

Help When Disaster Strikes

Submitted by Village of Richfield Springs Historian Harriett Geywits

No matter the disaster or the year, the people of Richfield Springs do their best to be of help to others. This dedication is shown by their continued support of the American Red Cross through monetary donations as well as blood drives.

The American Red Cross was established in 1882 by Clara Barton after she spent time with the International Red Cross. According to its charter, the Red Cross is to provide relief for the military and to provide disaster relief at home and abroad. The help of the organization has been, and continues to be, evident daily in our own area and across the nation.

One of the first disasters requiring the help of the American Red Cross occurred on April 23, 1906 at 5:12 A.M., Pacific time. This was the date of the great San Francisco earthquake and resulting fires caused, in part, by severed gas lines, fallen power lines and toppled lanterns. Ads for needed supplies were placed in all newspapers, relief stations were established as soon as possible which included private residences that were still standing and donations were solicited around the country. Within ten days of the earthquake, the Red Cross and the Mayor's funds had received \$600,000 in donations. The work was just beginning.

The then Governor of California, George Pardee, said: "The work of rebuilding San Francisco has commenced and I expect to see the great metropolis replaced on a much grander scale than ever before." Over eighty percent of the city, which was then the largest one on the west coast, had been destroyed with many aftershocks adding to the devastation. The major quake lasted less than a minute but the impact was disastrous and felt all along the fault line. The fires burned for four days. Water lines were destroyed so there wasn't an adequate way to fight the many outbreaks. Army troops were sent to help with crowd control and to provide tents and rations to those who needed temporary shelter. Twenty thousand refugees who were fleeing the fires were rescued by the ship USS Chicago. The first wireless telegraphy was used to notify others of the need.

Twenty-eight thousand buildings were reported destroyed, two hundred and fifty thousand people made homeless and over three thousand deaths were reported. The work of the Red Cross and others continued in the area for several years thereafter.

The Village of Richfield Springs wanted to do their part, of course, to help in any way they could so they tried something that was unusual for the time - they chose the novelty of selling seats at auction to the highest bidder to aid the San Francisco fund. The seats were for an entertainment to be given by community members of all ages.

The auction was held in the Board of Trade rooms. Mr. John D. Cary acted as auctioneer and it was reported that he 'did the trick very nicely with excellent results.' The first chair was sold to Mrs. C. M. Ruff for \$12 and she afterward purchased four other seats at \$3 each. Other seats were sold at ten, seven, six, and five dollars each. Added to the auction was a gold nugget which was sent by a friend of Mr. Cary's. The nugget was brought from California by her father in the time of the forty-niners. This was purchased by Mr. Ibbotson for two dollars.

The description of the entertainment was given in the May 17, 1906 issue of the Richfield Mercury as follows: 'This village is certainly to be congratulated that it possesses local talent that can, on short notice, get up such a meritorious entertainment as was given in the dining room of the Tuller, Tuesday evening. The object was a most worthy one and the financial results a great credit to the town and the amount will be forwarded today directly to the Red Cross Society in San Francisco.

The Richfield band played several selections in front of the hotel previous to the entertainment and the favor was much appreciated by the committee and the public generally.

The program as presented last week, was carried out almost literally and afforded an evening of delight to the home audience present. The piano duets by Misses Smith and Jark, members of the high school faculty were well received and the vocal solos by



San Francisco Earthquake and Fires, 1906

Miss Theresa Tolan, also a member of the school faculty, were heartily enjoyed. Miss E. Louise Hinds enjoys the unique distinction of being an elocutionist, a favorite with her home audiences as well as with the general public. She was at her best in the selection given and was most enthusiastically received. The sextet by Misses Marion Welch, Marjorie Lewis, Marguerite Rankin, May Derrick, Leila Ames, and Wayman Henry was evidently a favorite number as was evidenced by two recalls. Officer George A. Sitts, with his original topical songs, was one of the special favorites of the program. The gentlemen's quartette which accompanied him certainly presented an appearance full of mirth. It is doubtful if more effective costumes could have been found than were worn by Messrs. J. Gordon Black, Owen Bray, Ray Willse and John Sitts.

The entertainment fittingly closed with a presentation of Howell's famous farce, The Mouse Trap and its rendition was certainly good, all the parts being done to perfection. Mrs. Marjorie Blue as the leading lady, acted the part in a manner creditable to a professional. The ushers were Misses Eugenia Hinds, Marion Kinne, Mary Elwood and Hattie Drake.'

A letter of recognition was received by Mr. Cary on May 22, 1906: 'Dear Sir, Your letter

of May seventeenth enclosing a New York draft for \$321 has been received by Dr. Devine who desires to thank Richfield Springs for the generous contribution to the relief work in San Francisco and to state that he has turned the money over to the Finance Committee of Relief and Red Cross.' It was signed Ethan Hallet, Secretary.

The immediate need for relief with food, rebuilding materials, clothing, etc. continued for well over a year. It was answered not only by the efforts of the now unemployed who were seeking work as laborers to clean away the debris, but by millionaires who donated large sums for rebuilding. Monetary contributions from other countries came in as did contributions from those who gave in any way and in any amount that they could. Locally, the Woman's Missionary Society sent four barrels of goods including clothing, shoes, Bibles and prayer books - one of the many groups who sent necessities to those who now had none.

The need for organizations like the Red Cross continues as does the caring and generosity of others throughout the world who have come to the aid of those in need. 'No despair is so dark that the sun can't shine through it - our strength is measured by how well we endure.'