



Atlanta Chapter Founded

In April, 1914, at a meeting in the Ansley Hotel, the Atlanta Chapter of the American Red Cross was organized. In June of 1914, the Chapter's Charter was signed by President Woodrow Wilson. In the beginning, ours was an all-volunteer Chapter, although paid staff were added in later years as the organization expanded its responsibilities. Most Chapter records for the first two years were lost during a move, but we do know that First Aid courses were offered to the citizens of Atlanta.

In 1916 the Chapter was reorganized and a new Charter replaced the original, lost charter. The Chapter set about increasing its membership and preparing to carry out the work for which the Red Cross was chartered by Congress. The two Charter Obligations of the Red Cross were to give help to servicemen and their families, and to assist civilian families in times of natural disaster. It was believed that the United States was soon to be involved in World War I. Chapter committees moved quickly to prepare for the war.

Great Atlanta Fire

On May 21, 1917, 1,500 homes in Northeast Atlanta were destroyed by fire. The fire swept through the Boulevard, Pine Street and Forrest Avenue sections of town. Nothing was left standing from Forrest Avenue to Ponce DeLeon Avenue. These were some of the finest middle class neighborhoods in Atlanta before the fire. The Atlanta Chapter formed a committee for the fire chaired by Lee Ashcraft. The committee successfully raised funds for victims of the fire as well as providing emergency services to the victims. One of the most important things the Chapter did was set up a "Lost and Found Directory." The fire moved so quickly that many families were separated from each other. Family members could register with the Directory and as a result many were reunited.

World War I

The Red Cross played a vital role in care of the wounded by providing base hospitals for the Allied military. The Atlanta Chapter was responsible for staffing and recruiting volunteers for the Emory Medical Unit. The Emory unit, led by Dr. Frank M. Boland, was one of eight to be formed by various chapters in the U.S. These units were sent overseas on April 18, 1918, and were the first field hospital units to reach the battlefield. At the beginning of the great Allied offensive on June 18, 1918, 39 of the 45 base hospitals in England and France were Red Cross hospitals. WW I hospital personnel transported wounded soldiers to field hospitals in Europe.

In May of 1918 the Production Service, along with other Red Cross chapters accepted the responsibility to produce all surgical dressings to be sent to military hospitals in France and Italy. The Surgical Dressings Unit of the Production Service also furnished sweaters and other comfort articles to soldiers in the hospitals and overseas.

The Atlanta Chapter also provided aid and comfort locally. A Canteen Unit, chaired by Mrs. James L. Dickey, established canteen sites all over Atlanta for the aid of soldiers. Mrs. Dickey and 320 young women acted as hostesses, meeting troop trains with food and a cheerful word for soldiers on their way to camp or an embarkation center. The Home Hygiene committee, chaired by Mrs. Robert W. Woodruff, provided practical instruction in nursing, both at home and in a hospital. These courses filled a critical need because many nurses and physicians had entered the military, creating a shortage of doctors and nurses. Soon after 170 women completed the course, the terrible flu epidemic of 1918 hit Atlanta, allowing them to put their training to use.

Influenza Epidemic

The 1918 flu epidemic struck at an especially bad time, as many doctors and nurses were in military service. The Atlanta city Health Department appealed to the Atlanta Chapter for help in relieving the serious shortage of nurses. Graduates of the Red Cross nursing classes responded, treating flu victims in Atlanta and other localities throughout the Southern Division.

These nurses treated scores of influenza cases at centers such as the Home for the Friendless and Georgia Baptist Orphanage. Later many of these nurses served with the Army overseas. As late as February, 1920, the Public Health Nurses of Atlanta, the Canteen Service, and the Motor Corp reserves came to the aid of recovering flu patients by preparing and delivering meals. The Southern Division established a kitchen in an emergency hospital at the Atlanta Medical College.