

Florence Jenkins
Narrator

Betty Dekrey
Interviewer

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Heritage Education Commission Oral History Project
Moorhead State University Library Audiovisual Department
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BD: Today is November 19, 1985. Florence Jenkins, who worked for the Red Cross is here as a donor for the Oral History Project of Moorhead State University's Heritage Education Commission. I am Betty Dekrey of 2311 South Rivershore Drive, Moorhead, and will act as the interviewer. We are having this rather informal dialogue at the Audiovisual Department in the Library of Moorhead State University.

Florence, could you start by giving your name, address, the length of time you've lived in Moorhead, your age if you wish, and your phone number?

FJ: Ah, I am Florence Jenkins. I live at 105 North Third Street, Moorhead, Minnesota. Ah, did you ask me for the time of...

BD: How long you...

FJ: ...I had worked for the Red Cross?

BD: No, how long you've lived in Moorhead first, I guess.

FJ: Pardon me. Ah, we moved to Moorhead in 1947. And hmmm...oh, I was born in 1914.

BD: [Chuckles] And then your phone number?

FJ: Our...my phone number is 233-2923.

BD: As a person who worked as a volunteer for Red Cross, perhaps you can tell us about the activities that carried on here in Moorhead, where it was located, and any information about the people who started the chapter here.

FJ: Well, Betty, I have worked both as a volunteer and as a paid worker for the Red Cross. When I was a paid worker, I was the executive secretary of the Red Cross Chapter of Clay County. Ah, we initially had our office above Waterman's [Clothing] Store on Center Avenue.

And when the new courthouse was built in Moorhead, we moved our office over there. Hmm...you asked about some of the people who started the chapter or who were involved in the initially...ah...the beginning.

Well, ah...the *Moorhead Weekly News* had an article that stated, hmm, in 1917 about three hundred people attended a meeting, and there were not enough memberships to go around. Everybody wanted to join the Red Cross. Ah, in two weeks, there were seven hundred memberships sold. And for a dollar a year you could become a member. Of course, that was right during World War I, and there was a lot of patriotism and enthusiasm for helping servicemen. Hmm, the Clay County Chapter originally was not...as such. Barnesville and Moorhead both had chapters, and they were...they were united later on in...to form the Clay County Chapter.

Hmm...some of the people who started the chapter, or who were, I should say, leaders in the beginning, hmm, J.A. Aasgaard, who was President of Concordia chapter...ah, Concordia College, pardon me, was elected Chairman at the first meeting. Ah, Mrs. C.S. Marden was elected Vice Chairman, Mrs. Hal Harris, Secretary, and R.G. Price was elected Treasurer. Then during the World War I production project, Jessie Comstock was one of the leaders, as was Mrs. A.H. Costain. And Mrs. J.H. Deems became the Chairman of the Nurse's Aide Program. And Mrs. Edgar Sharp in World War II was...was very prominent in surgical dressings. Hmm, you will notice that many of these names...or in fact, most of these names were people who were the real leaders of Moorhead.

Ah, I should mention that the Superintendent of Schools, S.G. Reinertsen headed the Red Cross for many, many years. And then in Water Safety we have Jessie McKellar of Moorhead State College. Ah, Service to Military Families, Mr. C.H. Backstrom acted in that capacity for many years. And in First Aid, Delos Atkinson taught first aid from about 1942 until into the 1960s. For the Gray Lady program, Mrs. Inga Peterson and Mrs. James Dunlevy each gave well over a thousand hours at the Veteran's Administration Hospital in Fargo. Well, there were many other people who were volunteers and wonderful volunteers. I wish I could name them all but time doesn't permit that.

BD: Hmm, and the activities that they carried on were like water safety, and bandages, and types like...things like that? Knitting, did they do any of that sort of thing?

FJ: Oh, yes. During World War I the production program was responsible for knitting sweaters and gloves. And of course you've heard about the rolling of bandages during both World War I and World War II. The Junior Red Cross made many articles for servicemen who were in hospitals both during World War I and World War II. Hmm...the Gray Ladies were formed after World War II and worked in the Veteran's Hospital, as I mentioned, and they assisted in physic-...in therapy and hmm, transporting the patients around the hospital, writing letters, ah, serving a little coffee every Friday afternoon, and so forth, just generally making the days brighter for the patients in the hospital.

BD: Do you feel the local chapter worked well with the national? Maybe you could give some examples.

FJ: Mmmm.

BD: Or maybe these things you just mentioned were examples.

FJ: All of these programs were really national programs, although the local chapter did have some say in what they wanted to do over and above the two mandatory programs that the Red Cross had. The two mandatory programs were and still are Disaster Relief and Service to Military Families. They must be carried on. Then the chapter can decide what other programs they want if...if they have enough volunteers to carry them on, and if they have enough money to carry on other programs.

BD: What Red Cross goals and purposes applied to the Moorhead chapter? Did it provide services locally?

FJ: Ah, yes. Hmmm, first of all, when we talk about the local chapter and the national chapter, in the matter of a fund drive, a certain percent of the money always went (and still does go) to the National Red Cross to carry on its...its programs. And a certain percentage remains in the chapter. We had a number of...of chapter...ah, pardon me, programs in the chapter throughout the years. Hmmm. In the beginning, Christmas seals were a program of the chapter, and ninety percent of the proceeds went to fight tuberculosis in Minnesota.

The...hmmm...another program was the nurse...the Red Cross Nursing Program. And there the nurses went into the homes of handicapped children and helped them and also assisted in health projects in the home. During the Depression years of the 1930s the local Red Cross Chapter organized volunteer groups who went out and harvested potatoes and vegetables on the truck farms around Moorhead and gave them to people who were having a hard time finding money to buy food to eat. And hmmm, children also were supplied with eyeglasses. Now, many of these programs have...are no longer in effect. Ah, it seems that the Red Cross originated programs as the need arose and hmmm...so as a result, we had a great variety of programs which changed throughout the year.

BD: Do you think that change was brought about because the programs they started are now funded through other methods like taxation and so forth?

FJ: Yes. That...that is very true. The government has taken over some of these programs. But also a great many of these programs have been taken over by other organizations. You know, now we have a great number of organizations and...who are there to help people, and have their own pet little programs. And the Red Cross does not want to duplicate any program. So if another organization came in and wanted to do a particular program, ah, that was alright, that...that was given to them.

BD: Mmmm-hmmm. Do you see any change in the service goals over the years?

FJ: I think we have sort of mentioned that, Betty. Hmmm. As I say, now the...the main two programs of the Red Cross are Disaster Relief and Service to Military Families. The Red Cross has a charter, and each year it is reviewed by the national government, and they are committed to take care of those two programs. So these are the two main programs at the present time. Although, hmmm, there are several other programs that are still carried on. Ah, the training of water safety instructors is one, the training of first aid instructors, and the first aiding classes are another. They have a transportation corps in the Minn-Kota Chapter at the present time that will pick up people who are not able to call a cab, or are not able to get themselves to a hospital and so forth. Well, those are some of the programs that are carried on at the present time.

BD: Mmmm. Would the blood services be a Red Cross connected...?

FJ: Ah, yes, I'm glad you mentioned that. Ah, the Red Cross did train a group of volunteers a few years back to work with the Bloodmobile in...hmmm, well, Fargo and in Moorhead. And hmmm, these volunteers act...they register the donors as they come in. And this is a very valuable program both to the blood service...hmmm...I shouldn't say company, but the blood service at...locally. And they give many dollars' worth of volunteer hours.

BD: You mentioned that the Red Cross is funded through donations. Did you ever participate in any of their fundraising activities?

FJ: Oh my, yes. We had fundraising every year. [Chuckles] Hmmm. Originally, the fundraising was pretty much conducted by service clubs in Moorhead and by volunteers out in the county. Hmmm. Then the United Fund was organized, and the Red Cross Chapters did join in the United Fund, which they are also now a partner in the United Way as it is called at the present time. But fundraising was a...it was a job. Although I must say that people really responded very generously, and it was...it seemed to be just a way of life to give some money to the Red Cross.

BD: Did a donor automatically become a member?

FJ: For one dollar...and it's kind of interesting, because back in 1935 or 1934 or whenever it was [chuckles] the membership was a dollar. And it still remained that when I worked in the office in the 1950s and 1960s. At the present time, I believe anyone who gives to the United Way is automatically a member, because the United Way gives a certain percentage of its proceeds to the Red Cross.

BD: Then there probably aren't any special membership categories or dues.

FJ: No, ah, not at the present time.

BD: Hmmm, can you tell us about the meeting places that they've had through the years?

FJ: When we had our office in the courthouse, we had our Board of Directors meetings every month. And we just had it down in our chapter office, and usually in the evening. And now, after

the two chapters were joined, the Clay Chapter and the Cass Chapter, they have a noon meeting. It's a luncheon meeting and it's held in a restaurant.

BD: Are you still part of the board or are you...?

FJ: No, I'm...I am not part of the board at the present time. I have served my six years on the board. [Chuckles]

BD: Do they have programs at the meetings?

FJ: Ah, no, they don't. They have used...they conduct their business, and they have reports of the various committees, but time doesn't really permit them to have programs. I think once in a while they do have a program that particularly applies to the Red Cross.

BD: Do you recall if there were any Moorhead people who were leaders in district or state offices?

FJ: Ah, Neil Wohlwend is...was a...ah...oh, let's see. I believe he was a Fund Chairman for the district. And Delos Atkinson was on a...the First Aid District Committee.

BD: Can you describe whether or not the Red Cross has a unique role in Moorhead? And do you think it has an image that's the way it would prefer?

FJ: [Pauses] Well, the Red Cross was probably the first national organization that had a goal of *caring* for people. And you remember that this was back in 1917. Hmmm. Presently, it seeks to fulfill its obligations through the Disaster Relief and Service to the Military Families. Hmmm. And I believe that the community sees Red Cross as the agency to come to the aid of disaster victims, and to assist servicemen and their families within the bounds that are set by the Armed Forces and the Red Cross.

BD: It's also, hmmm, international as well as just local and national, isn't it?

FJ: Right. Yes, the American National Red Cross would be a part of the International Red Cross.

BD: When did you become an active participant in the Red Cross?

FJ: About in 1950 I became a volunteer in the Red Cross, assisting with certain projects and in the local office. And hmmm, in 1954...or I believe it was about 1953, I became the executive secretary of the local Red Cross Chapter. And I worked at that for ten years here in Moorhead. Then when the Cass and Clay Chapters united, I worked in the Fargo Chapter for four years. Then after that I was on the board for six years.

BD: Why do...?

FJ: I...

BD: Excuse me.

FJ: Pardon me, I should say that I was very aware of the Red Cross back in the 1940s during the World War II. And, hmmm, I took a first aid class and participated in some of the fund drives and so forth.

BD: Was that because your husband was in service?

FJ: Well, I think it was, but I guess...like during wartime, everybody feels that they need to be involved in the Red Cross.

BD: Yeah, I believe you're right. Hmmm. What do you...? What would you say the Red Cross has meant to you personally? What would be the most important thing that you would recall from it?

FJ: Mmmm-hmmm. [Pauses] Well, ah, working with the Red Cross brought to my attention how many people there are who need help. And our programs didn't always enable us to help everyone but we could always refer them to some agency that could. Hmmm. I...I think working for the Red Cross was very, very good for me. Ah, there were times when it got a little hairy. Hmmm, I was a part time worker, supposedly, in the office, but I had a number in the telephone, and so I was really on call twenty-four hours a day. And sometimes in the middle of the night I didn't appreciate that telephone ringing. But, by and far, it...it really was very, very good for me.

BD: And you don't regret it now that you're so far away from losing all that sleep! [Chuckles]

FJ: No, I don't regret it. [Chuckles]

BD: Hmmm, what do you consider the best illustration of the service the Red Cross provides? I would say locally, because we...we've mentioned the disaster aid and the...hmmm...military. Were you here when...? Were you working for the Red Cross when the tornado hit?

FJ: Yes, I was, Betty. We actually didn't have a lot of damage in Moorhead or Clay County. But of course we had to help the chapter over in Fargo. And *many* of our volunteers, in fact, I would say all of our volunteers assisted with the tornado relief over in Fargo. And ah...we were very, very busy at that time.

BD: And I think everybody worked on that.

FJ: Mmmm-hmmm.

BD: What, if any, serious obstacles does the Red Cross encounter?

FJ: Well...[Sighs] Hmmm, in an organization as large as the Red Cross, you will always find some disgruntled person who doesn't understand the limitations of the program. You know, no

organization can be everything to all people. And hmmm, so you hear stories about how the Red Cross didn't help me, or thus and so, but I don't think there are too many cases like that. Hmmm...I think today one of the obstacles is the recruitment of volunteers. And so many women who formerly could volunteer for the Red Cross are now in the workforce. So there is a bit of a problem in recruiting volunteers, plus the fact that there are so *very* many organizations in Fargo and Moorhead who have their own programs.

BD: Do you think of anything else you'd like to include that we haven't mentioned?

FJ: Mmmm-hmmm. I have a story here about a young man who made such good use of his lifesaving training. Ah, his name was Richard Pratt and he was thirty-one years old. And in 1963 he spotted a capsized boat in the Red River, and he rescued two children, five and nine years of age. And as a result, he was awarded the Certificate of Merit, and that's the highest Red Cross honor. So that proved that the training that the Red Cross gives can be very, very valuable. Hmmm, another rather interesting item is the fact that two foreign Red Cross officials visited the Clay Chapter at one point. Ah, one was the Red Cross Secretary General of Finland, and the other was the Vice Secretary General of Norway. And they included the Clay County Chapter in their visits. They were interested in studying fund drive, and Junior Red Cross, and blood clinics and so on.

BD: I imagine that was an interesting visit.

FJ: [Whispers] Yes.

BD: Well, thank you, Florence, I think you have covered the subject beautifully. And we'll conclude it right there.

FJ: Yes. It was interesting for me to do this, Betty. Thank you for asking me.

BD: Mmmm-hmmm. I see you did a lot of work on it, and thank you for all that effort.

[End of interview]