

**Guide to the
MS-212: Papers of Emma West Durkee**



**Abigail K Major '19
July 2017**

MS – 212: Papers of Emma West Durkee

(1 bound volume, .25 cubic feet)

Location: Collections Room

Inclusive Dates: 1918 - 1921

Bulk Dates: 1918 - 1920

*Processed by: Abigail Major '19, Diane Werley Smith '73 Summer Intern
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Provenance Purchased by Gettysburg College Special Collections, 2017.

Biographical Note

Emma West Durkee was born in 1881 in New York to Eugene and Emma Francis B. Durkee, and was the eldest sister of Helen Winslow Durkee. She attended Smith College in Massachusetts where she studied metalwork and jewelry, and was a member of the Banjo club (in which she played the guitar and autoharp). After graduating in 1901, she resided in East Patchogue, New York. From around 1918 to 1919 she contributed her skills and time to World War I by serving in the American Red Cross organization as a hostess at Debarkation Hospital No. 5, and later continued to work as a hostess at the United States Army General Hospital No. 41 in 1920. In 1927 at age 46 she married Chauncey Benton Humphrey who served as a colonel in the United States Army during World War I. By 1930 the couple resided in Brookhaven, Suffolk, New York. She passed away March 29, 1934.

Historical Note

Debarkation Hospital No. 5 opened on December 22, 1918, and was located at Grand Central Palace on Lexington Avenue and 46th Street in New York City. It consisted of twelve floors, and was near Grand Central Station. In general, debarkation hospitals were intended to receive overseas patients who landed back on United States soil. As Durkee concisely writes: "They served as way-stations and clearing-houses for all classes of patients: from the patient who had almost completely recovered and was on the point of receiving discharge from the Army, and for the gravely sick or wounded whose convalescence might be a matter of many months."¹ Debarkation Hospital No. 5 was capable of caring for 3,400 to 5,000 patients, and at one point received 1,328 patients in a single day, the hospital's highest record.

United States Army General Hospital No. 41 at Fox Hills in New York was ready to admit patients in the spring of 1918. At first, its purpose was to be a debarkation

¹ Durkee, Emma West. *Uncensored War Stories Told A Red Cross Worker* (New York: 1923), introduction to Debarkation Hospital No. 5, Grand Central Palace, New York City.

hospital since it had its own dock at the entrance at Port of New York, and was dubbed Debarkation Hospital No. 2 for more than a year. Its name changed to United States Army General Hospital No. 41 once debarkation purposes were no longer needed at Fox Hills. Cases treated there varied from medical to psychopathic. Durkee notes that in January of 1920, there were about 3,500 military patients receiving treatment at Fox Hills.²

Scope and Content Notes

The folio consists of [264] typed leaves and is illustrated with approximately 150 prints which include photographs, portraits, and mounted letters. More than half of the photographs are either taken by the author, Miss Nell Walker, R.A., or Captain R.C. Snidow. A variety of first person narratives of wounded soldiers as well as some of the events and happenings that occurred during the author's three years working at Debarkation Hospital No. 5 and Army General Hospital No. 41 are found throughout the book. Some of the patients' stories include Christmas at Debarkation Hospital No. 5, a movie theatre-party, a wedding for one of the patients that was planned in a recreation room, the sewing of uniform patches by Mrs. Grover Cleveland, the disappearance of one of the patient's turtle pet named Napoleon, and the Governor's party which was held for everyone that was associated with the hospital.

Some memorabilia included are Durkee's Red Cross Certificate recognizing her service, a silk souvenir handkerchief from France, a fabric swatch from the upholstery of the hospital lounge, a letter signed from the former First Lady Frances F. Cleveland Preston who also worked at Debarkation Hospital No. 5, a poem written by Private Moses M. Ashely, and letters and postcards from Russia signed by Admiral Newton McCully, who was in charge of U.S. Navy forces in Russia and helped perform intelligence missions against the Bolsheviks (and who later adopted seven Russian orphans).

The preface includes the date New York City, May 1, 1923 and states: "Five typewritten copies of this book have been made of which this is Number One. All the photographs except where otherwise indicated were taken by the author." The book is dedicated to the author's husband, Colonel Chauncey Benton Humphrey, who was part of the United States Infantry. Even though the author dates the preface with the year 1923, the official date of publication is unclear. However, the dedication to her husband who the author married in 1927 offers the suggestion that while the work was started in 1923 it was not completed until at least 1927.

² Durkee, Emma West. *Uncensored War Stories Told A Red Cross Worker* (New York: 1923), Introduction to United States Army General Hospital No. 41, Fox Hills, New York.

Subjects *(This field is included because our finding aids are cataloged in MUSCAT. Including a list of subjects covered in the collection will allow our catalogers to better describe the collection.)*

World War, 1914-1918

World War I Sources

United States Army Nurse Corps History

United States Army Nurse Corps History 20th Century

Collective memory United States History 20th Century

War and Society United States History 20th Century

War and Society United States History 20th Century Sources

Series Description

This collection is single series which the author divided into two sections, one for each hospital that she wrote about, and therefore has two table of contents. A list of some of the staff and the patients that were admitted into the hospital are included.

Contents:

The Grand Central Palace, New York City, as a Debarkation Hospital December 1918 to July, 1919.

The American Red Cross Staff at the Hospital.

Stories about Some of the Patients.

A Few of the Colored Patients on the Twelfth Floor.

Sentences taken from Letters received from Soldiers' Families by the Bureau of War-Risk Insurance at Washington.

Letters of Major Chas. F. Neergaard, A.R.C., Field-Director of Debarkation Hospital Number 5, while designated for Duty with Troops on board the U.S.S. "Plattsburg."

The Share our Wounded had in five great New York Parades.

Poem: "The Shadow Legion", by Garnett Laidlaw Eskew.

A Collection of Unusual War Experiences.

Contents:

The United States Army General Hospital Number 41, Fox Hills, New York, 1920-1921

The Laboratory Staff at the Hospital

Chaplains at Fox Hills

Some of the Army Nurses

The Reconstruction Aides

Red Cross Ward-Workers

The Patients' Mess

The Officer's Ward

Some of the Patients in the Enlisted Men's Wards

Contageous and Psychopathic Wards

Memorable Events for the Fox Hills Patients
The United States Army General Hospital Number 41 becomes: A United States Public Health Hospital, October 15th, 1921

Box List

Box 1

1-0 Finding Aid and Biographical Information

Series 1

Bound Papers of Emma West Durkee

For more information about Emma West Durkee Papers

Another copy of this work is located at Smith College, the author's alma mater:
https://fcaw.library.umass.edu/F/B4ICUYT8X7FU4BGNRJUFNU4R1LAQDVFA1SGNN4VSA6UXXRXY7Q-02400?func=item-global&doc_number=013409647&doc_library=FCL01&pds_handle=GUEST

The author has one other work titled *With the American Red Cross at Camp Upton*, which is estimated to have been published in 1932, and is located at Smith College:
https://fcaw.library.umass.edu/F/EFRBX3H7SPN2JCFMFSPM7P5P7EYR29EH626GXMEU AQ2XJ9V4T1-02307?func=item-global&doc_number=013409646&doc_library=FCL01&pds_handle=GUEST