Descriptive Summary
Title: Papers of Rose Alexander Bowers : U.S. Army contract surgeon,
Date (inclusive): 1918-1919
Collection number: 176
Creator: Bowers, Rose Alexander, M.D. 1887-
Extent: 0.5 linear feet (1 document box)
Repository: University of California, Los Angeles. Library. Louise M. Darling Biomedical Library History and Special Collections Division
Los Angeles, California 90095-1490
Abstract: Rose Alexander Bowers was born in 1887 and graduated from the Woman's Medical College of Pennsylvania in 1909. From August 19th to November 15th, 1918, she served as a contract surgeon with the U.S. Army Medical Corps, assigned to Camp Grant, Rockford, Illinois. Contract surgeons were civilians employed under contract in accordance with law, Army regulations, and executive orders, without military rank or status. Only nine were employed at the outbreak of World War I, but because of the medical emergency of the influenza pandemic of 1918-1919, this number rose to 899 by November 1918. Women were used as contract surgeons for the first time during World War I; fifty-five women contract surgeons were employed at the time of the armistice. These papers span a period of barely three months. They include a few personal items, but the bigger portion consists of the daily information bulletins issued by the commanding medical officer of the camp hospital to which Dr. Bowers had been assigned. These messages convey with gripping directness the reality of the emergency faced by hospital personnel and how it was met.
Physical location: History and Special Collections Division, Louise M. Darling Biomedical Library, University of California, Los Angeles
Language of Material: Collection materials in English
Access
The collection is open for research. Contact the History and Special Collections Division, Louise M. Darling Biomedical Library, UCLA, for information.
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Acquisition Information
Gift to the Biomedical Library received from the Los Angeles County Medical Association, 1992.
Biography
Rose Alexander Bowers was born in 1887. In 1909 she graduated from the Woman's Medical College of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, and was listed in the American Medical Directory first in 1911. From August 19th to November 15th, 1918, she served as a contract surgeon with the U.S. Army Medical Corps, assigned to Camp Grant, Rockford, Illinois, participating in one of the great medical dramas of her time. By 1923 she was practicing in Whittier, California and soon moved to Los Angeles, where she continued a private practice specializing in neurology and psychiatry (also her husband's, Paul Eugene Bowers, specialty). Her last listing, as retired, was found in the American Medical Association Directory, 1969.
The use of contract surgeons in the United States Army dates back to pre-Revolutionary War days and seems to have extended past the time of World War I. The term describes civilians employed under contract in accordance with law, Army regulations, and executive orders, without military rank or status. The term apparently originated during or just after the Civil War; during that conflict the number of contract surgeons (officially known as "acting assistant surgeons") was greater than the number of regular medical officers, but their use "declined sharply after creation of the Medical Reserve Corps in 1908. Only nine were employed at the outbreak of World War I, though this number rose to 899 by 15 November 1918. In World War I, women contract surgeons were used for the first time, serving as anesthetists, laboratory technicians, dispensary physicians and in other capacities. At the time of the armistice, 55 women contract surgeons were employed."
Scope and Content
These papers span a period of barely three months. In addition to a few personal items, the main portion consists of information bulletins issued by the commanding medical officer of the camp hospital to which Dr. Bowers had been assigned. These messages convey with gripping directness the reality of the emergency faced by hospital personnel during the last week of September and the month of October, 1918. The first two weeks' leaflets document the incredibly swift rise of the patient population, from circa 700 to 2,936 one week later; in another week, the count was 3,596 patients and 100 deaths per day; there were 1,500 pneumonia patients on the wards. During Week Two supplies and drugs were running low; healthy personnel were being moved to tents in order to free barracks for more patient beds; routines for notifying and dealing with relatives of critically ill patients were devised, and personnel assigned to keep track of the corpses and their belongings. Noted were the increasing exhaustion (but continued dedication) of health care personnel, the shortage of thermometers, but also the influx of nearby enlisted personnel and town volunteers to help clean the wards and feed the personnel. By Week Three admissions and deaths were thankfully declining, some emergency nurses and volunteers could be released, and there was room to hold patients in the hospital for a longer convalescence. By Week Four, there was time to exhort the hospital population to invest in the Liberty Bond drive, to worry about the format of daily and monthly reports from each ward, and to complain about discipline on the wards.

The collection is organized chronologically in one sequence.

Indexing Terms
The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the library’s online public access catalog.

Subjects
Bowers, Rose Alexander.
Camp Grant (Ill.)
Contract Services.
Influenza--history--United States.
Military Medicine--history--United States.
Physicians, Women--United States.

Folder 1  Circular of information: employment of women physicians as contract surgeons.
Scope and Content Note
issued by the Office of the Surgeon General, War Department, Washington; calls for medical school graduates between the ages of 23 and 45, with skills in administration of anesthetics

Folder 2  Contract with a private physician for service as contract surgeon, U. S. Army. 1918-1921
Scope and Content Note
entered into on Aug. 19, 1918 in Michigan City, Indiana, for the sum of $150/month, plus quarters, etc. as allowed for a First Lieutenant in the Medical Corps; entries on verso indicate the contract was terminated Nov. 15, 1918
Note
stamped entries note issue of a bronze victory button on Oct. 6, 1919 and a Victory Medal on Feb. 18, 1921 (see Box 1, Items 1 and 2 for these artifacts)

Folder 3  Special orders, no. 213, extract. 9/11/1918
Scope and Content Note
orders Dr. Bowers to report to Camp Grant, Rockford, Illinois

Folder 4  Special orders, no. 183, extract. 9/17/1918
Scope and Content Note
assigns Dr. Bowers to the Section of General Surgery as anesthetist
Note
two carbon copies
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Folder</th>
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| 5      | Memorandum, no. 61, Camp Grant. 9/22/1918  
Scope and Content Note  
warns medical personnel to wear masks and gowns and take proper precautions because of the influenza epidemic |
| 6      | Bulletins, Camp Grant: nos. [1], 2, 4-7. 9/28/1918 - 10/4/1918  
Scope and Content Note  
provide daily admission, discharge, death, and total patient counts; list major administrative actions and problems |
| 7      | Bulletins, Camp Grant: nos. 8-14. 10/5/1918 - 10/11/1918 |
| 8      | Bulletins, Camp Grant: nos. 15-21. 10/12/1918 - 10/18/1918  
Note  
two copies of no. 20 |
| 9      | Bulletins, Camp Grant: nos. 22, 25-29. 10/19/1918 - 11/4/1918 |
| 10     | Memoranda, Camp Grant. 11/5/1918 -11/6/1918  
Scope and Content Note  
memorandum to all ward surgeons, and memorandum announcing arrival of inspector to the camp |
| 11     | Letter from Woodrow Wilson.  
Scope and Content Note  
copy of a holographic letter to the people of the country "to lend their money" to the war effort |
| 1      | Bronze victory button. 10/6/1919  
Note  
see [Box 1 : 2] for paperwork |
| 2      | Bronze victory medal. 2/18/1921  
Note  
see [Box 1 : 2] for paperwork |