

VIRGINIA WOMEN AND THE SECOND WORLD WAR

RECORDS AND RESOURCES AT THE LIBRARY OF VIRGINIA



In 1941, when the United States entered World War II, men joined the armed forces and left crucial jobs vacant. Some 300,000 Virginians served in uniform, and more than 7,000 never returned home. With fathers, brothers, husbands, and sons off fighting for freedom, Virginia women stepped into their shoes on assembly lines, behind typewriters, and in garages. For many women, the war provided their first opportunity to work outside the home. It certainly gave them the chance to show they could perform jobs previously monopolized by men. The Richmond Engineering Company employed women welders to make bomb heads. In Lynchburg and Radford, women took wartime jobs in foundries and were congratulated for their expertise in the industry's magazine, *The Iron Worker*: "Ladies take a bow. You are doing an expert double-barreled job of helping whip the Axis." Although some women were paid less than their male counterparts, at federal installations they earned equal wages. Williamsburg resident Ethelyn Springs worked during the war at the Naval Weapons Station in nearby Yorktown. "A lot of women got jobs," she recalled, "to do similar things that men were doing. And the pay was the same." After the war, most women workers relinquished their jobs to returning veterans. Returning to the domestic sphere, women gave up their paychecks—but with their newfound independence, the world had been forever changed.

Records housed at the Library of Virginia chronicle women's wartime work selling stamps and bonds, sewing bandages, and visiting hospitals. Women served as aircraft spotters, photographers, clerks, and mechanics. They banded together to raise money, purchasing ambulances for the Red Cross, as well as bombers and fighter planes. Some joined the military as nurses and were sent overseas. Like soldiers, sailors, and marines, some did not return, including Lt. Eva Ageon, who was thirty-two years old when she died in the Panama Canal Zone in 1942. The path-breaking lives of Virginia women at home and abroad during the war are illuminated in the selected records described below. In addition, the Library of Virginia's Picture Collection provides a rich resource for World War II-era posters and photographs.

Archival Resources

Adams, Pauline

Papers, 1917–1990

Accession 37402

Includes a U. S. Army pass for the Norfolk Information Center, First Interceptor Command. During the war, civilian volunteers manned observation posts for the Aircraft Warning Service in Hampton Roads and relayed information on suspicious aircraft to Army Air Corps information centers. Adams's pass records her age, weight, height, hair color, and eye color, and contains a photograph and fingerprints.

American War Mothers, Richmond Chapter

Records, 1928–1957

Accession 30149

Organized in 1917 for mothers of sons and daughters who served in American wars and were honorably discharged. Records include membership applications, minutes of monthly meetings, and correspondence. The club sold war stamps and bonds at a booth in Woolworth's, sewed bandages for the Red Cross, and took apples and popcorn to recuperating veterans at Sheltering Arms Hospital.

Barton Heights Woman's Club (Richmond City)

Records, 1908–1967

Accession 26770

Including minute books, scrapbooks, and rosters of club officers and members. Boxes 4 and 5 contain scrapbooks, dated 1916–1967, that document the club's efforts during both World Wars, including volunteer work, fund raising, and knitting garments for fighting men overseas. The War Service Committee was formed on 27 May 1942. Members sold war stamps and bonds; sent letters, Christmas cards, and packages to servicemen overseas; and established a Student Loan Fund for the training of nurses. Together with the Virginia Federation of Women's Clubs, Barton Heights purchased an ambulance for the Red Cross and a bomber, the *Spirit of Virginia*.

Crouch, Kenneth E.
Scrapbooks, 1941–1945
Accession 37524

Scrapbooks compiled of newspaper clippings concerning Bedford County men and women who served in the armed forces during World War II. Of 35 Bedford soldiers in the first assault wave on D-Day, 19 died in the invasion's first fifteen minutes and 2 more died later that day. The deaths from the town of Bedford were the highest per-capita loss from any United States community on 6 June 1944. Bedford is the location for the National D-Day Memorial.

These scrapbooks contain newspaper articles and photographs of local men and women in the service, including Lillian Patterson, a WAC stationed at Fort Benning, Georgia; Vera Creasy, the recipient of a Good Conduct Ribbon for her work at the Red River Ordnance Depot in Texarkana, Texas; and Helen Kathleen Allen, an army nurse stationed at New Haven, Connecticut. A photograph of Lt. Allen in uniform appeared in the paper next to a photograph of her brother, John, a private stationed overseas.

Office of Civilian Defense (RG 55)
General records, 1940–1945
Scrapbooks, 1940–1945

Including official minutes, correspondence, and publications, as well as a draft history of civil defense in Virginia during World War II. Records currently closed for processing. See also *Civilian Defense News*, published 1942–1944 (Film 1226), *Salvage Bulletin* 1942–1945 (Film 1673), and Marvin W. Schlegel's *Virginia on Guard: Civilian Defense and the State Militia in the Second World War* (1949).

Scott, Sammy
Papers, 1910–1943
Accession 34652

Typed reminiscences of Scott, a high school teacher in Chester, Virginia, a member of the Camp Lee Motor Corps, and an aircraft spotter.

U. S. Army Signal Corps Photograph Collection

Hampton Roads became a crucial base during World War II, and many of the photographers, clerks, medical personnel, mechanics, and administrators employed there were women. These photographs (available on the Library's Web site) show women pouring coffee, boarding ships bound for Europe, and changing tires in the motor pool.

U.S.O. Histories

World War II History Commission (RG 68)

Histories for Virginia U.S.O. clubs, both black and white, some containing lists of members and photographs. Segregation laws in Virginia prevented African American servicemen and women from attending white U.S.O. facilities; as a result, African American community leaders often stepped in to offer an alternative. The Bruton Heights club in Williamsburg, for example, served black servicemen and women in a local school, while white soldiers and sailors frequented a separate club on Duke of Gloucester Street.

Virginia Federation of Women's Clubs

Records, 1907–1958

Accession 25115

Records documenting the history of the federation's contribution to Virginia's social welfare, including research materials for Etta Belle Walker Northington's *The Virginia Federation of Women's Clubs*, 1907–1957, photographs, yearbooks, scrapbooks, and club histories. Also includes information on home front service during World War II (organized by the club's Department of War Service) and a war bond scrapbook, 1943–1946, chronicling the efforts of Virginia club women to sell bonds and raise money for military equipment during World War II.

Under the leadership of Coeburn native Cynthia A. Boatwright (whose son-in-law was killed in action on Luzon in 1945), the federation purchased two ambulances for the Red Cross, then turned its fundraising efforts to establishing nursing scholarships. Two fighter planes were purchased through the efforts of the Virginia clubs, the Wings of the Alexandria Woman's Club in 1944 and the H. J. Miracle, for the Hilton Village Juniors, in 1943. These efforts to raise money for the purchase of planes are documented in a Bomber Campaign Publicity Scrapbook, 1941–1944.

Local club work during the war is vividly described in district reports from across the state. The Salem Woman's Club, for example, sent thirteen dozen diapers to the Virginia Council of Churches for needy infants in Europe; the Junior Women's Club in Marion prepared a care package for every Smyth County resident who enlisted; and the Community League in Big

Stone Gap prepared lunches for draftees who were traveling by bus to induction centers. For additional material and club histories, see Accession 34148 and *The Virginia Club Woman* (1928—), the official publication of the Virginia Federation of Women's Clubs.

War Memorial Commission

Records, 1953–1983

Accession 33938

In 1950, the General Assembly adopted the World War II Memorial Bill, declaring that it was “fitting and desirable that the Commonwealth of Virginia should accord appropriate and useful recognition to these patriotic Virginians whose service and sacrifice contributed substantially toward bringing the war to a victorious conclusion.” This collection includes architectural drawings, blueprints, correspondence, newspaper clippings, and photographs concerning the memorial, which was dedicated in Richmond on 29 February 1956. Initially planned to recognize casualties among servicemen and women during World War II, the structure also honors Virginia's war dead from Korea and Vietnam.

World War II History Commission (RG 68)

The World War II History Commission was established by an act of the General Assembly passed on 8 March 1944 “to collect, assemble, edit, and publish . . . information and material with respect to the contribution to World War II made by Virginia and Virginians.” Between 1944 and 1948 the commission published several volumes including a roster of war dead.

Manuscript materials include correspondence and data files, 1941–1950 (Accession 27544), reference notes, newspaper clippings arranged by subject, and scrapbooks. The Personal War Service Records of Virginia's War Dead, 1942–1945 (Accession 24805) includes letters, military service records, newspaper clippings, and photographs. *The Gold Star Honor Roll of Virginians in the Second World War* (1947), edited by W. Edwin Hemphill, was compiled from this collection. Also included are separation notices and reports, 1942–1946 (Accession 23573) for Virginia service men and women, providing brief descriptions of civilian background and military service. This collection is currently being processed.

Contemporary Printed Sources

The publication of books was regulated during the war. Most volumes carried a standard statement: “This book has been produced in conformity with wartime economy standards. The amount of reading matter has in no way been curtailed—when necessary, more words per page are used. Thinner books and smaller books will save paper, cloth, metals, transportation and storage space and will conserve manpower.”

Banning, Margaret Culkin. *Women for Defense*. New York, 1942.

Carson, Julia M. H. *Home Away from Home: The Story of the USO*. New York, 1946.

Dietz, Frieda M. *How to Be the Smart Woman in War Time*. Richmond, 1943.

Flikke, Col. Julia O. *Nurses in Action: The Story of the Army Nurse Corps*. Philadelphia, 1943.

Glover, Katherine. *Women at Work in Wartime*. New York, 1943.

Gorham, Ethel B. *So Your Husband's Gone to War!* Garden City, N.Y., 1942.

Greenbie, Marjorie B. *The Art of Living in Wartime*. New York, 1943.

Meyer, Dickie. *Needed—Women in Aviation*. New York, 1942.

Ross, Nancy Wilson. *The Waves: The Story of the Girls in Blue*. New York, 1943.

Shea, Nancy. *The WAACS*. New York, 1943.

Spencer, Louise Reid. *Guerilla Wife*. Chicago, 1945.

Steele, Evelyn. *Wartime Opportunities for Women*. New York, 1943.

War Department. Civilian Personnel Division. *You're Going to Employ Women*. Washington, D.C., 1943.

War Finance Committee. Women's Division. *W.S.S. History*. Richmond, 1946.

White, Lt. Barbara A. *Lady Leatherneck*. New York, 1945.

Public Housing Periodicals

Residents of housing projects in Norfolk produced (and illustrated) wartime bulletins—encouraging the planting of victory gardens, asking for volunteer air raid wardens, and organizing clubs for Navy mothers. The city’s Housing Authority and the federal government constructed these neighborhoods to house the influx of Navy personnel, war workers, and their families. Carney Park, Oak Leaf Park, and Roberts Park were reserved for African Americans.

Carney Park Star (1942–1943)

Commonwealth Bulletin (1943–1944)

Lewis Park Edition (1943)

Lewis Park News (1943–1944)

Liberty Park Bulletin (1943)

Merrimack Park Bulletin (1942–1944)

The Oak Leaf (1942–1944)

Roberts Park Journal (1943)

Reference Sources

Articles

Anderson, Karen. “Last Hired, First Fired: Black Women Workers During World War II.” *Journal of American History* 69 (June 1982): 82–97.

Hall, Phyllis. “Crisis at Hampton Roads: The Problem of Wartime Congestion, 1942–1944.” *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 101 (1993): 405–432.

“Inspired by Design: World War II Posters and the Virginia Home Front.” *Virginia Cavalcade* 37 (Autumn 1987): 68–73.

Johnson, Charles. “V for Virginia: The Commonwealth Goes to War.” *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 100 (1992): 365–398.

Litoff, Judy Barrett, and David C. Smith. “Writing is Fighting, Too: The World War II Correspondence of Southern Women.” *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 76 (1992): 436–457.

“Port of Embarkation: Signal Corps Photographs of Hampton Roads, 1942–1945.” *Virginia Cavalcade* 37 (Autumn 1987): 74–85.

“Posters of World War II.” *Virginia Cavalcade* 45 (Autumn 1995): 66–73.

Books

Friedl, Vicki L. *Women in the United States Military, 1901–1995: A Research Guide and Annotated Bibliography*. Westport, Conn., 1996.

Hartmann, Susan M. *The Home Front and Beyond: American Women in the 1940s*. Boston, 1982.

Poulos, Paula Nassen, ed. *A Women’s War Too: U.S. Women in the Military in World War II*. Washington, D.C., 1996. (Includes “The WAC as Cryptographer” by Mary B. Johnston, who interrupted her studies at Emory and Henry College in 1942 to join the Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps.)

Seeley, Charlotte Palmer, comp. *American Women and the U.S. Armed Forces: A Guide to the Records of Military Agencies in the National Archives Relating to American Women*. Revised by Virginia C. Purdy and Robert Gruber. Washington, D.C., 1992.

Treadwell, Mattie E. *The Women’s Army Corps*. Washington, D.C., 1954.

Wingo, Josette Dermody. *Mother was a Gunner’s Mate: World War II in the Waves*. Annapolis, 1994.

Cover image: Norfolk women learn the proper use of a gas mask, 1943. Courtesy of the Norfolk Public Library.