

California War History Committee (WWI) - San Diego County Branch, 1918-1925

Collection ID: MS.029

Collection Information

Inclusive dates: 1918-1923

Size: 3 boxes, 1.5 linear ft.

Processed: 9/16, by Richard Fridshal

Abstract

This collection is comprised of biographical records, letters, newspaper clippings, and photographs pertaining to servicemen from San Diego who served in World War I. The collection originated from the San Diego Branch of the California War History Committee which distributed "biography cards" to the public in order to obtain information about the county's veterans. The San Diego Public Library played a large part in this process by helping the committee gather information, putting the compiled list of names on display, and preserving the records. The city librarian at the time, Althea Warren, served on the committee and eventually brought the records to the city library as part of its holdings. Much of the information on the servicemen from National City was gathered by Mrs. Fannie Thelen, who served as the publicity chair on the San Diego County Women's Committee and longtime member of the National City library board. Her letters to servicemen and their family members makes up the majority of the correspondence in the collection. The service members represented throughout the collection come from diversified backgrounds including of all branches of service, varying education level, ethnicity, and gender. Highlights include an African American sailor who professed his love of the Navy, a photograph of a female nurse in her Red Cross uniform, a soldier pictured in front of the Eiffel Tower, a newspaper correspondent who was the brother of Brigadier General Joseph H. Pendleton, and several valor medal recipients.

Scope and Content

The California War History Committee commissioned a county branch, the San Diego Historical Committee, to compile records documenting San Diego's participation in WWI, also known as the Great War. This would help form a greater compilation of "California's Honor Roll" which would list all of those citizens of California who rendered patriotic services in the war. The San Diego committee put out a search for biographical sketches and photographs. "Biography cards" were distributed by the state and county committees and could be filled out by the service member or family and friends of deceased servicemen. The goal was to honor these individuals and display their names publicly in appreciation of their service and sacrifices, and to preserve their history for future generations. The San Diego Public Library played a large part in this process by helping the committee gather information, putting the compiled list of names on display, and preserving the records.

The committees were appointed by then California Governor, William Stephens. The San Diego committee included the city librarian, Althea Warren as the secretary as well as the county librarian. The board of supervisors of San Diego County provided funds for postage and clerical work for the project to mail the biography cards to veterans. They encountered difficulty, however, when nearly half of the addressed cards were returned due to bad addresses. Responding to this, the committee

publicly requested help from the community in tracking down and recording information for servicemen. Cards were then returned by mothers, fathers, siblings, and friends of servicemen who had been killed in the war in addition to surviving service members themselves. They were asked to provide two files, (including a photo of the service member in uniform if able) one for the state archives and one for the San Diego public library.

Another interesting component to the collection is a large amount of correspondence and biographical information on servicemen from National City. This is owed to the dedication of a woman named Mrs. Fannie Thelen (Mrs. Edmund Thelen) who served as the publicity chair on the San Diego County Women's Committee. Mrs. Thelen diligently wrote letters to families of service members whom the county had not received information for, in order to obtain their service records and ensure that the National City community received the credit it was due. One challenge she encountered in writing to veterans themselves was convincing them that their contribution to the project would not be seen as gloating. One letter reads "many servicemen think this is a vainglorious thing, but it is not." Her correspondence and the biographical information she received from families make up about a quarter of the collection.

The service members represented throughout the collection come from diversified backgrounds including of all branches of service, varying education level, ethnicity, and gender. Highlights include an African American sailor who professed his love of the Navy, a photograph of a female nurse in her Red Cross uniform, a soldier pictured in front of the Eiffel Tower, a newspaper correspondent who was the brother of Brigadier General Joseph H. Pendleton, and several valor medal recipients.

Container List

Box	File	Contents	Dates
1	1	Correspondence related to the California War History Committee Project	1918-1921
		Lists of names of men who served in the Armed Forces during World War I	1918-1921
	2	Newspaper clippings about servicemen in World War I	1918-1919
	3	Biographical information collected on servicemen from National City, surnames Alexander-Burnham	1921
	4	Biographical information collected on servicemen from National City, surnames Clemens-Epstein	1921-1922
	5	Biographical information collected on servicemen from National City, surnames Greiler-Morrison	1921
	6	Biographical information collected on servicemen from National City, surnames O'Connell-Turner	1921-1923
	7	Biographical information collected on servicemen from National City, surnames Van Deripe-Yoakim	1921-1922
	8	Photos, surnames A	
	9	Photos, surnames B	
	10	Photos, surnames C-G	
	11	Photos, surnames H-J	
	12	Photos, surnames K-L	

Box	File	Contents	Dates
1	13	Photos, surnames M	
	14	Photos, surnames N-R	
	15	Photos, surnames S	
	16	Photos, surnames T-Z	
2		Biographical cards containing records of San Diego County servicemen in World War I with surnames Achard-Houston	1919-1923
3		Biographical cards containing records of San Diego County servicemen in World War I with surnames Howard-Yoakim	1919-1923