

# The Red Cross after WWI

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■ Community leaders come to the aid of an agency that helps those in need.

The Rock Hill chapter of the American Red Cross, organized in 1917 to help servicemen and their families, spent as much time during the war assisting influenza victims as it did soldiers and their relatives.

To meet the need for what was then called "home service work," Miss Mattie Lou Barnette, a Winthrop graduate, was hired as the local group's first trained worker and began her duties Jan. 1, 1919. Four months later, on May 1, she reported she had dealt with 347 families, personally visiting 261 homes, as well as fulfilling many other duties. The job was so demanding that Miss Barnette resigned in the fall. The board had difficulty replacing her and the work of the Red Cross lapsed.

In late April 1921, a group of community leaders met to reorganize the Red Cross. The American Legion Post, which spearheaded the reorganization, announced that the need for the Red Cross to assist veterans was greater than ever.

Veterans were beginning to exhibit disabilities not evident when they were mustered out of service. They needed assistance in making claims against the government for physical examinations, hospitalization, compensation and vocational training. Many veterans were having difficulty getting their allotments and bonuses.

J.E. Gettys was elected president of the reorganized Red Cross, now called the York County Chapter of the American Red Cross. Mrs. Alexander Long, wife of the president of Industrial Mills, was elected vice chairman and appointed chairman of the Committee on Home Service, which included soldier relief.

The Chamber of Commerce donated a room for an office. Fort Mill had given valuable assistance previously and was requested to join with the Rock Hill group again.



## Nearby history

LOUISE  
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The Red Cross was the only social service group in the area, and the list of needs was great indeed. Early reports show that the placing of orphans in homes was a major task, as was finding assistance for elderly people (there was no Social Security or Medicare system in place). Help was needed to buy coal and food for the needy. There were tuberculosis sufferers who needed transportation to the State Park near Columbia. Families needed help with burial expenses.

A Mrs. Kirkland, who had been executive secretary in the 1920s, later recalled she placed deserted or homeless children in orphanages or foster homes, providing \$5 a month for their care. She arranged for the mentally ill to be placed in institutions. No one could be committed without the approval of two physicians and the chief of police. She kept bassinets and layettes in her office for people who needed them.

Mrs. Kirkland recalled that a second flu epidemic occurred in the early 1920s that hit Rock Hill just as hard as the World War I epidemic. The local Red Cross chapter set up kitchens and prepared food for families to pick up and food to be delivered.

The Red Cross provided food, rent, clothing and medical assistance to the families of men who were in prison.

During the Great Depression many people wrote the White House asking for assistance. The White House staff sent the letters to the National Red Cross which, in turn, sent them to the local chapters.

Today, the demands for services from the American Red Cross are as great as ever. Among the present-day Red Cross activities are disaster relief, both local and national; service to military families; aid to families with emergency food, shelter and utility assistance; blood services; health and safety training; aid for visually impaired adults; single family fire assistance.

One thing that hasn't changed over the past 78 years: The Red Cross still works with a very small professional staff and hundreds of volunteers (407 last year). And, it still has tremendous demands on its time and limited funds.

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