Smith County Red Cross, 1917-1920

Vicki Betts
vbetts@gower.net

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The International Red Cross was founded in Switzerland in 1863, during the American Civil War. Clara Barton, who had worked so hard in the United States with the Sanitary Commission, saw the Red Cross in action in Europe during the Franco-Prussian War, and helped to found an American branch in 1881. They at first assisted at Michigan forest fires, Mississippi floods, a Florida yellow fever epidemic, the Johnstown Flood, hurricanes in South Carolina and Galveston, and the San Francisco earthquake. Most American chapters were in major cities. Dallas formed the first group in any Gulf state in 1906. When World War I broke out on July 28, 1914, there were only 107 chapters nationwide. After the United States declared war on Germany in April 1917, that number exploded to 3,864 chapters, and nearly one-fifth of the total population of the United States became Red Cross members.\(^1\)

Tyler organized its Red Cross Chapter in June 1917. P. K. Birdwell, secretary-treasurer of Carlton Lumber Company, served as chairman. Mary Davenport Bonner was named vice chairman, Earl Jackson secretary-treasurer followed by E. P. McKenna, wholesale merchandise broker. The executive board consisted of Clara Baldwin, Birdie Johnson, Mrs. Dr. L. E. Smith, Mittie Phillips, L. M. Green, and J. B. Miller. Over one hundred people joined at the very first meeting, paying one dollar as dues, with half of that going to the national office.\(^2\) This was at the same time that the Liberty Loan campaign was also gathering money for the war, and while local troops were being raised.
The Tyler paper declared

Tyler is now organizing a volunteer company to send to the front. It will be no sham battle. Your son may go. After our boys have struggled nobly and honorably for the sake of Old Glory, in the face of the enemy’s artillery; after the smoke of battle is cleared away; some of our boys will be stricken down, and when they are we will want to feel that we have helped make possible the care which can only be given by the American Red Cross.²

Smith County was also sending more than money and troops. Eunice Olive, of Pine Springs, had received nursing training in Dallas and was working there in early 1917. She was in the first wave of Dallas Red Cross nurses to be sent to Ellis Island for debarkation in June. She wrote to her family in Smith County "We have learned that we will be in a base hospital in France, and will therefore take care of our own soldiers. So you know that makes us feel lots better." A later letter mentioned going to Rouen, which had fourteen mostly British base hospitals. The second Smith County Red Cross nurse to serve was Gertrude Brogan, whose brother was a local doctor. She received her education in Fort Worth at St. Joseph’s Training School for Nurses and was shipped out in May, 1918, heading for Base Hospital 52 in France, one of the largest.³

By the end of June, Smith County had almost 1,200 members of the Red Cross, and it was time to organize the women for work. One of the first projects was constructing and filling comfort bags with the goal of giving one to each soldier leaving the county. Each bag needed to be sewn of washable material, ten by thirteen inches, with a draw string at the top. It should have khaki colored cotton sewing thread, white thread, needles, needle case, khaki colored buttons and white buttons in a smaller three by five inch bag, a large thimble, blunt pointed scissors, a cake of soap, safety pins, common pins, a small comb, toothbrush, toothpaste, small round mirror, handkerchiefs, lead pencils, writing pad, envelopes, postal cards, playing cards or game, collapsible aluminum drinking cup, pocket knife, and tan shoe laces.³ The headquarters during that first summer were at the high school, with hours from 9:00-12:00 in the morning, and 3:30 to 6:00 in the afternoon.⁶

The next major project was bandage production, and that would continue throughout the war. Thirteen committees formed, each with its own chairman, each working on a different particular kind of surgical supply. For example, Mary Douglas headed a group of women and girls making gauze compresses, folding a sixteen by sixteen square down into a four-inch pad, twenty-four in a package, and 144 packages in a box. Helen Taylor (Mrs. Gus Taylor) headed a group making laparotomy bandages. Seventy-eight women organized for this part of the Smith County Red Cross. Their motto was “Not our bit (referring to “doing my bit for the war”), but our utmost.” As the ladies said in the Tyler Daily Courier-Times, “This is America’s war and America’s Red Cross for America’s soldiers; therefore every American should help.”⁷

Of course all of this took money, and the Red Cross was constantly fund raising. Besides soliciting individuals, lodges, and businesses for donations, on July 1st the First Baptist Church held a Sunday Patriotic Day with a special free-will offering for the Red Cross. Pastor G. L. Yates told his congregation that “no man can live unto himself and no nation can live unto itself,” that the United States was “fighting for a world wide democracy.” “America is to be the standard bearer of God in championing the rights of the oppressed.” The Electric Palace movie theater offered a film called “The Call of Her People” with Ethel Barrymore, with twenty-five percent of the receipts going to the Red Cross. The Red Cross also held a huge carnival around the square on August 4, with booths decorated to represent various nations, a minstrel show, refreshments, aesthetic dances directed by Arkie Crutcher, a fortune teller, an address, and band music, followed by orchestra music, then dancing. Between fifteen hundred and two thousand persons attended at ten cents per head, and over
three hundred dollars total was cleared.\textsuperscript{8}

If there were women who could not leave their homes to work at the high school, the Red Cross also needed knitting done—sleeveless sweaters, mufflers, wristlets, and socks. Twice the Tyler newspaper ran knitting instructions. Mrs. C. A. Caldwell served as chairman of this branch, Louise Mansfield and Ruth Patterson distributed the wool, Liza McCardell and Minnie Wright offered to teach knitting at the school, and Sarah Hall offered private instructions.\textsuperscript{9}

By mid-September Tyler High School was set to begin the fall term, so the Red Cross had to find another place to meet. They chose the auditorium on the second floor of Tyler's public library as their new headquarters and workroom. It was well lit and heated, had sanitary tables for bandage making, and 500 workers could be accommodated over the week. Workers had to wear caps and aprons, and those could be bought from the Red Cross for $1.50 per apron, and twenty-five cents per cap. Mondays, Fridays, and Saturdays were for knitting, Tuesday for cutting surgical supplies, and Wednesdays and Thursdays for making surgical supplies. Mary Bonner appealed to women to give a half day per week to the cause. “Consciousness of service well done will always be a pleasing memory to you. Your bandage may save the life of a wounded soldier.”\textsuperscript{10}

Of course the children of Smith County also got caught up with all of this enthusiasm and activity, so Junior Red Cross groups organized under the overall leadership of Mrs. Frank Williams, with approximately nineteen hundred members. Almost all of the school children of Tyler, Swan, Lindale, and Winona enrolled, raising funds with entertainments and tag-days, cutting and finishing infant’s garments for poor French babies, making hospital shirts, and knitting bed socks. A manual training class made all shipping boxes and tables for one camp hut. Students also financed and participated in a Health Crusade, promoting good health habits and the control of preventable diseases. In Sarah McClendon's memoirs, she recalls that as a seven-year-old her father dressed her and her sister in little Red Cross uniforms and took them to the post office to sell war bonds. Evidently she tried knitting as well.\textsuperscript{11}

The county-wide Red Cross soon became so large that smaller auxiliaries were formed. Within Tyler, the Bonner School auxiliary had 160 members chaired by Mary Douglas. Douglas School had 75 members under Lovie York. These groups tended to come from neighborhoods with lower income families, with the husbands often working in the railroad yards. The Lady Maccabees, a fraternal benefit association, organized their own knitting circle as did Cedar Street Methodist Church.\textsuperscript{12}

Distance dictated that outlying communities have their own auxiliaries. Troup formed its branch in August of 1917, with Rev. R. L. Owen of the Presbyterian Church chairman, Mrs. D. B. Braly vice chairman, Mrs. J. D. Nance secretary, and Henry Edwards, of the Troup Banner, treasurer. They almost immediately enlisted “fifty odd” members, each paying the $1.00 fee and receiving a Red Cross button. They solicited the old fiddlers of the area to present a concert, with all proceeds going to the organization. By the end of October the Troup Red Cross had taken possession of the old Methodist church as a work space and had received yarns and needles for knitting. Ladies of the area lent sewing machines and tables. The Troup Banner printed instructions for knitting sleeveless sweaters, wristlets No. 1 and No. 2, medium sized men’s socks, and sweaters of either light or heavy weight wool. Smaller communities in southeastern Smith County such as Omen, Arp, and Blackjack contributed to Troup, as well as the northeastern Cherokee County communities of Concord and Blackjack. By January 17, 1918, the Troup
Red Cross Auxiliary had 481 members and in July they organized a Junior Red Cross unit to help utilize their new four workshops.\(^{13}\)

Lindale supported its own auxiliary, which was led by Mrs. J. F. Williams. It focused on knitting at first, and then later Mrs. J. S. Ogburn became chair and they added hospital garments and surgical dressings. Pleasant Grove was under M. H. Elliott. Mrs. H. M. Shank took charge of Hopewell, and they knitted hospital garments and made clothing for the poor Belgians. Mrs. J. A. Wallace supervised one hundred members in Flint. Other auxiliaries were at Bullard, Arp, Winona, Swan, New Harmony, Holt, Mt. Sylvan, Red Springs, Gresham, Wood Springs, and Garden Valley.\(^{14}\)

This was all happening during Jim Crow law, so unfortunately African-American women were not welcomed into the white organizations. Black Tyler women formed their own auxiliary with over one hundred members. The official 1919 Red Cross history did not link any names to it, but Beulah L. Caswell, a teacher and wife of barber James Cornelius Caswell, appears in the Red Cross account book over and over as turning in membership funds. A newspaper article notes that the auxiliary supported black soldiers at Camp Travis and it did a great deal of knitting. Besides the Tyler “Colored” Red Cross chapter, W. W. Williams brought in memberships from Village Creek, and the Mt. Olive community east of Sand Flat sent in theirs. African-Americans in the Troup area organized at the First Baptist Church (Colored) in February 1918, after speeches by Prof. E. O. Adams and Dr. E. M. Griggs, and it raised funds with a box supper. They were soon joined by Second Baptist Church, the Troup Colored Methodist Church, and smaller communities at New Hope (Conglee), Horn’s Chapel, Piney Grove, Liberty, and Nebo.\(^{15}\)

One black soldier sent back a poem of appreciation that was published in the *Tyler Daily Courier-Times*:

Red Cross friends and helpers too,
It filled the army boys with joy
To know the home folks are so true,
And never forget their boys,

To encourage us is great,
And shows much patriotism,
Comes where colored congregate,
As quickly as baptism.

We thank your friends heartily,
For the Xmas presents sent,
To the boys now in Khaki,
Big U. S. we represent.

We are going to free the world,
And bring peace on land and sea,
Place Old Glory’s stripes unfurled,
When the Kaiser’s blood you see.

Some say it’s hard to whip him,
Others are nervous and sick,
Men from Smith County have vim,
And shall give him one hard lick.

When this war we shall have won,
And all nations peace declare,
May this nation be as one,
One flag and one party fair.\(^{16}\)

One of the Tyler cultural groups that worked hardest for the Red Cross was the Coterie Club. They held frequent concert and recital fundraisers at various
homes. The Mickwitz Club, named after the Dean of Music at Southern Methodist University, sold tickets. In late 1917, they presented a benefit cantata, “Pan,” at the Electric Palace, which began with an appeal by Gal-loy-way Calhoun and ended with one by Cone Johnson.17

By Christmas of 1917, Red Cross members were busy packing 300 boxes for soldiers training in Fort Worth and San Antonio. The boxes included homemade candy, cake, stuffed dates, figs, salted nuts, fruitcake, sweetened crackers, chewing gum, chocolates in tinfoil, nuts, khaki colored handkerchiefs, writing pads, pencils, envelopes, postcards, stamps, books, locally produced scrapbooks, Boy Scout type knives, checkerboard games, tobacco, mechanical puzzles, pipes, and water tight match boxes. The Red Cross also sponsored the first municipal Christmas tree in Tyler.18

Fundraising continued into 1918, with a Marvin Choir/Coterie Club benefit directed by Mrs. John Durst to raise funds to replace medical supplies lost when a transport ship was sunk. Both the Electric Palace and the Queen movie theatres offered benefit showings. In May the Red Cross held its own parade, with 150 members forming in line of march in front of the public library, with elderly lady knitters in automobiles. They were led around the square by several soldiers carrying a large U. S. flag, ending on the west side of the square with a drawing and auction. This kicked off yet another membership drive. Membership rose to 7571 persons, 3159 of those from the city of Tyler. The war fund drive published a quota of $11,000 and instead raised $17,000. The Tyler Commercial College building hosted a rummage and record sale, and Dixie Garage furnished a stand on the corner of North Broadway and Ferguson to collect old automobile tires and rubber hoses.19

In July 1918, the Smith County Red Cross published a report of its accomplishments. It had enrolled nearly eight thousand members, created three well equipped work rooms with nearly 300 women folding surgical dressings and more than that knitting. They were sending out two, sometimes three boxes of bandages a week. Seventeen boxes of knit garments had been sent out since December 1, 1917, over one thousand hospital garments, and 127,600 surgical dressings, “a prayer was interwoven with each dress.”20

But the next month the Tyler Red Cross commenced probably its most notable, or at least most noticeable, contribution to the cause—the canteen. Arkie Crutcher took control of this project, Mrs. Dabney White was assistant commandant, and Paulette Clay served as secretary. Lenora Woldert, Sallie Bell, and Mary Cox were considered “mothers of the canteen.” The wooden building, sixteen by sixteen feet, was located just fifteen feet west of the railroad depot. It had twelve windows all around, the exterior was painted gray, and it had a large red cross in the center of the roof. The interior was also painted gray, the windows had curtains, and there were built in lockers three feet wide along two sides. One of the remaining sides had the door and a bunk, and the other had a magazine rack and book cases. The canteen was furnished with brown wicker tea-wagon, tables and rockers. The floor was covered with brown linoleum and brown velvet rugs. All the necessary china, silverware, electric-percolator, sandwiches, fruit, candy, cigarettes, matches, postcards, stamps, papers, and magazines were kept in the hut as well as a first aid medicine cabinet. Several blocks south of the hut was a 50 by 100 feet building fitted up with a dining hall and kitchen, decorated with flags and bunting, with long rows of tables, chairs, dishes, etc., to serve one thousand people. A separate squad of workers signed up for each day. There were also provisions for sick soldiers who would be taken to King’s Daughter’s Hospital on the northwest corner of South College and West First. If possible, the canteen would get advance notice of the needs of a troop train coming through so that the Red Cross could be prepared. One such Special Troop Train, No. PD-375, came though on September 6 from St. Louis. The men were provided a chicken supper, ice cream, cake, apples, chicken salad, potato salad, pimento sandwiches, ham sandwiches, nut sandwiches, pickles, lemonade, ice tea, chewing gum, cigarettes, postcards, and stamps.21

World War I officially ended on November 11, 1918, but the armies did not disband and return home immediately. A few came home from Camp Stanley near San Antonio as early as December 8. On Christmas day, twenty-four men passing through were greeted at the canteen with a Christmas tree laden with “good things,” and stockings for each filled with candy, apples, oranges, and nuts, but no fireworks—"for they had had enough fireworks to last them the rest of their lives.” They were served fruit cake and ambrosia. In January the canteen served as many as fifty men a day, but averaged about two dozen. As their work slowed down, the women of the canteen adopted a French war orphan, François M. Crapel, thirteen years old.22

On June 14, 1919, the Tyler Red Cross canteen closed, after giving out 6,000 magazines, 30,000 sticks of gum, 24,000 sandwiches, 15,000 chocolate bars, 15,000 packages of cigarettes and matches, 1000 cigars, 100 pounds of tobacco, 15,000 postcards, 7,000 lunch-
es, 5,000 meals, 1,000 bushels of fruit, 1,000 pounds of candy, 300 gallons of coffee, 200 gallons of ice drinks, 100 gallons of ice cream, 1,000 cookies, doughnuts and pies, serving a total of 12,517 soldiers. June 14 was also the day that Company C, 133rd Machine Gun Battalion, based on Tyler’s National Guard unit, reached Tyler at 6 p.m. Shop whistles blew loud and long as the train left Troup, notifying business houses to close. As the train rolled into the Tyler station, all bells, car horns, shop and train whistles saluted the boys by blowing ten full minutes. Dozens of Junior Red Cross Girls, in white robes, bearing garlands and scattering flowers from golden baskets, made a pathway of roses upon which the soldiers tread as they marched toward the square. Lieut. Hendry dropped from his airplane hundreds of all colors of roses, on the heads of the heroes. J. W. Miller of the YMCA served as bandmaster of the 50-piece Cotton Belt Band, directed by “Doc” John F. Witt. They were followed by William Bostick, flag bearer, and Ed Tarbutton on a black horse leading the mounted police force and fire department. Major Louis S. Davidson of Dallas, in charge of the battalion, and Capt. Will Harrington, battalion adjutant came next. Immediately after them came “our beloved boys; God bless them, with heads erect and chests thrown out, these handsome brown clad men six hundred strong, marched with the ease and grace of the Generals of old to the stirring strains of ……… Dixie.” They marched up Spring Street and around the square, returning to the review stand. Henry Bryan Marsh officially welcomed them home, and then Doc Witt sounded “mess call.” All the soldiers filed to the east side of the courthouse plaza where fourteen tables forty feet in length, decorated with flowers, flags, and bunting groaned beneath their load of good things to eat. Beside each plate was placed a package of cigarettes, chewing gum, and a box of matches furnished by the canteen, as well as ten cent cigars donated by the Chamber of Commerce. The 133rd Machine Gun Battalion included some Native Americans from north of the Red River. One was reported to have said “Heap good feed at Tyler. Heap good people at Tyler. … Tyler is the best place on earth, except Oklahoma.”

By October, 1919, Arkie Crutcher had written up the history of the Red Cross work in Smith County during the war, and had sent one copy to St. Louis. They were very impressed. However, it was now time to figure out what the Red Cross would do locally during peace time. They moved into an extension of the Home Service program helping families of soldiers and sailors, helping returned soldiers, general family relief, and disaster relief. They were especially interested in maintaining community standards in physical and mental child care, assisting in health education, and improving working conditions. The local chapter hired Mary Ann Cross as civilian relief worker, and she suggested the hiring of a certified Red Cross community health nurse, which was done by 1921. They often worked through the schools and organized community classes.

Tyler Red Cross nurse Gertrude Brogan came home on August 12, 1919. She went on to work in several relief efforts stateside following floods and tornadoes. She also became the first woman to join the Favre Baldwin Chapter of American Legion Post No. 12 in Tyler. On April 21, 1932, Brogan died at the National Soldiers’ Home in Dayton, Ohio, after suffering a stroke three years previously. Her funeral mass was held at Immaculate Conception in Tyler, and, just as the returning soldiers had received, O. C. Palmer scattered roses from an airplane as the procession made its way down South Broadway to Rose Hill Cemetery. At the cemetery members of the Favre Baldwin Post of the American Legion conducted military services, and a volley was fired as the casket was lowered. She was honored with a military tombstone.
On July 23, 1949, Red Cross nurse Eunice Olive, formerly of Pine Springs community northeast of Tyler, died in a veterans hospital in Los Angeles. After the war she had been the first student in Baylor’s class in anesthesia, and she later worked as a private nurse. She is buried in Oakland Cemetery in Dallas.26

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Footnotes


7. “Tyler Women Doing Bit for Our Soldiers,” TDC-T, July 28, 1917, p. 8; American Red Cross, Smith County, Texas, Chapter [History of the Smith County Chapter, American Red Cross, (Tyler, Tex.: Red Cross, 1919), 24]; “Red Cross Canvass Planned,” TDC-T, August 2, 1917, p. 5.


12. “Bonner School Mothers’ Club Organize Red Cross Auxiliary,” TDC-T, April 1, 1918, p. 3; “Bonner School Red Cross Auxiliary Met,” TDC-T, April 8, 1918, p. 4; [History of the Smith County Chapter, American Red Cross, 27-29]; “Red Cross,” TDC-T, January 5, 1918, p. 4.


14. [History of the Smith County Chapter, American Red Cross, 30-33, 47-48]; “Red Cross,” TDC-T, January 5, 1918, p. 4.


19. “Marvin Choir Recital Red Cross Benefit,” TDC-T, February 19, 1918, p. 10; “Red Cross Drive,” TDC-T, May 10, 1918, p. 1; “Red Cross Parade Was Imposing Affair,” TDC-T, May 13, 1918, p. 5; “Important Red Cross Meeting Was Held Last Evening,” TDC-T, July 2, 1918, p. 5; [History of the Smith County Chapter, American Red Cross, 51].

20. “Summary of Work Done by Tyler Chapter, Red Cross,” TDC-T, July 13, 1918, p. 5.

21. “Red Cross Canteen Being Erected in Tyler at Union Station,” TDC-T, August 29, 1918, p. 5; “Tyler R. C. Canteen Famous
Far and Near,” TDC-T, October 11, 1919, p. 8; “Fame of Tyler, Texas, Canteen is Widespread,” Important Items (September 1, 1919), p. 5; Jones, 335-336; [History of the Smith County Chapter, American Red Cross, 53-54]; Digital Sanborn Maps, Tyler, Texas, August 1919, Sheet 5; “Local Red Cross Chapter Served 600 Soldiers with Lunch,” TDC-T, September 7, 1918, p. 8; “Tyler Red Cross Canteen Congratulated by Railway Official,” TDC-T, September 10, 1918, p. 4; “Soldiers Tell Folks at Home of Great Feed Given Them by Red Cross Canteen,” TDC-T, September 10, 1918, p. 7.


23. [History of the Smith County Chapter, American Red Cross, 58-62, 68]; “Fame of Tyler, Texas, Canteen is Widespread,” Important Items (September 1, 1919), p. 5.


25. “Military Rites for Miss Brogan to be Conducted,” Tyler Morning Telegraph, April 22, 1932, p. 11; “Roses Dropped from Airplane on Funeral Procession Here as Tribute to Miss Brogan,” Tyler Courier-Times-Telegraph, April 24, 1932, p. 7; Findagrave.com, Memorial #35853037.


(Top) Mrs. Frank Williams, Chairman of Junior Red Cross, 1917-1918.

(Bottom) Tyler Junior Red Cross group, "Busy for Belgium" History of the Smith County Chapter, American Red Cross.