

Lettie Gavin Papers

Collection Summary

Title: Lettie Gavin Papers, American Women in WWI: They Also Served

Span Dates: 1914-2003

Bulk Dates: 1917-1920

Creator: Gavin, Lettie, 1922-2006

Extent: 163 folders, 4 boxes

Summary: Photographs, newspaper articles, correspondence, personal letters and other printed matter concerning the female involvement in World War I in the United States, both overseas and on the home front. Materials are the culmination of Lettie Gavin's research for her book, American Women in WWI: They Also Served.

Biographical Note

Lettie Gavin was an award winning writer and editor for the Seattle Post-Intelligencer newspaper. Her 24 year long career in journalism began at the Highline Times in the 1950s as a reporter, joining the P-I in 1968. American Women in WWI: They Also Served was her first and only book.

Scope and Contents

The Women's Collection spans the years 1914-2003, with the bulk of the materials dating from 1917 to 1920. This collection of archival materials pertains to the female involvement in the World War I war effort in the United States. Because the materials are a culmination of research for a book, they are organized by the chapter topics of that book. These include, an Introduction section, Navy Yeoman (F), Marine Corps, Nurses (Army, Navy), Army Signal Corps ("Hello Girls"), Reconstruction Aides (Physical and Occupational Therapy), YMCA, female physicians, Red Cross, Salvation Army, and a series of miscellaneous folders.

Each topic includes photographs (both in print form and photocopied), newspaper articles (original clippings and photocopies), correspondence with various institutions, personal letters between Gavin and her research subjects or their families, handwritten notes, and other printed materials from books and journals. In most sections, Gavin identified several important individuals who were prominent in that field; each has their own folder and is organized alphabetically by last name. Where possible, items are organized by date (this mostly pertains to letters and correspondence). Much of Gavin's original intent was preserved, thus, items are not necessarily organized by type (i.e. all of the photographs are not pulled together in a single file). Gavin noted whether certain information was used or not used in the creation of her book, this information was also preserved and noted in the collection.

Navy: Yeoman (F) were the first group of women to be enlisted to serve in the military. These women filled the positions of the men on the home front who were needed overseas. Important women include Margaret Mary Fitzgerald King, Frieda

Hardin, Bernice Smith Tongate,, Daisy Erd, Gertrude Howalt, and Gertrude McGowan. The Bremerton Shipyard in Washington is discussed extensively.

Marine Corps: Important women discussed include Martha Wilchinski, Minnie Arthur, Pearl Chandley, and Lela Leibrand.

Nurses: Both Army and Navy nurses are discussed, most attention is focused on the Army Nurse Corps. Many photos of nurses treating wounded soldiers, mostly overseas at the Base Hospitals in France. Important women include Eva Austin, Josephine Bowman, Nellie Dingley, Lucy Freeman, Aileen Stewart, and Julia Stimson.

Army Signal Corps: The “Hello Girls” were American switchboard operators who were recruited to improve communications on the Western front. Applicants had to be bilingual in English and French, many were former switchboard operators or employees at telecommunication companies. Important women to note are Merle Eagan Anderson, Grace Banker, Adele Hoppock, and Marie LeBlanc.

Reconstruction Aides: The task of reconstruction aides was to provide treatment, in the form of physical and occupation therapy, to enable servicemen suffering from wounds to return to the battlefield. The training program at Reed College in Oregon is discussed. Important women include Harriet Forest Moore, Mary McMillan, and Emma Vogel.

YMCA: Canteen activities and entertainment were provided by YMCA volunteers to the soldiers serving overseas. Important women to note are Marguerite Cockett, entertainer Elsie Janis, Eleanor Butler Roosevelt, Jean Graham Townley, and Helen Walker.

Female physicians: Prominent women doctors are focused on in this section. Doctors trained at Smith College and the Medical College of Pennsylvania are discussed. Important women include Dr. Nellie Barsness, Dr. Mary Merritt Crawford, Dr. Frances Haines, and Dr. Anne Tjomsland.

Red Cross: This section focuses on Red Cross volunteers who provided relief and first aid to servicemen overseas, mostly volunteer nurses. The Red Cross Motor Corps is discussed. The Studio for Portrait Masks is discussed extensively. Anna C. Ladd was a sculptor and headed the studio, making facial masks for soldiers whose faces had been mutilated in battle. Other important women include Lois Brundred and Edith Edna (Scott) Crawford.

Salvation Army: Provided humanitarian services overseas during WWI. The organization was created to provide both physical and spiritual relief to those in need. Important women include the McAllister sisters, the McIntyre sisters, and Florence Turkington.