

John Patrick Hurley: The First U.S. Consul to the Republic of Estonia



*U.S. Commissioner John A. Gade and his staff arrive in their Cadillac in Narva in November 1919.
(Eesti Filmiarhiiv)*

While the United States of America and the Republic of Estonia celebrate 85 years of continuous official diplomatic relations on July 28, our consular and diplomatic ties actually go back several years earlier. In November 1919, John A. Gade – a U.S. Navy officer assigned to the U.S. Department of State – arrived in Reval (present-day Tallinn) to serve as the first U.S. Commissioner to the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. When Commissioner Gade moved on to set up his permanent mission in the neighboring capital of Riga, he would leave behind a new U.S. Consul in Tallinn as the United States' first permanent representative in Estonia.

In a letter addressed to the Estonian Minister of Foreign Affairs dated November 8, 1919, Commissioner Gade wrote: “I further beg to inform your Excellency of the arrival in Reval of Mr. John P. Hurley, Consul of the United States of America. Mr. Hurley is anxious at once to

establish an office in Reval and render such assistance as is possible, at the present difficult period, in order to further future trade and commercial relations between Esthonia and the United States.” Commissioner Gade's letter continued: “The Department of State having sent me to Latvia and Lithuania as well as Esthonia, I can not unfortunately constantly remain in Esthonia. I would thus beg of you kindly, during my absence, or until I may designate another agent, to address all communications intended for my Government to me in the care of Consul Hurley.”

As Estonia was still fighting its War of Independence (1918-1920), the U.S. State Department carefully selected the men it assigned to the war-torn Baltic states. Commissioner Gade was a lieutenant commander in the U.S. Navy decorated by the Finnish, Swedish, Danish, and Norwegian governments for his services during the Great War as a naval intelligence officer (Gade would go on to receive Estonia's Cross of Liberty 1st Class in 1920). Although a brand new consular officer on his first assignment for the U.S. Department of State, Consul Hurley distinguished himself during the Great War as a U.S. Army captain, winning the U.S. military's second highest award for valor.

Hurley's Journey to Tallinn

John Patrick Hurley was born in New York City on September 15, 1878 to Michael and Mary Hurley. From 1894 to 1901, he attended St. Kieran's College in Kilkenny, Ireland. After graduation, he worked as both a clerk and student engineer before receiving his engineering degree from Cornell University in 1907. From 1903 to 1909, he worked as an assistant engineer for the Water Supply System of New York City before becoming a highway construction engineer in Brooklyn. He married Marie Teresa Henry on October 23, 1912. In 1914, Hurley became a construction engineer for the New York Subway.

Hurley joined New York City's National Guard unit in 1909. Mobilized in 1916, he was stationed first along the Mexican border. When the United States entered the Great War in April 1917, Hurley was promoted to the rank of captain in the U.S. Army and sent to the front lines in France. During the war, Hurley served in New York City's famous *Fighting 69th* – also known as the *Fighting Irish* thanks to regimental poet Sergeant Joyce Kilmer. Medal of Honor winner Lieutenant Colonel William *Wild Bill* Donovan – who would go on to run the elite Office of Strategic Services during the Second World War – commanded the unit. Other famous members of this predominantly Irish-American regiment included Distinguished Service Cross winner Father Francis B. Duffy – known as the *Fighting Chaplain* – whose statue can be seen in the northern part of New York City's Times Square which is also known as Duffy Square. Before the U.S. entered the Second World War, Hollywood turned the heroic regiment's many exploits

during the Great War into a film called the *Fighting 69th* (1940) starring famous Irish-American actor James Cagney.

Following the very best traditions of his unit, Captain Hurley also received the Distinguished Service Cross for his bravery under fire. His citation reads: "For extraordinary heroism in action at Villers-sur-Fere, France, July 28, 1918. His company having reached its objective, he ordered several patrols forward to silence several enemy machine guns which were causing heavy casualties in his own and other companies of his battalion. The patrols meeting heavy casualties from the enemy fire, Captain Hurley himself organized a patrol and led it forward. While temporarily checked by the intense fire, he crawled forward and rescued a wounded officer, carrying him to a place of shelter. Resuming the advance of the patrol, Captain Hurley was severely wounded, but continued to direct the movement of his men who, inspired by the great courage and fortitude of their leader, pushed forward and capture the machine gun nest, killing or capturing the crews thereof."

During the Great War, the *Fighting 69th* was also known as the 165th Infantry Regiment of the 42nd *Rainbow* Division under the command of Brigadier General Douglas MacArthur. As the division was originally made up of National Guard units from across the United States, General MacArthur once remarked that: "The 42nd Division stretches like a rainbow from one end of America to the other." The nickname stuck and the rainbow became an integral part of the division's colors.

Postings in Tallinn and Riga

After recovering from his wartime wounds, Hurley entered the U.S. Foreign Service in August 1919. In November 1919, he received his first posting as the new U.S. Consul in Tallinn. Other than setting up the U.S. Consulate, few records remain of what Consul Hurley was able to accomplish during his short tour in Tallinn. In June 1920, Hurley was named U.S. Consul in nearby Riga and soon transferred there. In September 1920, a veteran consular officer named Charles H. Albrecht of Pennsylvania (1886-1929) arrived in Tallinn to take Hurley's place as the new U.S. Consul to Tallinn.

While in Latvia, Consul Hurley would work directly for the second U.S. Commissioner to the three Baltic States: career U.S. Foreign Service Officer Evan E. Young. During the Bolshevik Scare of January 1921, Consul Hurley's wife Marie was one of the Americans evacuated from Latvia although he remained behind with Commissioner Young and his military attaché U.S. Army Colonel T. Worthington Hollyday. During his tour in Riga, Consul Hurley would see the United States establish official diplomatic relations with Latvia – as well as Estonia and Lithuania – on

July 28, 1922. He also saw Frederick W.B. Coleman, the first U.S. Minister to the Baltic states, present his credentials in Riga on November 12, 1922.

Onward Assignments

After serving for four years at Riga, Hurley was appointed as the U.S. Consul in Vienna in July 1924. He would serve there for almost five years except for a brief tour as the U.S. Consul in Baghdad, Iraq. In July 1929, Hurley returned to Riga to serve as the U.S. Consul there a second time. In June 1932, he was transferred to Nassau in the Bahamas where he served as U.S. the Consul.

On March 27, 1935, Hurley was appointed to be the U.S. Consul in Marseille, France and was soon promoted to the position of U.S. Consul General. He served in Marseille up until the Germans consolidated their control over occupied France in August 1940. During this time Hurley displayed his courage once again by helping British Army officers escape Nazi-occupied France and return to England. Two of the officers he helped – Major General Thomas Rennie of the Black Watch and Major General R. MacKintosh-Walker of the Seaforth Highlanders – presented Consul General Hurley with a silver statue of a Scottish Highlander officer as a token of their appreciation. The statue can be found today at the Bacon House in Washington, D.C. run by the organization known as DACOR (Diplomatic and Consular Officers, Retired).

When the U.S. Consulate in Marseille was finally shut down by the Germans in September 1940, Hurley transferred back to the U.S. Department of State. He retired from the State Department not long afterwards on December 31, 1942. He died on December 30, 1944 in his home of New York City.