

Her Extensive Collection was Protected over 100 Years. The Story of a Lowndes County World War I & Armistice Day Nurse comes to the Museum

WWI Nurse Jessie Ragan “Background”

by Allen Pensol, great-great nephew
Presenting her Life and Collection

The following assemblage of her keepsakes is a reconstruction of the “Scrapbook” Nurse Jessie kept while serving with the Emory Unit Base Hospital 43 in Blois, France during World War I. The Unit originated in Atlanta, Georgia with native Georgians making up the largest percentage of Doctors and Nurses.

Due to the age of the items saved by Nurse Ragan some have been lost or simply deteriorated over the one hundred plus years of storage.

However, many of her mementoes and artifacts survive and appear in the “Scrapbook.” Items include photographs, letters, news clippings, italicized excerpts from Ragan’s journal and excerpts from The History of the Emory Unit 1919, photographs of military pins and medals. Also included is a hand written note by King George V presented to each U.S. Service Member as they passed through England on their way to France.

Jessie Ragan was born December 9, 1892 in the Ousley community of Lowndes County, Georgia. She was the fifth daughter and the seventh of ten children born to Billington Philemon and Margaret Elizabeth Woodward Ragan.

Ragan received her nurse’s training in the Bellevue Hospital, formerly the Halcyon Sanatorium in Valdosta, Georgia. She began her career assisting area Doctors including Dr. A. G. Little at the Union Hospital also in Valdosta.

At the time of her enlistment in 1918, Ragan was practicing in the Boyd community of Taylor County, Florida. A passage from her journal dated April 6, 1918 reads, “Am nursing a dear baby girl and Dr. Weeks calls me and says he has a telegram for me to report home. My orders have arrived and for me to report for duty at Walter Reed General Hospital in Washington, D.C.” Two of Ragan’s brothers also served in the military during World War I, George Ragan served in the Army and Thomas Ragan served in the Navy/Merchant Marines.

From April until July, Ragan, along with additional nurses of the Emory Unit were stationed at several Army bases receiving Basic Military Training, being equipped for response to war related casualties and fitted for uniforms and necessities. On July 11, 1918 the unit departed from Halifax, Nova Scotia. After four weeks at sea the Nurses arrived at Base Hospital 43 in Blois, France where Ragan was assigned for over ten months.

With the Armistice of November 11, 1918 and the official relieving of Base Hospital 43 on January 21, 1919, some unit members were reassigned to other posts including Ragan. Her tour of duty ended on July 29, 1919 and on September 6, 1919, Nurse Ragan was honorably discharged at U.S. Hospital 12 in Ashville, North Carolina.



Now a civilian, Ragan continued her nursing career in Atlanta, Georgia with Dr. William A. Shallenberger and Dr. Guy Crawford Hewell. Upon her retirement on May 1, 1960, Ragan returned to Valdosta, Georgia residing with her sister Claudia Ragan Milton until she passed away on December 2, 1967. Nurse Jessie Ragan is buried at Columbia Primitive Baptist Church Cemetery in Nankin, Brooks County, Georgia.

“That’s Aunt Jessie”

When the Pensols from Kentucky arrived, the photo *at right* from the museum archives was placed on our screen. We had no identification for the nurse standing at left.

Allen, who had never seen this photo announced. “That’s Aunt Jessie!” Now Jessie Ragan was identified with Irby Moore and Annie Cornelia Dean (Hunter), whose family donated the photo image.

The Bellevue Sanatorium diploma of Cornelia Dean, also provided by her family, is the only such diploma image to our awareness that survives. Earlier in Valdosta was the Halcyon Sanatorium. *Below*, Allen Pensol and photo.



At left: Jessie Ragans’ extensive photo collection included Dr. A. G. Little and vehicle in front of the Union Hospital on Adair Street. Drs. Little, A. Griffin, F.H. Thomas and W.C. Wilson are named on Bellevue Sanatorium diplomas.

Left: An excerpt from the *Valdosta Daily Times* April 10, 1915 concerning Jessie Ragan and Florence Hall.

Miss Florence Hall, of Birmingham, England, and Miss Jessie Ragan, two of the nurses who are in training at the Bellevue, are in Savannah today taking the state examination.

3 Among Hundreds

Learning about Jessie Ragan gave us pause to see if Lowndes had other local Nurses in WWI. *The History of Lowndes County Georgia, 1825-1941* by the James Jackson NSDAR names 2 additional nurses, Florence Mae Hall and Myrtice Tarte, these three Army nurses among the hundreds of soldiers listed.



The over 100 photos, clippings and souvenirs in the scrapbook reflect Jessie Ragan's evident understanding in collecting the many varied aspects of nursing training in Valdosta to her time as a WWI A.E.F. nurse in France.



Immediate left: Florence Mae Hall from the Emory University WWI yearbook.

Far left: The photo of the WWI trenches is an example of the broad collection assembled by Jessie Ragan. Her WWI photos and information include Camp Gordon Georgia, New York City, *New York Times*, Ships and submarines, Windsor Castle note from King George, French towns and people, Train stations and trains with German POWs, Military cemeteries, destruction of towns, humorous drawings of a patient, Cootie hunts, novelties, etc.

Below: Jessie Ragan was reassigned for short period after Blois Hospital No. 43 to Hospital No. 35. From her Journal, February 10, 1919, "Ten months ago I left for Walter Reed and today our Base is leaving Blois and forty of us attached to Base Hospital 35. Went down to see the girls and boys and officers off. Makes me feel sad."

February 13, 1919. "This has been the most awful night I have had in the A.E.F. [Army Expeditionary Forces]. Cunningham dying in one room and Lt. Bleuie in the next. Two in one night is too much,"
(*Journal abstracts by Allen Pensol*)





Left: Allen Pensol, Zac Pensol and Emily Dixon Pensol filling out an Acquisition Form at the museum. Allen's mother Emily married a Moody pilot from Kentucky. Depending on his father's assignment, at one time Allen attended elementary school in Valdosta and later two years at Lowndes High. Emily Dixon Pensol, now 88 and blinded, was a 1953 graduate of Valdosta High. She worked here in the Carnegie Library during that time. She was determined to enter and exit using the front steps and did so. **Right:** Jessie Ragan's collection includes the WWI Pictorial Supplement of *The Stars and Stripes* and the *New York Times* Pictorial issue of the July 4th Parade down 5th Avenue.

Excerpt from Jessie Ragan in the Journal *below* "July 4, 1918- Out of bed at 6:30 to early breakfast. Have to be at Waverly Place 8:00 a.m. We march in the great parade down Fifth Ave. to 72nd St."



Jessie Ragan World War I Artifacts Presented to the Museum.

The above Photo from the scrapbook that was prepared by Allen Pensol
The Jessie Ragan WW1 Journal, **History of the Emory Unit 1917-1919**, Army Issued Canteen, Indoor Nurse Cap, Rolled Cotton Dressing, Nurse Leggings/Spats, Army Song Book.



Blois Hospital 43 activity. The diagram below is from an online video 2016 lecture from Emory University commemorating their important participation in WWI. On YouTube: **When Emory Doctors Went to War, 1917-1919.**

DIAGRAM :

Census at war's end: 2,237 current patients

July-November 1918, total patients treated;

2,500 soldiers with gunshot wounds

513 with simple or compound fractures

714 poison gas casualties

1,034 influenza patients

6,500 patients with other illnesses

9,000 total patients

Remarkably, Only 102 deaths.

Christmas 1918– The Unit received a citation for dedicated service from Gen. Pershing

Left: A dried pressed poppy over 100 years old from the Jessie Ragan Scrapbook, which also includes military cemetery photos, postcards and the Flanders Field poem.

Below: Excerpts from The Jessie Ragan Journal presented by Allen Pensol in the Scrapbook.

Patients Reported German Women chained to Machine Guns

August 6th 1918 – Ten o'clock a.m. sent to Annex No.1 for duty. See some horrible gunshot and shrapnel wounds and boy told us when his company went "over the top" they found German women chained to machine guns. Another of the capture of a fifteen year old boy chained to the guns.

He died so homesick

October 22nd 1918- It is heartbreaking some of the things we see. One death last night of a seventeen year old boy. Machine gun bullet through his head and a bunch of letters for (?name illegible). One who died last week and he was so homesick and hadn't heard from home in five weeks.

Went to pieces on the Ward

October 24th 1918- Went to pieces on the ward. Had to be sent off duty- cried for two hours.

Cootie hunt so Everything sterilized

November 6th, 1918 – Today we have a wonderful "cootie" hunt. Everything in the ward had to be sterilized and I had no pajamas, sheets or blankets for the boys...

Armistice Day Every bell and whistle ringing...good news of peace

November 11th 1918- The eleventh month, eleventh day, and eleventh hour. Every bell and whistle ringing and good news of peace. Celeia and I had two hrs. off duty. Didn't know so much could be done in two hours, Went to the sisters for our laundry and found them very excited. Had a ride home in the ambulance and when we went back we got in the truck with the boys. Saw the parades three times, Two bands and a "German" on a stretcher. Could hardly get back to Annex 1, Had an MP [military policeman] on our running board and had showers of confetti...

Jessie Ragan World War I Medals & Pins

Victory Medal/ France
Service Clasp,

Army Nurse Corps
Lapel Pins,

6th Cavalry
Crossed Sabers Pin,

Good Conduct Ribbon Bar,

Dog Tags

Service Stripes/Patch,

Three Star Sons/Daughter
Service Pin

Allen Pensol
presented this display
of medals and pins to the
museum already assembled
in a shadowbox, thus pro-
tected and exhibit ready.



At left is a portrait of Jessie Ragan. In the *above* photo the Dog Tags read,

"U. S. A. N. C. JESSIE RAGAN BASE HOSP. 43"

ENDNOTES: by Allen Pensol

"Who would have thought that these tokens of remembrance from World War I stored away by a young nurse from rural South Georgia would someday be revived and revered well into the 21st Century by her numerous great and great-great nieces and nephews? Certainly not Aunt Jessie for she was not one for self-promotion. She didn't have to. Jessie Ragan was briefly married in the early 1940's thus the King surname on her tombstone and was childless herself. Because of this, Aunt Jessie lavished her love, experiences and encouragement to each of us and our endeavors, especially those entering the medical profession.

Therefore, it is with deepest endearment and admiration that this compilation is preserved in memory of Aunt Jessie for future generations to reflect on one of history's most decisive moments through the early career of a young nurse.

Aunt Jessie was not only a Great Aunt and a Great Lady, but more than these, a Great Human."

The Pensol Family inside the fenced Courthouse Square at the Sheriffs' Memorial: "Those who made the Ultimate Sacrifice"



Emily Dixon Pensol, her son Allen and grandson Zac, a nephew to Allen, descend from the first man to lose his life while on duty in Lowndes County.

"Deputy Jeremiah Coleman Dixon. Age 25. End of Watch: Dec. 24, 1854, Sheriff John T. Adams." (occurred in Troupville)

Being October 2022, the construction crews were most accommodating for this photograph. This family was making a quick trip to Valdosta to hand deliver a significant contribution to our local WWI history, the story of Lowndes WWI Army Nurse Jessie Ragan. *Right*, the title page of the Emory Unit WWI yearbook from the Ragan Collection donation.

MEMORIALS

Bettie Fowler Bazemore

By
Donald O. Davis
Sally S. Kurrie

Carole Buescher

By
Sally S. Kurrie

John Walton Coleman

By
Donald O. Davis
Mary D. Gray
Sally S. Kurrie

Harry Douglas 'Doug' Davis

Orlando/Reddick, FL
By
Dr. and Mrs. William W. Oliver
Macon, GA

Shelly Decker

Pinetta, FL
By
Donald O. Davis

Joanne Dowling Dryman

Atlanta, GA
By
Mary D. Gray

Laura Lynn McCorkle Miller

Savannah/Towsend, GA

By
Mary Dickey Gray
Donald O. Davis
Sally S. Kurrie

Grayson C. Powell, Jr.

By
J. Edward Willis

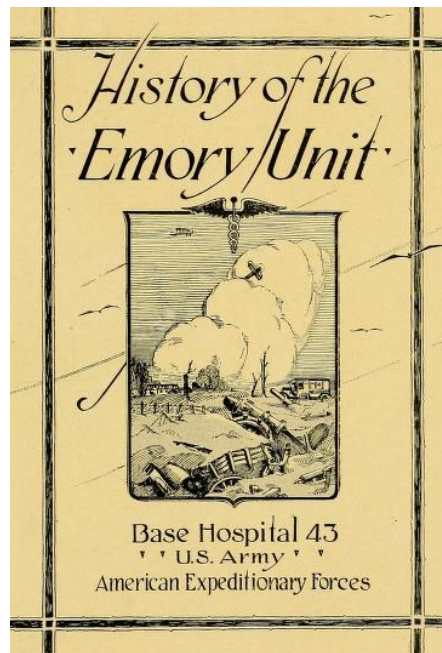
Sharon Williams Stalvey

By
Donald O. Davis
Sally S. Kurrie

Mary Jane Bridges

Wetherington

By
Donald O. Davis
Dr. and Mrs. William W. Oliver
Macon, GA



2024 Membership Application Information

People that are already LCHS members will receive their Annual Membership Application Notice in the mail by the first week in January 2024. The letter is mailed annually to current members and any remaining in the membership files for 2 previous years, thus 2021 and 2022 receive the mailing also. Anyone else should clip this membership form and mail to LCHS. This year begins a slight dues increase to cover rising costs. The individual membership level is raised from \$25.00 to \$30.00, and the Family (Household) level from \$30.00 to \$35.

2024

Mail to: LCHS
P.O. Box 56
Valdosta, GA
31603

Name _____
Address _____
Phone _____
Email _____

Membership Category

Individual	\$30.	___
Family	35.	___
Contributing	100.	___
Patron	250.	___

MUSEUM CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Officers and Executive Committee

President, John Reid Bennett; 1st Vice President, Ron Irwin; 2nd Vice President, Mary Young Manning; Secretary, Carol M. Irwin; Treasurer, Ed Hightower; Past President, Ex Officio, Sally S. Kurrie

September 21 Society meeting with program by Deborah Davis
 October 19..... Program for the Colonial Dames. The McKey and the McKeys
 October 25.....Ribbon Cutting and Celebration, Restoration of 1905 Courthouse
 November 11, 11 a.m.Armistice Day Bells of Peace, Museum Grounds
 Recognizing Jessie Ragan local WWI U.S. Army Nurse
 Nov. 16Program for VSU Public History Class Dr. Magdalena Nowak
 Nov 23 -25 Closed for Thanksgiving Weekend
 December 1.....Downtown Christmas Tree Lighting
 December 10, 2-5pm Lake Park Area Historical Society Christmas Tour of Homes
 December 25- January 2.....Museum Annual Holiday Closure
 January-March 2024..... Society Annual Membership Drive

Lowndes County Historical Society & Museum

305 West Central Avenue
 P.O. Box 56 Valdosta, GA 31603
 (229) 247-4780

Fax: (229) 247-2840

E-mail: research.lchs@gmail.com & ddavis.lchs@gmail.com

Web page:

<http://www.valdostamuseum.com>

YESTERDAY & TODAY

Newsletter of
 Lowndes County Historical Society

Newsletter Editor

Donald O. Davis

Museum Staff

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Amy Brown
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