



The New York Public Library
Billy Rose Theatre Division

Guide to the

Stage Women's War Relief Fund scrapbooks

1917-1921

*T-Mss 2023-006

Processed by Valerie Wingfield in 2023.

Summary

Creator: Stage Women's War Relief (Organization)

Title: Stage Women's War Relief Fund scrapbooks

Date: 1917-1921

Size: 4.88 linear feet (5 volumes)

Source: Gift of Actors Fund of America.

Abstract: The Stage Women's War Relief was founded in 1917 on the eve of the United States' entry into World War One. Rachel Crothers (1878-1958), a playwright and producer, founded the organization along with six other women active in the theatre. Crothers was the national chairman of the organization. The Stage Women's War Relief fund scrapbooks, dated 1917 to 1921, were created by this charitable organization to have a record of their relief work to aid the American military during the war. The scrapbooks hold newspaper clippings, playbills and other printed matter.

Preferred citation: Stage Women's War Relief Fund scrapbooks, *T-Mss 2023-006. Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts

Language of the Material: English

Processing note: Processed by Valerie Wingfield in 2023.

Related Materials:

Stage Women's War Relief records, 1892-1938, Manuscripts and Archives Division.

Creator History

The Stage Women's War Relief was founded in 1917 on the eve of the United States' entry into World War One. Rachel Crothers (1878-1958), a playwright and director, along with Louis Closser Hale (actor, playwright and novelist), and actors Dorothy Donnelly, Josephine Hull, Minnie Dupree, Elizabeth Tyree and Louise Drew founded the organization. It was originally announced as "The War Relief Fund of the

Women of the American Theatre." This cumbersome name was rapidly changed to The Stage Women's War Relief.

The Relief's objective was to support the troops and their families. Rachel Crothers stated at the first organization's meeting "Why cannot the women of the American stage stand together as a unit for war relief work?" (*Review*, April 7, 1917). The organization was under the auspices of the National League for Women's Service (NLWS) which had begun their relief operations several months earlier. The Stage Women's War Relief would also cooperate with the American Red Cross and other organizations to secure relief for the military.

To raise funds, appeals were sent out to the theatre world, the emerging film industry and the general public. The iconic image for the Stage Women's War Relief was a woman standing with one hand outstretched, while taking off a red velvet coat to reveal a white relief uniform. James Montgomery Flagg (1877-1960) designed the print that was published in advertisements, playbills and posters. Another iconic image, less conspicuous, was a shield with the initials of the organization.

The Stage Women's War Relief worked on multiple fronts as follows: promoted the Liberty Loan Drives to encourage the public to buy war bonds to support Allies overseas; opened a canteen for the military in New York City; participated in "Hero Land," a benefit for the dependents of soldiers in 1917; repurposed old linens for bandages; repurposed leather gloves into waterproof jackets; and knitted garments to be sent to the troops in Europe.

This organization became successful with expanding branches in Chicago, Philadelphia, and other cities.

At the end of the First World War, the Stage Women's War Relief disbanded. Rachel Crothers would revive the organization at the beginning of World War II, now as a branch of the British War Relief Society. The name of the Stage Women's War Relief would now be known as the American Theatre Wing. The ATW were the founders of the Antoinette Perry Awards, colloquially known the "Tony's." Currently, the American Theatre Wing offers education and scholarships about the theatre.

Scope and Content Note

The Stage Women's War Relief fund scrapbooks, dated 1917 to 1921, were compiled by the organization's press department. These scrapbooks preserve a record of the Relief's work on behalf of soldiers and their families during World War I. The scrapbooks hold newspaper clippings, playbills and other printed matter.

The scrapbooks are arranged chronologically.

The scrapbooks are mostly newspaper articles that highlight the relief work of the Stage Women's War Relief. These articles feature the Relief's efforts to raise money. There are photographs of the founders meeting to discuss the management of the Relief funding work, articles and photographs showing women repurposing linen to make bandages, and also knitting garments for the soldiers abroad.

Other articles in the scrapbooks reported on vaudeville shows arranged by the Red Cross in cooperation with the Relief organization; a Relief booth stationed outside of the New York Public Library on Fifth Avenue and 42nd Street to solicit contributions; entertainment for soldiers at the Relief's Canteen; and requests to prominent theatrical figures to donate their talent for fund raising. Harry Houdini gave a sensational act for the relief efforts. Houdini was restrained in a straitjacket and hoisted

upside down in front of Madison Square Gardens to encourage the public to buy tickets for the "War Thrift Festival" (*Billboard*, June 1, 1918, volume 4).

One scrapbook, volume 3, holds mostly playbills and other promotional materials for fund raising. Some examples are images of the iconic relief worker designed by James Montgomery Flagg. This volume also has a lesser known image of a medieval shield with the initials "SWWR;" Liberty Loan Drive playbills; a "Hero Land" playbill from the bazaar held at the Grand Central Palace in 1917; and playbills from productions on behalf of the Stage Women's War Relief.

Arrangement: The scrapbooks were arranged chronologically and retain the local call numbers.

Key Terms

Subjects

Charities -- New York (State) -- New York

Charities -- United States

Theatrical posters

World War -- 1914-1918 -- War work

World War, 1914-1918 -- Women -- United States

Genre/Physical Characteristic

Clippings (information artifacts)

Printed ephemera

Theater programs

Names

Crothers, Rachel, 1878-1958

American Red Cross

Stage Women's War Relief (Organization)

Container List

- v. 1 1917
MWEZ + n.c. 5460
The patterns to knit a hat, gloves and sweaters are located on page 100 to 102 (same pattern used by the Red Cross).
- v. 2 1917-1918
MWEZ + n.c. 5461
- v. 3 1917-1918
MWEZ + n.c. 5462
- v. 4 1918-1919
MWEZ + n.c. 5463
- v. 5 1918-1921
MWEZ + n.c. 5464
There are several pages of printed matter, including a full size poster, that were created to support the Relief organization.