

Franklin County Red Cross Nurses Who Lost Their Lives in the First World War

By Suellen Burkey

HAMMOND, NURSE JOSEPHINE

GOOD, NURSE MOTTIE

IRWIN, NURSE KATHERINE P.

MATTHEWS, NURSE FLORENCE

MILLER, NURSE LYDIA E.

MINICK, NURSE MARY E.

Women's names as they are inscribed on the Franklin County World War I Monument in Chambersburg

At the "East Point" in Chambersburg---where Route 30 splits into westbound Lincoln Way and eastbound East Queen Street---in front of a building which was once a fire station, stands an old statue which most people probably drive past without noticing. An inscription on the monument reads "The Spirit of the American Doughboy." One could find such a monument being erected in many towns across the country in the decades after the war; 134 of them are documented as still surviving. They were mass-produced by E.M. Viquesney and sold in a country mourning the loss and commemorating the bravery of those who fell in the "War to End All Wars."¹

Chambersburg's Doughboy monument was dedicated on November 11, 1923, on the fifth anniversary of the Armistice. It was funded by public donations raised by the editor of the local newspaper and handed over ceremoniously to the care of the Burt J. Asper American Legion Post Number 46.² On the base of the statue is a bronze plaque inscribed "To the Memory of the Men and Women of Franklin County Who Gave Their Lives in the World War." Listed among the eight-six names are those of six

women as noted above. With each of the six names is the simple description: "nurse." All six served with the American Red Cross, and four of them were victims of the very thing they were trying to combat, the Spanish Influenza epidemic of 1918.

The United States declared war on Germany on April 6, 1917, but the country was not well prepared for what was to come. There had been political resistance to the war and a popular desire to stay out of the European conflict until provocation from the Germans and encouragement from the British finally led to the reversal of President Woodrow Wilson's policy of neutrality. The standing United States Army and National Guard were small in number compared to the forces fighting in Europe. The supply and support lines for the troops needed to be put in place before United States involvement in the conflict would have a significant impact on the battlefield. This would include recruiting nurses, and a drive to do so was initiated by the American Red Cross.

At the start of the war, there were 98,000 trained nurses in the United States. The Red Cross called for one quarter of them to serve in the war effort. Of a total of 24,000 American Red Cross nurses who eventually served, 12,500 of them--a little over half--remained at American Army bases and were not sent overseas.³ In addition to American Red Cross nurses, there were 21,000 nurses serving directly with the Army and 1,386 with the U.S. Navy.⁴ Two hundred ninety-six nurses died in service during the war, most of them from influenza.⁵ Given its rural location, Franklin County's contribution to this part of the war effort is significant.

Prior to the First World War, the Red Cross had concentrated on public education in first aid, water safety, and public health services. The American branch of the organization had been chartered in 1881 by renowned Civil War nurse Clara Barton. In 1914 there were 107 chapters across the country, swelling to 3,864 chapters by 1918. The U.S. troops deployed to France needed to be trained as soldiers. There were new recruits, and even more new men who came from the universal military service conscription that was put in place. These recruits were sent to training camps all over the country. These camps eventually had the capacity to train tens of thousands of troops, and these camps needed nursing staff. The Red Cross staffed hospitals and ambulance companies at home and in France where they not only supported Allied troops but aided refugees.⁶

Requirements for American Red Cross nurses were rigorous. There were restrictions on age, height, weight, training, and familial connections. All applicants were to be single, between the ages of twenty-five and thirty-five, though this restriction was broadened by the end of the war to admit both younger and older women. Applicants had to be in good health and capable of hard physical work. They were to have no relatives serving in the United States Army or Navy, stateside or overseas, or any German or Austrian relatives. They must have graduated from an accredited nursing school with a two-year residency and worked in a hospital with at least 100 beds

which cared for male patients. In addition, they were required to hold a membership in at least one of the nursing organizations affiliated with the American Nursing Association. Knowledge of French was considered a plus for those being sent overseas. The volunteer nurses signed a two-year contract and were expected to go wherever they were sent. They received vaccinations against smallpox and inoculations against typhoid and paratyphoid. Each nurse was issued a kit in a duffle bag and allowed one piece of personal luggage.⁷

In addition to the training of nurses, the Red Cross also accepted volunteer Nurses' Aides. They were required to train in specific American Red Cross courses on elementary hygiene and home care of the sick.⁸ The Army also opened a training school for military nurses at the Walter Reed Medical Center in Washington, D.C. The requirements there were only that the women be between the ages of nineteen and thirty-five and possess a high school diploma.⁹

One of the first Franklin County applicants in the Red Cross program was an experienced nurse who had served with the organization in military training camps as well as at the Walter Reed Army Hospital. Miss Mottie Good came from a farming family near Waynesboro, Pennsylvania. Her parents were Christian Welty Good and Leah Keefer Stouffer Good. She had one brother and five sisters. While she did not die of war-related causes (she died of cancer) she was honored as a war casualty. Her obituary, from the *History of American Red Cross Nursing* notes her extensive service at U.S. Army bases:

Mottie Good died 25 September 1918 at Walter Reed Hospital in Washington, D.C.

Mottie, class of 1907, Garfield Hospital, Washington DC, died from carcinoma. Burial was at her home in Waynesville [sic] PA. Miss Good served for six months at Fort Sam Houston and for more than a year at Camp Sevier. She was a member of the Graduate Nurses' Association of DC and had long been active in nursing affairs.¹⁰

Fort Sam Houston was one of the largest and most well-established military bases at the time of the first World War. It had served as the base for United States military action against Pancho Villa's rebels in Mexico in 1916 with troops led by its then-commander Brigade General John Pershing who was soon to be placed in charge of the American Expeditionary Force (AEF) sent to France.¹¹ It is not documented, but from the obituary above it seems likely that Mottie Good was indeed serving at Fort Sam Houston during the time of the Mexican border action. She then spent a year at Camp Sevier, in Greenville County, South Carolina. Unlike Fort Sam Houston,

Camp Sevier was built specifically for the training of World War I troops. It opened in 1917 and was closed and dismantled in 1919.¹² Mottie Good is buried with her family in the graveyard at Price's Church of the Brethren, a few miles northwest of Waynesboro along US Route 316. Her footstone has a bronze Red Cross insignia on it and reads simply, "Mottie." There is a World War One veteran's marker by the grave.

The next four women have some things in common: they did not go overseas and all died of the Spanish Flu. Nurses were desperately needed in stateside training camps. The camps were vectors for spreading disease, which killed these four women in October of 1918. This epidemic is the almost-forgotten other tragedy of the period. There are various theories as to why it was termed the "Spanish Flu." The most plausible seems to be that it was named due to an outbreak of the same virus in Barcelona, Spain, in 1888. Another theory holds that the Spanish government did not censor its casualty figures from flu during the war as did the other combatant countries, which made it appear that Spain had a higher casualty rate. Whether it was called "influenza," "Spanish Flu," or simply, "La Grippe," it was devastating.¹³

And it came at the end of the war, wreaking havoc even after the cease-fire in November of 1918. The worldwide death toll from the flu epidemic of 1918-1919 has been estimated as high as 50 million. The United States death toll was estimated at 675,000 and the disease was responsible for half of the American military casualties of the war.¹⁴ The worst outbreak in the U.S. started in Massachusetts in September 1918 and lasted until the end of that year. It was probably spread by troops arriving back from Europe through the port of Boston. One of the Army bases hardest hit was Camp Devens in Shirley, Massachusetts.¹⁵ There was no effective treatment for the virus; either it killed you or it did not. Most victims actually died from pneumonia, the secondary infection that followed the influenza. Various ineffectual and sometimes slightly outrageous treatments were tried, but mostly people resorted to very large doses of aspirin.¹⁶

Franklin County suffered a major outbreak of Spanish flu in the fall of 1918 along with the rest of the country. There were 3,000 documented cases of Spanish flu in the county with 103 reported casualties. There were quarantines of schools, cancellations of public meetings, and closings of churches, theaters and bars. On November 14, 1918, an article appeared in the Chambersburg *Public Opinion* titled "When the Plague Came to Town," which mentioned three Red Cross nurses:

None of the non-professional nurses were beckoned by the white messenger which they were combatting, but 3 professional nurses of the town answered the last call, victims of influenza.

On October 13, Miss Mary Minnick, a graduate of the Chambersburg Hospital, died at Camp Devens, where she had been sent as an army nurse.

On October 18, Miss Florence Matthews, who as a visiting and dispensary nurse of the state health department had done a big, fine work as a visiting nurse, died in the hospital at Chester where she had been sent to help fight the plague.

On October 20, Miss Lydia E. Miller made the supreme sacrifice. She was a graduate of the Chambersburg hospital but had entered office work at the Cumberland Valley Railroad because her strength was not sufficient for the arduous tasks of a nurse. When the call came from Camp Colt, Miss Miller volunteered and while nursing the soldier boys she was stricken.¹⁷

At 24, Mary Minnick was the youngest of the three nurses from Chambersburg. She served at Camp Devens, one of the hardest-hit spots in the country during the influenza epidemic.¹⁸ Her obituary notice in the October 14, 1918, *Public Opinion* tells her story:

MISS MARY MINNICK

A graduate nurse of the Chambersburg Hospital, Miss Mary Minnick of Stoufferstown, who volunteered for army service and was accepted by the Red Cross. Being recently called to service at Camp Devens, Massachusetts, died yesterday at the base hospital where she had been stricken by influenza a few days ago. Her father Strauss Minnick was notified of the illness on Saturday morning and soon afterwards left for her bedside.

Miss Minnick after graduating from the training school for nurses here, acted as an assistant superintendent of the local hospital, until she resigned a few months ago to enter the service. Until she was called to duty she was engaged in private nursing.

She was a member of the United Brethren Church and was a competent nurse. Her only sister Miss Eliza Minnick is very ill at the Chambersburg Hospital. Her parents, Mr. and Mrs. Strauss Minnick and her sister Eliza survive.

Mary is buried in the Norland Cemetery in the family gravesite with a grandmother and her sister Eliza. The graves of her parents Strauss P. and Annie Alexander Minnick are beside them. Eliza also was a victim of the Spanish flu in December of 1918. She was employed by Nicklas Brothers, a local furniture company, as a stenographer and

had been bedridden since July 1918 with “nervous trouble,” but the cause of death was influenza.¹⁹

The next nurse from Chambersburg was 38-year-old Lydia E. Miller, or as her name appears in some of the Red Cross records, E. Lydia Miller. Miss Miller was born in Chambersburg in 1880. Her parents, Conrad and Margaret, were German-born, so the American Red Cross regulation barring nurses with German relatives seems to have been relaxed as the war went on and the need for trained nurses increased. Lydia signed up for Red Cross duty during the height of the epidemic at Camp Colt in Gettysburg, which opened in March 1918 as a training base for the Army Tank Corps. Its commander was a young Major Dwight D. Eisenhower. At its peak, Camp Colt had 10,600 officers and men. On September 30, 1918, it was put under a general quarantine due to an influenza outbreak. Total flu casualties were 150.²⁰ One of these was Nurse Lydia Miller. Her obituary from the *Public Opinion* of October 21, 1918, tells the sad tale:

Miss Lydia E. Miller, a trained nurse, died last evening at 9:30 at her home on Lincoln Way East after a short illness following an attack of flu. Miss Miller had accepted a position with the Cumberland Valley Railroad but gave up this work two weeks ago to go to Camp Colt to nurse when the influenza epidemic broke out there. She returned home on Tuesday of last week having contracted the disease before her return. Miss Miller was a member of St. John's Church and an excellent nurse. She is survived by her mother Mrs. Conrad Miller and three brothers and sisters, Mrs. Elmer Isenberger of town, Mrs. W.W. Crowe of New Cumberland and Harry Miller of Waynesboro.²¹

Miller's Pennsylvania death certificate listed the cause of death as “Bronchial Pneumonia, with “Contributory Causes” given as “Influenza Epidemic.” She is interred in the mausoleum at Norland Cemetery in Chambersburg.²²

The fourth nurse named on the monument was Miss Mary Florence Matthews. She was born in 1870 and her family lived on South Main Street. Her parents were Alfred and Sarah Matthews and she had one sister and a brother who died as a young man. She served during the war at the Crozer Hospital in Chester, Pennsylvania. The Crozer Hospital still exists and is part of a major medical group in suburban Philadelphia. At the time of the First World War it was located near a naval base, shipyards, and an airfield as well as several major munitions plants.²³ Thus while it was not specifically a military facility, many military patients ended up there. Philadelphia was also one of the areas hardest hit by the epidemic, with influenza spreading into military installations and the city via ships at the Port of Philadelphia. From that entrance point in September of 1918, it seems to have spread across the state.²⁴

Here is Miss Matthews' obituary, from the *Public Opinion*, October 19, 1918:

HAVE ANSWERED THE CALL OF DEATH. MISS FLORENCE
MATTHEWS

Miss Florence Matthews, State Health Department nurse, died yesterday morning at 6 o'clock in the Crozer Hospital, Chester, where she had been sent to help combat the epidemic of influenza and to which she fell a victim. She was 47 years old.

Mrs. W.C. McGowen, her sister, and her only close relative, was at her bedside. She was a daughter of the late Mr. and Mrs. A.A. Matthews of this place and was a member of the Episcopal Church. The remains will be brought here for burial.

Miss Matthews for years did a big, fine work as visiting nurse in this county. Because it is the policy of the state health department not to seek publicity for its workers, and because Miss Matthews did not care to let her right hand know what her left hand did, her works were given small notice.

But week in and week out, Miss Matthews went about doing good. As visiting nurse for the state tuberculosis dispensary, she had to minister unto all kinds of homes. Some of the inmates were suspicious, others openly hostile to the approved methods of battling consumption, but with rare diplomacy, tact, and kindness, and after her first few visits, her coming was welcomed.

Not only did she instill in her patients the efficacy of her theories, but she also instilled in the households with utility of practice. When she would find a new patient living in filth, she would not only preach cleanliness but she would practice it, herself getting busy with broom and brush. In not infrequent occasions, Miss Matthews' advent to some homes---especially among the ignorant of the mountain sections---was met with attempts at physical ejection, but she was as brave as she was thorough and never did she retreat. Nearly always her cheery smile and word won the confidence of the people with whom she was dealing. Her heart was in her work and she literally burned herself out in caring for the sick and miserable, not only

during the present epidemic, but for years past, her life was devoted to helping the unfortunate.²⁵

Florence Matthews is buried in Cedar Grove Cemetery, Chambersburg, beside her mother and brother.

The youngest of our Franklin County Red Cross nurse heroines was Josephine Hammond.

She came from Path Valley and had just graduated from nursing school in Pittsburgh when the influenza epidemic broke out. She is listed as an influenza casualty in an American Red Cross publication from 1920 entitled "Civilian Nurses Who Offered Their Services to the Military Establishment during the Epidemic."²⁶ She trained at the Elizabeth Magee Maternity Hospital in the Oakland section of Pittsburgh. This hospital was leased to the US Army in late 1918 and was used for treatment of flu victims from Camp Meade in Virginia.²⁷ It still exists as a part of the healthcare system of the University of Pittsburgh.

An excerpt from an article on the epidemic in the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* October 21, 1918, entitled "Death Toll Is Increased," tells her story:

Miss Josephine Hammond, aged 22, a nurse in the Magee Hospital, which is now used entirely for caring for soldiers ill with influenza, died of the disease yesterday, a martyr to duty. Miss Hammond was a graduate of the Magee Training School and 10 days ago she volunteered for duty in the hospital. A week ago she was stricken and did not rally. Her home was in Chambersburg, Pa. and her father, who had been in the city several days, took her body there last night for burial.²⁸

Hammond's family lived near Fannettsburg, Pennsylvania, not Chambersburg as the newspaper stated, and she was buried with other family members in the Spring Run Cemetery, by the Spring Run Presbyterian Church. Josephine's parents were Philip Hammond and Annie Shearer Hammond and she had two brothers and four sisters.²⁹

The sixth nurse named on the Franklin County Doughboy monument, Katherine Patterson Irwin, is something of a mystery, as she was not from Franklin County. She had a distinguished service record both as a civilian nurse before the war and as a Red Cross nurse. She was also the only nurse listed on the monument who served in France. Irwin was born in Dayton, Ohio, and later lived in various places including New Jersey, New Hampshire and Kentucky. There was a tenuous local connection: a great-grandmother, Elizabeth Lindsay, was born in the Falling Spring settlement, now

Chambersburg, in 1760. Lindsay married Colonel Robert Patterson from Bedford County who served in the American Revolution and they settled in Kentucky.³⁰

How did her name come to appear on the monument in Chambersburg? It may be that there were still some cousins living in the area and one of them may have requested her name be included. Nurse Irwin was famous in Red Cross history. She was the first American Red Cross nurse to die in service in France during the war.³¹

Irwin, or Kitty, as her friends and family called her, trained at a hospital in Patterson, New Jersey and worked for a time as staff nurse at the Phillips Exeter Academy in Exeter, New Hampshire, where her sister Sarah C. Irwin worked as the nurse matron. In 1916, she was back in New Jersey and employed as the night supervisor of the Patterson General Hospital. From there she volunteered for American Red Cross duty in 1916. She spent a year serving as a nurse at Fort Sam Houston in Texas, overlapping the service there of Mottie Good.³²

In April 1917 Irwin left for France from Lakewood, New Jersey, in charge of a group of Red Cross volunteers. Her first posting was at General Evacuation Hospital #1. She served there until April of 1918, then was posted in several mobile field hospitals and later sent to General Evacuation Hospital #2 in Bacarat in April 1918.³³ An undated clipping from a Dayton, Ohio, newspaper reads as follows:

FURTHER DETAILS OF NURSE'S DEATH

Miss Sarah Irwin, Exeter, NH, has received further details concerning the death of her sister, Miss Katherine Patterson Irwin, army nurse, which occurred in France.

She died June 20 and was buried with full military honors. Her death occurred after she had suffered from an illness of spinal meningitis and embolism set in while she was apparently on the road to recovery.

Miss Irwin left for France in the spring, having charge of 90 Red Cross nurses. She was connected with an eastern unit. Previous to that she had served a year at an army hospital on the Mexican border. At one time she lived in Dayton and was superintendent of nurses at Miami Valley Hospital.

She was the granddaughter of Rear Admiral Schenk and was related to the family of Colonel Robert Patterson.³⁴

Katherine Patterson Irwin has a large cross-shaped tombstone beside

her brother Wood Irwin's grave in Kuttawah County, Kentucky. The inscription reads:

AEF
KATHERINE P. IRWIN
NURSE. EVAC. HOSP. NO. 2.

And then on the back:

FOR GOD AND HER COUNTRY.³⁵

These nurses came from various backgrounds and ranged in age from Josephine Hammond, the youngest at 22, to Florence Matthews, aged 47. Their nursing experience was also varied - from many years under difficult conditions to almost none. They shared the bond of being willing to give up their lives to support the cause of American involvement in the First World War. They participated in a remarkable part of American history for this was the first time that women served extensively in any capacity in a conflict, and certainly the first time that their names were honored alongside the other war dead of the area. Their sacrifice was summed up by the residents of Franklin County in the inscription still found at the bottom of the plaque on the Doughboy monument:

Greater Love Hath No Man Than This
That a Man Lay Down His Life for his Friends
St John XV 13

ENDNOTES

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