



The Historical  
Society of  
Pennsylvania

Collection 2053

Edith Madeira  
Papers

1900-1951 (bulk 1917-1919 )  
2 boxes, 5 folders, 1 flat file, 0.4 lin. feet

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**Processing Completed:** October 2008

**Sponsor:** Processing made possible by a generous  
donation from Dorothy Del Bueno

**Restrictions:** None

**Related Collections at** None

**HSP:**

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**Abstract**

Edith Madeira (1865-1951) served as the chief nurse for the American Red Cross Commission to Palestine from June 1918 to January 1919. The Commission was formed “to look after the sickness and starvation of the civilian population in the occupied area of Palestine.”

The papers of Edith Madeira consist of typescript letters, 1917-1919; her “Report for Nursing Service” detailing the Commission’s work in Palestine; Madeira’s nursing diploma and license; memoirs detailing her voyage to Palestine, by way of South Africa and the Indian Ocean; memoirs featuring her service in Palestine and surrounding regions; and lastly, a scrapbook filled with photographs, memorabilia, and a few plant specimens.

**Background note**

Edith Madeira, the daughter of Louis and Adeline Madeira, was born in 1865 in Philadelphia. In 1900, Madeira obtained a nursing degree from John Hopkins Hospital Training School in Baltimore, Maryland. She served as a nurse superintendent for Howard Hospital in Philadelphia and Mountainside Hospital in Montclair, New Jersey. Madeira also served as a public health nurse and was superintendent of the Visiting Nurse Association in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, and Waterbury, Connecticut. She died in 1951.

Madeira, committed to helping the needy, volunteered for the American Red Cross Commission to Palestine during World War I. In 1914, Turkey declared war against Russia and Britain. British forces invaded the Turkish-occupied Middle East and pushed Turkish forces out of Syria, Egypt and Palestine. Relief work was initiated by the British Committee of Armenian and Syrian Relief to provide medical and social services to the civilian populations in this region. In 1917, the committee appealed to the American Red Cross for help. The American Red Cross responded by donating millions of dollars to the relief effort. In 1918, the committee requested additional support, and the American Red Cross formed the Red Cross Commission to Palestine, appointing Dr. John H. Finely to head the commission and Lieutenant Colonel Edwin St. John Ward to serve as the deputy commissioner. Edith Madeira was named the chief nurse and was responsible

for overseeing all nursing staff. The commission consisted of ten nurses, six surgeons, three sanitary engineers, and twenty additional staff, including social workers and teachers. The commission volunteers could not reach Palestine via the Mediterranean Sea, and instead traveled to Palestine by way of Cape Horn, the India Ocean, the Red Sea, and the Suez Canal. The volunteers reached Port Said, Egypt, on June 11, 1918, and commenced operations in Jerusalem on July 4, 1918. The commission provided health and social services to over fifty-four towns, villages, and refugee camps, extending from Port Said to the town of Acre on Palestine's northern coast. It operated twelve hospitals and sixteen dispensaries in Palestine and surrounding areas. With the British victory over the Turks in October 1918, the commission's work was assumed by a new committee, the America Committee for the Relief of the Near East. Many American Red Cross nurses and aid workers continued service under the auspices of this new committee. Since it was unclear whether the new committee would require a chief nurse, Madeira returned to the United States in January 1919.

### **Scope & content**

The collection documents Madeira's journey to Palestine and her work in Palestine and surrounding regions. Madeira's papers are separated into a manuscript box, a scrapbook box, and a flat file. The collection primarily covers her nursing work and travel experiences from December 1917 to February 1919, with a few documents from 1901 and 1905, as well as a short biography written in 1951. Included in the collection are biographical notes, Madeira's typescript letters, a "Report for Nursing Service," memoirs, a scrapbook, and her nursing diploma and license. There is scant information on Madeira's personal life or her family.

The biographical notes include a short biography of Madeira and related handwritten notes. Included in this folder is Madeira's appointment letter from the Red Cross Commission to Palestine.

Two additional folders contain typescripts of Madeira's correspondence to friends and family while she was journeying to the Middle East and serving in Palestine. The correspondence vividly details Madeira's journey from the U.S. to Palestine, including her experiences in South Africa, Ceylon, the Red Sea, and the Suez Canal. Her later correspondence describes the difficult working conditions in hospitals and clinics in Palestine and Armenian refugee camps. Madeira's travels to nearby countries, including Egypt, are also noted.

Contained within another folder is Madeira's "Report for Nursing Service," a sixteen-page report detailing the daily medical activities of nursing, medical, and social services staff from June to September 1918. This folder also contains a concise summary of Madeira's work in Palestine, as well as a typed memoir of Madeira's work and personal experiences in South Africa, Ceylon, Egypt and Palestine. Madeira spent weeks traveling around South Africa and wrote pages describing her impressions of the native populations and their relationships with the ruling classes in cities such as Cape Town and Durban. Madeira also includes painstaking details of the nurses' work in Palestine at the Russian Hospital, the Turkish Municipal Hospital, the Children's and the Infectious

Hospitals of Jerusalem, the small hospital at Ramleh, and the refugee camps of Wadi Surah. In addition, Madeira colorfully describes the social mores of the local peoples and the arid conditions of Palestine. Her memoir also includes details of social and religious events she attended while in Palestine.

Lastly, Madeira's scrapbook encompasses her journey to Palestine, as well as her service in the Red Cross Commission to Palestine. The scrapbook contains photographs of nursing staff and military officers, movement and docking orders, dried flowers and leaves collected on the trip, a palm leaf with a written prayer, postcards, hotel pamphlets, tickets, newspaper clippings, and greeting cards.

## Separation report

None.

## Related materials

At other institutions:

Clark and Madeira Family Papers, 1820-1942. University Archives and Records Center, University of Pennsylvania. The collection includes Edith Madeira's correspondence, 1917-1919.

American Red Cross Museum and Hazel Braugh Records Center and Archives, Lockport, Va.

The National Archives houses the American Red Cross's organizational records dating from 1881 to recent decades.

The Library of Congress has a collection of still photographs from the early years of the American Red Cross, including the World War I era.

## Bibliography

*The American Journal of Nursing*, Vol. 4, No. 5 (February 1904), p. 360.

*The American Journal of Nursing*, Vol. 18, No. 6 (March 1918), p. 476.

*The American Journal of Nursing*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (October 1918), p. 31.

*The American Journal of Nursing*, Vol. 19, No. 8 (May 1919), p. 620.

*A Statement of Finances and Accomplishments for the Period July 1, 1917 to February 28, 1919*, American Red Cross, 1919, WWW Virtual Library.

<http://www.vlib.us/medical/ARC/ARCintro.htm#TC>

## Subjects

Egypt — History — 1919-1952  
Kaffirs (African people)  
Nursing — History — 20th century  
Palestine — History — 1917-1918  
Red Sea Region  
South Africa — History  
South Africa — Race relations  
Sri Lanka — History — 20th century  
Suez Canal (Egypt) — 1900-1950  
World War I, 1914-1918  
World War I history

World War I Nurse  
Zulu (African people)

American Red Cross — 1910-1920  
American Red Cross — History — 20th century  
American Red Cross. Military and Social Services  
American Red Cross Nursing Service

Madeira, Edith, 1865-1951

## **Administrative Information**

### **Restrictions**

The collection is open for research.

### **Acquisition information**

Gift of Mrs. Crawford Madeira, 1975.

### **Preferred citation**

Cite as: [Indicate cited item or series here], Edith Madeira Papers (Collection 2053), The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

### **Processing note**

The scrapbook came to HSP without a spine, so pages may or may not be in their original order. Scrapbook pages were placed in a binder in the order found.

## Box and folder listing

Box or folder title	Date	Extent	Box	Folder
Biographical Notes and Red Cross Appointment Letter	1951, 1918	8 items	1	1
Typescripts of Madeira's Letters	Dec.1917 – Aug. 1918	17 items	1	2
Typescripts of Madeira's Letters	Sept. 1918 – Feb. 1919	19 items	1	3
Report for Nursing Service and Memoirs	1918-1919	5 items	1	4
Registered Nurse License issued by Maryland Board of Health	1905	1 item	1	5
Scrapbook	1918-1919	1 item	2	N/A
Edith Madeira's Diploma from Johns Hopkins Hospital Training School for Nurses	1900	1 item	N/A	FF1