan, which is about 6,000 feet above sea level and very cold. From the island cliffs, one can look down into the deep clear water and see large schools of beautiful lake trout, the Ishkan, or Prince, as they are called. It fairly burned me up to see those beautiful fish just waiting around to be caught and to have not even a bent pin to offer them.

There are several church buildings there, the oldest supposedly dating from the tenth century. There are many fascinating legends which the monks related to us about these churches.

So, with romantic legends, good swimming, fine fishing (if I only had some tackle) and delightful company, we had the finest one day vacation the heart could wish, my first day off in 18 months. (Elder, July 14, 1919)

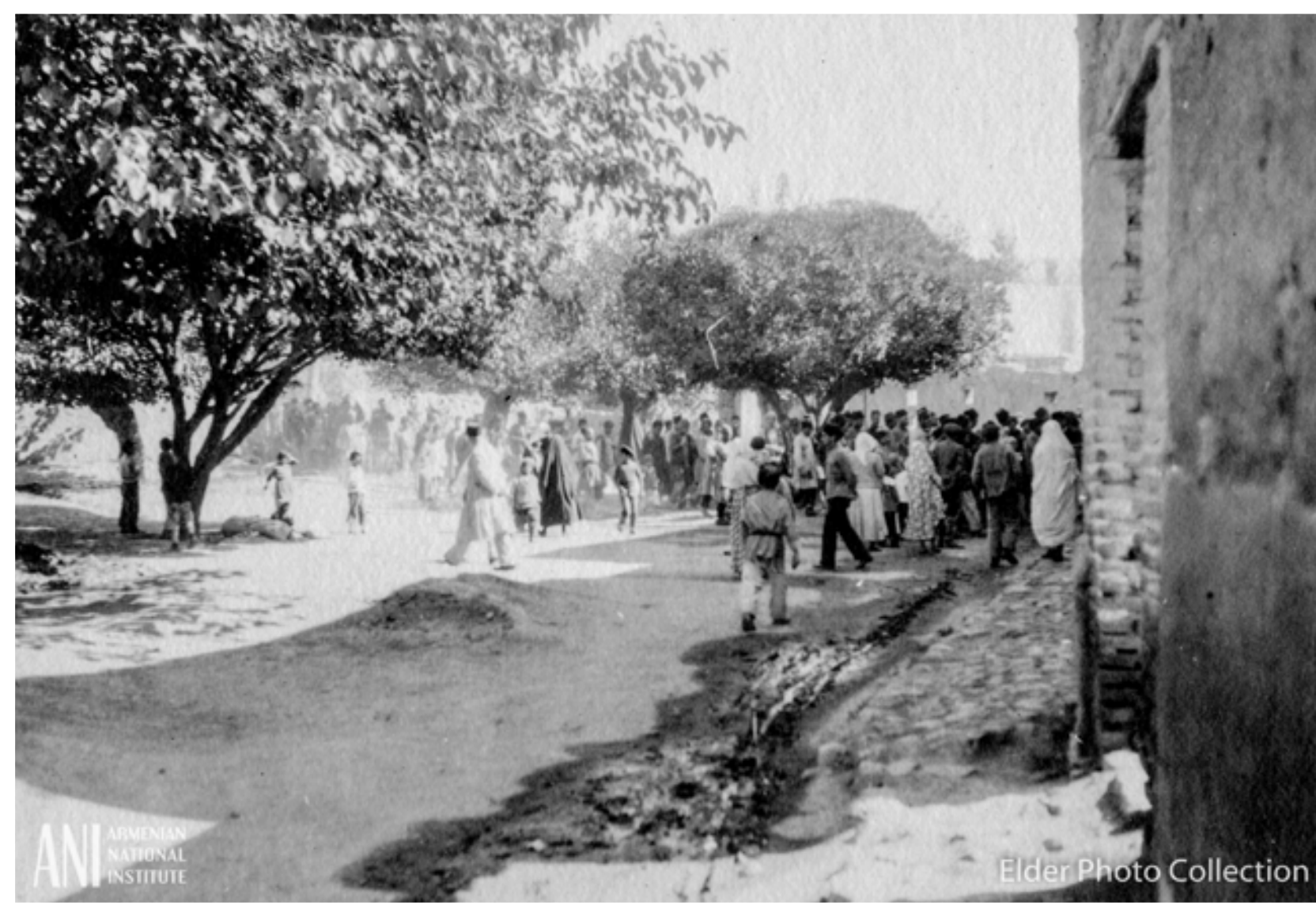
SEVAN ORPHANAGES

It was hard saying good-bye to people you have known and worked with for so long as I have out here. (Elder, July 27, 1919)



Novo Bayazid reception to NER [Near East Relief] workers (July 1919)

We have opened an orphanage at Novo Bayazid with definite instructions to our man to accept no more than 150 orphans. He wires back he has taken in 300 and has no food for them. Nor do we. (Elder, January 5, 1919)

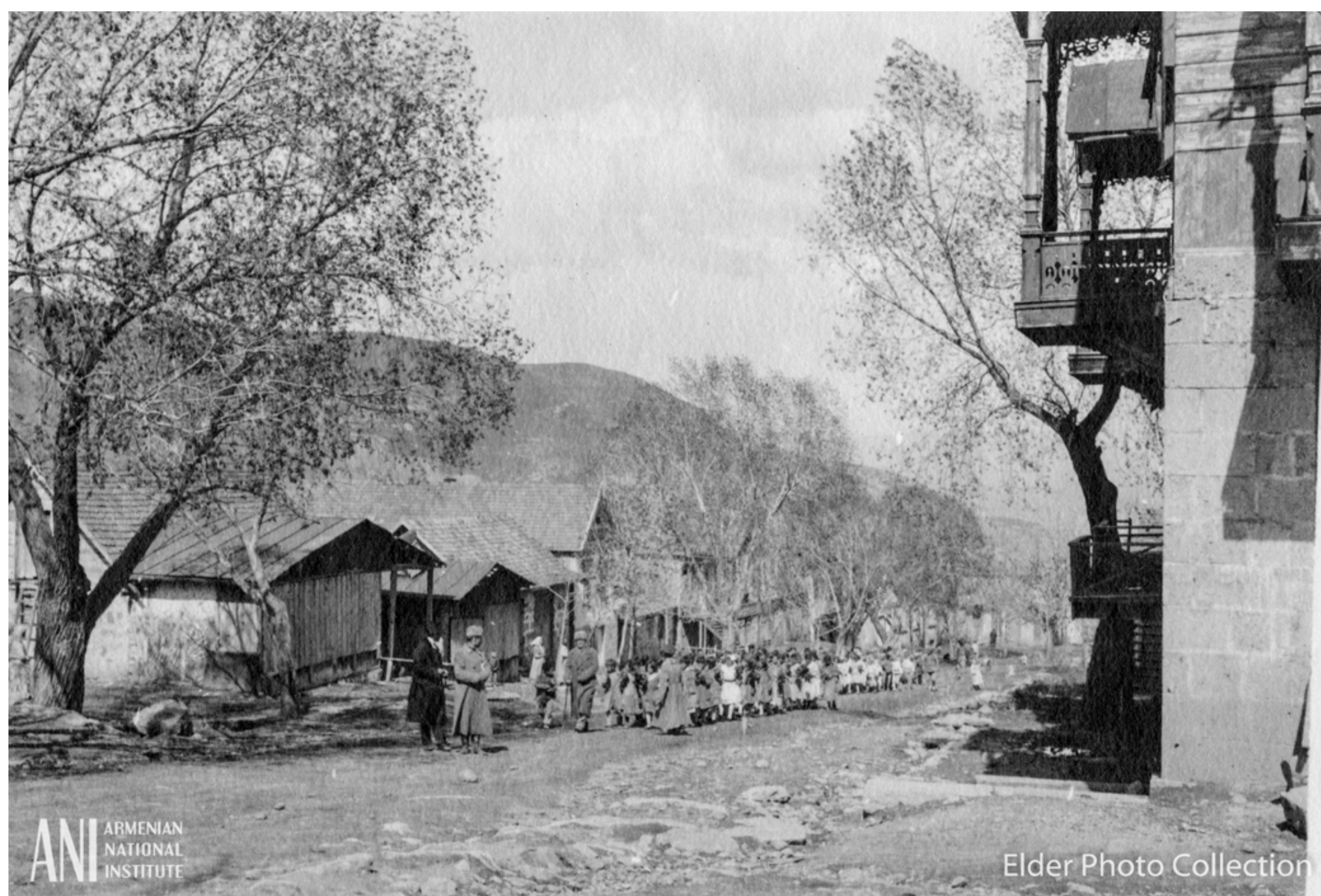


Village on the road to Novo Bayazid



Feeding station Novo Bayazid

This week I went up to Novo Bayazid for a last inspection. It is up in the mountains on the shore of Lake Sevan so it was a great relief from the heat to get up there. The reception they gave us was something I shall long remember. We had thought it very nice when at Darachichak we walked up a flower strewn walk and steps to our orphanage there, but that was nothing to our reception at Novo Bayazid. About five miles from the city we saw a squad of cavalry on the road ahead. With bared sabers they stood at attention along each side of the road as we drove up, and our local manager Mr. Arsen Khachigian, informed us that we had been welcomed by the Commandant of the city and his personal cavalry troop. We stopped the car and he rode up to welcome us in the name of the city and to express his appreciation for the work of the Committee during the previous year. From there on, the cavalry escorted us until about two miles from the city we came upon the orphans, over five hundred of them with flags in their hands and their arms filled with flowers...The kiddies cheered us, filled the car with flowers, and escorted us into town...It was hard saying good-bye to people you have known and worked with for so long as I have out here, especially to ones who have worked so faithfully as has Mr. Arsen. I had to swallow pretty hard as the car wound up out of the city to the echoes of the kiddies' cheers, many of whom would not be cheering today if God had not sent me here to help them. (Elder, July 27, 1919)



Street in Darachichak [with rows of orphan children]

FAREWELL - AUGUST 1919



ANI ARMENIAN NATIONAL INSTITUTE

Elder Photo Collection

Orphan drill, goodbye entertainment at Yerevan



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Elder Photo Collection

Farewell parade English Garden, Yerevan, August 1919



ANI ARMENIAN NATIONAL INSTITUTE

Elder Photo Collection

Yerevan, Aug 12, 1919 Farewell parade

The government has now turned over to us all of their orphanages, so that I am now head of a family with 13,000 children; scattered throughout Armenia.

On May Day, the workers gave Jim and me a party that we shall not soon forget. It was held in the YMCA club which had been decorated beyond recognition for the occasion. There were about 70 invited guests including the leading workers, most of the cabinet ministers, Archbishop Khoren [Muratbekian, later Catholicos] of the Armenian Church, newspaper men and all the local American, French and British communities. There were the sort of flowery speeches that make one wish what they said were really true, but what we prize most are the silver souvenir cups they gave us. They are lovely examples of the Van silver works including a picture of Woodrow Wilson, the American and Armenian flags in gold and silver, and an inscription that reads: "1918. In memorial of May 24th. Erivan, capital of the Armenian Republic. In those terrible days, two young Americans J. Elder and J. O. Arroll, members of the YMCA volunteered their lives willingly for the unfortunate nation of Armenia." On the silver saucers accompanying the cups were pictures of the three great Armenian cathedrals, Etchmiadzin, Varagand Akhtamar. (Elder, May 4, 1919)



ANI ARMENIAN NATIONAL INSTITUTE

Elder Photo Collection

Farewell parade August 1919 Yerevan

At last I really have my release. About two weeks ago I sent in my third resignation, pointing out that there are now 64 American workers in the Caucasus, and naming a half a dozen persons who might take my place. Saturday I received the telegraphic answer I had asked for: "Released with regret." A Mr. Spoer is coming to take my place, an older man reported to be very energetic and conscientious, so I am busy getting ready to go home.

Every one is going out of his way to overwhelm me with appreciation. I have a trunk full of farewell gifts; The Government has given me a lovely silver cup and a fine letter of thanks, and every one has been wonderful, letters of appreciation, embroidery work, silver work, pictures and all sorts of parting gifts have rained in.

A few mornings ago, as we finished breakfast we heard the sound of singing on the street outside, and went out to see two long lines of girl orphans, looking lovely in their new white dresses, singing a serenade. They called me down, and escorted me toward the English Garden, or Park. On the way, we were joined by thousands of other orphan children lined up along the way, singing and cheering. At the garden there were farewell speeches and more cheers as the orphans said good-bye. I was certainly proud of my populous family. (Elder, July 27, 1919)

(Elder, July 27, 1919)

Dr. John Elder, Memories of the Armenian Republic, *Armenian Review*, 1953, vol. 6, no. 1, pp 3-27.

“AN AMERICAN EPIC”



Gertrude Pearson

From the outbreak of the war in 1914 to the Communist Revolution in 1917, Russia was on the Allied side... The Russian authorities raised no obstacles to the Armenian, Assyrian, Nestorian, and Persian refugees who flooded their southern provinces. The Russian Government furnished emergency rations and army doctors in the fight against starvation, destitution, and epidemics among the refugees. However, these aids were far from adequate, and the American Consul in Tiflis, F. Willoughby Smith, appealed to the Near East Committee for help. Within a month, some \$40,000 was en route, a prelude to far greater funds... some Americans from their institutions in Turkey and Persia accompanied the refugees from their countries, and later, additional American staff was sent from the United States. A local volunteer committee of Americans was formed, with Samuel G. Wilson, previously in Persia, as chairman, and Consul Smith as treasurer. They joined a British relief committee which had been created under the chairmanship of Lord Bryce. In return for monthly rations from the committee, some 130,000 Armenian refugees were set to work repairing irrigation ditches and rebuilding roads and sanitary systems. Factories were set up and some 2,500 refugee women were employed – at spinning cloth both for relief use and for public sale. Families were resettled in rural areas and

provided with seed and animals; they soon became self-supporting. More than 15,000 orphans were apprenticed to refugees in 450 villages under a subsidy arrangement.

With the Communist Revolution in November, 1917, the Russian Government aid ceased. Medical supplies were unobtainable, and epidemics of typhus and relapsing fever raged among the refugees. However, the White Russian armies to the north provided a shield against the Communists, but the Germans and Turks began invasions from the south, and the American workers had to be temporarily evacuated. To prevent total break in the relief efforts, supplies and funds were left with local committees, while thousands of orphans continued to be cared for under the supervision of John Elder, a Young Men's Christian Association worker who had been unable to leave because of illness. Elder and a companion who had remained to nurse him obtained funds for their effort by selling drafts on the Near East Committee in New York to local merchants. Although unknown to the Committee at the time, this device was approved by it *ex post facto* and the drafts honored.

Herbert Hoover, *An American Epic*, vol. 2, 1960. Herbert Hoover (1874-1964) was Director General of the American Relief Administration 1918-1921 and President of the United States 1929-1933.

POSTSCRIPT

With the breakup of the Soviet Union and the restoration of Armenia's independence in 1991, the YMCA returned to Yerevan. In a repeat of history, Armenians were living in circumstances very similar to the time when John Elder and James O. Arroll were in Armenia during the first republic. Once again Armenia was blockaded by Turkey and Azerbaijan and a severe earthquake in December of 1988 had devastated the north of the country. In marked contrast to the anxious months when Elder and Arroll tackled the challenges they faced alone and with limited resources, on this occasion, numerous U.S.-based charities reached out to the newly-independent state to assist in its economic recovery and support social stability. American and international relief workers showed great creativity and determination to fulfill their missions and ease the suffering, and with the establishment of full diplomatic relations between the United States and Armenia, the American government generously sent aid and hundreds of specialists to encourage Armenia's transition and enlistment among the nations of the free world. The programs to assist reconstruction in the earthquake-stricken zone, supplying heating fuel to relieve severe shortages during the first winters after independence, or financing the successful demining of the border regions of the Artsakh Republic contributed mightily to easing the mountain of challenges faced by Armenians.



United States Ambassador to Armenia Richard M. Mills, Jr. with the Peace Corps in Armenia, June 2, 2017

in the earthquake-stricken zone, supplying heating fuel to relieve severe shortages during the first winters after independence, or financing the successful demining of the border regions of the Artsakh Republic contributed mightily to easing the mountain of challenges faced by Armenians.

In his 2017 year-end message, U.S. Ambassador to Armenia Richard M. Mills, Jr. marked the conclusion of a year-long celebration of America's 25 years of partnership and friendship with an independent and sovereign Republic of Armenia by noting "the strong partnership between our two countries and the significant accomplishments we've achieved together." A list of the milestones in bilateral relations included: over \$1.1 billion to improve the lives of the Armenian people, supporting their efforts to strengthen democratic, economic, and social governance, provided by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID); contributing to the establishment of a competitive private sector; reforming the energy sector; transforming the tax code; strengthening rural economies across Armenia; the liberalization of the civil aviation sector; fostering civil society, independent media, and civic engagement; launching the American University of Armenia; helping secure U.S. investment in Armenia – more than \$600 million dollars in the preceding two years, that creates jobs around the country and improves livelihoods; through academic and professional exchange programs, more than 4,000 Armenians visited the United States; military cooperation based on a shared vision of a peaceful, sovereign, and prosperous Armenia; helping the Armenian military improve its readiness for peacekeeping operations around the world, and trained hundreds of soldiers through educational exchange programs; completed 22 humanitarian projects, at a value of over \$5 million, including renovating hospitals, schools, orphanages, and fire stations; and providing nearly \$40 million in training and equipment to help Armenia strengthen rule-of-law and secure its borders. The U.S. Embassy also promoted a program that pays tribute to the likes of John Elder and James O. Arroll, Americans selflessly pioneering international humanitarianism, with more than 1,000 Peace Corps volunteers who have lived and worked in towns and villages across Armenia, improving education, enhancing youth and community development, protecting Armenia's environment, and promoting health care. Notably, Richard Mills himself was the first desk officer for Armenia at the Department of State responsible for overseeing United States assistance with humanitarian and political support when Armenia achieved independence again in 1991.