Collection #
P 0242
BV 2569-2569A

RUTH WRIGHT COPPEDGE
MATERIALS, 1913, 1917–1918, 1922, 1980

Collection Information

Biographical Sketch

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Processed by

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Manuscript and Visual Collections Department
William Henry Smith Memorial Library
Indiana Historical Society
450 West Ohio Street
Indianapolis, IN 46202-3269

www.indianahistory.org

COLLECTION INFORMATION

VOLUME OF COLLECTION:	1 folder of photographs 1 panoramic photograph under glass, OVB storage box 2 bound volumes 6 artifacts
COLLECTION DATES:	1913, 1917–1918, 1922, 1980
PROVENANCE:	Elizabeth Stephens, Louisville, Kentucky, 1990; Helen Bridwell, Indianapolis, Indiana, 2008
RESTRICTIONS:	None
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ALTERNATE FORMATS:	
RELATED HOLDINGS:	Hitz Family Papers, 1917–1951 (M0997)
ACCESSION NUMBER:	1990.0174, 2008.0139, 2008.0139a
NOTES:	

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Ruth Wright Coppedge was among the first group of Indiana nurses to go to Europe during World War I. Originally from Rochester, Indiana, Ruth was employed as a nurse at Methodist Hospital in Indianapolis when war was declared in 1917. She was inducted into the US Army and left Indianapolis in September, 1917 with the Eli Lilly Base Hospital 32. The hospital, outfitted by the Eli Lilly & Co. and the Indianapolis Chapter of the Red Cross, was staffed with volunteer physicians, surgeons, and nurses to serve overseas during the war.

The women nurses spent ten weeks training at Columbia War Hospital in New York City and St. Mary's Hospital in Hoboken, New Jersey. Ruth recalled that on October 8, 1917 the group along with other Red Cross members marched in a New York parade with John Phillip Sousa's band.

Before embarking for Europe they were transferred to Ellis Island where they received their orders and in December boarded the ship *George Washington* bound for France. The trip to France took seventeen days. Upon arriving in France, the group boarded a train to Contrexéville where the group set up a military hospital.

During her stay in France Ruth was transferred several places, sometimes very close to the front where there were nightly air raids. She worked in the shock wards and often lived in tents. At the time Armistice was declared she was stationed in Verenz. After the Armistice she went to Germany to take over a Catholic hospital and was there from December 1917 to June 1918. In May 1919 Ruth returned home to Rochester, Indiana to the home of her parents, Mr. and Mrs. William Wright.

She then returned to work at the Methodist Hospital in Indianapolis and later worked in hospitals in Arizona, New Mexico, and California. While in California Ruth met and married Dr. Walter Coppedge in 1934. After his death in 1935 she moved to Naperville and Maywood, Illinois where she continued her nursing career.

After working forty years as a nurse she retired in 1955 at the age of 62 while at Maywood, Illinois. She returned to Rochester, Indiana to live with her sister Rena Wright, a retired high school teacher. Ruth died there in January 1986.

Sources:

Materials in collection

www.wwvets.com/BaseHospital32.html

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The collection is comprised of a newspaper article, photographs, two diaries, pins and chevron patches, and one printed book.

The photographs show Ruth Wright Coppedge in her nurses uniform, and group shots of her and the other nurses with the Eli Lilly Base Hospital during their training in New York before going overseas to France.

Ruth's diary, dated September 6, 1917 to April 2, 1918, contains her experiences as an Army nurse while traveling from Indianapolis to New York then to France. In her diary she does not say very much about her work with patients in France. The newspaper article interview with her from 1980 gives more information on her work with patients than the diary.

The other diary entitled "My Trip Abroad" details a voyage to Europe with friends dated June 15, 1913 to August 17 1913. The handwriting is different from the 1917–18 war diary. There is no name found in the diary but it was acquired by the donor at the same time as Ruth's WWI diary and it is assumed it was written by her.

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CONTENTS	CONTAINER
"Ruth Coppedge first nurse to go overseas in W.W. I" *The Sentinel* Rochester, Ind. Monday, June 2, 1980	Photographs: Folder 1
Formal portrait of Ruth Wright in nurses uniform	Photographs: Folder 1
Snapshot of Ruth Wright in her nurses uniform at St. Mary's Hospital, 1917	Photographs: Folder 1
Snapshot of Ruth Wright and other Methodist Hospital nurses on Ellis island in their Army nurse uniforms, October 1917	Photographs: Folder 1
Panoramic photo of Ruth Wright and other nurses in Army nurse uniforms before going to France, 1917 [photograph was unframed but is stuck to the glass]	Glass Storage: OVB size box
Diary September 6, 1917–April 2, 1918	BV 2569
Diary June 15–August 17, 1913	BV 2569A
2 sleeve chevron patches	Artifacts: 2008.0139a
"U.S." pin	Artifacts: 2008.0139a
"U.S.N.A." pin	Artifacts: 2008.0139a
2 "C.N.A." caduceus pins	Artifacts: 2008.0139a
A History of Base Hospital 21 (including Unit R) edited by Benjamin D. Hitz	General Collection: D629.U8 F65 1922