

CHARLOTTE CHAPTER, AMERICAN WAR MOTHERS COLLECTION, 1926-1991

4 document boxes, 8 flat boxes (6.8 cu. ft.)

ABSTRACT

The American War Mothers organization was founded in September 1917, developed a constitution and by-laws in August 1918, and was granted a Congressional charter on February 24, 1925. The purpose of this organization was for mothers of young men and women at risk during World War I, to engage in patriotic service to those serving their country. At the time, their membership was strictly limited to mothers whose sons and daughters served between April 6, 1917 and November 11, 1918. Among their missions, these women led conservation efforts, and visited and assisted veterans and the families of those in service. They flew flags with a blue star in the middle; in the event of a death, a yellow star was sewn on top of it. Women who lost family members during the war developed their own organization later, named the American Gold Star Mothers.

The American War Mothers continue in their mission today, and have expanded their membership to include women who are United States citizens, and are mothers, step-mothers, and adoptive mothers whose sons and daughters served in any encounter involving the United States from World War I through all subsequent wars or conflicts, and who had an honorable discharge from service or are still in service. The collection included here is from the Charlotte Chapter of the American War Mothers, which was established in 1917.

This collection includes documents, negatives, scrapbooks, and artifacts.

ACCESS

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PREFERRED CITATION

Cite as: Charlotte Chapter, American War Mothers Collection, 1926-1991, Robinson-Spangler Carolina Room, Charlotte Mecklenburg Library

ACQUISITION

Processed by Hannah Cox, October 2015

HISTORICAL NOTE

The American War Mothers organization grew from a Presidential request for Americans to improve food production, conservation, and distribution, which would aid in the prosecution of World War I. In 1917, President Woodrow Wilson appointed Herbert Hoover to serve as National Food Administrator, and tasked him with supervising these efforts. Hoover in turn appointed a local administrator for each state to assist him. Initial calls for conservation went largely unheeded, as many Americans met the idea of such a need with skepticism. Governor Goodrich of Indiana met with Wilson's Indiana appointee, Dr. Harry E. Barnard, the State Council, and other interested organizations, to determine how they could foster interest in helping the war effort through food conservation. One attendee, Don Herold, from the State Office of Food Conservation, spoke up and said, "If the Mothers of men in service could be made to know the necessity staring the world in the face, food conservation programs would be solved." He further suggested that the mothers in question, or "War Mothers," could be quickly mobilized. The call went out to the Women's Civic League in July 1917. Alice M. French, a committee member of the Civic League, agreed to help plan the appeal to each county in the state, asking for the selection of a "County War Mother" to take charge of efforts. Dr. Barnard sent copies of Mrs. French's letters to Herbert Hoover. Hoover requested that Mrs. French lead the Indiana war mothers, and she consented on September 29th, which became known as the "Founders Day" of the American War Mothers. The movement quickly caught on, and the Indiana chapter of the American War Mothers was incorporated on May 18, 1918, with 72 members.

Shortly after its incorporation, a conference was called for August 1918 in Indiana. Mrs. French sent letters asking that a State War Mother from each of the 48 states be appointed as a delegate to the conference. At the conference on August 16, the national organization of American War Mothers was effected, along with the adoption of a constitution and by-laws, and election of national officers. The organization received its Congressional Charter on February 24, 1925. Initial membership was limited to the mothers whose sons or daughters served in the Armed Forces between April 6, 1917 and November 11, 1918. This was later amended to include mothers whose children served in any conflict involving Americans. Further amendments allowed for the inclusion of mothers of adopted and step-children as well.

The American Gold Star Mothers eventually branched off from the American War Mothers. During World War I, women flew flags with a blue star in the middle for each family member serving overseas. If a relative died, a gold star was sewn on top of the blue one. This group of women was recognized as representing a separate entity from the American War Mothers, and the American Gold Star Mothers organization was incorporated on January 5, 1929. As with the American War Mothers, the Gold Star Mothers' membership was initially limited, but was later amended to include all American conflicts, and all mothers of children killed during these conflicts.

The North Carolina chapter of the American War Mothers was organized by a Mrs. Patterson, in December 1920. The Charlotte chapter was initially known as the War Mothers Club, and was organized in 1917. The mothers, along with Rev. Spaugh, met weekly at the home of Mrs. J. Warren Roark and other members, to pray for their sons

overseas. This prayer club once had over 450 members. The Charlotte Chapter American War Mothers was formally organized in August 1920. The charter officers were Mrs. Hugh Montgomery, President; Mrs. W.E. Younts, First Vice President; Mrs. L.D. Whitsett, Second Vice President; Mrs. J.H. Wearn, Treasurer; Mrs. W.O. Nesbit, Historian; and Mrs. J. Warren Roark, Secretary.

The Charlotte American War Mothers were active in numerous ways. Along with other chapters in the state, they helped maintain a Guest House at Oteen, North Carolina, which provided housing for soldier's relatives at a nominal fee during the soldier's recovery at the Oteen V.A. Hospital. Like many of their sisters across America, members also participated in fund-raising activities, visited and corresponded with disabled and shut-in veterans as well as those overseas, held Memorial and Veterans Day services which included placing flags and flowers on graves, participated in V.A. Hospital parties and other events held there, and donated money and time to help veterans and their families in need.

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RELATED MATERIALS

History—20th Century—World War II (1939-1945)—Gold Star Mothers Project. (CALL NUMBER: NCR VERTICAL FILES)

Robinson-Spangler Carolina Room Staff. *Gold Star Veterans: Veterans Who Died in World War II: Mecklenburg County*. Charlotte, NC: Public Library of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County, 2000. (CALL NUMBER: NCR 929.3756c M43m 1939 v. 1-4) Also available online at: <http://www.cmstory.org/content/gold-star-veterans-introduction>

United States War Department. *Pilgrimage for the Mothers and Widows of Soldiers, Sailors, and Marines of the American Forces Now Interred in the Cemeteries of Europe as Provided by the Act of Congress of March 2, 1929*. Washington, D.C.: G.P.O., 1930. (CALL NUMBER: NCR 940.468 OVERSIZE)

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The American War Mothers Collection consists primarily of materials belonging to the Charlotte Chapter, however there are some items from other North Carolina chapters, as well as North Carolina State and National levels, and some related veteran organizations' materials. The collection spans from 1926-1991, with the bulk encompassing materials from 1950-1986. The series consist of Chapters, State, National, Veterans, Negatives, Scrapbooks, and Artifacts.

Chapters, 1926-1986, includes reports from several of the American War Mothers chapters in North Carolina. The predominant chapter concerns items from the Charlotte chapter. Materials found within the Charlotte chapter include articles; certificates; correspondence; deeds for the Elmwood cemetery lots; financial records such as statements and tax returns; chapter histories; legal information such as permits; membership lists, applications, and rosters; meeting minutes; officer lists; program information; and reports from the various chapter committees.

State, 1950-1986, encompasses State Convention materials; correspondence; board meeting minutes; newsletters; lists of Presidents; program materials; and reports from various state committees.

National, 1957-1981, consists of National Convention materials; correspondence; price lists for emblems; financial information; a history of the American War Mothers organization; membership objectives; and amendment information.

Veterans, 1943, 1978, 1986, includes council minutes from a Charlotte veteran's organization, a service record of a veteran, and an anniversary book from the Salisbury, North Carolina, V.A. Hospital.

Negatives, undated, is comprised of one sheet of images that appear to be from either a Memorial or Veterans Day program.

Scrapbooks, 1957-1991, include eleven scrapbooks put together by the Charlotte Chapter American War Mothers. The materials within the scrapbooks consist of newspaper articles concerning the organization and its members, obituaries and memorial services, artifacts from a variety of events, greeting cards, and an assortment of additional materials.

Artifacts, undated, encompasses two small American flags, one sash, and an American War Mothers pin.

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