

Amy Beers

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Amy Beers was born 15 April 1885 in Millbrook, New Jersey, daughter of Dr. Frank and Rosa (Hice) Beers and was one of three of their seven children to enter the nursing profession. After completing high school in Bushkill, PA, she taught school for three years in Tannersville and Fruchteys, PA. She graduated in 1908 from the School of Nursing, City Hospital, Welfare Island (now Roosevelt Island), NY.

Upon graduation from nursing school, she served as Supervising Nurse at New York City Hospital for a time and then accepted a position as assistant superintendent of Hackley Hospital in Muskegon, MI, where she served from 1910-1912. In 1912, she became the first Superintendent of newly constructed Jefferson County Hospital, Fairfield, IA. She also supervised and provided instruction in the Training School for Nurses launched by Jefferson County Hospital in 1912. She remained in Fairfield until 1915, when she was invited to return to New York City Hospital as the Assistant Principal of the School of Nursing, a position she held for two years before returning to Iowa. During her time at City Hospital, she also served as an instructor for several courses in the nursing curriculum.

From September 1916 to January 1918, she was Superintendent at Jefferson County Hospital in Fairfield. When the U.S. declared war on Germany, Dr. J. Fred Clarke of Fairfield initiated the organization of a hospital unit to aid in the war effort. He asked Miss Beers to take on the responsibility for recruiting and supervising the nurses. The group was assembled over a few months from May to December 1917 and was told by the War Department to have their personnel ready to mobilize on short notice. Amy Beers enlisted in the U.S. Army Nurse Corps on January 22, 1918 and on February 16, 1918 boarded the SS *Carmania* with the officers, nurses and enlisted men of Unit R and sailed for France to become part of US Army Base Hospital 32 at Contrexéville, France.

In Contrexéville, a town of about 2,000 with an established reputation as a spa town, the American Expeditionary Forces leased six hotels from the French health ministry and converted them for use as hospitals or lodging for hospital personnel. Base Hospital 32, originally planned for a capacity of 500 beds, was expanded to 1,250 beds before any American unit reached the town. A medical group from Indianapolis, arriving on December 26, 1917, provided personnel and equipment and began the task of cleaning and preparing the facilities. Unit R was attached to Base Hospital 32 to assist with increased the planned capacity.

When Allied casualties mounted in September 1918, the hospital was ordered to increase its capacity once again (with no additional personnel) to an "emergency capacity" of 2,115 beds. By the time it was deactivated in February 1919, Base Hospital 32 had admitted 9,698 patients from 35 nations, including 189 German prisoners and many members of the local populace.

Miss Beers served as chief nurse of the Unit R (and assistant chief nurse of Base Hospital 32) for a little more than one year at Contrexéville. Her specialty was rehabilitating victims of shell shock, and she accepted detail assignments with care teams sent to the front on several occasions. She was recognized by the French government with a Medal of Honor for her courage and service. She returned to the continental U.S. aboard the SS *America* on March 13, 1919. She was released from active service on April 22, 1919 and resumed her duties at the Jefferson County Hospital in Fairfield, IA, where she remained until 1924.

After taking a leave of absence for health reasons, during which she spent time in California, she accepted the offer to return to Hackley Hospital in Muskegon, MI, where she served as Superintendent from 1924 to 1945.

She was recognized throughout the nation as a leader in nursing and hospital administration. She was a member of the American Hospital Association for several years, starting as early as 1914. In 1921, Miss Beers was elected president of the Iowa State Nurses Association and served a two-year term. She served three years on the Iowa State Board of Nurse Examiners, and twice served as president of the Michigan State Nurses Association and was treasurer of the Michigan Hospital Association from 1926 to 1940, when she was elected as the organization's president. In 1935, she was named a fellow in the American College of Hospital Administrators (today American College of Healthcare Executives), the first woman administrator to be accepted in the organization. In 1942, she became vice president of that nationwide organization.

Amy Beers died in Hollywood, FL, on January 15, 1974 and is buried in Sandhill Cemetery, Bushkill, PA.

Sources:

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Photo credit: Miss Amy Beers, undated photo, provided by Jefferson County Health Center, Fairfield, IA.