

American Legion. Helen Fairchild Nurses Post No. 412

Records, 1919-1989

MC 39

Extent:

2.25 linear feet, 1 oversized map folder

Provenance:

American Legion. Helen Fairchild Nurses Post No. 412

Access:

This collection is unrestricted

Citation:

American Legion. Helen Fairchild Nurses Post No. 412 Records, Center for the Study of the History of Nursing, School of Nursing, University of Pennsylvania

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Historical Sketch. As the American Legion came into being in the years following World War I, a great number of nurses who had served overseas expressed interest in forming their own American Legion posts. Nurses posts became quite numerous; some of these took names which honored the bravery of American nurses who had been wounded or killed in the line of duty.

One such post, the Helen Fairchild Nurses Post #412 (hereafter referred to as the "Post"), was named for a graduate of the Pennsylvania Hospital School of Nursing, who was one of the contingent of nurses that accompanied the American Expeditionary Force (AEF). Serving at Base Hospital #10 in France, Fairchild fell prey to a poison gas attack and died soon after, on January 18, 1918. Upon their return to the states, some of the other Base 10 nurses founded Nurses Post #412 in Philadelphia, and named it in Fairchild's honor.

The first meeting of this post was held at the Frankford Hospital on October 14, 1919. The Post was chartered a year later, on October 15, 1920. Membership grew rapidly from 200 in the first year to 386 in 1926. Meetings of the Post were initially held at various area hospitals. During the 1920s, the Post was headquartered in the Third Regiment Armory, before locating more permanently to the Central YMCA on Arch Street in 1934. For a number of years, the Post met either at the Arch Street YMCA or in the Philadelphia County Council Building.

Unfortunately, many of the Post's pre-1947 records were destroyed in a fire, and thus little information survives for the period from 1931-1947. In 1947, membership was hovering around the upper 300s - it reached a peak of 421 at the end of 1948. It was during this period - the decades of the 1940s and 1950s - that the number of activities sponsored by the Post also reached its height. The Post was very active in the community: during the holiday season, the members demonstrated their generosity by providing food, clothing, and toys to needy families and children. In the winter months, the Post sponsored a student nurse basketball league, which pitted teams from area hospital training schools against one another. League play culminated in a championship in the spring, with the championship trophy provided by the Post. The league, which was begun by members of the Post in 1931, was in existence for fifty years before a lack of interest caused it to fold.

The Helen Fairchild Nurses Post also provided a number of awards and scholarships. The Elizabeth Weaver Scholarship, in the amount of \$250, was awarded to a needy and deserving student attending the school which won the cheerleaders contest (held at the same time as the basketball championship). Each summer, the Post sponsored a high-school-aged boy to go to Keystone Boy's State, a camp-like program run by the American Legion designed to teach Americanism, government, leadership, and the like. At the end of each school year, the Post presented American Legion Awards to two students at the George Thomas Junior High School, one to a boy, one to a girl. These awards and scholarships helped to make the Helen Fairchild Nurses Post and the American Legion quite prominent in the community.

Remembrance of fallen comrades has traditionally been a very important mission of the Fairchild Post, as well as the American Legion in general. To this end, the Post planned ceremonies to honor them each Memorial Day weekend. The Sunday before Memorial Day,

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members of the Post would help decorate graves in the Mt. Moriah cemetery, along with members of the William T. Shetzline Post. On Memorial Day itself, the Post would hold memorial services at Pennsylvania Hospital, where there was a tree dedicated to the memory of Helen Fairchild. Armistice Day (Veterans Day) was celebrated by a banquet which was usually well attended.

The last two decades have been a period of decline for the Post. It was on the strength of the WWI veterans that the Post (and the American Legion) was founded, and it was through the combined efforts of veterans from both world wars that the Post reached its summit. Thus, as these members who had been so instrumental to the success of the Post grew older, and became unable to participate as fully in outside activities, the Post began to lose much of its former vigor.

Without a large influx of new veterans, the Helen Fairchild Nurses Post (and, indeed, the American Legion in general) was forced to scale down its scope of activities. In the 1970s, the number of meetings per year were cut down to six. In 1981, this number was reduced further, to four. The Federal Post building, where the Fairchild Post had been meeting since the 1960s, was sold, and the members of the Post again had to use hospitals and other smaller venues as sites for their meetings. Membership declined in a slow but steady manner, from 303 at the end of 1966 to 102 at the end of 1987.

Summary. This collection documents one of the largest and most active American Legion nurses posts: the Helen Fairchild Nurses Post No. 412 of Philadelphia. In its heyday, the Fairchild Post engaged in a multitude of community activities, and enjoyed a large membership base. These files provide a glimpse of the long and eventful history of the Post, beginning in 1919 and continuing to 1989.

The office files, especially the newsletters and meeting minutes, give a fairly complete description of the organizational makeup of the Post (despite some considerable gaps). In addition, they catalog a number of the activities sponsored by the Post. The members files, on the other hand, paint a more intimate picture of the Post and its members, being made up, as they are, of various personal effects. Clippings and photographs complement these files to provide a well-rounded view of the Post.

Series Description. This collection has been arranged into five series:

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|-------------|---|
| Series I. | Office Files, 1919-1989 |
| Series II. | Members Files, 1910-1985 |
| Series III. | Clippings, 1920-1978 |
| Series IV. | Photographs, 1913-1980 |
| Series V. | World War I Register of Pennsylvania Nurses, 1941 |

Series I. Office Files, 1919-1989. The series includes Post newsletters from 1947 to 1989, but by no means should this be considered a complete set. The newsletters provided Post members with information on upcoming meetings and other Post events, but also served as a

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forum for disseminating general information on members, items of interest, etc. During its height, the Fairchild Post sent out 10 to 12 newsletters per year, but this number has decreased in the time since the late sixties. The newsletters were an important tool in reaching all of the members of the Post, since only a fraction attended meetings regularly.

Also contained in this series are Post meeting minutes from a fifteen-year period between 1971 and 1986. Except for 1971, the minutes for each year represent a complete record of the meetings held during the given year. It should be noted, however, that the Post often did not hold regular meetings during the summer months.

The series includes correspondence, both general and related to specific topics, such as awards and scholarships. There are also events files, which contain general information and correspondence pertaining to certain events sponsored by the Post. There are a number of other, smaller items. A financial ledger dating from the 1920s has survived, and provides a somewhat different insight into the workings of the Post. A list of officers, committee members, and convention delegates for the years 1919 to 1966 is included, though because of its size (6 feet long, accordionated) it has been placed in a flat file. General information on the American Legion, the Helen Fairchild Nurses Post, and the history of the Post has been collected; these files, however, are much more miscellaneous and fragmentary in nature. Other items in the series include an operations manual for incoming Post adjutants, programs from annual Post banquets, citations garnered by the Post over the years, and membership records of the Post, consisting of 4 by 6 inch information cards, one (or more) for each member.

Series II. Members Files, 1910-1985. This series provides a different look at the members of the Fairchild Post than can be obtained through the office files series. It contains a number of personal effects of Post members, from a journal to poetry to correspondence. In addition, there are a couple of personal documents of former members, such as an RN certificate and a passport certificate issued by the American embassy in London to nurses who were attached to the AEF. Short biographies of individual members are included; these too are useful in studying the history of the Post. In all, though there is less inherent organization in this series (as compared to the first), it is nevertheless valuable in getting a true feel for the rich history of the Post.

Series III. Clippings, 1920-1978. A very small series consisting of one file, this includes clippings taken from local (Philadelphia and Pennsylvania) newspapers and magazines, the oldest dating from the 1940s. Most pertain directly to the Fairchild Nurses Post and Post-related activities, but a few are more general.

Series IV. Photographs, 1913-1980. Most of the photos in this series are of a more informal nature. There are a small number of photographs which relate to the American involvement in World War I, most notably one of Helen Fairchild's gravesite, and another which may have been taken at her funeral. The bulk of the photos, however, pertain to the many activities which the Fairchild Nurses Post either sponsored or was involved in. For instance, there are as number of photos taken at awards ceremonies (especially for the basketball championships),

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as well as photos taken at other Post functions. There are also quite a few photographs of Post members, particularly from the early days of the Post. These photos provide a unique view of the collection, one which cannot be achieved by the rest of the material alone.

Series V. World War I Register of Pennsylvania Nurses, 1941. This series contains a listing of Pennsylvania nurses who served in World War I, along with their addresses and military histories (as compiled by the Helen Fairchild Nurses Post in the late 1930's). As noted in the introduction to this roster, the listing includes both nurses who graduated from training schools in state, and those who graduated from schools outside of Pennsylvania, but enlisted from Pennsylvania. Over 325 pages long and six years in the making, the roster was designed to be as complete as possible. The Post was aided in this task by the numerous hospitals in the state, as well as such groups as Alumni Associations and various regional nursing associations. The end result, which was complete as of January 25, 1941, was used by Roberta Mayhew West in her *History of Nursing in Pennsylvania*.

Series I. Office Files

Box 1

	Newsletters
f.1	1947-48
f.2	1965-67 (not inclusive)
f.3	1973, 1974, 1978, 1980-84, 1985-89
	Minutes
f.4	1971 (Sept.-Dec.)
f.5	1972
f.6	1973
f.7	1974
f.8	1975
f.9	1976
f.10	1977
f.11	1978
f.12	1979
f.13	1980
f.14	1981
f.15	1982
f.16	1983
f.17	1984
f.18	1985
f.19	1986
ffile5/f.1	List of officers, committee members, convention delegates 1919-66
f.20	Post 412, membership
f.21	Post 412, financial ledger

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- f.22 Post 412, operations manual
- Events
- f.23 Memorial Day, general
- f.24 Memorial Day, correspondence
- f.25 Plaque Dedication, general
- f.26 Plaque Dedication, correspondence
- f.27 Campaign for Fairchild Veterans Administration Medical Center
- Correspondence
- f.28 Post 412, general
- f.29 Elizabeth Weaver Scholarship
- f.30 Keystone Boy's State
- f.31 American Legion Awards
- f.32 Citations
- f.33 American Legion/Helen Fairchild Post, general
- f.34 History, Helen Fairchild Post
- f.35 Programs
- f.36 1927 American Legion Conference (Paris)
- box 3 Membership cards: World War I A-P
- box 4 Membership cards: World War I Q-Z; World War II A-Z

Series II. Members Files

Box 2

- f.1 Members, general
- f.2 Biographies, individual members
- f.3 Correspondence, Irene Matthews
- ffile5/f.1 RN certificate, Mary Robinson
- ffile5/f.1 Passport certificate, Amina Fuhrman

Series III. Clippings

- f.1 Clippings

Series IV. Photographs

- f.1 Paris parade 1918
- f.2 World War I Army Base, related photos
- f.3 Helen Fairchild, funeral? & gravesite
- f.4 Johnstown parade 1926
- f.5 Paris, Second AEF parade 1927
- f.6 Graduation, Pennsylvania Hospital
- f.7 Post members
- f.8 Basketball championship awards
- f.9 Awards ceremonies
- f.10 Gravestones, Post members
- f.11 Memorial dedication ceremony
- f.12 Post function

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f.13 Post 412, displays
f.14 Miscellaneous photos
box 5 Rolled photographs

Series V. World War I Register of Pennsylvania Nurses, 1941.

f.1 Typescript

Box 3

Membership cards: World War I A-P

Box 4

Membership cards: World War I Q-Z; World War II A-Z

Box 5

Rolled photographs

Flat File 5

f.1 List of officers, committee members, convention delegates, 1919-66
f.1 RN certificate, Mary Robinson
f.1 Passport certificate, Amina Fuhrman