

# The World War I American Red Cross Uniform of Miss Annie L. Wheeler

**F**EW women served overseas either as nurses or in support of nursing services, during both the Spanish-American War and World War I. Miss Annie L. Wheeler, born on 31 July 1868, the daughter of General Joseph Wheeler,<sup>1</sup> was one of these few, exceptional women. The Alabama Historical Commission owns the uniform she wore in France during World War I and displays it at the Joseph Wheeler Home. The white two-story house, surrounded by enormous shade trees, was Annie Wheeler's home through most of her life and it was her residence at the time of her death in 1955.

During the Spanish-American War, Congress authorized the Army's surgeon general to contract with up to 1,500



FIG 1. Annie Wheeler in her Spanish-American War nurse's uniform. She served in Cuba in 1898 and in the Philippines in 1899. Courtesy of the Joseph Wheeler Home.

*Lt. Col. William K. Emerson, USA (Ret.)*

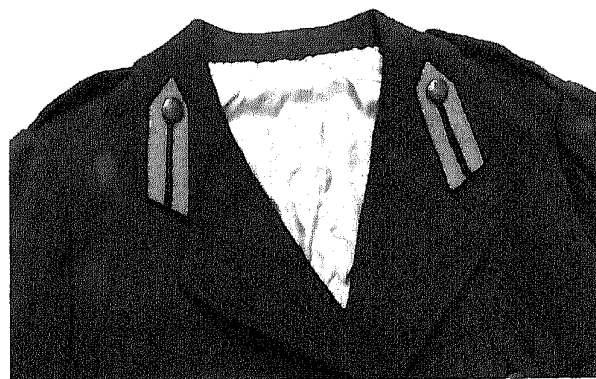


FIG 2. Annie Wheeler's coat collar showing the typical ARC light blue trim with a black center stripe and a dull silver button. The coat's lining is white silk. Photograph by the author.

women as nurses and the Army ultimately reached a maximum of 1,158 nurses.<sup>2</sup> During this early service, women wore standard white civilian ward uniforms; their only insignia was a red enamel Maltese cross worn on the left collar. By 1899 the Army specified the ward uniforms to be blue and white but until World War I, Army nurses had only uniforms used on the hospital wards, as they wore civilian clothing when on travel and away from hospitals for an extended period.<sup>3</sup>

While General Wheeler served in Congress representing northern Alabama, the family lived in Washington and Annie was a member of the social set in the capital. When the Spanish-American War broke out, Annie volunteered to go to Cuba and eventually Clara Barton, founder of the American Red Cross (ARC), put her in charge of a new hospital where she worked with the sick and wounded. A year later she went with her father and brother to the Philippines and served as a nurse in a military hospital.<sup>4</sup>

An 1898 photo of Annie Wheeler in her uniform is shown in FIG 1. Her service is well documented. In January 1899, House Resolution 330 (55th Congress, 3d Session), was introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives. This resolution recognized "the patriotic devotion and unremitting attention of Miss Annie Wheeler as nurse to private soldiers of the Army of the United States during the war with Spain." Although the resolution authorized that a gold medal be prepared by the Director of the Mint, this was never accomplished since the Senate never passed the resolution.

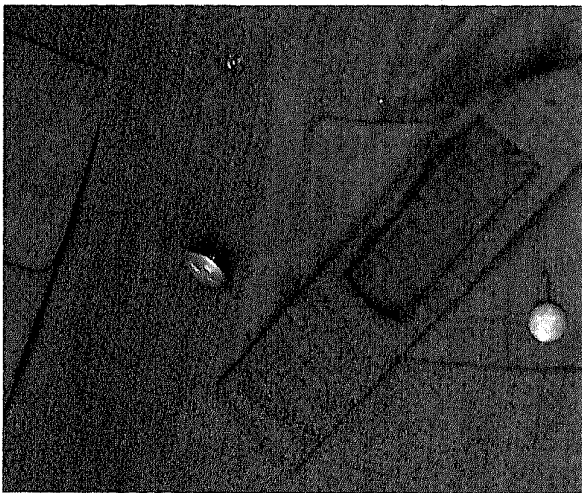
Annie returned to private life in northern Alabama, but at the age of fifty returned to serve with the Red Cross in France



*FIG 3. The front of Annie Wheeler's World War I ARC gray coat. The gold colored V on the left sleeve shows she served more than six months overseas. Photograph by the author.*



*FIG 4. Back of the Wheeler coat showing two black metal hooks at the belt. Photograph by the author.*



*FIG 5. Detail of the belt. The rectangle is a section cut out from the underside of the belt and evidently used for a patch elsewhere. Rather than a regulation third button that would be covered by the belt, the button was totally omitted. The snap fastened to the underside of the belt to hold it in place. Photograph by the author.*



*FIG 6. The long World War I skirt. In this photo one corner is laid over the front. Photograph by the author.*

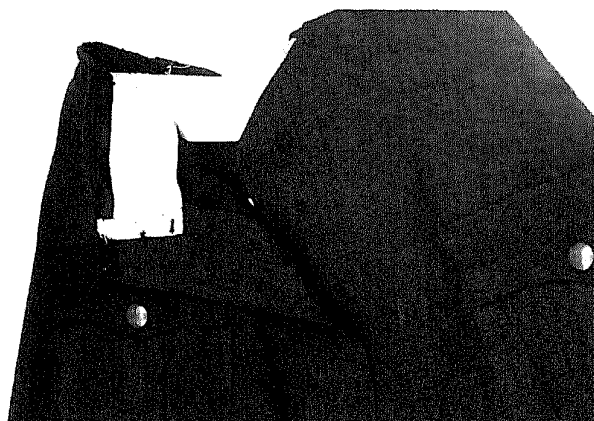


FIG 7. Detail of the skirt top showing the three hooks and eyes which fastened the waist, and the snaps which fastened the top 2 1/2 inches. The 2-inch wide white cotton lining is only at the waist. Photograph by the author.



FIG 8. The cape, which fastens with four large buttons and two long decorative strips sewn in at the neck, is lined with light blue cotton, as is the underside of the collar. Photograph by the author.

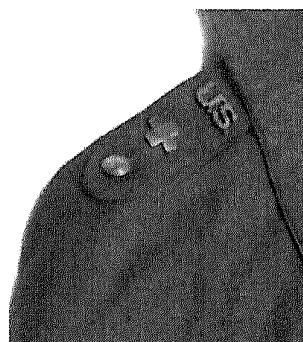


FIG 9. Detail of the reverse cape epaulet, sewn in at the neck and fastened near the shoulder with a button. The dark metal U.S. letters and the enameled red cross appear on both shoulders. Photograph by the author.

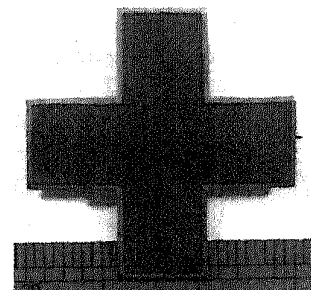


FIG 10. Annie Wheeler's red cross insignia of the type worn on American Red Cross hats in World War I, shown at its actual size. Photograph by the author.

and England during World War I. In the interval between the wars, nursing had changed and required more formal schooling, plus the Red Cross had become a more active organization. During World War I, the American Red Cross supplied nurses to the War Department to supplement those nurses directly employed by the Army. The War Department wanted all personnel overseas to have uniforms and this meant both Army and Red Cross nurses had to adopt standard clothing for wear outside medical facilities.<sup>5</sup> As a result, ARC personnel began to wear gray whipcord uniforms which included a single breasted, four-button, lapel style tunic. These coat collars had a variety of trim, each color showing a distinctive function.<sup>6</sup>

Table: American Red Cross Trim Colors, World War I

| Service                          | Color of Trim |
|----------------------------------|---------------|
| National Headquarters            | Royal blue    |
| Military relief                  | Horizon blue  |
| Civilian relief                  | Dark red      |
| Development                      | Bottle green  |
| Clerks                           | Tan           |
| Chauffeurs                       | Peacock green |
| Delegates to meet transportation | Wine          |
| Automobile services              | White         |

Miss Annie Wheeler's coat, now at the Joseph Wheeler Home near Courtland, Alabama, generally matches the description of the World War I ARC prescribed uniform. The coat has dull silver ARC buttons, a cloth belt fastened with a button, the prescribed bronze metal US letters on the shoulder

loops, and on the lower left sleeve, one gold colored V, indicating more than six months' service overseas.<sup>7</sup> Accompanying the coat is a long matching skirt with two pockets, each fastened with a small ARC button, and also a long ARC cape which buttons with four large ARC buttons and that also has, on the collar, the same style of colored collar trim used on the coat.

The British had a significant influence on U.S. uniforms during World War I and the distinctive ARC collar trim is somewhat similar to that used by British officers. The ARC adopted trim in a range of colors to show functions other than nursing. These colors are listed in the table.<sup>8</sup>

Annie Wheeler's coat and cape collar trim are both a light blue, which must be interpreted as horizon blue, given the ARC trim colors listed in the table. A photo of the 1 1/16-inch wide collar trim, with a narrow 3/16-inch wide black central ribbed tape and a medium 5/8-inch diameter ARC dull silver button, is shown in FIG 2. Wheeler's petite stature is shown by the small coat and skirt.

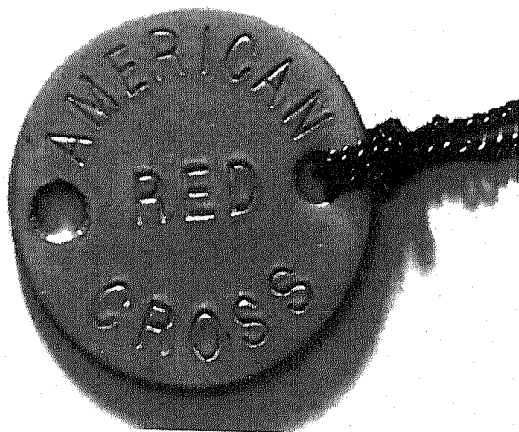


FIG 11. The American Red Cross World War I style aluminum identification disk from the Wheeler home. Photograph by the author.



FIG 12. The pair of sterling silver identification tags used by Annie Wheeler while in France. Photograph by the author.



FIG 13. Annie Wheeler in her American Red Cross uniform, 1919. Courtesy of the Joseph Wheeler Home.

The front of Annie Wheeler's coat is shown in FIG 3. While regulations call for it to be fastened with four buttons, this coat's third button is covered by a cloth belt, which is itself fastened with a button. The back of the belt is held with two hooks sewn into the coat rear side seams. Large pockets, both above and below the belt, are fastened with 7/8-inch diameter dull silver buttons. Shoulders carry plain cloth epaulets, 1 3/4 inches wide at the base. On the coat's left cuff is a gold-colored V showing more than six months' service overseas.

The heavy, unlined long skirt with two pleated pockets had hook and eye fasteners to close it at the waist, and snaps to fasten up the top seam. Thirty-five inches long, it has an 80-inch circumference at the bottom and a trim 24-inch diameter waist.

The cape generally matches the coat and skirt, except that the lining is light blue cotton, the same as the collar trim. The cape has four buttons generously spaced down the front, plus two long straps, each of which has one end sewn into the inside collar. The free ends of these two straps are designed to button together so one strap has a small ARC button on one end and the other a button hole. After wrapping the two straps in opposite directions around the large coat collar, these straps button together to secure the neck opening. In this manner these straps act like a top button on a conventional heavy top coat, closing the neck opening. The collar is very wide and could be turned up to cover the ears and sides of the head and

the collar underside is lined in light blue. On the cape shoulders the cloth epaulets are unusual since they are sewn in at the neck and buttoned at the shoulder. These epaulets carry the prescribed dark bronze metal U.S. letters, and red enameled crosses not called for in regulations.

Annie Wheeler proudly displayed her father's insignia and badges, her brother's medals and assorted insignia, and her own medals, such as for the Daughters of the American Revolution and other societies, in various cases in her home. In one of these cases are two different identification tags of Annie's from World War I and a large enameled red cross of the type worn on ARC women's hats from 1917 to 1919. One identification tag is a standard aluminum World War I issue type disk with "American Red Cross" stamped on one side and a number on the reverse. No name appears on this tag. The other tag set is a matching pair of sterling silver disks. These two are fastened together by a single ring which also runs through the necklace chain. One side of these disks is engraved in block letters with her name, "A.R.C.," and "U.S.A." On the other side in script is engraved, "Notify Lucy B. Wheeler, Wheeler, Ala."

Annie Wheeler died in 1955 as a result of a fall and a

consequential hip fracture. She is buried in the family cemetery at the rear of the Wheeler Home. Her niece inherited the farm and in 1993 donated the fifty acres, thirteen historic buildings, and their contents, including the World War I uniform and other artifacts, to the State of Alabama."

## Notes

1. Joseph Wheeler graduated from West Point in 1859, became a lieutenant general in Confederate service and, during the Spanish-American War, a major general of volunteers and for three months of 1900, a brigadier general in the Regular Army.
2. *Historical Highlights of the Army Nurse Corps* (Washington: U.S. Army Health Service Command, n.d.), 2; War Department, *Annual Reports, 1901* (Washington: GPO, 1902), vol. 1, pt. 2: 599.
3. War Department, Surgeon General's Office, unnumbered circular, 20 June 1899.
4. Untitled fact sheet for Pond Springs, the Joseph Wheeler Home (Montgomery: Alabama Historical Commission, n.d.).
5. War Department, *Medical Department ... in the World War*, vol. 13 (Washington: GPO, 1927), 302-03.
6. American Red Cross, *American Red Cross Uniforms* (n.p., circa 1919).
7. War Department, General Orders 6, 12 January 1918.
8. American Red Cross, *American Red Cross Uniforms*.
9. Fact sheet for Pond Springs.

## Update on 4th New York Uniforms in 1775

*Philip D. Weaver*

IN 1977, Fellow Eric I. Manders presented his ground breaking research on the New York Line regimental coats of 1775 in *MC&H*. It shattered a long-held misconception that the regiments were outfitted in numerical sequence according to desired coat colors. He concluded, based on contemporary documents and accounts, that "it seems ... likely that the 1st

PHILIP D. WEAVER has been a member of *The Company* since 1980. His articles on the colonial period and living history were first published nationally in 1979. He is an original member of the West Point Chapter and served as Chapter President. A Revolutionary War living historian since 1975, Phil is a highly regarded tailor and researcher. Several extensive research projects about the New York Line of 1775 were spawned by that living history experience and many have been published in either *MUIA* or *MC&H*. A feature detailing the Yorker assault on Quebec in 1775 gleaned from personal accounts of the participants is currently in progress.

Regiment actually wore blue coats faced with scarlet, the 2d blue faced with crimson, the 3d a variety of different colored coats faced with green, and the 4th a variety faced with blue."<sup>1</sup>

In this article, Manders references a misdated document of an eyewitness description of Capt. Nathaniel Woodward's Queens County company of the 4th New York at Lake George on 25 September 1775 as being clothed in "grey and blue." This was the only known specific reference to the battalion's coat colors until now.<sup>2</sup>

Nathan Lockwood, a member of Capt. Jonathan Platt's company, made a deposition on 15 November 1819 for his application for a pension from the federal government. It reads, in part:

According to the best of his recollection he was enlisted in the year 1776, or if not that year, then in the year 1775, as a private in the Company commanded by Captain Jonathan Platt in the 4th New York Regiment commanded by Colonel James Holmes, and that this Deponent was