

5-14-2010

Behind the Banner of Patriotism: The New Orleans Chapter of the American Red Cross and Auxiliary Branches 6 and 11 (1914-1917)

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Behind the Banner of Patriotism:
The New Orleans Chapter of the American Red Cross and
Auxiliary Branches 6 and 11 (1914-1917)

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts
in
History

by

Paula A. Fortier

B.A. University of New Orleans, 2004

May, 2010

Acknowledgements

I would like to sincerely thank all of the people that sacrificed their time and effort in order to see this project to completion. I will be forever grateful to my classmates and professors in the Department of History at the University of New Orleans for their advice and guidance on my thesis. The composition of my thesis committee deserves my most sincere gratitude – I would like to extend a special thanks to Dr. Mary Niall Mitchell, Dr. Robert L. Dupont, and Dr. Nikki L. Brown. Additionally, I would like to thank Catherine Kahn and Linda Epstein at Touro Infirmary Archives for their assistance in navigating its unique collections. Last, but not in the very least, I would love to thank my spouse, Michael D. Fortier, Jr., for his faithful and unwavering support and his top-notch service as a research assistant. “Bravo Zulu,” everyone!

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Abstract

Socialite Laura Penrose and a group of wealthy businessmen founded the New Orleans Chapter of the American Red Cross in 1916. The Chapter expanded in 1917 with the addition of two black Auxiliary Branches chartered by nurses Louise Ross and Sarah Brown. Although Jim Crow dictated the division between the Chapter and its Branches within the mostly female organization, racial barriers did not prohibit them from uniting for the cause of national relief.

The American Red Cross differed from other forms of biracial Progressivism by the very nature of public relief work for a national charity. American Red Cross relief work brought women into public spaces for the war effort and pushed biracial cooperation between women in the Jim Crow South in a more public and patriotic direction than earlier efforts at social reform. Black women, in particular, used the benefit of relief work to promote racial uplift and stake a claim on American citizenship despite the disenfranchisement of their men.

Keywords: American Red Cross, World War I, Progressivism, Jim Crow, Biracial

Chapter 1

Introduction

“We are fighting for our beloved United States!” screamed Frank B. Hayne, Chairman of the New Orleans Chapter of the American Red Cross, from a platform in front of the Pickwick Club on Canal Street in New Orleans, Louisiana. His scream echoed through the crowd of ten thousand people who gathered to march on Canal Street starting at 7:00 p.m. on Wednesday, October 24, 1917, to support President Wilson’s call for the second Liberty Bond Drive. The nationwide Drive aimed to raise funds to support the American Expeditionary Force and allied militaries fighting in World War I. The crowd let loose a cheer that was heard all the way from the banks of the Mississippi River to the back of town, and Hayne’s rally cry became the catchphrase on everyone’s lips the next day.

An anonymous reporter for the *Times-Picayune* who witnessed the event could not believe his eyes. City residents from all walks of life marched together with complete disregard to the social and racial boundaries of the post-Reconstruction Jim Crow South. Blacks marched alongside whites and the wealthy walked among the poor working folks. People cheered and danced to patriotic tunes played by more than a dozen marching bands. The reporter wrote in an article published the next day, “If there was a slacker in all of New Orleans, his ears must have burned as the shouts greeted the procession and at the patriotic addresses of the speakers who delivered America’s message.”¹

The same high degree of patriotism and concern for the welfare of humanity that permeated the atmosphere of the great Liberty Bond parade in October 1917 also fostered a successful biracial relationship between the New Orleans Chapter of the American Red Cross

¹ News/Opinion, “Waves of Patriotism Sweeps All the City as Thousands March,” *Times-Picayune*, October 25, 1917, under “America’s Historical Newspapers,” <http://infoweb.newsbank.com.ezproxy.uno.edu/iw-search/we/HistArchive> (accessed February 14, 2010). October 25, coincidentally, is the author’s birthday.

and black Auxiliary Branches 6 and 11. Thousands of women accompanied by small groups of male volunteers, and a handful of paid employees, made up the American Red Cross organization in New Orleans that eventually provided relief for a regional population affected by aftershocks of the Mexican Revolution in 1916 and the First World War in 1917.

After the chartering of the black Branches in the summer and early fall of 1917, the organization united women across racial and social lines for the cause of national humanitarianism through a series of planned community projects. The Chapter and its Branches labored to link together the people of the city and the mission of the American Red Cross on a local level. Although Jim Crow laws in the post-Reconstruction South dictated the separate composition of the Chapter (white) and the Auxiliary Branches (African-American), a common thread of patriotism united both groups of women in public spaces for the war effort. Indeed, some events brought these women into a shared public space, particularly the parades through the city's streets that manifested a level of cooperation heretofore unnoticed by historians.

Chapter 2

A Brief Historiography

The theory behind biracial cooperation in women's organizations stemmed from an ideology within the black community labeled as "racial uplift." Black historian Kevin K. Gaines defined racial uplift as "an emphasis on self-help, racial solidarity, temperance, thrift, chastity, social purity, patriarchal authority, and the accumulation of wealth."² Black leaders adopted principles of chaste living similar to white Victorianism to combat racial prejudice and ease racial tensions by assimilation. Gaines claimed the upper and middle-classes embraced the lifestyle of their white counterparts too much by adopting the same prejudices as whites towards the lower classes of society. Many educated blacks refused to acknowledge communal relationships with working people. He further argued that black leaders defined racial progress using a paternalistic and class-based system that placed men at the head of the movement and gave little credit to women's contributions. Educated and refined black women struggled with recognition for their participation in racial uplift, as remarked by one of Gaines' female subjects, "its membership is confined to men."³

Scholarship in black women's history revealed professional women made sweeping contributions to racial uplift ideology by embracing the same Victorian norms as Gaines discussed, but utilized their education and social position to counteract the disenfranchisement of black men and racial prejudice in general. Historian Stephanie J. Shaw argued that black communities raised young middle to upper class women to take responsibility for their own actions and contribute to social change for racial uplift after receipt of a higher education. Black institutions often subsidized their education with the implied reciprocal agreement that these

² Kevin K. Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 2.

³ Gaines, *Uplifting the Race*, 128.

enlightened women return to their respective communities to help those less fortunate. Many black professional women of the early twentieth century descended from the daughters and granddaughters of former slaves who wanted to secure a better future for their offspring than what was available to them.⁴ Historian Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore labeled the adults as “Best Women” as examples for those in the lower classes who aspired to reach the top tier of the race.⁵ Gilmore argued that “Best Women” afforded disenfranchised black men an outlet with which to practice political citizenship by influencing their female counterparts to enact social change through participation in religious groups and volunteer organizations during the Progressive era.⁶

Gilmore discovered biracialism was a common practice in Progressive women’s religious groups and national organizations. Her study of the Women’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) revealed the admittance of black women in the 1880s, but only as junior partners subject to the ruling disciplines of established white chapters. Upper and middle-class black women chose to fight racism and white superiority on a national scale by forming their own chapters of the WCTU to work cohesively, or so they thought, with the white majority. The white leadership of the WCTU counteracted the independent black chapters by ordering them to fall under white department heads before acceptance by the organization.⁷ Gilmore argued the same held true for the Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA). Jim Crow permitted the formation of separate chapters for black women, but only after a white chapter of the YWCA chartered first within a city’s legal jurisdiction. YWCA headquarters then elected a white majority to the governing body for all of a city’s approved chapters.⁸

⁴ Stephanie J. Shaw, *What a Woman Ought to Be and to Do: Black Professional Women Workers during the Jim Crow Era* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 5.

⁵ Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 75-6.

⁶ Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*, chap. 6.

⁷ Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*, 49-50.

⁸ Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*, 192.

The leadership of the American Red Cross organized the charity during the Progressive era with a structure similar to the YWCA, yet little scholarship exists on its biracial constitution. Most written works focus on the American Red Cross Nursing Service that was active during World War I and leave out the populist city chapters, branches, and auxiliaries. Award-winning writer and editor, Lettie Gavin, devoted an entire chapter in her book to American Red Cross volunteers in Europe during the war.⁹ Her work did not mention black American Red Cross volunteers or black nurses admitted to the Nursing Service, as none were assigned to Europe until after the Armistice. Gavin omitted the American Red Cross roll members back home, black and white, who toiled mercilessly to provide massive relief efforts for the war.

Scholars have placed a disproportionate amount of emphasis on the Nursing Service more than any other active department in the American Red Cross during World War I. Gavin devoted a chapter to Army nurses, again only those who served in Europe, and separate from the volunteer chapter, but most Army nurses were American Red Cross volunteers. The American Red Cross, acting as the wartime reserve component of the Army, supplied nearly all of the nurses via their Nursing Service for the Army's Nurse Corps during World War I.¹⁰ Historian Kimberly Jensen also devoted a chapter in her book to Army/American Red Cross nurses who served in Europe.¹¹ Historian Nikki Brown preferred to discuss the segregation of the Nursing Service in a chapter about the American Red Cross. She argued "few black nurses were called up into the Red Cross, leading to even greater resentment among African American women" that left black soldiers stationed overseas at the mercy of medical treatment from white nurses.¹²

⁹ Lettie Gavin, *American Women in World War I: They Also Served* (Boulder, CO: University Press of Colorado, 1997), chap. 8.

¹⁰ Gavin, *American Women in World War I*, chap. 3.

¹¹ Kimberly Jensen, *Mobilizing Minerva: American Women in the First World War* (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2008), chap. 7.

¹² Nikki Brown, *Private Politics and Public Voices: Black Women's Activism from World War I to the New Deal* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006), 67.

Brown grouped the American Red Cross (Nursing Service) with the YWCA since both had similar biracial structures and claimed memberships as the largest women's volunteer organizations during the war.¹³

Few scholars mention the actual biracial relationships within the volunteer network of the American Red Cross during World War I, which leaves the field wide open for discussion and debate within the sphere of racial uplift ideology. Brown gave a brief mention of women's biracial cooperation in volunteer activities connected to the Louisiana Council of National Defense, which was affiliated with the American Red Cross in the state.¹⁴ Only historian John F. Hutchison pointed out the creation of "colored branches" to serve the "colored" military units. He argued "nevertheless, all Americans were enjoined to do their duty for the Red Cross...the distinctly subtle message, "Loyalty To One Means Loyalty To Both."¹⁵

¹³ Brown, *Private Politics and Public Voices*, chap. 3.

¹⁴ Brown, *Private Politics and Public Voices*, 43.

¹⁵ John F. Hutchinson, *Champions of Charity: War and the Rise of the Red Cross* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996), 270.

Chapter 3

History of the American Red Cross and Historical Arguments

Former Civil War nurse Clara (*nee'* Clarissa) Barton and a group of business associates founded the American Red Cross in May 1881.¹⁶ Barton, nominated as the first Chairman, directed the organization to provide civilian relief for war and disaster victims, both at home and overseas, and organized charitable efforts at the local level. During her tenure the American Red Cross supported the American military in the Spanish-American War, treated patients of a yellow fever epidemic in Florida, and provided relief for victims of an 1893 South Carolina hurricane.¹⁷ Barton resigned in 1904 amidst controversies over financial accountability and the supervisory board's desire to use the American Red Cross as a vehicle for Progressive reform under the direction of wealthy members of American society.¹⁸ The federal government granted the American Red Cross a second charter in 1905 that designated the organization as a national charity staffed by a volunteer force for the provision of relief in peacetime and in war.¹⁹

The founders of the American Red Cross accurately predicted the mass volunteerism of women in the organization. Women dominated the new field of social work that encompassed public and private charitable institutions in the Progressive era. The ideal feminine elements of compassion and patience for those who were suffering paired perfectly with the optimism of a national charity. The American Red Cross afforded women the opportunity to volunteer their time outside of the domestic household and participate in active social reform without compromising assigned notions of femininity. Charles S. Bowles, a member of the Sanitary

¹⁶ Portia B. Kernodle, *The Red Cross Nurse in Action, 1882-1948* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1949), 7.

¹⁷ Kernodle, *The Red Cross Nurse In Action*, 11.

¹⁸ Hutchinson, *Champions of Charity*, 225.

¹⁹ Hutchinson, *Champions of Charity*, 235. Congress granted the first charter in 1900. To date of publication of this thesis, the charter states no requirement enforcing mandatory membership in the event of war. The American Red Cross ensures a direct connection between military personnel and their families and assists the military with relief efforts at home and abroad.

Commission who was present with Barton at the 1864 (First) Geneva Convention, argued that “women were predestined by God for works of charity requiring long and patient devotion.”²⁰

The American Red Cross established a hierarchal pyramid of city chapters, branches, and auxiliaries for metropolitan areas in the Progressive era right before the outbreak of World War I. The new system of subsidiaries created an efficient way for the headquarters to manage a network of local relief organizations during a time of war or national emergency. The subsidiary system also affected the structure of preexisting upper level regional divisions that answered to headquarters in addition to directing a network of new city chapters.²¹

A pamphlet published by the American Red Cross in 1917 established strict guidelines for chartering a city chapter. “The committee on organization must be composed of persons of prominence and public spirit who have the confidence of the community. Its work is sufficiently important, varied, and extensive to demand the voluntary service of the ablest men and women of the community.”²² The pamphlet also detailed the formation and duties of a chapter’s officer corps and the requirement to elect an executive committee to direct the financial and business affairs of the chapter.

Jim Crow played an important role in the chartering of chapters, branches, and auxiliaries. The American Red Cross, acting as the reserve component of the United States Armed Forces, regulated the organization of the subsidiary system under the military’s *de jure* racial segregation that always placed whites in leadership roles.²³ William H. Taft, the former

²⁰ Hutchinson, *Champions of Charity*, 81. Barton proposed the idea for the American Red Cross at the 1864 (First) Geneva Convention.

²¹ American Red Cross, *Department of Chapters – Organizing a Chapter*, ARC 149 (New York: S.L. Parsons and Company, 1917),1.

²² American Red Cross, *Department of Chapters*, 1.

²³ Hutchison, *Champions of Charity*, 270. The American Red Cross did not desegregate until enactment of Executive Order 9981: Desegregation of the Armed Forces, signed by President Truman on July 26, 1948. See “Transcript of Executive Order 9981: Desegregation of the Armed Forces (1948),” National Archives and Records Administration, <http://www.ourdocuments.gov> (accessed March 29, 2010).

President of the United States appointed as the wartime President of the National Red Cross Association, addressed a letter about racial separation to the Florida State Medical, Dental, and Pharmaceutical Association (Colored). The provisions of the letter stated:

Negroes are eligible for membership in the National Red Cross Association without restriction based on racial lines. It is not permitted for persons of one color to form a separate chapter whether they be white or colored. Question of Negroes forming separate auxiliaries has been left in the hands of the individual chapters to decide.²⁴

Since Jim Crow only authorized American Red Cross leadership in cities via white chapters, Taft's letter remained a moot point for the duration on the subject of separate black chapters. The American Red Cross relegated African-Americans to assignments in black branches and auxiliaries attached to a supervisory white chapter.

Upper class white Progressives chartered the New Orleans Chapter of the American Red Cross in the image of an elite social club. The men's portion of the New Orleans Chapter mirrored a "gentlemen's club." The Chapter's men served in some of the most prestigious positions in the city's business community as financiers, lawyers, and boards of directors of large companies. Several men in the Chapter also enjoyed memberships in the exclusive Pickwick and Boston Clubs of New Orleans. These private men's clubs functioned as social vehicles to "create culture, celebration, social activity, and new traditions."²⁵ Upper class white women joined Progressive clubs attached to greater social causes. Some women in the Chapter belonged to the Needlework Guild, an organization associated with the American Red Cross since 1907. The Guild donated knitted and stitched garments for homes and hospitals through a network of

²⁴ "Letter dated July 3, 1917 to Dr. Alonso P.B. Holly, President Florida State Medical, Dental, and Pharmaceutical Association (Colored). Response to letter dated June 28, 1917 addressed to Honorable William H. Taft, President National Red Cross Association. Signed by Secretary to Mr. Wells (Assistant to Chairman)," American Red Cross, Group II, Record Group 200, Box 254, File 156 (Negro Auxiliaries), National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD.

²⁵ Liesbeth Ramirez, "Pickwick Club," Tulane University, http://medianola.tulane.edu/index.php/Pickwick_Club (accessed February 19, 2010).

400 city branches.²⁶ Others contributed relief efforts through the city chapter of the Women's Committee for the Louisiana State Council of Defense.²⁷

The American Red Cross authorized the addition of branches and auxiliaries to maximize participation in relief work with no limit set for the number a chapter could add to its jurisdiction. Branch and auxiliary subsidiaries differed only by location and numbers of roll members. Pamphlets published by the American Red Cross in 1917 outlined the requirements for establishing branches and auxiliaries based on geographical boundaries, numbers of participants, and affiliation with certain groups. White women made up the vast majority of members in branches and auxiliaries. The American Red Cross permitted chapters to add branches up to 499 members inside or outside of the parish (county) lines under a chapter's legal jurisdiction.²⁸ Chapters could only add auxiliaries in the same parish with less than one hundred members on the auxiliary roll. Women formed auxiliaries based on common interests and socioeconomic backgrounds.²⁹ Branches and auxiliaries, especially those chartered in rural areas miles away from city chapters, gave people an opportunity to unite for a humanitarian cause through American Red Cross charity work.

An American Red Cross pamphlet revised in 1917 described auxiliaries as "formed within any group of persons associated through ties of race, work, or common interest," which automatically labeled African-American groups as auxiliaries regardless of how many people joined the rolls.³⁰ Black women and men joined auxiliaries by the thousands, yet the racial

²⁶ Ida Clyde Clarke, *American Women and the World War* (New York and London: D. Appleton and Company, 1918), 426.

²⁷ Clarke, *American Women and the World War*, 276-8.

²⁸ American Red Cross, *Method of Recording and Classifying Applications for Volunteer Red Cross Service*, ARC 148 (New York: S.L. Parsons and Company, 1917), 3. Branches could transition to independent chapters once membership rolls reached 500 or more.

²⁹ American Red Cross, *Department of Chapters – Auxiliaries*, ARC 147 (New York: S.L. Parsons and Company, revised 1917), 1. Many religious and civic groups chartered individual auxiliaries.

³⁰ American Red Cross, *Department of Chapters – Auxiliaries*, 1.

structure of the subsidiary system never permitted the formation of an independent black chapter in the entire organization. The American Red Cross only permitted chapters to grant charters for black auxiliaries with more than a hundred members on the rolls as auxiliary branches.

Progressive African-Americans in New Orleans joined the black Auxiliary Branches 6 and 11 as vehicles to advance the city's black neighborhoods in a communal ideology labeled "racial uplift" by scholars of black history. Progressive blacks focused their energies on influencing civic leaders to enact legislation for the improvement of schools, hospitals, churches, and businesses for the benefit of a regional black population. Black-owned and operated institutions, such as benevolent social clubs that initiated charitable reforms for people denied the equivalent in the white sector, were cornerstones of racial uplift.³¹

Black leaders utilized propaganda photographs for political leverage to advance racial uplift ideology. Photographs of black people posed in civil settings and participating in decidedly middle-class activities demonstrated the power of racial uplift and the ability of African-Americans to transcend class lines. Figure 1 of the black United States Navy sailors relaxing in a room at Auxiliary Branch 6 in New Orleans clearly showed young men who were both educated (reading, writing, and typing) and refined (starched military dress uniforms) examples of the emerging black middle-class. Additionally, the photographer ensured the background contained framed portraits of prominent black leaders, American flags, and painted red crosses that showed the black community's dedication to racial uplift and patriotism towards the war effort.

³¹ Historian Committee, "History of the Zulu Social Aid and Pleasure Club," <http://kreweofzulu.com/Krewe-Of-Zulu/History-Of-the-Zulu-Social-Aid-&-Pleasure-Club.html> (accessed May 2, 2009). The Krewe of Zulu, a male carnival parade organization founded in 1909, started as a benevolent society that issued the first life insurance policies in the city's black communities. For an extensive list of black benevolent societies in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in New Orleans, see the Louis A. Martinet Papers at the New Orleans Notarial Archives, <http://www.notarialarchives.org/martinet.htm> (accessed March 13, 2010).

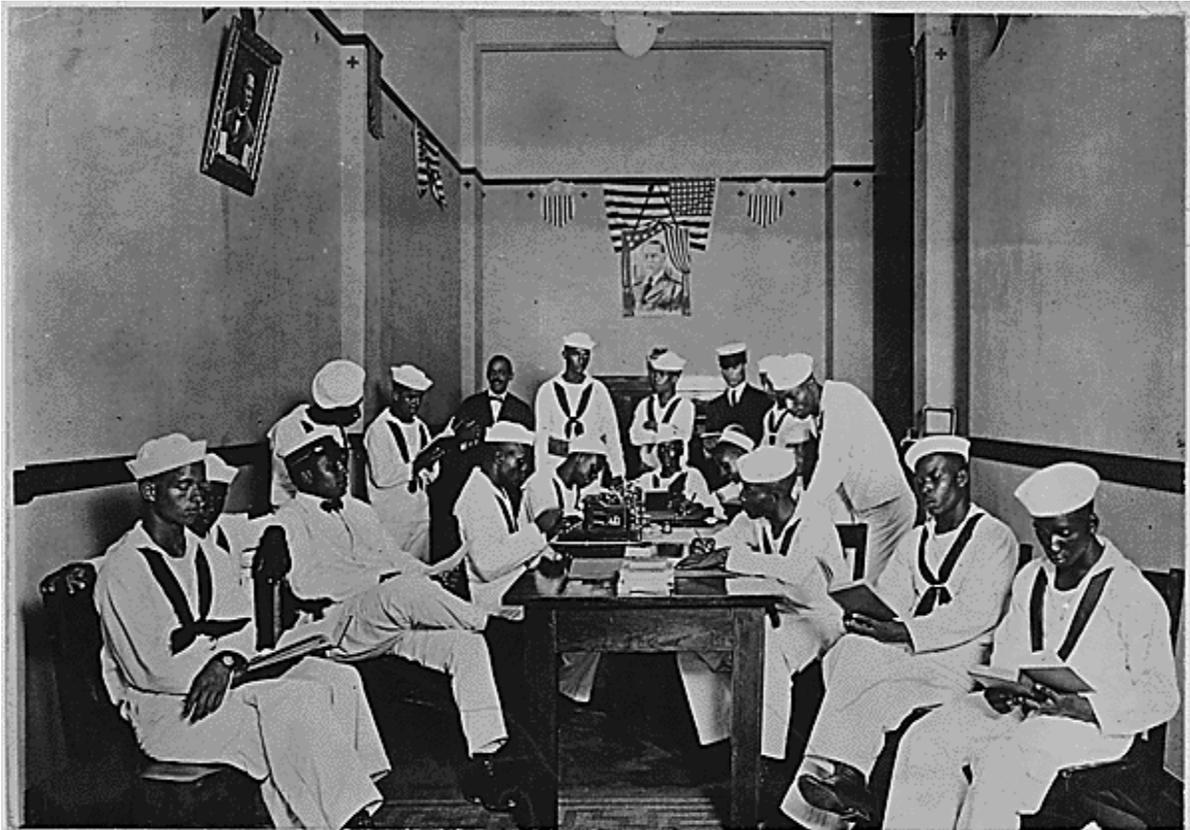


Figure 1. "American Red Cross Rest Room for (African American) soldiers and sailors. (African American) sailors in the rest room of the Red Cross headquarters, Branch Number 6, of the New Orleans Chapter. This room has been fitted for the use of the (African American) sailors and soldiers by Louise J. Ross."

Source: "Records of the War Department General and Special Staffs, 1860-1952," Record Group 165. Archival Research Catalog. [Online version, <http://arcweb.archives.gov/arc/action>, National Archives and Records Administration, March 25, 2010.]

The American Red Cross differed from other forms of biracial Progressivism by the very nature of public relief work for a national charity. President Wilson joined forces with the American Red Cross to institute a nationwide preparedness campaign in the early months of 1916. The campaign committee promised to generate relief on a massive scale to support possible American involvement in a world war. A patriotic fever swept the nation that year with the American Red Cross at the helm. Roll members chartered city chapters and recruited thousands of volunteers by distributing posters, buttons, and pamphlets at every public venue and government institution to encourage people to sign up for American Red Cross service.

American Red Cross Progressives joined the New Orleans Chapter or the black Auxiliary Branches to agitate for social reform through subsidiaries of a national charitable institution. Both sections utilized public spaces and facilities throughout the city of New Orleans to conduct community projects and complete tasks delegated by the national headquarters of the American Red Cross. Roll members in New Orleans committed themselves to implement the public service mission statement of the national organization. The original charter of 1900 for the American Red Cross included the following clauses:

To furnish volunteer aid to the sick and wounded of armies in time of war. To act in matters of voluntary relief and in accordance with the military and naval authorities as a medium of communication. To carry on a system of national and international relief in time of peace and to apply the same in mitigating the sufferings caused by pestilence, famine, fire, floods, and other great calamities. To devise means for preventing disasters and to promote measures of humanity and welfare of mankind.³²

Chapter and Auxiliary Branch roll members in New Orleans labored to get every capable citizen, white or black, involved in some sort of American Red Cross work through a system of mutual cooperation. The Chapter rarely left the Branches to their own devices in the planning and execution phases of community projects. The Chapter's leadership, or at least a small fraction of the Chapter, supported the Branches through either sponsorship or co-chairing of projects, so as not to overshadow the significance of the Branches' dedication to the cause. The Branches received top billing for black-themed events as evidenced by the numerous articles in the *Times-Picayune* featuring American Red Cross activities throughout the latter half of 1917. Newspaper articles described in detail the Branches' unwaivering support and loyalty to both the Chapter and the city, and often labeled the women and men of the Branches as fine examples of credit to their race.

³² American Red Cross, "About the Red Cross," American National Red Cross, <http://www.redcross.org/portal/museum/history/charter.asp> (accessed January 11, 2010).

Charity work in public spaces reversed gender roles for the men and women of the American Red Cross. The women performed the bulk of the physical work in public while the men consigned themselves to supportive roles in supervisory and financial positions. New Orleans Chapter and black Auxiliary Branch women performed tasks in spaces normally occupied by men within prescribed gender roles in the paternalistic climate of the post-Reconstruction South. Membership in the American Red Cross afforded them the opportunity to appear in public without a chaperone for the purpose of promoting national charity at the city level. The *Times-Picayune* often printed article headlines with titles such as “Women Get Credit for Zeal and Skill in Red Cross Work” that detailed examples of public relief from a paternalistic point of view and cemented the gendered national perception of membership in the American Red Cross as “women’s work.”³³

The campaign committee targeted women as the primary group for recruitment by encouraging them to venture out in public and join the local chapter of the American Red Cross. While the armed forces actively recruited a million men for military service, the nation’s women were expected to contribute to the war effort through some type of volunteer work at home. Enrollment in the American Red Cross represented one of the many outlets for women’s participation in the fight for victory overseas. The committee, in an effort to snare the largest number of able-bodied volunteers, printed a series of American Red Cross recruiting posters designed to appeal to the feminine instinct. They often featured an attractive young white woman dressed in a white uniform emblazoned with red crosses and accompanied by slogans such as “The Greatest Mother in the World” or “Angels of Mercy.”³⁴ Many recruiting posters

³³ News/Opinion, “Women Get Credit for Zeal and Skill in Red Cross Work,” *Times-Picayune*, September 24, 1917 (accessed February 14, 2010).

featured American Red Cross nurses tending wounded soldiers and war orphans that reiterated the role of women in helping professions while simultaneously performing a service for their country (see fig. 2).



Figure 2. American Red Cross recruiting poster, circa 1917.

Source: Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, WWI Posters, (reproduction number LC-USZC4-10134).

³⁴ Hutchinson, *Champions of Charity*, pictorial essay, 12. For a list of World War I American Red Cross posters, see the Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Online Catalog (PPOC), <http://www.loc.gov/rr/print/res> (accessed March 21, 2010).

Chapter 4

The American Red Cross in Louisiana

The American Red Cross admitted Louisiana as an official state association on June 15, 1882 in New Orleans at the home of Presbyterian minister, Reverend Hugh Hilton. The Louisiana State Branch of the American Association of the Red Cross consisted of three charter members: Reverend Hilton, F. A. Ogden (President), and Colonel F. A. Southmayd (Secretary and “Executive”). For two years they supervised relief efforts for yellow fever victims in Louisiana and flood victims in Mississippi. The organization changed names to “Red Cross State Society of Louisiana” on January 29, 1885 under the leadership of Colonel Southmayd in New Orleans. The charter of the State Society granted corporate existence to the organization based in New Orleans for a period of ninety-nine years.³⁵

The American Red Cross, after receipt of its second congressional charter in 1905, ordered the reorganization of random state societies into state boards. The state boards had two functions: supervise chartered city chapters in the future and transfer private donations to the American Red Cross account at the United States Treasury Department. In the case of a disaster, the state boards transferred funds to the American Red Cross national representative at the scene. The State Society of Louisiana transitioned into the Louisiana State Board of the American Red Cross in the spring of 1910. The State Board, headquartered in Baton Rouge, consisted of Governor J. Y. Saunders leading a group of six elected businessmen.³⁶

³⁵ “Early History of the Red Cross in New Orleans, Louisiana,” American Red Cross, Group 1, Box 22, Folder 161.1 (Louisiana State Society of the Red Cross), Document 161.1, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD.

³⁶ “Letter to Governor Saunders from National Director dated March 16, 1910 – Request to Organize State Board,” American Red Cross, Group 1, Box 22, Folder 161.1 (Louisiana State Board), Document 161.12, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD.

Stripped of their power to supervise relief efforts at the city and state level, the state boards, like the defunct state societies, succumbed to the American Red Cross as part of its campaign for Progressive reform in the 1910s. The leadership of the American Red Cross believed a further reorganization was the key to efficient management and devised a plan to replace the loose network of state boards with a set of subsidiaries (chapters, branches, and auxiliaries) for city organizations.³⁷

The Louisiana State Nurses Association accepted membership to the American Red Cross Nursing Service on December 5, 1910 along with nineteen other states.³⁸ Nurses graduating from state-certified training programs who met the eligibility requirements could apply for membership in the American Red Cross. The state nursing associations determined which nurses qualified for membership. A selection board, appointed by the state nursing association, rated the nurses on moral character, professional standing, and overall reputation in the community as part of the application process.³⁹ By the spring of 1918, the American Red Cross Nursing Service had enrolled eleven percent of Louisiana's registered nurses which ranked the state the twelfth highest in the nation during a national membership drive.⁴⁰

³⁷ Hutchinson, *Champions of Charity*, 233.

³⁸ Jane A. Delano, "Red Cross Work," *American Journal of Nursing* 11, no. 4 (January 1911): 275, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3404914> (accessed December 7, 2008).

³⁹ Kernodle, *The Red Cross Nurse in Action*, 43. Primary sources revealed a conflict with the age requirement. The minimum age of 25 is from this source. Some states modified the age requirement based on a waiver from a particular school's minimum age for admission. Other requirements consisted of a doctor's certificate of good health, a certificate of completion from an approved state nursing school with at least a two-year course of instruction, and a signed agreement to be a volunteer or paid nurse, depending on the needs of the American Red Cross.

⁴⁰ Jane A. Delano, "The Red Cross," *American Journal of Nursing* 18, no. 7 (April 1918): 548, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3405695> (accessed December 7, 2008). The American Red Cross accepted applications from African-American nurses but did not approve them for Nursing Service membership until after the Armistice. See Susan Muaddi Darraj, *Mary Eliza Mahoney and the Legacy of African-American Nurses* (Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers), 87-90.

Chapter 5

The New Orleans Chapter of the American Red Cross

Until the spring of 1914, the only divisions of the American Red Cross remotely affiliated with New Orleans were the Louisiana State Board and the Louisiana State Nursing Association. Expansion of American Red Cross services in the city commenced with a chance encounter between a widowed New Orleans socialite and the Chairman of the American Red Cross during a convention in the nation's capital. Laura (*nee'* Maginnis) Penrose (see fig. 3), widow of former New Orleans City Treasurer George Bright Biddle Penrose, and American Red Cross chairman, Mabel Boardman, attended the annual convention for the Needlework Guild of America in May 1914.⁴¹ The New Orleans branch of the Guild chose Penrose as the delegate to attend the convention. Boardman, the Guild's honorary chairman, spoke about several international incidents including the trouble brewing in Mexico as an aftershock of the Mexican Revolution. She emphasized the necessity of American Red Cross relief to support American troops stationed in the immediate vicinity of the squabbling factions. Penrose, inspired by Boardman's speech, left the convention and returned to New Orleans with a dream of organizing a city chapter.⁴²

⁴¹ Mrs. George B. Penrose, preface to *My Monograph: War Relief Work in Old Louisiana* (New York: Himebaugh and Browne, 1919).

⁴² Penrose, preface to *My Monograph*.



Figure 3. Laura Penrose, founder of the New Orleans Chapter of the American Red Cross, wearing an American Red Cross volunteer uniform. Date of the photograph is unknown.

Source: Mrs. George B. Penrose, preface to *My Monograph: War Relief Work in Old Louisiana* (New York: Himebaugh and Browne, 1919).

Both Penrose and her late husband descended from New Orleans families with deep social and political ties to the city. Her father, Arthur Ambrose Maginnis Sr., owned the Lafayette Warehouse Company, the Maginnis Cotton Mills, and the Maginnis Oil and Soap Works, as well as several sugar plantations along Bayou Lafourche. His innovative work in the cotton industry led to the invention of cottonseed oil and other uses for the cotton plant. In the 1870s, Maginnis served two terms in the state legislature.⁴³ Her husband's father, Clement Biddle Penrose, grew up on the family plantation at Pointe Celeste in Plaquemines Parish. After graduating with honors from Tulane University, he practiced law in both Orleans and Plaquemines Parishes.

⁴³ Mike Miller, "Biography of MAGINNIS, Arthur Ambrose, Baltimore, MD., then Orleans Parish, Louisiana." U.S. Gen Web Archives Project, Orleans Parish, Louisiana, <http://files.usgwarchives.net/la/orleans/bios/m-000008.txt> (accessed January 14, 2010). Bayou Lafourche flows through southeastern Louisiana into the Gulf of Mexico.

Penrose and her husband mingled in the same upper class social circles of New Orleans. They married on November 16, 1887 and settled into a comfortable house on Prytania Street in the affluent Garden District. George Penrose served as a member of the New Orleans Sewerage and Water Board, the Board of Liquidation City Debt, and as the Director of the Louisiana National Interstate Bank and Trust Company. He was elected as City Treasurer in 1896. His vested interest in the city's social scene earned him the position of captain in the Mystick Krewe of Comus, while his white supremacist sympathies garnered a membership in the White League and secured an appointment as a lieutenant in the Crescent City Rifles. The city's business elite mourned his death in June 1903.⁴⁴

Penrose attended the National Nurses Convention in April 1916 at the Grunewald Hotel in New Orleans. Jane A. Delano, founder of the American Red Cross Nursing Service and aunt to future President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, made a public appearance at the convention as the guest speaker.⁴⁵ Delano interviewed Penrose based on a recommendation from Boardman, whom Penrose had met in May 1914 at the Guild convention. Delano steered the interview towards the establishment of an American Red Cross chapter in New Orleans to supply relief for military personnel assigned to respond to the revolution in Mexico. The city, and its proximity to Mexico, provided a strategic point for the transport of medical supplies to the combat troops via commercial shipping lanes. The Army issued orders that same month for Penrose's only son and his unit, the Washington Artillery, to camp near the Mexican border.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Mike Miller, "Biography of Penrose, Honorable George B.B., Orleans Parish," U.S. Gen Web Archives Project, Orleans Parish, Louisiana, <http://files.usgwarchives.org/la/orleans/bios/p-000013.txt> (accessed January 22, 2009). The Mystick Krewe of Comus, a white male carnival organization, paraded in the streets of New Orleans from 1857 to 1991. To date of publication, Comus hosts a formal masque ball during carnival season but does not stage an official parade.

⁴⁵ Emile V. Stier, *Report of the New Orleans Chapter of the American Red Cross: New Orleans, June 30, 1919* (Washington, DC: American Red Cross, 1919), 13.

⁴⁶ Penrose, *My Monograph*, 21.

Penrose and other prominent city residents prepared for the inception of the New Orleans Chapter of the American Red Cross. The prospective Chapter's women volunteers marched through the streets in the first "Preparedness Parade" on June 12, 1916 to celebrate the forthcoming official charter. Frank B. Hayne (see fig. 4), a wealthy businessman and first Chairman of the New Orleans Chapter, chaired the parade with 40,000 people in attendance. The Chapter received its first donation of \$500 from the parade fund and continued to collect ample donations from businesses and people throughout the city and neighboring parishes from that day forward.⁴⁷

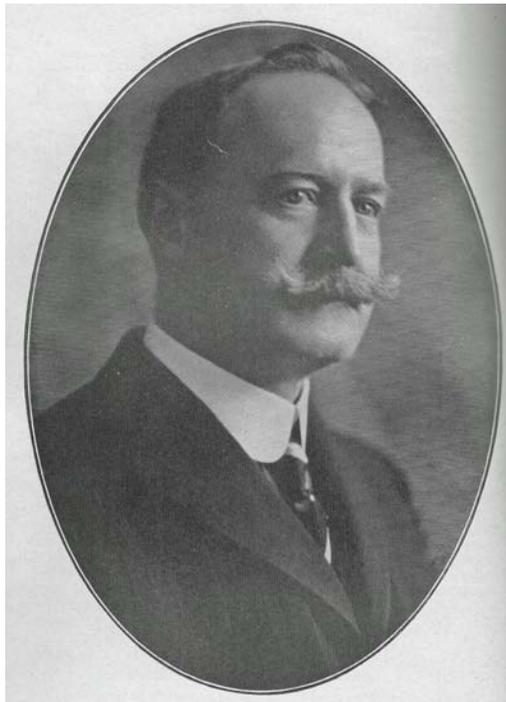


Figure 4. Frank B. Hayne, first Chairman of the New Orleans Chapter of the American Red Cross. Date of the photograph is unknown.

Source: Emile V. Stier, *Report of the New Orleans Chapter of the American Red Cross: New Orleans, June 30, 1919* (Washington, DC: American Red Cross, 1919), 14.

The parades drew thousands of spectators to the streets with city chapters leading the marching groups. Women's social clubs from the surrounding area joined the parades in support

⁴⁷ Stier, *Report of the New Orleans Chapter of the American Red Cross*, 17. Frank B. Hayne served simultaneously as President, Lake Shore Land Company; President, Poitevant and Favre Lumber Company; and President, Bogalusa Land and Import Company.

of the organization. Suffrage groups placed a temporary hold on campaigning for the right to vote through their own parades to march behind the city chapters for the national cause of humanitarian service. American Red Cross parades provided suffragettes with a dual benefit: free publicity and another opportunity to march in the streets for the suffrage campaign. Double-duty suffragettes who volunteered with city chapters carried banners printed with slogans for the right to vote and flags bearing large red crosses.⁴⁸ Chapters permitted black American Red Cross auxiliaries and related black women's clubs to march, albeit at the back of the parade. Although the American Red Cross promoted the idealism of racial harmony through charity work, Jim Crow often directed black American Red Cross auxiliaries to stage separate parades through black neighborhoods. Multiracial crowds attended the black parades for the virtue of free spectatorship in parade participation.⁴⁹ Parading to increase volunteerism and sympathy for the war effort topped the list of American Red Cross community service projects in cities throughout the nation.

After the initial June 1916 parade, Penrose drove around neighboring parishes in a car emblazoned with American Red Cross flags to tack up posters in post offices and submit advertisements to local newspapers. Her solo publicity campaign promoted large-scale interest in the American Red Cross relief work by establishing contacts in over 150 post offices in ten parishes throughout southern Louisiana.⁵⁰ Penrose's publicity initiative paid off, especially in New Orleans where the *Times-Picayune* published regular articles starting at the end of June 1916 about the prospective Chapter's activities. "Red Cross Forms Orleans Classes for War Service" documented the short history of the Chapter, including planned relief work for Mexico, and noted the women's partnership with medical staffs at Charity Hospital and Touro Infirmary

⁴⁸ Hutchinson, *Champions of Charity*, 268.

⁴⁹ Hutchinson, *Champions of Charity*, 270.

⁵⁰ Penrose, *My Monograph*, 23-5.

for training and qualification as nursing assistants. Penrose and another Chapter woman, Margot Samuel, organized the classes for proficiency in the construction of surgical dressings for military medical facilities and local hospitals. Twenty-four Chapter women filled the first quota of nurses' aides, and Penrose promised to secure more class seats for other interested women.⁵¹

Penrose received a letter from Charles J. O'Connor, Assistant Director General of Civilian Relief of the American Red Cross, on July 6, 1916. The letter authorized her to officially charter the New Orleans Chapter, listed the basic provisions of chapter organization such as officer and branch titles, and requested sponsorship from local businessmen. Penrose secured the financial backing of the Chapter by writing and telephoning some of the wealthiest and most influential people in New Orleans to help her complete the charter.⁵² Men such as Captain Pendleton S. Morris, Vice President of the Standard Oil Company in Louisiana, and St. Clair Adams, a prominent local attorney, answered the call of duty to fill positions on the new Chapter's Executive Committee and elect one man as Chairman of the Chapter.⁵³ The all-male committee reserved one privilege for the lone woman in their midst – the granting of the title of Honorary Chairman to Penrose for envisioning the Chapter.⁵⁴

The prospective Chapter's first mission provided relief for soldiers of the Washington Artillery stationed at an outpost in Donna, Texas. Penrose contacted Dr. Rudolph Matas, Professor of Surgery, Tulane Medical School, and urged him to telegraph the unit to inquire about the need for medical supplies and other assistance. Dr. Matas received an urgent reply with a list, dated August 12, 1916, from unit surgeon Dr. Garrett. Penrose summoned the

⁵¹ News/Opinion, "Red Cross Forms Orleans Classes for War Service," *Times-Picayune*, June 29, 1916, Microfilm 452, June 20 – July 23, 1916, Multimedia Collections, University of New Orleans, New Orleans, LA.

⁵² Penrose, *My Monograph*, 23.

⁵³ New Orleans City Directory, 1916, Louisiana and Special Collections, University of New Orleans, New Orleans, LA.

⁵⁴ Stier, *Report of the New Orleans Chapter of the American Red Cross*, 13.

Committee for Emergency Work together and three women, including Penrose herself, packed boxes of medical supplies and personal items to sail on the next ship to Mexico. The New Orleans Archdiocese cooperated with Penrose and two men of the Executive Committee in assigning an Army Chaplain, Reverend John Vigliero, to the artillery unit to boost the soldier's morale. The Chapter paid for all of his travel and living expenses through private donations. Final arrangements for the unit consisted of a large recreation tent with a raised wooden floor donated by the New Orleans Tent and Awning Company and a freight truck courtesy of Miller King Automobiles.⁵⁵

The Executive Committee called to order the first official meeting of the New Orleans Chapter of the American Red Cross on December 1, 1916 at the Grunewald Hotel.⁵⁶ John J. O'Connor, Director of the Central Division (Chicago), attended the meeting as a representative for the national organization to verify the Chapter's new business followed American Red Cross directives. Chapter members in attendance elected three absentee businessmen to the Executive Committee on the basis of their reputations as community leaders and mandated a three-year term of service for each committee member.⁵⁷ The Chapter dictated general membership in the organization to be strictly on a volunteer basis per regulations set forth in the charter of the American Red Cross, with the exception of the Secretary and the Chapter administrative staff in paid positions.⁵⁸ The last order of new business established the Chapter headquarters at 307 Carondelet Street through a generous donation from the Hibernia Bank and Trust Company.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Penrose, *My Monograph*, 63-65.

⁵⁶ Stier, *Report of the New Orleans Chapter of the American Red Cross*, 13. The Roosevelt Hotel at 123 Baronne Street in the Central Business District is the former Grunewald Hotel.

⁵⁷ Stier, *Report of the New Orleans Chapter of the American Red Cross*, 13.

⁵⁸ Stier, *Report of the New Orleans Chapter of the American Red Cross*, 25.

⁵⁹ Stier, *Report of the New Orleans Chapter of the American Red Cross*, 15. Carondelet Street runs perpendicular between Canal and Poydras Streets in the Central Business District. The Hibernia Bank and Trust Company was a client of St. Clair Adams, a lawyer and Executive Committee member.

The year 1917 proved to be a tumultuous one for the Chapter. Newswires and telegrams saturated with details about the escalating war in Europe poured into newspapers in every American city. The Chapter, anticipating American involvement in a world war, rapidly admitted thirteen southern Louisiana parish branches to their jurisdiction shortly after the New Year.⁶⁰ After Congress declared war on Germany on April 6, 1917, the Chapter moved into a larger building at 316 Carondelet Street to accommodate the increased need for relief during wartime.⁶¹ The Executive Committee expanded the metro organization through the addition of five departments (Junior Red Cross, Women's Work, Canteen Service, Motor Corps, and Home Service), and six white female auxiliaries.⁶²

Traditional male/female roles in the early twentieth century determined the gender of departmental chairpersons in the American Red Cross. Departments with so-called masculine functions (finance, military, supply, and legal) or those that required a high level of coordination with community leaders (Junior Red Cross, publicity, and disaster relief) warranted men as chairmen with many executive committee members also serving as departmental chairs. Women, on the other hand, chaired departments geared towards female service occupations (women's work, elementary hygiene, and nursing).

The New Orleans Chapter's Junior Red Cross department partnered with the Orleans Parish School Board and Mayor Martin Behrman in the spring of 1917 to bring American Red Cross activities to local schools. Three Executive Committee members and a pair of Tulane

⁶⁰ Stier, *Report of the New Orleans Chapter of the American Red Cross*, 15. The parishes stayed as branches of the New Orleans Chapter until July 1918, after which they chartered their own chapters.

⁶¹ Stier, *Report of the New Orleans Chapter of the American Red Cross*, 15. William Mason Smith, a businessman (Mason Smith and Company) and Executive Committee member, donated the building to the Chapter.

⁶² Stier, *Report of the New Orleans Chapter of the American Red Cross*, 17. The Executive Committee ordered the demobilization of all branches and auxiliaries by June 1919.

University professors handpicked for the job chaired the department.⁶³ The department convinced the school board and the mayor that relief work for the war provided an excellent opportunity to teach the city's youth about world affairs. Schoolhouses turned into recruiting stations for Junior Red Cross volunteers. Teachers allotted classroom time for knitting sweaters, rolling bandages, and activities labeled as relief work under the instruction of Chapter volunteers. The New Orleans Junior Red Cross department encompassed 117 auxiliaries in Orleans Parish public and parochial schools with 38,885 youths on the rolls by the end of the year.⁶⁴

Base Hospital Unit 24, an Army 500-bed mobile medical unit, formed in the spring of 1917. The Chapter partnered with Tulane University Medical School to equip and sponsor the Unit. Dr. Rudolph Matas, Professor of Surgery, conceived the project at the university in 1915, two years before the United States entered the war. After Dr. Matas spoke about the urgent need for the Unit at a Chapter meeting on July 6, 1916, the Executive Committee approved sponsorship through donations of cash and medical supplies. Teachers and graduates from Tulane Medical School staffed the medical division, Charity Hospital and Touro Infirmary School of Nursing allotted nurses for the nursing division, and enlisted men from New Orleans and surrounding parishes filled the rest of the billets. The American Red Cross estimated an average cost of \$25,000 to equip a mobile medical unit for military deployment. The Chapter gave \$100,000 to the Unit and coordinated other private donations for ambulances and medical equipment. The Unit received orders to mobilize at Jackson Barracks on August 31, 1917 following the commissioning of the doctors into the Medical Corps of the United States Army.

⁶³ Stier, *Report of the New Orleans Chapter of the American Red Cross*, 7. Executive Committee members St. Clair Adams, W. R. Irby, and Emile Stier chaired the Junior Red Cross department with Professors J. M. Gwinn and Nicholas Bauer as advisors.

⁶⁴ Stier, *Report of the New Orleans Chapter of the American Red Cross*, 58-9. The Junior Red Cross enrolled 51,668 youth in 235 auxiliaries throughout fourteen parishes by the end of the war.

The Unit's medical staff and enlisted men departed for Camp Greenleaf, Georgia on September 3, 1917 for five months of military training and instruction.⁶⁵ The nurses accepted commissions into the Nurse Corps on December 9, 1917 at Touro Infirmary. The Chairman of the Chapter, Frank B. Hayne, addressed the nurses at the ceremony and presented each one with \$50 for travel expenses. The nursing division left the city the next day for nine weeks of military instruction and occupational training in public health at Ellis Island, New York. Both divisions reunited in March 1918 at the Unit's base camp in Limoges, France.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Stier, *Report of the New Orleans Chapter of the American Red Cross*, 67-71. Army Major (Dr.) Matas never went to France with Base Hospital Unit 24. A serious illness in his family kept him in New Orleans for the duration of the war.

⁶⁶ Stier, *Report of the New Orleans Chapter of the American Red Cross*, 81-2. Base Hospital Unit 24 gained notoriety as the first southern mobile medical unit to serve in France.

Chapter 6

Auxiliary Branches 6 and 11

The earliest publicity concerning a black American Red Cross auxiliary in New Orleans appeared on May 2, 1917. The *Times-Picayune* published a brief article, “Plan Negro Red Cross Unit,” that announced three black nurses: “Sarah Hall, Viola Dominique, and Louise J. Ross are leading the movement” to organize an African-American auxiliary. The article noted the meeting would take place at the Pythian Temple on a Thursday with Chapter Executive Committee member, William J. Leppert, addressing the attendees.⁶⁷ The nurses chose the Pythian Temple as the meeting space for its physical representation as a testament to racial uplift. The Temple, located on the corner of Gravier and Saratoga Streets in the Central Business District, was a cornerstone of the black community in New Orleans. The black Knights of Pythias erected the Temple in 1908 as a monument and tribute to the economic success of black businesses in the city.⁶⁸ Hall and Dominique nominated Ross to lead the new auxiliary as chairwoman. Ross then drafted the request to charter the auxiliary and delivered it to the Chapter for approval in June.

Two black female nurses chartered Auxiliary Branches 6 and 11 of the New Orleans Chapter of the American Red Cross in the summer and fall of 1917. The Chapter bestowed Ross (see fig. 5) and Sarah G. Brown with the responsibility of chairing major subsidiaries of its organization based on their training, qualifications, and professional reputations in the city’s

⁶⁷ News/Opinion, “Plan Negro Red Cross Unit,” *Times-Picayune*, May 2, 1917 (accessed February 11, 2009). William J. Leppert worked as a reporter for the *Times-Picayune*.

⁶⁸ Greater New Orleans Community Data Center, “Central Business District Neighborhood Snapshot,” Greater New Orleans Nonprofit Knowledge Works, <http://www.gnocdc.org/orleans/1/47/snapshot.html> (accessed April 30, 2009). City officials changed the name of Saratoga Street to Loyola Avenue.

black communities. Ross practiced as a private registered nurse for several years before she assumed the full-time volunteer position as Chairwoman of Auxiliary Branch 6.⁶⁹



Mrs. Louise J. Ross, Chairman New Orleans Chapter American Red Cross, recognized leader of the race in the South.

Figure 5. Louise J. Ross, Chairwoman of Auxiliary Branch 6, wearing an American Red Cross volunteer uniform. The caption incorrectly identifies her as the Chairman of the New Orleans Chapter. Date of the photograph is unknown.

Source: Great War Primary Document Archive: Photos of the Great War – www.gwpda.org/photos.

Brown graduated from the Providence Hospital School of Nursing in New Orleans and held certificates from the Public Health Service, the Louisiana State Board of Medical Examiners, and the New Orleans School of Domestic Science.⁷⁰ Ross and Brown both earned written commendations from the Chapter for their dedication to the organization and strong work ethic.

“Both are trained women. They have executive ability, and can meet a situation in an intelligent

⁶⁹ Stier, *Report of the New Orleans Chapter of the American Red Cross*, 145.

⁷⁰ Colored Civic League of New Orleans, “Colored New Orleans: High Point of Negro Endeavor, 1922-23,” Louisiana Division/City Archives, New Orleans Public Library, New Orleans, LA.

and efficient manner.”⁷¹ Brown’s reputation as a community leader spread far into the city’s black community. The Colored Civic League of New Orleans cited her in the early 1920s as “well known several years on account of her untiring effort for racial uplift. This community has always felt proud of Sarah G. Brown.”⁷²

Brown posed for two photographic portraits which seemed to promote racial uplift from a woman’s perspective. She wore her nursing uniform with cap in the top photograph of figure 6 and an evening dress with pearls for the bottom photograph. Brown’s uniform and cap clearly demonstrated the benefit of advanced education as a tool for racial uplift through the example of a trained and licensed nurse. Her choice of evening attire in the bottom photograph represented a black woman who had secured a place within the middle or upper-middle class. Brown’s gown, trimmed with intricate lace and delicate shoulder straps, reflected handmade haute couture designs of the times that were usually adorned only by wealthy women. Additionally, the long strand of pearls, considered by connoisseurs of fine jewelry to be a luxurious piece, signified a woman bestowed with a certain air of refinement and social grace.

⁷¹ Stier, *Report of the New Orleans Chapter of the American Red Cross*, 148.

⁷² Colored Civic League of New Orleans, “Colored New Orleans,” New Orleans, LA.



MRS. S. G. BROWN

Figure 6. *Top*, Sarah G. Brown, Chairwoman of Auxiliary Branch 11, wearing her nursing uniform; and *bottom*, wearing evening attire. Dates of photographs are unknown.

Source: Colored Civic League of New Orleans, "Colored New Orleans: High Point of Negro Endeavor, 1922-23," Louisiana Division/City Archives, New Orleans Public Library, New Orleans, LA.

The Chapter participated in the First War Fund Drive from June 18-25, 1917. The War Council of the American Red Cross established a national goal of \$100,000,000 to fund relief efforts for the boys overseas. The first drive netted \$15,000,000 over the national goal with the Chapter contributing \$672,237.69 against a \$400,000 assigned quota. The Chapter raised the money through the sale of American Red Cross paraphernalia, collection of membership dues, and donations from every public and private institution in the city and surrounding parishes that the Chapter could reach before the expiration of the drive. Mayor Behrman chaired the city drive with the Chapter divided by gender into teams of ten to canvas the city and parishes. The men's teams, led by Executive Committee members, canvassed businesses, industries, labor

unions, fraternities, and other civic organizations populated predominantly by males. Women “prominent in Red Cross work and civic affairs in the community” led the women’s teams to canvass the charitable and non-profit sectors of the city through contacts in churches, schools, and hospitals.⁷³

Executive Committee member, William J. Leppert, exerted his influence at the *Times-Picayune* to issue a public statement to the black population of New Orleans. He had attended the meeting at the Pythian Temple a month before and developed a rapport with the three black nurses. Leppert’s statement, published June 19, 1917, urged black people to contribute to the First War Fund Drive:

I earnestly beg of you to join with this splendid body of women of the race – purchase your card of membership – wear with pride this badge of honor and be contented in knowing you are doing your part to aid this great humanitarian work – that you have done your part for your country – that you have answered the appeal of the nation’s chief executive.⁷⁴

African-Americans quickly answered the call of duty. Three days later, on June 22, 1917 in the middle of the First War Fund Drive, the *Times-Picayune* announced the formation of the first black auxiliary in New Orleans with forty members on the rolls.⁷⁵ The American Red Cross proved to be a vehicle for black citizenship through recognition of membership in a national charity. Although Jim Crow laws had left black men disenfranchised, service in the military and membership in national volunteer organizations partially restored some of their civic rights during the war. Black women, on the other hand, experienced a certain degree of civic freedom for the first time through American Red Cross membership. Black auxiliaries, staffed mostly by

⁷³ Stier, *Report of the New Orleans Chapter of the American Red Cross*, 28-9. Paraphernalia included badges, buttons, and American Red Cross magazine subscriptions.

⁷⁴ News/Opinion, “Appeals to Negroes,” *Times-Picayune*, June 19, 1917 (accessed February 14, 2010).

⁷⁵ News/Opinion, “Auxiliary to Red Cross Formed,” *Times-Picayune*, June 22, 1917 (accessed February 14, 2010). The *Times-Picayune* published articles about the Chapter’s black auxiliary attached to the Houma, Louisiana Branch on May 16, 1917 and a black auxiliary in Biloxi, MS on May 31, 1917.

women, organized and executed community projects to increase support for their organizations. Public demonstrations by black women roll members through parades, campaign drives, and other activities strengthened the appeal of the national organization in the black communities.

Ross submitted the application for the auxiliary after the meeting at the Pythian Temple. The Chapter's Executive Committee readily approved her request to charter the auxiliary with headquarters at the Temple. Ross soon abandoned a lucrative practice as a registered nurse to devote all of her time as chairman of the auxiliary. She "appeared in different churches, attended meetings of men's societies, mingled among the workmen on the riverfront and industrial plants" to recruit women for the auxiliary. Ross, a middle-class black woman, gave a series of speeches in male-dominated public spaces that rallied black men to send their women to her auxiliary for American Red Cross work.⁷⁶

The New Orleans Chapter appreciated the zeal and enthusiasm generated by the black community, but chapters in other cities declined to admit black people into the American Red Cross. Colonel William Peel, Chairman of the Atlanta, Georgia Chapter and Manager of the Southern Division, in a letter dated December 6, 1917 to the national organization, flatly refused to admit blacks into his organizations. He insisted the American Red Cross "evidently know[s] very little about the negro situation South. They are an inferior race, and we resent the suggestion from any one that we should put them on a footing with us socially."⁷⁷ A series of further correspondence between him and the American Red Cross headquarters in Washington, DC over the next eight days failed to change his mind.

⁷⁶ Stier, *Report of the New Orleans Chapter of the American Red Cross*, 145.

⁷⁷ "Letter to Mrs. F.M. Chapman, Director, Women's Bureau, American Red Cross from Manager, Southern Division, American Red Cross dated December 6, 1917," American Red Cross, Group II, Record Group 200, Box 254, File 156 (Negro Auxiliaries), National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD.

The Chapter accepted generous contributions from parish branches and local institutions throughout July 1917 to restock the supply of relief funds drained by the First War Drive. The Audubon and Country Clubs of New Orleans hosted golf “Patriotic Tournaments” and donated all of the proceeds to the Chapter.⁷⁸ The Gretna Auxiliary in Jefferson Parish gave the Chapter \$881.40 from membership dues.⁷⁹ Continued sales of American Red Cross paraphernalia, renewals of annual membership dues, and new member enrollment fees ensured a constant flow of cash into the Chapter’s treasury.

Ross’ public speaking campaign reaped substantial rewards by the end of July 1917. Black men and women of all social classes flocked to her auxiliary by the hundreds to participate in American Red Cross relief work. The drastic increase in membership forced the Chapter to upgrade the status of the auxiliary to Auxiliary Branch 6 with Ross as the chair. Her officer corps included black nurse Viola Dominique, one of her peers and fellow organizer of the auxiliary. Ross supervised a women’s workroom for fabricating hospital garments at the Pythian Temple and turned in the Branch’s first contribution of \$200 to the Chapter’s treasury. A *Times-Picayune* article dated in August noted, “This is the only officially recognized Negro branch that will be authorized by the New Orleans Chapter in New Orleans and the Chapter earnestly urges all Negroes to cooperate with this branch.”⁸⁰ Ross quickly earned a reputation within the walls of the Chapter’s headquarters as “one of the leading women of her race in the South.”⁸¹

⁷⁸ News/Opinion, “Golfers Brave Rain for Red Cross Cause,” *Times-Picayune*, July 5, 1917 (accessed February 14, 2010). American Red Cross and Allied flags decorated the holes.

⁷⁹ News/Opinion, “Algiers and Gretna Daily News Budget,” *Times-Picayune*, July 8, 1917 (accessed February 14, 2010).

⁸⁰ News/Opinion, “Negro Red Cross Branch,” *Times-Picayune*, August 2, 1917 (accessed February 11, 2009). The newspaper underestimated the number of black branches admitted by the Chapter.

⁸¹ Stier, *Report of the New Orleans Chapter of the American Red Cross*, 145.

Ross and her branch staff motivated the black community in New Orleans to participate in American Red Cross relief work by securing sponsorships from black businesses and social organizations for Auxiliary Branch 6 fundraising projects. The Branch announced plans to host a picnic for the city's black residents on Monday, September 17, 1917 at the New Orleans Fairgrounds. Proposed picnic attractions included a parade of local black fraternities, a tennis tournament, relay races, and special activities for children.⁸² The Branch planned the picnic to generate funds and increase community support for the American Red Cross. The *Times-Picayune* published a series of articles, from August 19 to September 16, 1917 that advertised the proposed event. Donations poured into the Branch from all over the city to finance the picnic. Ross accepted \$100 for picnic funds from the Longshoremen Benevolent Association at a Branch meeting in mid-August.⁸³ Picnic donations from twelve businesses and social clubs totaled over \$250 by the end of the month.⁸⁴

Branch 6 scheduled two more fundraisers on the weekend before the picnic. The first one sent the black roll members into the street. The Branch hosted a parade on Friday night, September 14, 1917 for local African-American troops ordered to training camps. Parade units marched from South Rampart and Louisiana Avenue to Lapeyrouse and North Johnson Street in the Mid-City District. An American Red Cross ambulance full of black nursing school graduates led the parade. Marching bands provided music for parading units. The largest unit, a succession of one hundred cars carrying black nurses, proved to be the main attraction. The Branch organized the parade as a free advertising campaign for the picnic and to increase

⁸² News/Opinion, "Work for Red Cross," *Times-Picayune*, September 2, 1917 (accessed February 14, 2010).

⁸³ News/Opinion, "Negro Red Cross Benefit," *Times-Picayune*, August 19, 1917, August 14 1917 – September 9, 1917, Multimedia Collections, University of New Orleans, New Orleans, LA.

⁸⁴ News/Opinion, "Negro Picnic September 17," *Times-Picayune*, August 26, 1917 (accessed February 14, 2010).

community awareness of their activities. Thousands of spectators attended the parade.⁸⁵ The second event consisted of selling American Red Cross tags on September 15, 1917 throughout the city. Following the example of the Chapter's canvassing strategy in the First War Fund Drive, the Branch divided into teams with specifically assigned areas for the tag sale.⁸⁶

The Chapter elected to sponsor the picnic through a series of actions designed not to divert the spotlight from Branch 6's community effort. The Executive Committee secured the Fairgrounds for the picnic and allotted payment of the rental fee from Chapter funds. The Junior Red Cross department persuaded the Orleans Parish School Board to excuse black children from school at 11:00 a.m. on the day of the picnic.⁸⁷ The Chapter's Motor Corps donated the ambulance and several cars for the parade.⁸⁸ The Branch needed the support and business acumen of the Chapter to finish planning the picnic. Logistics and financial resources unavailable to the Branch fostered a dependency on the Chapter that developed into a system of cooperation and respect.

While Auxiliary Branch 6 made last-minute preparations for its picnic, another African-American auxiliary branch formed in the city's Algiers District on the west bank of the Mississippi River. Nurse Brown recruited a hundred members and applied for a branch charter through the Chapter. Brown, copying Ross' public speaking recruiting techniques, "appeared at public gatherings of her people, organized church and mass meetings, and in an effective manner told her men and women that their services were needed by the government."⁸⁹ The Chapter

⁸⁵ News/Opinion, "Negroes in Parade," *Times-Picayune*, September 16, 1917 (accessed February 14, 2010). The Mid-City District includes the traditionally black Seventh Ward.

⁸⁶ News/Opinion, "To Sell Red Cross Tags," *Times-Picayune*, September 15, 1917 (accessed February 14, 2010). Tags are small lapel buttons.

⁸⁷ News/Opinion, "Negro Picnic September 17," *Times-Picayune*, August 26, 1917 (accessed February 14, 2010).

⁸⁸ News/Opinion, "Negroes in Parade," *Times-Picayune*, September 16, 1917 (accessed February 14, 2010).

⁸⁹ Stier, *Report of the New Orleans Chapter of the American Red Cross*, 146.

approved the charter for Auxiliary Branch 11 on September 25, 1917 with headquarters at the Ladies of Hope Benevolent Mutual Aid Association Hall on Homer Street in the Algiers District. Brown's officer corps mirrored the middle-class community of active women of Ross' branch: two of Brown's officers were schoolteachers "who were well known and esteemed in this district."⁹⁰

By the time the *Algiers Herald* published an article on September 26, 1917 that officially announced Branch 11 to the public, roll members had participated in a parade for departing black troops on Sunday, September 23, two days before the Chapter issued the branch charter. Branch 11 hosted their own parade in the streets of Algiers with Brown in charge of all the American Red Cross parading units and activities. She enjoyed the full cooperation of local black businessmen who organized the bulk of the parade.⁹¹

The entire Chapter organization switched regional management in September 1917 from the Central Division in Chicago, Illinois to the new Gulf Division headquartered in New Orleans. The American Red Cross granted charters for several new wartime regional divisions in 1917 to manage the rapidly increasing number of chartered city chapters. The Gulf Division, under the direction of Leigh Carroll, encompassed a network of chapters throughout Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas.⁹²

The Auxiliary Branches jointly sponsored a black Junior Red Cross Department in the autumn of 1917 for Orleans Parish and Xavier University students. Professor John Hoffman, principal of black high school McDonogh 35, chaired the new department. Membership in the

⁹⁰ News/Opinion, "Colored Red Cross," *Algiers Herald*, September 26, 1917, Microfilm AH5, January 4 – December 27, 1917, Louisiana Division/City Archives, New Orleans Public Library, New Orleans, LA. The Mississippi River separates the Algiers District from the rest of the city. Residents refer to the land on the Algiers side of the River as the "west bank."

⁹¹ News/Opinion, "Colored Red Cross," *Algiers Herald*, September 26, 1917.

⁹² Stier, *Report of the New Orleans Chapter of the American Red Cross*, 17. The Gulf Division reduced its organization to just Alabama, Louisiana, and Mississippi by June 1919.

black Junior Red Cross surpassed its white counterpart by enrolling more than ninety-five percent of eligible students. The success of the black Junior Red Cross in New Orleans won praise from both the national headquarters and the Chapter and “encouraged Chapter officials in the belief that there are still greater possibilities among the members of the Junior (Red Cross) organization.”⁹³

The black Junior Red Cross Department provided the Auxiliary Branches with an opportunity to instigate racial uplift at the lowest level. The ideology of racial uplift commenced with the rearing of children in positive directions of self-worth, concern for others, and respect for the community. Black American Red Cross leaders held the same values in high regard per the charity’s mission statement. Ross and Brown (and likely Hoffman), labeled as fine examples of their race and bearers of American Red Cross high moral standards, experienced little resistance from parents and school administrators in persuading students to enroll in the Junior Red Cross Department.

The community picnic hosted by Auxiliary Branch 6 at the Fairgrounds on September 17, 1917 netted more than \$600 for the charity. The *Times-Picayune* finally published an article about the event at the end of the month. The newspaper pointed out that Ross and a select group from Branch 6 delivered a check to the Chapter, with a promise of more to come from uncollected funds, and forecasted another public charity event for departing troop trains carrying black soldiers off to war. Ross’ plans to appoint a committee to “serve light lunch and refreshments” to the soldiers transformed into the Colored Canteen Service of Branch 6.⁹⁴ She appointed Frank P. Farrell, a black journalist and Odd Fellow, to chair the canteen. The Chapter

⁹³ Stier, *Report of the New Orleans Chapter of the American Red Cross*, 146. Xavier University students built a collection of tableware chests.

⁹⁴ News/Opinion, “Red Cross Negroes Raise \$600 at Fair,” *Times-Picayune*, September 30, 1917 (accessed February 14, 2010).

approved her choice of Farrell and also appointed him Chairman of the Colored Department of Military Relief, because he “was the first colored man in New Orleans to tender his services to the New Orleans Chapter.”⁹⁵ Ross’ husband, Alexander, and fourteen other black men, including Professor Hoffman, volunteered their time to help with the canteen.

Ross and other black community leaders attended a religious farewell service for the troops on October 5, 1917 at the St. James African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church. The pastor, Reverend E. Whittenberg, summoned Ross to address the packed congregation. She stood in the pulpit and reminded the troops to attend her Colored Canteen Service on Sunday at the train station.⁹⁶

Ross’ planned lunch for the troops turned into a swarm of humanity on October 7, 1917 after 20,000 black and white spectators jammed the streets and the New Orleans Union Station train depot. The city hosted a parade that featured 228 black soldiers from ten Army divisions. Black Spanish-American War veterans led the procession starting at the Longshoremen’s Hall on Jackson Street. Mayor Behrman and New Orleans Police Department Superintendent Frank T. Mooney reviewed the soldiers’ units from the steps of Gallier (City) Hall before the parade turned towards the train station. Several uniformed social clubs, Civil War veterans, and marching bands joined the parade to cheer on the soldiers. The *Times-Picayune* declared the day’s events as “Afro-American Day,” in a feature article published the next day. A reporter commented on the actions of the white spectators:

⁹⁵ Stier, *Report of the New Orleans Chapter of the American Red Cross*, 147. Frank P. Farrell worked as a correspondent for *The Odd Fellow*, the journal of the Independent Order of Odd Fellows benevolent fraternal society. See Independent Order of Odd Fellows, <http://www.ioof.org> (accessed February 14, 2010).

⁹⁶ News/Opinion, “Services for Drafted Men,” *Times-Picayune*, October 6, 1917 (accessed February 11, 2009). Constructed from 1848-51, the church is on North Roman Street in the Mid-City District.

A determination on the part of white citizens to give way to the Negroes on the eventful occasion everywhere was apparent, and crowds of white persons, attracted by the music, the flags and the uniformed clubs in the processions to and from the depot, stepped back and gave the vantage-points to the Negroes, that they might get their full share of entertainment.

The multiracial crowds on the parade route gave the soldiers gifts of food and clothing. Branch 6's Colored Canteen Service served boxed lunches, donated by members of the prestigious Boston and Pickwick Clubs, to the troops at the Longshoremen's Hall and the train station.⁹⁷ Patriotism and good behavior crossed all boundaries of color. Police reported no incidents of racial unrest on the day the city sent her black sons off to war.

Patriotic parade fever swept the city again in late October 1917 with 10,000 men, women, and children marching on Canal Street, from Elk Place to South Peters, to join President Wilson's national rally for the sale of Liberty Bonds. Bands playing patriotic tunes accompanied the throngs of marchers. The uniformed women of the Chapter and the Auxiliary Branches marched as a singular unit and drew the loudest cheers from the crowds watching the parade. Chapter Chairman Frank B. Hayne, Governor Ruffin Pleasant, and New Orleans Postmaster Charles Janvier reviewed the parade from a platform in front of the Pickwick Club. The *Times-Picayune* noted, "Social barriers were broken down under the strain of enthusiasm and men and women from every walk of life rubbed shoulders with each other."⁹⁸

The Auxiliary Branches scheduled a three-day cinematic event for their own benefit at a local black movie theater during the last week of October 1917. One of the films, "A Trooper of Troop K," showcased the patriotism and bravery of black soldiers under fire in the war. The

⁹⁷ News/Opinion, "Drafted Negroes Parade to Trains Cheered by 20,000," *Times-Picayune*, October 8, 1917 (accessed May 2, 2009). Several Executive Committee members were also members of the Boston and Pickwick Clubs located on Canal Street. Gallier (City) Hall is on St. Charles Avenue.

⁹⁸ News/Opinion, "Waves of Patriotism Sweeps All the City as Thousands March," *Times-Picayune*, October 25, 1917 (accessed February 14, 2010). Canal Street separates the Central Business District from the French Quarter.

film's plot focused on a black soldier rescuing his injured white counterpart. The Branches invited all the black roll members to watch free movies featuring black casts as appreciation for their hard work and services rendered during the planning and execution phases of the picnic and parades.⁹⁹

The New Orleans Women's Committee of the National Council of Defense invited the Chapter and Auxiliary Branches to participate in a women's patriotic parade on November 2, 1917. The Committee planned the parade to celebrate the Women's Registration Day proclamation passed two weeks prior on October 17 by Governor Pleasant. The proclamation mandated all Louisiana women volunteer for some type of war work by registering with a member of the State Council of Defense.¹⁰⁰ Thousands of women turned out to march from Gallier (City) Hall to Canal Street, u-turning at Magazine Street, and back up Canal Street to Elks Place. Lucia A. Miltenberger, first Chairman of the Chapter's Women's Work department, organized the uniformed American Red Cross units to march as a single unit with women in both Canteen Service departments leading the way.¹⁰¹ The Chapter placed the canteen women in front of the marching unit as a public recruiting campaign for the crowds watching the parade. Canteen Service departments required the largest number of women volunteers with the least amount of training to serve refreshments to troops passing through the city on their way to training camps.

Auxiliary Branch 6 prepared for the upcoming holiday season by constructing Christmas packages for black soldiers and sailors stationed overseas. The packages contained knitted

⁹⁹ News/Opinion, "For Negro Branch of Red Cross," *Times-Picayune*, October 28, 1917 (accessed February 14, 2010).

¹⁰⁰ Clarke, *American Women and the World War*, 275-9. Governor Pleasant's proclamation made Louisiana the only state in the union with mandatory women's war work.

¹⁰¹ News/Opinion, "Patriotic Women to Unite Today in Great Parade," *Times-Picayune* (accessed February 14, 2010). Women's religious clubs, sororities, and benevolent associations contributed floats and/or marched in the parade.

articles of woolen clothing, foodstuffs, and other personal comfort items needed in the trenches or onboard ship. An article published in the *Times-Picayune* on November 11, 1917 noted, “Louise Ross reported people of her race are responding handsomely to the call which will make soldiers and sailors happy during the Christmas holidays.”¹⁰²

The patriotic joy of the holiday season inspired a dramatic increase in Chapter membership but not enough to fill a national quota. The American Red Cross gave the Chapter a goal of 75,000 new members by Christmas Eve as their share of the 1917 Christmas Roll Call membership drive. Mayor Behrman, the Executive Committee, and parish branch chairmen, supervised a network of 2,000 American Red Cross roll members that canvassed the fourteen parish jurisdiction. The Maison Blanche department store in New Orleans added several hundred employees to the rolls with store owner, S. J. Schwartz, subsidizing the one-dollar membership fee for those who couldn’t afford it. The Barron G. Collier advertising agency placed signs on all the streetcars for the drive.

Mayor Behrman and Chapter Chairman Frank B. Hayne partnered for a public speaking tour to encourage people to join the American Red Cross. Speeches on the first day at the Mid-City District black Tammany Aid and Pleasure Club and Bull’s Club ended with over 120 new members enrolled in Auxiliary Branch 6. Behrman, addressing a capacity multiracial crowd at the Crescent City Theater said, “It should be the solemn duty of every one of you to enroll every member of your household, regardless of color.”¹⁰³ Hayne addressed the black longshoremen

¹⁰² News/Opinion, “Colored Red Cross Active,” *Times-Picayune*, November 11, 1917, (accessed February 9, 2009).

¹⁰³ News/Opinion, “House-to-House Canvass for Red Cross a Success,” *Times-Picayune*, December 18, 1917 (accessed February 14, 2010). Maison Blanche on Canal Street closed in the late 1990s.

the next day and “complimented the women of the race for the splendid manner in which they are performing the Red Cross work in all its branches.”¹⁰⁴

The American Red Cross Seal Drive coincided with the 1917 Christmas Roll Call membership drive. Sales of the seals at a penny apiece raised money for the medical treatment of people in Louisiana who suffered from tuberculosis. The black and white Junior Red Cross departments in New Orleans hosted the Drive in area schools to encourage children to donate their pennies for charity and join the Junior Red Cross. The *Times-Picayune* reported impressive seal sales of \$400 from white schools and at least \$10 from the black McDonogh 6 public school during the Drive.¹⁰⁵

While rosters of new roll members poured into the Chapter headquarters, actual numbers totaled much less than the set goal. Mayor Behrman issued a panicked statement to the *Times-Picayune* on the eve of the closing date. He pleaded with all city residents, “The showing is deplorably small. The press dispatches will tell the world that New Orleans has failed utterly in her duty to suffering humanity. Surely there must be some mistake about this.”¹⁰⁶ Roll counts showed no error. The Chapter and Branches netted only 19,222 new members and \$20,830.28 in dues across their jurisdiction, less than one-third of the assigned goal.¹⁰⁷ The year ended on a bit of a sour note for the Chapter, the Branches, and the state of Louisiana on the eve of 1918, all things considering the string of communal and organizational successes in the preceding months.

¹⁰⁴ News/Opinion, “Local Red Cross Plans to Increase Its Membership,” *Times-Picayune*, December 12, 1917 (accessed February 14, 2010).

¹⁰⁵ News/Opinion, “Red Cross Seal Sale Surpasses Record of Past,” *Times-Picayune*, December 16, 1917 (accessed February 14, 2010). Seals are adhesive stickers. American Red Cross seals bore the infamous “red cross” emblem.

¹⁰⁶ News/Opinion, “Faces Failure in Red Cross Drive in New Orleans,” *Times-Picayune*, December 24, 1917 (accessed February 11, 2009). Louisiana’s roll member deficit added up to 102,289 members. In comparison, Alabama and Mississippi fell short by 127,508 and 94,768 roll members respectively.

¹⁰⁷ Stier, *Report of the New Orleans Chapter of the American Red Cross*, 137.

While the Chapter and the Branches may have pondered briefly about the failure of the membership drive, there was no real time to fret or slow down the workload. The year 1918 proved to be the most challenging and costly so far for the young organization. The First World War seemed to rage on forever across the ocean with American Red Cross relief supplies dwindling at a faster rate than they could be replenished by the roll members. The additional appearance of an even deadlier enemy, one invisible to the naked eye and nicknamed “the Spanish Lady,” in the fall of 1918 further stretched the manpower and lifesaving skills of the Chapter and Auxiliary Branches to their very limits.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

Patriotic support for “the boys over there” inspired millions to join the American Red Cross after the United States entered the war in April 1917. People from all walks of life flocked to city chapters across the nation with a desire to do something good for their country. City chapters added a network of branches and auxiliaries that carried out the mission statement of the American Red Cross and spread the word of national humanitarianism from coast to coast. Chapters, branches, and auxiliaries partnered with city officials and community leaders to plan, sponsor, and organize projects designed to get every able-bodied citizen, including the nation’s children, involved in American Red Cross charity work.

The American Red Cross afforded women the ability to step out in public for a national cause and influence opinion about wartime policy. Women roll members rallied the cry for public support of a national charity during wartime by demonstrating gender independence and an infallible degree of patriotism in public spaces. They used the American Red Cross as a vehicle to spread a patriotic sense of duty and self worth to anyone who would listen. Their uniformed appearance and calm encouraging demeanor in public generated even more support for the cause. No one dared to doubt the mission of the “Angels of Mercy” for fear of being labeled a traitor to the war effort.

Black women, in particular, utilized the benefit of American Red Cross volunteer work to engage racial uplift ideology through a declaration of citizenship despite the disenfranchisement of their men. Black women entrusted with positions of leadership exerted a newfound freedom to make decisions that affected entire communities, while their husbands’ wartime influence only reached as far as donning a military uniform. Often labeled the best examples of their race,

black women stood at the forefront of the Auxiliary Branches and were better trained and more experienced in the field of nursing than their white counterparts.

The New Orleans Chapter of the American Red Cross and its black Auxiliary Branches labored to unite the black and white communities in the city for national relief. Over 20,000 black and white women from fourteen southern Louisiana parishes volunteered their services to the organization. Another thousand or so black and white men helped them accomplish a series of tasks assigned by the Chapter's Executive Committee delegated by the American Red Cross headquarters in Washington, DC.

The patriotic fever that swept the city in 1917 fostered a system of mutual cooperation and respect between the Chapter and its black Auxiliary Branches. The Chapter sponsored the Branches in the planning and execution phases of charity events for the city's black community. For events that included a larger multiracial representation of the city, the Chapter invited the Branches to participate as an equal part of the organization. The Chapter frequently commended the roll members of its Branches for their devotion to duty and hard work in uplifting the race. The Branches responded by fulfilling each obligation with more zeal and enthusiasm than they had the last. The biracial alliance between the New Orleans Chapter of the American Red Cross and its black Auxiliary Branches proved to be one of the greatest assets of the South's participation in the First World War.

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