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*Weaving Their White Magic: Avenues of Feminine Patriotism in World War I South Carolina*

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WEAVING THEIR WHITE MAGIC:
AVENUES OF FEMININE PATRIOTISM IN WORLD WAR I SOUTH CAROLINA

by

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Introduction

In 1914, the battlefields of Europe seemed remote to isolationist Americans, who had been facing their own challenges in the early decades of the twentieth century—new waves of immigration, violent race relations, labor disputes, economic shifts, and alterations to gender roles. These internal preoccupations fostered confusion about America’s stake in the war and the causes and purposes of its entry into the conflict. World War I provided the government, military, and civilian organizations with the opportunity to rejuvenate a sense of nationalism in America by selling a particular package of values, beliefs, and identities that defined the nation.¹ To accomplish this, President Woodrow Wilson drew upon the language of progressivism and its key tool of reform—publicity—and in April 1917 the Committee on Public Information was established to coordinate war-related publicity efforts.²

George Creel, the head of CPI, and others framed the war crisis as the break-up of basic American values and identities, which had already been under great stress during the societal shifts early in the new century. Through the CPI, gender became a crucial ideological component of the war. Gender roles and class structures became unsettled during World War I because men and women were forced to take on duties outside of

those defined by tradition. Propaganda posters used gender as the category in which to address issues coinciding with the war and therefore becoming part of the process of national self-definition. Representation of men and women in posters shifted between the temporary demands of the war back to the more permanent postwar roles the government wanted women and men to assume. Although poster images showed women in many different pursuits, the propaganda medium ultimately reinforced the traditional separation of gender spheres and the definitions of masculinity and femininity that endured during the twentieth century.  

Posters depicted women both as those who must be protected from the atrocities perpetuated by the brutish, sexually-depraved Germans and as a tantalizing reward for the American men who fought to protect them. Sexuality was a popular tool in the emerging advertising industry, which was learning to use women, desire, and sex to sell products. Because many of the artists and designers of war posters were drawn from the ad industry, they placed great importance on sexuality in the selling of the war. Women in the posters were frequently clad in clinging Greek-style drapery that often revealed part of the bosom—a classical, but still titillating image.

There were, however, serious images of women in war posters as well. The war increased the female presence in the work force by intensifying the need for paid and volunteer female labor. New, albeit temporary, opportunities arose for female employment, including overseas work for the Army, Navy, Marines, Red Cross, and the Young Women’s Christian Association, as nurses, ambulance drivers, social workers,

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3 Knutson, 21-3.
4 Knutson, 42-3, 166.
5 Knutson, 161.
cooks, hostesses, and secretaries. On the home front, women volunteered with relief agencies and food conservation, and filling the vacancies left by men at war, in factories, post offices, farms, and cities. War posters attempted to sell these new activities to women who were unused to them; however, they also emphasized that these opportunities were temporary, and women were expected to return to their traditional gender roles after the war crisis was over. Posters promoting women’s war service activities, such as the Motor Corps of America, the YWCA, and the Salvation Army, depicted women in “practical, mannish uniforms devoid of all traces of sexuality.” These war-related organizations wanted women volunteers who were serious-minded and ready to work for victory.  

Another representation of women in war posters was that of the mother-figure, which was utilized extensively by the Red Cross. Propaganda that featured motherly women reinforced the idea that they were naturally self-sacrificing and devoted to nurturing and protecting life. Drawing upon the traditional view of women’s roles allowed war organizations to justify new roles for women in the service of the war effort, such as ambulance drivers and other activities in the public health domain. Red Cross posters typically enforced the nurturing role of women by showing nurses caring for wounded soldiers, but they also portrayed motherhood as a source of strength. The most famous Red Cross poster from World War I is a prime example of the blending of these two concepts. “The Greatest Mother in the World” shows a seated, oversized woman wearing a Red Cross headdress, her body completely hidden under her flowing clothing;

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6 Knutson, 153, 183.
7 Knutson, 200.
she is an image of great strength, but she also epitomizes feminine nurturing and compassion because she is cradling a tiny, wounded man on a stretcher.\(^8\)

Despite these attempts to promote women’s expanded opportunities as temporary due to the war emergency, many women, especially feminist leaders, hoped women’s involvement in the war effort would result in permanent gains. Although feminist leaders were divided on the main issues of the war, most answered their nation’s call to duty, with many serving in France as American Expeditionary Force nurses and telephone operators and YWCA volunteers. A small minority, including Jane Addams, the founder of Hull House, held fast to their prewar pacifism, subjecting themselves to intense public pressure and scorn. The National American Women Suffrage Association, headed by Carrie Chapman Catt, announced its support prior to America’s declaration of war, hoping that the support and service of women in the war effort would serve as a “proving ground for women’s capabilities” and push through women’s suffrage and economic equality. President Wilson did tell the United States Senate in 1918 that the vote for women was vital to the winning of the war, and women’s wartime services provided a final push over the top after one hundred years of struggling. Their hopes of economic equality were dashed, however; the employment of American women during World War I was limited and brief in comparison with their counterparts in Great Britain and France. Around one million American women took up war work, but few were entering the work force for the first time. Most were single young women who took advantage of the new war industries and vacancies left by men entering the armed forces by moving up from lower paying jobs; after the war, they returned to their previous jobs. Other female workers were previously employed, now married women who entered the work force in

\(^8\) Knutson, 191-3.
order to help their families keep pace with inflation. Many women had no intention of staying on the job after the war.\(^9\)

The first large-scale twentieth century conflict, World War I demanded huge increases in production, which required enlarging the labor force beyond what the traditional male working population could fill, leading to an influx of women into industrial areas that traditionally had been blocked for them. Durable manufacturing, the industries most directly affected by increased military demands, saw the most dramatic increase in the number of female workers. However, women’s increased presence in industry did not alter the “deeply entrenched social concepts regarding women’s proper employment spheres.” Despite women’s notable contributions to the industrial war effort, women’s issues were overshadowed by military demobilization, industrial conversion back to a civilian economy, and international trade. Furthermore, the flow of women into industry (and in other occupations) was always seen as a temporary measure brought on by the emergency circumstances of armed conflict. As a result, women workers saw their wartime economic gains disappear after the war.\(^10\)

Prior to the Great War, women rarely competed directly with men for employment; women’s work required fewer skills and less training, and therefore paid lower wages. The top five nonagricultural employment fields for women were servants, semi-skilled manufacturing operatives, laundresses, school teachers, and nonfactory dressmakers and seamstresses.\(^11\) Women’s increased wartime entry into manufacturing field (which previously excluded them) lead to the establishment of the Woman-In-

\(^9\) Kennedy, 284-5.
\(^10\) Laura Noble Lacasa, *British and American Women Workers During World War I* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1997), 1-5.
\(^11\) Lacasa, 76-8.
Industry Service (WIIS) by the Department of Labor in July 1918; the American National Women's Trade Union League had been pushing for some such organization for years. The WIIS examined and monitored working women's concerns, such as wages, hours, and working conditions, including safety issues and night work. The agency's recommended standards for women's employment in 1918 included a forty-eight hour work week, Sundays off, no night work, equal pay for equal work, and comfortable and sanitary working conditions.\(^{12}\)

The war's outbreak disrupted European immigration, which was a key source of industrial labor; additionally, alien workers in America were called back to their home countries for military service. Industrial leaders resisted turning to American women as primary source of replacement labor until the traditional labor force had been reduced even further. Some industrial leaders preferred using male sources more efficiently, including tramps, convicts, "street loafers," children aged 12-16, and male and female enemy aliens, before turning to American women. But as the labor situation worsened after America's entry into the war, employers were forced to draw upon female labor.\(^{13}\)

Women began operating heavy machinery for first time, including drill presses, light power presses, and engraving machines, whereas their prewar employment traditionally had been in nondurable manufacturing, such as apparel production, weaving and food processing. They also were introduced in ordnance manufacturing, primary and fabricated metals, and electrical machinery.\(^{14}\) Many employers praised their female employees for their attention to detail, dexterity and agility. Although women were

\(^{12}\) Lacasa, 97-100.
\(^{13}\) Lacasa, 124-8.
\(^{14}\) Lacasa, 193-4.
earning more than their usual salaries, it was still only two-thirds that of male workers.\textsuperscript{15} Despite their valuable contributions to the industrial war effort, their efforts did not alter interpretations of their postwar role in manufacturing.\textsuperscript{16} After the war, the majority of female workers were pushed out of the traditionally male work areas, an action that "epitomized the nation's desire to return to normalcy," as well as the American male's discomfort and feeling of being threatened by women in the industrial work force.

Outside of the extreme circumstances of war, most industrial work was considered to be too heavy, dangerous, and unbecoming for women. After the war crisis had passed, and women had done their duty for their country, they were forced back into traditional feminine jobs.\textsuperscript{17} All of these women were, in fact, expected to patriotically leave their new jobs after the war, just as they had been expected to patriotically go to work during the war.\textsuperscript{18}

As the shadows of war swept across America early in 1917 the nation scrambled to prepare itself, and American women sought to carve places for themselves in the war effort. In the South the war spirit intensified the patriotism of many southerners and made them more self-conscious about their renewed American identity. South Carolina's state and local leaders responded enthusiastically to the host of federal agencies dedicated to organizing and coordinating the war effort on the home front, the most prominent of which were the American Red Cross and the Council of National Defense.\textsuperscript{19} These organizations offered South Carolina women avenues of patriotic service that were

\textsuperscript{15} Lacasa, 228-9.
\textsuperscript{16} Lacasa, 328.
\textsuperscript{17} Lacasa, 336-7, 363.
\textsuperscript{18} Kennedy, 285.
acceptable modes of feminine behavior within societal norms, as well as opportunities to stretch the limitations of the feminine ideal.
Chapter One: The American Red Cross

The image of the lady in southern culture is a powerful and enduring one. Physically frail, but morally strong, the ‘Southern Lady’ exemplified the most desirable attributes of a nineteenth-century American woman. Although she was created in the years before the Civil War she survived well into the 20th century, because she was reinterpreted and updated to suit different circumstances. The southern women of the late nineteenth and early 20th centuries had only to look toward their Revolutionary and Confederate heroines for role models who were gentle and loving, but also brave, intelligent, and capable. Male and female white southerners delighted in tales of Confederate women who outsmarted Yankee soldiers during the war and resisted Republican rule during Reconstruction. Such tales illuminated a different aspect of the feminine ideal – the ability to be outspoken on occasion. The key to reconciling the contradictory characteristics was the ‘Southern Lady’s’ instinct for doing the right thing at the right time. She was a blend of Scarlet and Melanie, the steel of the belle and the sweetness of the magnolia. White southern women continued to prize the virtues of courage, resourcefulness, self-sacrifice and - in the absence of men – self-reliance. She had to hone that instinct for the proper place and time, however, for a southern lady who
defied Yankee masculine authority was to be praised, but one who defied southern male authority was looked upon as a pariah.  

To be a good citizen, it was essential that she be a good mother, which included instilling patriotic values and ethical standards in her children, particularly her sons. Women had long been considered the moral authority of the family, charged with the task of shaping the characters of their sons, the future leaders of America. These ideas of feminine citizenship and civic responsibility were important facets of the ‘Southern Lady,’ and those women who joined patriotic societies and women’s clubs found ways to fulfill, and in some cases expand, those responsibilities without directly challenging the image of the Lady herself. Women who joined voluntary associations were trailblazers, adjusting the definitions of a woman’s place, all the while reassuring the men who feared where these changes in her conventional gender role might lead that they continued to cherish the ‘Southern Lady’ as the “most sacred ideal womanhood.”

When America entered the Great War, many South Carolina women sought ways in which they could fulfill their patriotic duties without challenging the traditional feminine sphere. The women’s organizations that had developed over the past several decades provided the leadership for South Carolina women’s war work. The notices in the Society and Clubwomen pages of the newspapers read like a veritable who’s who of leading South Carolina families and clubwomen. In Columbia, for example, The State newspaper’s articles on women’s war work lists such notable South Carolina names as Gibbes, Guignard, and Manning. The State Council of Defense and the American Red

21 Sims, 129.
22 Sims, 4.
Cross provided the primary structures through which South Carolina women fulfilled their patriotic duties. The Council focused on mobilizing resources to win the war. To this end, the Woman's Committee of the South Carolina State Council of Defense focused on food conservation, health protection, work registration, and illiteracy. The Red Cross directed humanitarian efforts for military personnel and their families as well as war refugees.

Of the two, the Red Cross possessed a tremendous headstart in organization, experience, and reputation. It was the only voluntary society authorized by the United States government to render aid to its military forces in time of war; any other society desiring to help could do so only through the Red Cross. The agency furnished the military with personnel, supplies, and transportation. It was charged with the duty of helping provide troops with comforts and necessities when in the field, aiding them in transit, and assisting the army medical corps in caring for the sick and wounded. It also expected its chapters to raise funds and carry on relief work for the families of soldiers and sailors who may have been left in need by mobilization of their loved ones. The agency carried out its work through local chapters formed in cities, towns, and counties.²³

A chapter is a permanent local organization which directs all the local activities of the Red Cross within its territory: fundraising, manufacturing hospital garments and supplies, transporting supplies, and aiding the families of soldiers and sailors. A branch is a miniature version of the chapter. Whereas a chapter may be formed for a large city, a branch may be formed in neighborhoods or satellite communities of that city, such as the Blythewood, Shandon, and Horrell Hill branches of the Columbia Chapter. Separate

²³ The State, April 1, 1917.
branches were also formed for the black community and placed under the authority of the white chapter, including the Palmetto Branch under the Columbia Chapter. Auxiliaries were formed in a chapter’s community, and were part of and subordinate to that chapter. An auxiliary conducts one line of the agency’s services, typically that of the Woman’s Work Committee – production of medical supplies, military and refugee garments, and care packages. To coordinate the work of the chapters and receive and distribute funds, a state board was established, consisting of the governor as ex-officio president and “several citizens of the state selected for known probity and public spirit.”

Once a chapter was established and an executive committee elected, the next step was to appoint committees to direct the different areas of Red Cross work. These included membership, woman’s work, educational, civilian relief, and publicity. South Carolina women served as officers on each of the committees, including the executive. The committee work that received the most attention in the media was that done by the educational and woman’s work committees. The educational committee oversaw the training of Red Cross nurses and volunteers. Courses were offered in such areas as home nursing, first-aid, hygiene, and the making of surgical dressings. Hygiene was important to the efforts to clean up areas around hospitals and military camps, and prevent the spread of disease. The Red Cross, in conjunction with local agencies, conducted campaigns to establish a healthy area one mile around each camp, which involved identifying and cleaning up any source of water within that area in order to wipe

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25 Helen Kohn Hennig, History of the Richland County Chapter of the American Red Cross (Columbia, University of South Carolina: Richland County Chapter American Red Cross, 1945), 12.
26 Hennig, 14.
out the threat of malaria. Any possible illness that could prevent a soldier from doing his duty in the war was targeted, including venereal diseases. Therefore, relief and social agencies as well as military leaders pressured local authorities to wipe out red light districts near army and navy camps.27

The lion’s share of Red Cross volunteers, however, flocked to the activities directed by the woman’s work committee, and carried out by numerous Red Cross branches and auxiliaries. Their work was carried out by three committees responsible for surgical dressings, hospital garments and supplies, and general supplies. The chapters and branches established work rooms stocked with supplies and sewing machines and manned on a rotating basis by auxiliaries and other organizations, such as church societies. Many of them gave up their regular meetings to work in the Red Cross rooms. The hospital garments supply committee was in charge of producing clothing for patients as well as pillows, blankets, and other linens. The general supplies committee knitted appropriate articles of clothing for servicemen and refugees, such as sweaters, gloves, and socks.28

Auxiliaries tended to focus on the activities of the woman’s work committee. Once an auxiliary was formed, its members signed up for Red Cross instruction in the production of medical supplies. The great majority of the work performed by these auxiliaries was in the production of medical supplies and care packages to be sent overseas – activities that were appropriately feminine for the ideal southern lady, and tremendously important to the war effort. Nationally the women of the American Red Cross made, packed, and shipped 253,000,000 surgical dressings, 22,000,000 articles of

27 Davison, 46; Grantham, 394.
28 Hennig, 23-4.
hospital supplies, 14,000,000 clothing articles for the military, and 1,000,000 refugee garments. The Red Cross declared it to be the “most marvelous factory” the world had ever known - a monument to the energy and self-discipline of the American woman. It attributed an almost mystical quality to the work of its female members:

Woman’s classic part in war is to send her man away with a smile and then wait. Somewhere she must find the strength to bear that waiting; but women of the Great War found it in the countless work rooms of the Red Cross ... the quiet, white-garbed women sat with flying fingers, and thoughts that kept pace with the swift whir of machines turning out the endless yards of gauze and cotton for the war-locked lines in France. This is the freemasonry of women, this white magic that they weave to shield their men from harm, laying innumerable folds of gauze and cotton between them and the bayonet thrusts.29

Much of this work’s great appeal for women must be attributed to the fact than many of them did not have to leave their homes to perform it. The Columbia Chapter gave special recognition to the women who, “on account of strenuous home duties,” were unable to go to the work rooms but instead sat at their own sewing machines to conduct Red Cross work after their regular duties were done. Accordingly, “one garment made under these conditions may be said to be worth its weight in gold.”30

And yet, despite the acknowledged importance of the women’s war work through the Red Cross, a newspaper report on a large meeting of women in Columbia to learn how they could help the war effort received a patronizing tone not found in reports on men’s activities:

The speaker of the afternoon, Miss Jane Evans, state chairman of the national women’s service league ... a slight woman of entirely feminine type, with a quiet, even, soft voice, drew a deep breath, as she gazed over the waiting crowd of women, so ready to learn how

29 Davison, 33, 25.
30 Hennig, 24-5.
they might serve ... There was much to tell - so much to be done - how to tell them right!\textsuperscript{31}

Evans and the National League for Women's Service were instrumental in the early organization of women's clubs for the war effort. In March 1917 the NLWS called for women's clubs to organize under it, so that, should America enter the war, the organization could coordinate women's war relief activities. This included providing information on Red Cross work, a service that later aided the clubs in becoming affiliated with the relief agency. In just four weeks, eighteen detachments had been established in the Columbia area alone, before war had even been declared; the numbers continued to increase during the following months.\textsuperscript{32}

Shortly after the NLWS began organizing the clubs, Red Cross chapters were established in cities across the state. Once the South Carolina chapters were established, numerous women's clubs, including those that had organized under the NLWS, became auxiliaries of the Red Cross, among them, the Newberry Woman's Club, the Eau Claire Literary Society, the women's auxiliary of the National Guard, and the Women of the Sixties.\textsuperscript{33} This last group had a unique qualification for membership, having originated as a special unit composed only of women who cared for the wounded during the Civil War; the current members promised to take Red Cross courses in order to update their skills.\textsuperscript{34}

During the summer, however, a "misunderstanding" arose in "various quarters of the state" regarding rumored conflict between the activities of Red Cross and the

\textsuperscript{31} The State, April 10, 1917.
\textsuperscript{32} The State, March 11, 1917.
\textsuperscript{33} Hennig, 12.
\textsuperscript{34} The State, March 24, 1917.
National League for Women’s Service. It was also rumored that the Red Cross had taken over all of the other organization’s duties. In response to these rumors, Guy E. Snavely, Director of the Southern Division of the Red Cross, and Eliot Wadsworth, Acting Chairman of the American Red Cross, issued statements that were published in the newspapers. They assured citizens that the two organizations were not in competition and that they each had plenty of work to do in their respective areas, which they defined. A key difference highlighted was that the NLWS worked for women alone, and was structured differently. Its social and welfare work included social clubs near military camps, industrial canteens, housing for industrial workers, manning railroad canteens (under the direction of the Red Cross where organized), welfare of industrial workers, and cooperation with other agencies in caring for the families of military personnel. The League also helped women find wartime employment (replacing the men who had gone to war) as stenographers, file clerks, record clerks, telegraph, telephone and switchboard operators, and in signaling, map reading, and wireless operations. Units of the League that were willing to perform Red Cross work first had to take the agency’s instructional courses and had to act under its direction.\footnote{Columbia Record, August 12, 1917.}

The coverage given to the early organizational activities of the NLWS soon extended to the South Carolina chapters, branches, and auxiliaries of the Red Cross. The Columbia Chapter organized in April, and by May its committees were formed and hard at work. Membership drives began almost immediately, and the call went out for persons interested in volunteering to fill out registration cards, so that the committees could learn what they would be willing and able to do. The cards mentioned about twenty-five varieties of workers needed, including typists, drivers, needle workers, and “women who
understand providing food for a certain number of people.” They also requested that citizens register every automobile in Columbia that could be used by the agency in case of emergency, and registered homes where a sick soldier might be placed when hospitals were full, reminding citizens that “the war will touch on everyone, of course. If its first call on most of us is to sacrifice a little personal comfort – surely that is small!”

Initially, the Columbia Chapter had jurisdiction over Richland and Lexington counties; among its many branches were those in Congaree, Lexington, Leesville, Batesburg, Hopkins, Eastover, Horrell Hill, and Swansea. In March 1918 the Lexington Branch received permission to organize as a chapter, and the Columbia Chapter’s jurisdiction was reduced to Richland County. The Palmetto Branch was organized in June 1917 by a “large number of the leading and professional Negroes” of Columbia and a “still larger number of the working class.” Forty-five members enrolled at the initial meeting. As in the white branches, women played a prominent role in the Negro branch, holding three of the five positions on the executive committee. Dr. Matilda A. Evans, the first native-born South Carolina black woman to practice medicine, served as Vice Chairman. The *Columbia Record* reported that the Palmetto Branch intended to organize branches in “every hamlet, town and city in the state among the members of their race, in order to help this country win the fight for world democracy.” One week later, their membership topped one hundred. After its initial formation, however, the newspaper fell silent as to the branch’s activities.

Columbia also had a multitude of auxiliaries, among them the N. C. Butler

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36 *Columbia Record*, May 31, 1917.
37 Hennig, 12.
38 *Columbia Record*, June 13, 1917; June 19, 1917.
Chapter of the United Daughters of the Confederacy, the Women of the Sixties, the Association of Catholic Women, the Eau Claire Literary Club, and the Newberry Women’s Club. Auxiliaries were also formed at the University of South Carolina, Columbia College, and Benedict College. In order to develop “capable leadership” among its female students, the University of South Carolina added “special courses in Red Cross work, in the activities of the Women’s Service League, and in Food Thrift and Dietetics.” Two auxiliaries, the Eau Claire Literary Club and the Newberry Woman’s Club, differed in their reactions to the Red Cross’s call.

The Eau Claire Literary Club was founded at the home of Mrs. Charles C. Muller, on Wildwood Avenue, in September of 1911. The club founded a successful circulating library for the community in 1912. When the National League for Women’s Service requested clubs organize under its guidance, the Eau Claire Club was one of the earliest to do so. Once the Columbia Red Cross Chapter was established and members decided to become an auxiliary, they discontinued the library and donated the majority of the collection to the Camp Jackson library – 250 volumes and 500 magazines. Members took up the traditional woman’s work by attending courses in surgical dressings, manning Red Cross work rooms, and sewing dressings and garments at home. Over a nine-month period, these eleven women sewed a total of 1,166 hospital, soldier and refugee garments and surgical dressings – an average of 106 items per woman.

By contrast, the Woman’s Club of Newberry entered cautiously into Red Cross work. Organized in October 1914, the members studied literature, history and art;

39 Hennig, 12.
41 Eau Claire Literary Club Papers. South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.
members read articles or their own papers for the club. Topics ranged from “The Value of Art Study to Life,” to “Influence of Women on the History of the World.” They were also involved in social issues, supporting the establishment of Public Health Day in the schools, gathering information on girls’ reformatories, and appointing a committee to work with the Civic League’s committee to bring about enforcement of two laws regulating the working hours and conditions of women in mercantile establishments.

The issue of first-aid work for the Red Cross was introduced at the April 26, 1917 meeting. After “much discussion” a committee was appointed to cooperate with some other organizations in planning the club’s activities. Three weeks later, the committee presented its report. After even more discussion ensued about what part the club would play, it was decided to take it up as individuals and not as a club. No reason for the decision was given. Finally, in October the club organized as a Red Cross auxiliary. Interestingly, the members had already been manning the Newberry Red Cross room on Wednesdays before they officially organized. Thereafter, the minutes indicate that reports were given on their Red Cross activities, but the reports were not extant.42

Many women of South Carolina responded strongly to the relief agency’s appeals. The Columbia Chapter reported that it was able to keep its work rooms filled with workers nearly every day, and coordinated its efforts among its branches, including the Negro Branch, which contributed a large part of the muslin dressings used in Front Line Packets. There is no indication of whether the dressings produced by black women were separated from those of white women, and sent only to black soldiers. By the war’s end the Columbia Chapter had produced nearly 153,000 surgical dressings and over 12,000

42 Newberry Woman’s Club Minute book, 1914-1919. South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.
military, hospital, and refugee garments and supplies.\textsuperscript{43} The Marlboro County Chapter produced over 2,000 knitted articles, and over 15,000 surgical dressings.\textsuperscript{44}

In addition to the production of supplies, South Carolina women participated in the Red Cross canteens, Motor Corps, fundraising, and Home Service activities. The canteens were typically placed along railroad stops, and provided food, newspapers, medical services and lodging when necessary. The work of the Red Cross Motor Corps and fundraising activities placed South Carolina women on the edge of appropriate feminine activities. The Motor Corps was organized to carry workers to and from the canteens, and transport chapter supplies and hospital patients. South Carolina women drove trucks, ambulances, and their own cars. Requirements included courses in auto mechanics and first-aid, a chauffeur’s license, a physical exam, and at least sixteen hours of service per week.\textsuperscript{45} Before beginning the first major fundraising drive, in June 1917, South Carolina’s female Red Cross workers published a request in the newspapers asking for kindness and courtesy from the public during the fundraising campaign so as not to make their work any harder: “They admit that, in undertaking this canvas for Red Cross funds, they are making a sacrifice of their personal feelings - it will be difficult - but, because of their patriotism, they will do it.”\textsuperscript{46} The Red Cross home service activities were perhaps the least reported work conducted during the war, but no less important. These “unsung heroes” looked after the families left behind by deployed troops, offering legal and financial aid.\textsuperscript{47}

\textsuperscript{43} Hennig, 23-4.
\textsuperscript{44} Records of the American Red Cross, Marlboro County Chapter. South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.
\textsuperscript{45} Davison, 33-4.
\textsuperscript{46} The State, July 1, 1917.
\textsuperscript{47} Davison, 67.
Chapter Two: The Woman’s Committee of the State Council of Defense

Whereas the Red Cross was well established, and easily attracted women to take up its work, the Woman’s Committee of the State Council of Defense was a new construct, and had a more difficult time in establishing its organizations. Moreover, its task was to mobilize the state’s resources to win the war, not for the familiar humanitarian aid of the Red Cross.

The Council of National Defense was created in August 1916 to help prepare the nation for war by coordinating industries and other resources for possible future wartime activities. Its membership consisted of the secretaries of the navy, interior, agriculture, commerce and labor; the secretary of war served as chairman. In order to create close contact with each state, the CND formed a section charged with coordinating the efforts of the state councils. Each state council was to basically harness and direct all of the state’s resources into supporting the war, including industries, civilian morale, education, propaganda, fundraising appeals (such as the liberty loan campaigns, Red Cross, and war saving stamps), and relief work. It was also responsible for carrying out the policies of federal agencies, including the food administration, fuel administration, and the labor department.48

48 Annual Report of the South Carolina Council of Defense, Dec. 31, 1918 (Columbia, University of South Carolina: Gonzales and Bryan, State Printers, 1919),.
Women were not initially included in the government’s preparedness activities, and the way in which the National Woman’s Committee came into being during the Great War “accurately reflected the status, fears, and aspirations of American women.” Whereas pressure to establish the men’s State Councils Section of the Council of National Defense came from state governments, the pressure for the formation of a Woman’s Committee came from the activities of voluntary women’s organizations. Organized women were eager to serve the nation and forced government to define the role that they would play. But when the newly appointed chairman of the Woman’s Committee, suffragist Dr. Anna Howard Shaw, was unable to return to Washington, D.C. immediately for selection of its remaining members, the CND went ahead and appointed them without her input.49

Even without Shaw’s influence, seven of the nine original appointees were very prominently associated with major women’s groups, including the National American Woman Suffrage Association. The domination of the suffragists on the Woman’s Committee drew some fire, but no one on the Council objected. Although Shaw and fellow committee member Carrie Chapman Catt did not slow their suffrage work, their performances of their patriotic duties has been cited as helping to the suffrage movement.50

The organizational structure of the national Woman’s Committee encompassed defense work, relief work, and work for the preservation of the home through ten departments: registration for service; food production and home economics; food

50 Breen, 117.
administration; women in industry; child welfare; maintenance of existing social service agencies; health and recreation; educational propaganda; liberty loans; and home and allied relief. The national body saw itself as a clearing house for women’s war work performed by individuals and organizations, and appointed temporary chairmen in each state in order to call a meeting of women’s groups that would elect chairmen, members, and subcommittees. The WC did not want to interrupt the efforts of existing women’s groups, but sought to coordinate them to avoid duplication. Solving overlapping jurisdictions proved to be a difficult task.⁵¹

Despite the domination of the organization by suffragists, Shaw and her committee members organized the Woman’s Committee along the familiar, traditional lines of women’s societies and clubs. Work was divided into separate departments directed by committees formed at the state, county and local levels. The women did not seek permission from the Council of National Defense to organize in this way, and were initially left to their own devices. As a result, a misunderstanding developed regarding the WC’s nature. The CND viewed the WC as an advisory body only, which meant that it neither needed nor had the authority to form the state divisions. The Woman’s Committee believed it would organize and direct women’s war work and act as a channel of communication between the federal government and American women.⁵²

In June 1917, the CND responded to a query by the Woman’s Committee itself regarding its status. The Council defined the WC’s function and authority as a strictly advisory body to the CND. The WC was limited to suggesting activities that would be helpful in coordinating women’s work. The CND had to give approval for any suggested

⁵¹ Breen, 118-9.
⁵² Breen, 121.
activities and would determine the appropriate agency to enact the suggested program—not necessarily the Woman's Committee. The WC ignored this definition of its purpose and forged ahead with its self-appointed role as a national clearinghouse for women's patriotic activities.\textsuperscript{53} It is interesting that although the Woman's Committee was chaired by a leading suffragist, only one of its programs stretched the boundaries of traditional feminine roles.

The WC took on two difficult tasks early in its existence: a food conservation program and a national women's registration campaign. The implementation of the food conservation program required the State Councils of Defense and the state Woman’s Committees to cooperate with the United States Food Administration, headed by Herbert Hoover. The drive (also known as the Hoover food drive) began on July 1, 1917, and sought to educate American women on the importance of conserving food for the war effort. Women were asked to sign pledge cards that stated they would make every effort to conserve food and minimize waste.\textsuperscript{54} Twenty-four states were able to conduct house-to-house canvassing. By the end of the campaign, twenty-seven states had completed their campaigns. Only ten states made no report. Thirty-one had placed their Woman's Committees in charge of distributing the pledge cards; over five million were distributed nationwide. The USFA immediately announced a second food drive, again under its direction, but with a more prominent role for the Woman's Committee. The second drive netted six million cards.

Despite its success, the food drive was not without opposition. Workers had to dispel rumors that participating women would have to give up half their canned goods to

\textsuperscript{53} Breen, 122.  
\textsuperscript{54} Ibid.
government and soothe feelings that it was a governmental imposition on women’s traditional realm, the kitchen. In Minnesota, the Woman’s Committee received reports of refusals to sign in areas where pro-German and socialist propaganda had been distributed.55

The women’s registration campaign was much less successful. The CND began a registration campaign in the summer of 1917 to identify women who were able to work, regardless of prior training or education, just in case the war dragged on and caused a male labor shortage. Great Britain and France had already realized the advantage of using womanpower to replace the manpower lost to war, but they had been suffering from the effects of war much longer than the United States. Americans were not convinced that women could or should step into traditionally male jobs. However, no one knew how long the war would last, so as a precaution the registration campaign was held to establish a central register of American women’s skills in order to meet potential labor needs efficiently.56 Similar efforts were made by the state councils to mobilize manpower and industrial and agricultural power in order to meet the federal government’s increasing demands.

The national Woman’s Committee was charged with the task of registering women and provided a general guide for each state, which had responsibility for scheduling its own campaign, with assistance as needed from the men’s state councils. The registration card, designed by the Woman’s Committee in consultation with Census

55 Breen, 123.
Bureau, asked women to list “every possible occupation that a woman could follow” and “her willingness to give service.”

The campaign results were mixed, with about half the states never undertaking registration at all. Sixteen reported it successful. By March 1, 1918, an estimated 33 percent of women in Illinois were registered for war service, which was “exceptionally good.” In the Carolinas, less than 1 percent registered. Reasons given for the reluctance to sign the card, especially in rural districts, was fear that they would be drafted, or that their husbands would be drafted if they said they could perform any kind of work themselves. The food campaign may have been an intrusion on woman’s traditional domain, but the work registration campaign was perceived by many women as pushing them toward the men’s traditional spheres.

One of the operational difficulties shared by the state woman’s committees and the state councils was coordinating with related government agencies that had already established their own machinery. Often they found themselves largely ignored or used only in a supportive capacity. For example, the Home and Foreign Relief subcommittee’s proposed functions were already well-covered by the Red Cross, which “would not tolerate competition from the Woman’s Committee.” The committee’s Food Administration and Food Production and Home Economics departments were so intertwined that there was no distinction at the state and local level. The WC’s Food Administration committee helped the USFA coordinate proposals, which gave them some influence over the selection of the women to be the agency’s state directors of home economics; but in November 1917, the USFA established its own women’s section to

57 Breen, 123.
58 Breen, 124.
handle all home conservation work, gradually lessening the duties of the Woman’s Committee’s own Department of Food Administration.\textsuperscript{59}

There was less friction between the Department of Agriculture and the WC’s Food Production committee. The Department of Agriculture already had home demonstration agents in the states, so the WC’s committee worked to support and promote that work, stressing educational outreach among housekeepers, including production and preservation of food, elimination of unnecessary waste, and better housekeeping methods. Spectacular success was enjoyed by the WC’s Department of Child Welfare, aided by a “very close connection with the Children’s Bureau in the [United States] Department of Labor [that] enabled that tiny bureau to undertake a most ambitious project on behalf of the nation’s children under the guise of a war measure.”

The bureau was not charged by Congress with specific executive functions, so it was free to make maximum use of the Woman’s Committee’s vast volunteer network to promote programs that educated the public on child welfare. Furthermore, the dual role of its administrator Julia Lathrop as Children’s Bureau chief and the executive chairman of WC’s Child Welfare committee ensured close cooperation between the two entities. The child welfare work emphasized the importance of medical examinations and public health nurses in the community, with its major project being the Children’s Year program which began on April 6, 1918.\textsuperscript{60}

As with the lackluster registration drive, the Children’s Year program was a response to the experiences of England, France, and Canada, which had increased infant mortality rates associated with the war. The campaign focused on three separate drives.

\textsuperscript{59} Breen, 124-6.
\textsuperscript{60} Breen, 127.
A weighing and measuring test, conducted April 6 to June 6, 1918, sought to register, weigh and measure every child under school age. It cooperated with the appropriate government and medical agencies, eventually distributing more than seven million cards to the states, and achieving great success in demonstrating to communities the need for preventive and remedial measures by pointing to the number of defects discovered in registered children.  

The second segment of the Children's Year was the recreation drive, designed to boost interest in the provision of adequate recreational facilities for children in every community. The results of the drive, which was held in cooperation with the Playground and Recreation Association of America, were hard to measure, but it did increase interest in providing playgrounds. The third segment of the Children's Year focused on truancy in American schools, stemming from a fear that high wages for wartime work would pull children out of school. In the Back-to-School drive, subcommittees for each schoolhouse would investigate student absences and seek to return the children to school. By the end of Children's Year on April 6, 1919, 45 states were participating in the program.

The South Carolina Woman's Committee got its start on June 29, 1917, when Shaw wired Frances Louise Mayes in Greenville and informed her that Governor Richard I. Manning had recommended her for the chairmanship of the committee. Mayes accepted only on a temporary basis, in order to convene a statewide conference in which the committee could be organized and officers elected. She publicized the conference by sending out notices to women's clubs and organizations and advertising in newspapers.

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61 Breen, 128.
62 Breen, 128-9.
across the state, urging women to attend and discover ways to fulfill their patriotic duty. Mayes’s efforts were well rewarded. On July 12, 1917, hundreds of South Carolina women gathered at the Winthrop College auditorium in what *The State* newspaper called the most significant and far reaching conference ever held by the women of the state. The conference received front page coverage in *The State* newspaper even though the publicity announcement had been relegated to the women’s society page. They, like their Red Cross sisters, were answering their nation’s call to home front duty.

The Rock Hill conference marked the beginning of the Woman’s Committee’s efforts to harness “woman-power” in South Carolina. By the end of the day, Mayes had been officially elected chairman, and forty-two women’s organizations had pledged their support and cooperation of the committee, including the Daughters of the American Revolution, the United Daughters of the Confederacy, and the Equal Suffrage League. Mayes described the conference as a representative body of “earnest, purposeful women, determined to answer the call of our country in our God-given sphere as providers of our homes in the production and conservation of food.” Though suffragist organizations had pledged their support of the Woman’s Committee, the agenda held no such leanings.

The Woman’s Committee was partnered with the South Carolina State Council, and its chairman was a member of the State Council of Defense’s executive committee - an arrangement encouraged by the Council of National Defense to ensure cooperation between the men’s and women’s organizations. The national Woman’s Division continued to serve in an advisory capacity throughout the war, channeling information on

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64 *The State*, July 13, 1917.
65 Frances Louise Mayes to Woman’s Committee county chairmen, July 19, 1917, Coker Collection.
guiding women's energy's through government-approved war work, which primarily consisted of food conservation and production, along with registering women for war work, and educational campaigns on their patriotic duty. The state committees were to organize the women of the state in order to carry out these programs.

The concept sounded simple enough, but the application was another matter entirely. Mayes was to appoint a chairman for each county in the state, who was to organize her own executive committee to carry out instructions sent from the national Women's Division; in addition, the county organizations must cooperate and coordinate with other women's and men's patriotic organizations as well as the State Council of Defense's county committees, which were composed primarily of men. Counties organized at varying speeds, according to levels of interest, and some presented particular obstacles. Mayes reported in December of 1917 that Jasper and Hampton counties were particular thorns in her side, as she could find no woman in either county who would accept the chairmanship.67 The women also met with resistance from their male counterparts, some of whom were simply indifferent to their efforts, and others who openly ignored them or ran roughshod over their efforts. Despite these difficulties, the Woman's Committee members pushed on in fulfilling their home front duties, which were manifested in four major campaigns: women's war work registration, food conservation and production, public health issues, and adult illiteracy.

Of the four campaigns in South Carolina, the women's war work registration proved the most frustrating and the least successful. Despite the hard work of the South Carolina Woman's Committee, the registration campaign largely failed in Palmetto State,

67 Mayes to Reed Smith, December 3, 1917, South Carolina State Council of Defense Papers, South Carolina Department of Archives and History.
as it did across the nation. South Carolina women found the cards confusing, and campaign workers reported many women refused to sign even after workers explained them, fearing compulsory service of some kind.\textsuperscript{68} In addition, the powerful influence of the ideal 'Southern Lady' must be considered. Agreeing to work outside the home was breaking the appropriate gender role for many women. Mayes stated in a letter to State Council Executive Secretary Joe Sparks that the women demonstrated "considerable repugnance" in signing the cards, thinking that it was an ironclad oath, binding them to some service they were unwilling to perform.\textsuperscript{69} Only a few hundred women signed them.\textsuperscript{70} Registration Day did receive moderate media coverage, but the tone was patronizing.\textit{The State} newspaper presented an article written in the frivolous style of the society pages. It gave a series of vignettes from the day, including one entitled "The Question of Age." One of the female registrars, described as a buoyant, round cheeked matron, visited the home of a slim, "somewhat sallow," and obviously single woman. The single woman indicated she did not appreciate the government's request for her age, to which the matron replied for her to just put 30 and it was no use for the government to know any more than that. After the matron left the house, she puzzled over why the other woman had suddenly frozen up and whether the slammed door was accidental or intentional.\textsuperscript{71}

In contrast to the frustrated registration efforts, the second major campaign conducted by the Woman's Committee saw great success. Much of the civilian

\textsuperscript{68} Mrs. Robert Macfarlan to Mayes, August 29, 1917, State Council of Defense.
\textsuperscript{69} Mayes to Joe Sparks, September 3, 1917, State Council of Defense.
\textsuperscript{71} \textit{The State}, August 22, 1917.
contribution to the war effort came in the form of conservation and of various resources, including fuel and food. United States Food Administration director Herbert Hoover instigated a campaign to educate Americans on the importance of food production and conservation to the war effort. He recognized that for the campaign to be successful, the women of America would have to be enlisted; they were purchasing and preparing the food in the homes, and they would be the ones to curb the waste. The campaign made it clear that waste was unpatriotic; “food will win the war” became the slogan. The pledge cards simply asked that persons agree to conserve foodstuffs and avoid waste.

South Carolina’s women displayed much more enthusiasm for the Hoover cards than for the registration cards. It was simpler than pledging to answer a vague call to work by the government, and was clearly appropriate to woman’s sphere of influence. By December, 1917, over 100,000 homes in South Carolina had registered in the food conservation campaign. Women of the Great War proved that they could “serve their country without leaving their kitchens.”

The ongoing food production and conservation campaign constituted the majority of the Woman’s Committee’s work for the duration of the war. Councilwomen worked with the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s home demonstration agents in teaching and encouraging women to can and preserve foodstuffs, and in the patriotic advantages of growing their own gardens. War gardens, sometimes called liberty gardens, increased a home’s food supply while lessening the burden on agricultural labor and the nation’s transportation system, utilized land not otherwise employed in food production, and gave

72 *The State*, July 12, 1917.
73 David R. Coker to Reed Smith, December 16, 1917, State Council of Defense.
74 Sims, 151.
75 Mayes to Woman’s Committee county chairmen, July 19, 1917, State Council of Defense.
gardeners a better understanding of what it took to feed a nation. The Woman’s Committee had to make certain, however, that the women were properly instructed, in order to avoid the “dangers of injudicious gardening,” which wastes time and labor as well as seeds, fertilizers, insecticides. Participants received Liberty Garden signs to display in their yards. In addition to growing their own food, promotional materials urged women to cook “just enough,” thus eliminating wasted food.\textsuperscript{76} State Council of Defense Chairman David R. Coker recognized that for South Carolina’s women to participate in food conservation, “the old Southern tradition of the groaning dinner table” must end. It was established during a time “when food was plentiful, cheap and home raised and when every family had servants to eat up the surplus.” He suggested that every woman compete with her neighbors and friends to see how cheaply she could feed her family a well-balanced meal without any waste.\textsuperscript{77}

Despite the success of the food conservation campaign, members of the Woman’s Committee sometimes felt unappreciated. Frances Louise Mayes wrote to State Council Field Agent Reed Smith that, with the exception of the Liberty Loan campaigns, she believed that the women had done most of the work in the state. Adding that, while she was not detracting from Smith and Coker’s valuable and highly appreciated services, Mayes emphasized that across the state speaking of the state the council women had worked harder than the council men, citing several instances where the men had been uncooperative.\textsuperscript{78}

The women’s contributions were not completely without acknowledgment,

\textsuperscript{76} Council of National Defense, bulletin to State Councils of Defense, April 8, 1918, Coker Collection.
\textsuperscript{77} Coker to Mayes, July 9, 1917, Coker Collection.
\textsuperscript{78} Mayes to Smith, February 1, 1918, State Council of Defense.
however. Smith and Coker expressed their appreciation of the woman's committee work on numerous occasions, and treated Mayes as an equal in council matters, offering assistance and advice when requested instead of meddling in the affairs of the South Carolina Woman’s Committee. Mayes and her councilwomen may have had to focus their campaigns on traditional woman’s work, but they had impressed the State Council of Defense’s male leaders with their efficient, dedicated work. In April of 1918, Smith replied to an inquiry by the Council of National Defense, regarding the state council helping the Woman’s Committee with the new Children’s Year program. Reed Smith saw no need to become involved in the program, because the women had not asked for help. “Any time the ladies wish assistance,” he wrote, “they are not in the least backward about asking for it … The fact that the men have not been asked as yet to assist in the Children’s Year program is proof that the women are carrying it on efficiently and successfully.” When the women wanted their help, he added, they would be “delighted” to furnish it.⁷⁹

The Children’s Year program became the first part of the Woman’s Committee third major campaign, focusing on public health issues – an area in which women had gained prominence during the Progressive Era. The idea was that an unhealthy civilian population constituted a drain on the resources pouring into the waging of the war. The original project conceived by the Council of National Defense promoted the establishment of a Children’s Year program, which was essentially a child welfare program. The Woman’s Committee coordinated with other appropriate public and voluntary agencies, including the Red Cross, in order to implement the programs of the Federal Children’s Bureau. The first drive focused on the reduction of infant and

⁷⁹ Reed Smith to E. D. Smith, April 20, 1918, State Council of Defense.
maternal mortality, and included a National Baby Test given by committee members, which received good response from both the white and black women the Palmetto State.\textsuperscript{80}

The eagerness of some rural women to have their babies weighed, measured and registered gave rise to a scam in the Hardeeville area. A man posing as a government agent was charging fees to weigh and register babies. Notices were immediately sent out to county council members and local newspapers to warn residents about the scam.\textsuperscript{81}

South Carolina expanded upon the child welfare program by conducting a statewide Health Institute, on August 1 and 2, 1918. Women such as Annie I. Rembert, Field Secretary for the South Carolina Sanitarium, played key roles in planning the institute, and conducted several sessions.\textsuperscript{82} Rembert had been working with black and white workers of the state's Board of Health in establishing Negro tuberculosis camps and enlisting the black community's ministers in educating the congregations on venereal disease.\textsuperscript{83} The purpose of the institute was to educate and instruct representatives from schools, agencies and county committees so that they would able to act as instructors themselves in their communities.\textsuperscript{84} The Institute was highly successful in statewide attendance and publicity, as well as national attention. The Council of National Defense sent a representative in order to learn from the Palmetto State's pioneering example and encourage similar campaigns in every state of the union.\textsuperscript{85}

The final major campaign pushed by the Woman's Committee focused on adult

\textsuperscript{80} Council of National Defense, "Children's Year Program" bulletin to State Councils of Defense, February 7, 1918, Coker Collection.

\textsuperscript{81} Helen S. Gulick to Elinor M. Reed, September 4, 1918; Governor Richard I. Manning to Reed, September 10, 1918, State Council of Defense.

\textsuperscript{82} Dr. E. A. Hines to Smith, July 25, 1918, State Council of Defense.

\textsuperscript{83} Annie I. Rembert to Coker, June 7, 1918, Coker Collection.

\textsuperscript{84} Smith to Mattie C. Kneece, July 29, 1918, State Council of Defense.

\textsuperscript{85} Minutes, State Council of Defense, August 1, 1918, Coker Collection.
illiteracy, another subject for progressive reform. Julia E. Selden, Chairman of the Woman’s Committee’s Education Committee, instigated a state campaign to educate the illiterate and near-illiterate. Illiteracy was an embarrassment for South Carolina, as time that should have been spent on training the state’s soldiers for combat instead had to be spent on teaching them to read and write. It was also seen as a security threat, as the illiterate were believed to be more susceptible to German propaganda. Early in 1918, Selden began pressing the State Council of Defense to sponsor an illiteracy campaign. David R. Coker, however, felt that the council was not equipped to handle such a mammoth task, and arranged a cooperative effort between the council and the State Department of Education. University of South Carolina Education Professor Patterson Wardlaw, a member of the National Illiteracy Commission for South Carolina, was tapped to lead the campaign, which emphasized the establishment of night schools and other methods of adult education. After the state council was disbanded on February 1, 1919, Selden continued her work with esteemed educator Wil Lou Gray.

Like the Red Cross, the men’s state councils established separate black county organizations that were subordinate to the all-white county councils. Mayes suggested to Reed Smith that the black communities be organized as auxiliaries to the county councils, and that the county chairs select “intelligent, reliable, respected colored people” to help organize “their people.” Mayes believed that this was the best way to carry out the

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87 Coker to Selden, July 15, 1918, Coker Collection.
88 Gray founded the Opportunity School for Young Adults in Tamassee, South Carolina, which later moved to Columbia.
government programs and counteract any German propaganda that made its way to the black community.\textsuperscript{89}

However, the organization of black women in South Carolina was largely left to the men’s councils, despite letters from the national Woman’s Committee urging otherwise, including an inquiry in August of 1918 as to the advisability of sending black women throughout the South to help organize the region’s black woman-power. WC chairman Mrs. W. C. Cathcart responded that “under no circumstances should an outside organizer attempt any work in the State without the knowledge and consent of the State machinery.” She refers to the Sumter County Council’s plan as the best form of organization, but clearly indicates the low priority that the South Carolina Woman’s Committee has placed on forming a similar committee for black women:

The work of the Woman’s division has just been reorganized and as soon as this is accomplished it is our intention to take up the matter of organizing the Negro women. And it is probable that the form will not go farther than a reliable colored woman for county chair who shall be responsible to the white county chair.\textsuperscript{90}

After sixteen months of efforts to harness white woman-power for the war effort, the Woman’s Committee still had not attempted to do the same for black women.

The Sumter County Council wasted no time in organizing the wartime contributions of its black citizens. Its members invited R. W. Westberry, “a leading and intelligent leader of the colored race in Sumter,” to the white county council’s first meeting in April 1917, and to all subsequent meetings. In addition to holding mass meetings across the county to organize its black men into a colored auxiliary, Westberry

\textsuperscript{89} Mayes to Smith, May 30, 1918, State Council of Defense.

\textsuperscript{90} Mrs. W. C. Cathcart to Hannah J. Patterson, CND, August 20, 1918, State Council of Defense.
organized black women’s auxiliaries as well. Sumter County Executive Secretary E. I. Reardon reported that the council “placed stress upon the teaching of colored women and girls how to preserve and can.” The council employed an “expert colored home demonstrator” and opened a school that instructed “thousands” of black women and girls in food preservation. Most of the Sumter Council’s activity reports included the work of the colored auxiliary, and notices for the auxiliary’s events were issued on the white council’s stationery. Despite the importance placed on the contributions of the colored auxiliary, Sumter’s white council members had no intention of disrupting the racial status quo. Reardon emphasizes at the close of his report that in the organizing of the county’s black citizens, “No social restrictions were broken down.”

The Sumter County Council was the notable exception to the tendency of county councils to delay in organizing their black citizens, and was submitted to the National Council of Defense as a model for other southern states. Other councils followed Richland County’s example in focusing on completing the white organizations before considering the formation of black committees, and then primarily working with black men. In a letter to Elliott D. Smith, of the State Councils Section, CND, South Carolina Council executive secretary Reed Smith states:

As to the woman’s work, that has not yet been undertaken and it is my judgment that it should not be undertaken until the work among the Negro men has become firmly established and justifies beyond question its continuance. The work of organizing the Negro men is comparatively easy and safe, but were the work to be started simultaneously among both men and women, I am afraid chaos would ensue. We expect here in Richland County, when the men get firmly organized and accustomed to defense work, to try out an organization among the women. It will be an experiment simply, and there is not prophet to tell us exactly how it will turn out.

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91 E. I. Reardon to Reed Smith, October 10, 1917, State Council of Defense.
92 Reed Smith to Elliott Smith, January 15, 1918, State Council of Defense.
By February 1918, State Council chairman David R. Coker reported that the majority of counties had "effective organizations among the whites ... [but] only a few have yet organized the Negroes."93 The low priority placed on the value of black women (and men) to the war effort was an natural extension of the lowly place they held in southern society, and ignores or dismisses the charitable work that had been performed by black women's clubs and voluntary associations for many decades. The National Association of Colored Women's Clubs, colored branches of the YWCA, units of the Women's Christian Temperance Union, and numerous church groups were working hard to improve the lives of their fellow black citizens. Some of their projects included homes for unwed mothers, neighborhood clinics, libraries, and college scholarships. However, cooperative projects with white women's clubs was rare, and in many instances the white women were apparently unaware of the activities of their black counterparts.94

Little is recorded on the work of the South Carolina black units. The annual report of the State Council states:

The Council has all along felt that the Negro population of the State should by no means be neglected [in supporting the war effort]...In connection with the white committees and white county councils there is being built up an effective Negro organization which will be responsible for the spread of information and suggestions among the Negroes of the State.

However, the 1918 report included a report by the Woman's Committee acknowledging that "the colored women have rendered valuable assistance in every canvass for Red Cross funds, liberty loan bonds, war savings stamps ... [and] in nursing during the recent

93 Coker to county chairs, February 28, 1918, State Council of Defense.
epidemic of influenza.” The epidemic placed tremendous strain on the state’s and the nation’s medical resources in the fall of 1918, and relief and women’s organizations provided numerous volunteers to nurse the sick. After discussing the contributions of the various organizations that assisted the Woman’s Committee, including the Associated Charities and the Red Cross Influenza Committee, the report concludes, “the colored women of the State did magnificent work in relieving the situation.” The report also states that a “complete survey” of the work done by both white and black women would be published in pamphlet form. It is unknown if the report was ever published or is simply no longer extant.

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95 Annual Report, 21, 16-17.
Chapter Three: Other Avenues of Service

Although the Red Cross and the Woman’s Committee were the largest organizations for women’s war work in South Carolina, several others offered patriotic service as well, including the Young Women’s Christian Association and the Liberty Loan Campaigns. During World War I, the YWCA and the YMCA acted as social work agencies, looking after the spiritual needs of military personnel and their families. The Columbia and Greenville YWCAs both were located near large army cantonments, camps Jackson and Sevier, respectively. The two organizations cooperated with the Red Cross and the YMCA’s War Camp Community Service organization in providing social and spiritual services for the men in uniform. In addition to forming Red Cross auxiliaries, these chapters of the YWCA held dances at the camps, sponsored community center activities, and manned Hostess Houses at the camps, which included Sunday vespers, games, marches, singing, visiting, and serving refreshments. For the soldiers’ wives they sponsored teas, Red Cross classes, and other war-related projects. The hostess house was built and partially operated by the National YWCA War Work Council. The Greenville Y formed a Patriotic League composed of women and girls from the high schools, businesses, and industries of the area. Patriotic League members participated in
traditional feminine war work projects, such as knitting, making comfort kits, rolling bandages and selling war bonds and savings stamps.96

One activity that all of the war work organizations had in common was the Liberty Loan. Once South Carolina women overcame their hesitation to enter into the previously unladylike activity of fundraising, they demonstrated that they were quite capable of bringing in millions of dollars to aid the war effort. When America entered the war, Secretary of the Treasury W. G. McAdoo urged that the majority of war financing should come from bonds, in order not to impose heavy tax burdens on the citizenry. The establishment of the Liberty Loan bond campaigns was wildly successful. Two-thirds of the war funds used during actual hostilities by the United States were obtained through the sale of liberty bonds; use of the bonds included loans to the Allies and equipping and maintaining America’s military forces. Over $23 billion was raised in five loan drives, compared with $20 billion each in France and Great Britain, $8 billion in Italy, and $1 billion in Canada. The bulk of subscriptions came from the “patriotic every day citizen” who purchased bonds of the smaller denominations.97 The National Woman’s Liberty Loan Committee was formed in May 1917 and by the close of the war had one million workers. South Carolina contributed over 100 million dollars in the four Liberty Loan and the final Victory Loan campaigns. Of that, South Carolina’s Women’s Liberty Loan Committee secured over 27 million dollars in four campaigns (they were not organized until the second one in October 1917). Bertha J. (Mrs. Frederick S.)

96 Lillian Clement Hunt, A Study of Columbia, South Carolina and the Young Women’s Christian Association as a Social Work Agency (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1948), 8, 61; Ethel Simpson, The First Fifty Years of the Young Women’s Christian Association of Greenville, South Carolina, 1917-1967 (Greenville, University of South Carolina: YWCA, 1967), 18, 40.
Munsell of Columbia served as the women’s committee’s chair for all four campaigns, and assisted her husband during the first campaign.  

Another nontraditional way in which womanpower was applied to wartime production was the Woman’s Land Army. Originating in Great Britain, the idea was to alleviate severe agricultural labor shortages caused by the war by replacing the absent male workers with women. Units soon were established in France, Italy and Canada. These programs were responsible for the greater part of wartime agricultural production in their areas. The idea met with resistance in America, however, as paid agricultural labor was considered outside the traditional woman’s sphere. Although farmers’ wives and daughters had been performing such labor for centuries, it was unacceptable for white women to be hired field workers. However, as the drain of manpower into the armed services and essential industries created a labor scarcity in rural America, the idea of adapting the European solution to American circumstances began to take shape.

Despite increasing interest in the formation of a Woman’s Land Army, the United States government did not follow the lead of its European counterparts by establishing the WLA as a government program. Instead, private women’s organizations engaged in some successful experiments with the idea. In February 1918, the women’s National Farm and Garden Association, the garden clubs of America, the women’s committee of the Council of National Defense, and several women’s colleges organized the American Woman’s Land Army. The organization’s purpose was to supply trained women workers to the farms to help meet the need for increased food production during wartime. The

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98 "Report of the State Chairman, Woman’s Liberty Loan Committee for South Carolina," Jean Flinn Chisholm Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.
organizers emphasized that the program was yet another way for women to respond patriotically to their country’s wartime needs.

Recruits were required to pass a physical examination and serve for at least two months of duty. They were enlisted from among college students, professionals, and women laborers in the seasonal trades. In order to allay fears that male workers would be undercut by a female labor force, the prospective recruit was guaranteed to receive minimum wage for the appropriate work. The work included livestock care, dairying, poultry raising, fruit picking, market gardening, canning, and lighter field tasks such as planting, transplanting, weeding, hoeing, and mowing. Some women became involved in more technical work and also operated farm machinery, but the majority performed work assignments that required a minimal amount of training. Thanks to the enthusiasm, conscientiousness, and quality of the recruits’ work, the farmerette soon became one of the symbols of the home front effort by women.¹⁰⁰

Not all areas of the nation, however, were convinced of the value of the WLA. In response to a WLA bulletin, State Council Chairman David R. Coker stated that he did not feel “enthusiastic” about a “proposition of this kind in the South,” since women who work indoors most of the year would not be very effective on the farms during the long hot summers. In fact it would be dangerous.¹⁰¹ Mayes agreed with Coker that the WLA was not practicable for “our women,” and went on to say that the organization had overlooked the fact that “we have colored women whom we can use in this way. The North has a large number of European peasant women, whom they are using for this

¹⁰⁰ Martelet, 141-2.
¹⁰¹ Coker to Harriet P. Lynch, February 21, 1918, Coker Collection.
purpose, and besides their climate is not as trying as ours in the summer." The ‘Southern Lady’ may have her own Liberty Garden in the backyard, but she did not work in the fields. That was something for her black sister, who could not claim the title of lady.

The successes of the various war-related agencies in South Carolina owed a great deal to the strong leadership of the state, from which they drew the leaders of their respective activities. These women had already established themselves as community leaders, and were able to build upon their established network of women’s organizations. All of the war-related agencies during World War II offered women in South Carolina the opportunity to demonstrate their patriotism and contribution to the war effort. The most successful agencies were in traditionally feminine roles, such as knitting garments, sewing bandages, and adjusting arms in camouflage gear, but the demands of war also allowed South Carolina women to stretch the boundaries of acceptable gender norms through the Red Cross Motor Corps and fundraising activities as well as demonstrate their skills in the efficient operation of their organizations. Ultimately, their efforts aided the cause of women’s suffrage.

For South Carolina black women, however, opportunities to support the war effort were more limited. The Woman’s Committee of the South Carolina State Council of Defense showed no real interest in organizing black women’s power, and, for the most part, the black county councils included black women as an afterthought in their colored auxiliaries. The majority of opportunities for black women to contribute to the war effort came through the American Red Cross, a national institution that already had well

102 Mayes to Coker, March 12, 1918, Coker Collection.
The successes of the various war-related agencies in South Carolina owed a great deal to the white clubwomen of the state, from which they drew the leaders of their respective activities. These women had already positioned themselves as community leaders, and were able to build upon their established network of women’s organizations. All of the war-related agencies during World War I offered women in South Carolina and across the nation opportunities to demonstrate their patriotism and contribute to the war effort. The most successful activities were in traditionally feminine roles, such as knitting garments, sewing bandages, and adopting ways to conserve food, but the demands of war also allowed South Carolina women to stretch the boundaries of acceptable gender norms through the Red Cross Motor Corps and fundraising activities— as well as demonstrate their skills in the efficient operation of their organizations. Ultimately, their efforts aided the cause of women’s suffrage.

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established organizational procedures and encouraged the establishment of black chapters (though always placed under white authority). However, any hopes that black women’s efforts to fulfill their patriotic duties would lead to improvements in their status in American society were dashed after the war, when they were denied the prize of suffrage.

In South Carolina, the Nineteenth Amendment transformed black women into the state’s largest voting group and a significant threat to white supremacy. Black women were forced to run a gauntlet of obstacles set up by white male registrars to discourage them from voting. They had to stand in line for up to twelve hours while white women were allowed to cast their votes first, and were subjected to tests that were not required of white women, including the reading and interpretation of the state and federal constitutions. Both races had worked hard at fulfilling their patriotic duties during World War I, but it was white women who – despite facing limited opportunities to hold political offices – were able to enjoy the fruits of their wartime labor.

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