

Elizabeth Drwila Massachusetts Women's Defense Corps Collection, 1941-1992

General Information

Repository: Lawrence History Center
Creator: Elizabeth Drwila, Vincenza Lomastro
Dates: 1941 – 1992
Accession Numbers: 2001.032, 2012.153
Quantity: Four Hollinger Boxes
Processed By: Diane Lafond and Jennifer Williams
Access: Open for research.

Provenance

This collection was created by Elizabeth Drwila and partially by Vincenza Lomastro. It was gifted to the Lawrence History Center in two installments in 2001 by Elizabeth Drwila.

Related Material

Margaret Spooner, also a member of the Massachusetts Women's Defense Corps, was interviewed by Joan Kelley regarding the MWDC, tape #579.

Historical Note/Biographical Note

The Massachusetts Women's Defense Corps (MWDC) was a group of volunteer women dedicated to providing war-related and emergency services to the citizens of the Commonwealth during World War II. Its origins began with the Gloucester Civic Patrol which was founded by several prominent women in August 1940. In May 1941, Governor Saltonstall approved the establishment of the Massachusetts Women's Defense Corps under the Massachusetts Committee on Public Safety. The MWDC worked closely with the Massachusetts State Guard, the United States Army, state agencies, and local communities. Its function was to assist in five areas: Medical, Transportation, Communications, Canteen, and Air Raid Protection/Warden Services. In December 1944, the MWDC's name was changed to the Massachusetts Women's Corps. In September 1946 the Massachusetts Women's Corps was inactivated.

Elizabeth D. Drwila was born in Lawrence in 1921 and graduated from Lawrence High School and Burdett College in Boston. She was a bookkeeper at Essem Packing Co. in Lawrence and then a supervisor for 30 years at the Internal Revenue Service Center in Andover. She progressed through the ranks to captain in the Massachusetts Women's Defense Corps.

Scope and Content Note

This collection includes a variety of materials, the bulk of which date between 1941 and 1946. There are manuals dating between 1944 and 1945 that cover such subjects as buying and receiving supplies, how to help injured persons, and general regulations. There are also multiple publications, including newsletters dated between 1942 and 1946 as well as a history of the MWDC written in 1992. The collection also contains two group photographs from the Farewell Dinner for the 4th Battalion in 1946. There is also another photograph of four members of the MWDC in uniform, one of which is

Elizabeth Drwila. There is one object, which is a good conduct medal awarded around 1945. Lastly, there are two scrapbooks. The first is thin and focuses on the Fifth Anniversary of the MWDC which was celebrated in 1946. It contains portions from various newsletters that talk about the anniversary. The other scrapbook is quite large, encompassing half of the collection. Within it are such items as photographs, newspaper clippings, correspondence, and logs.

Series I. Manuals, March 1944 – November 1945

Boxes 1 - 2

This series includes multiple manuals from the 11th Company of Lawrence. They cover the topics of supplies, air raid precautions for the care of animals, communications, canteens, public relations, aiding the injured, motor transport, firefighting, and general regulations. The series also includes a notebook pertaining to the 4th Battalion, 6th Company training school at the Lowell Armory. Within it are such data as the participants receiving training, weekly schedules, maneuvers, and examinations. The dates of the notebook are May 7th to June 25th of 1945.

Series II. Publications, May 1942 – May 1992

Box 2

This series is mostly composed of newsletters written for MWDC members. It includes the state-wide newsletter as well as those for the 4th Region, Haverhill Unit, and Beverly Unit. They cover a wide variety of topics, including holiday celebrations, regulations, promotions of officers, schedules of events, and overviews of the activities of the various units. There are also messages from commanding officers, editorials, and notes/news sections. Another grouping of newsletters is called the "Coverall" and was written for the 24th Infantry, 1st Battalion of the Massachusetts State Guard. It is noted as being a reference for the MWDC. Subjects in these newsletters include discipline, tributes to deceased soldiers, activities and celebrations, and tips for various maneuvers. They also have editorials, notes, and jokes.

Within this series there are also the photocopied pages of *The Corps: A History of the Massachusetts Women's Corps 1941-1946*, by Ronald J. McBrien. It is dated May, 1992 and pages "i" to 65 are complete. After page 65 are several handwritten lists of names which appear to be condensed from the original pages: personnel roster, promotions roster, deactivation roster. Pages P-1 through P-11 contain photographs of MWDC activities, insignias, pins, identification cards, and shoulder patches. The original was inscribed by the author to Colonel Carolyn F. Standley.

Series III. Objects, c. 1945

Box 2

This series is composed solely of a Good Conduct Medal in its original blue cardboard box. The bronze medal is suspended from a red ribbon, with three thin white stripes on each side, attached to a ribbon-covered pin. Two spare sections of ribbon are included in the box. The face of the medal shows an eagle with wings open, standing on a sword that is lying on a book. The words "efficiency", "honor," and "fidelity" surround the eagle. On the reverse side is a small five point star with the words "For good conduct" enclosed in two different tree branches.

Series VI. Photographs, 1941? - 1946
Photocopies Box 2

This series includes two identical photographs of the Massachusetts Women's Corps taken at the Farewell Dinner 4th Battalion, 1946. The dinner was held at the Salem, Massachusetts Armory on September 5, 1946. The photograph shows long tables at which sit many women in uniform. There is also another photograph of four women in uniform. They were members of the MWDC. The second woman from the left is Elizabeth Drwila. The photograph was taken at some point between 1941 and 1946.

Series I. Scrapbooks, 1941 – 1950
Boxes 2 - 4

This series is composed of two scrapbooks. The smaller scrapbook commemorates the celebration of the Fifth Anniversary of the Massachusetts Women's Corps, which was held at Camp O'Connor in Framingham between May 17th and 19th of 1946. It contains the May and June newsletters from several battalions. The newsletters consist of various articles and essays, commander messages, humorous stories, news and announcements, and drawings. All of them have articles related to the Anniversary celebration.

The large scrapbook was created by Elizabeth Drwila (Captain) and Vincenza Lomastro (Company Clerk). It details the activities of the Massachusetts Women's Defense Corps, 11th Company Lawrence. It covers the Company's creation in 1941 as a unit of the Massachusetts Commission on Public Safety and its evolution to the Women's Defense Corps Association after the end of the World War II. It was a female counterpart to the National Guard. The scrapbook has a leather cover and paper pages with news clippings, photographs, brochures, and memorabilia. Part one of the scrapbook has news clipping of MWDC activities during the war, both training as well as social. The photographs in part two include the women at various training facilities and other activities. Some photos are identified. Part three includes holiday greeting cards and acknowledgments of condolences. Part four has a very detailed typed log of daily activities, broken into years. Part five is composed of textile badges. Part six has news articles that detail the post war re-arrangement of the Corps and political upheaval. Part seven has the by-laws and programs of the Corps after it changed format and name from the Massachusetts Women's Defense Corps to the Massachusetts Women's Corps Association. The pages have been removed from the scrapbook cover. Each section of pages is housed in an individual folder. Some items have been removed from the pages to separate folders, marked by the section number. Removal pages indicate the separation.