

**1 Dorothy M. Harrison describes the efforts of the Louisville Unit of the Women's Overseas
2 Service League to preserve the histories of its members and then talks about the life of
3 Constance Sheltman White who served in the U.S. Army Medical Department as an
4 occupational therapist during WWI
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7This is Dorothy Harrison of the Louisville, Kentucky Unit of the Women's Overseas Service
8League. As I explained on a previous tape, this particular unit began a historical project of
9interviewing its members in the second half of the 1960s, and we have since accumulated some
10other materials about our various members. On this tape, I would like to talk about Constance
11Sheltman White, a World War I member. In this year of 1983, she is 91 years old and she lives in
12McLean, Virginia where, earlier this year, she lost her husband, Charles T. White. He had been
13for many, many years, in fact, all of his working life, a member or an officer of the Near East
14Foundation but we're not here to talk about Charles White, we are going to talk about Constance.
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16In the Louisville Magazine issue for the winter of 1951, there is an article about Constance
17Sheltman entitled, "Women in Business, Miss Constance Sheltman Heads Printing House," and I
18will read some portions of this to give some clue as to her, uh, background.

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20Franklin Printing Company was bought by her father, Mr. Wade Sheltman, and a partner in
211887. It was then called Miller and Company and had been established for about 10 years under
22that name but because of Mr. Sheltman's admiration for Benjamin Franklin, he renamed the
23company. In 1909, a too-young graduate of Girl's High, Miss Sheltman came to work as a
24proofreader, shortly advancing to time keeper and cost accountant. Her main interest, aside from
25her work, was art and she took lessons in her free time. After 9 years of working, she enrolled in
26a school of design in New York. War came and, realizing the necessity of helping, Miss
27Sheltman attended a school of occupational therapy and joined the army. Attached to a medical
28unit, she served a year in France and Germany. Returning to this country, she worked with the
29Pine Mountain Settlement School and then went with the Near East Relief, spending 3 years in
30Turkey and 1 in Greece helping to set up industries. Her eyes fairly blaze when she tells you
31what a crusading suffragette she was. "I made a regular nuisance of myself," she says happily,
32"going around and making people sign things."

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34For a few year-, for a few years, she led a quiet life but in 1938, her father died, and his 2
35associates were ill, so she returned to Franklin Printing to do what she could. She added that if it
36had not been for her competitors, friends, and loyal employees, she would never have made a go
37of it. "My competitors were marvelous. I'd just call them up and ask them all sorts of questions
38and they'd tell me anything."

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40Though painfully shy about herself, she's boastful, um, about her employees – "I never could
41have made it without, without them. Franklin Printing's volume of business is about what it was
42in 1938, which is a tribute to the employees," Miss Sheltman says. Louisville Magazine
43described her in this way: "Her gentle charm and good looks, with white hair and fine features,
44thoroughly belie her role as president of a business that is traditionally a man's forte and she has

1a great amount of that peculiar pride she says all printers have because they believe they are in a
2business, which is done most for the progress of mankind.”

3In the Courier Journal newspaper of October 28, 1924, on page 16 in column 5, there is a brief
4comment on Constance’s work in the Near East and, uh, this is a result of a, a Golden Rule
5dinner given at the Elks Club where a [Doctor Vance 5:13] addressed the assembled multitude
6on the work in the Near East. After commenting on, uh, the excellent efforts made by the Near
7East Foundation, [the Doctor Vance 5:36] said that the work put more than 1 million persons on
8a basis where they could rebuild, expand, and become producers. Then there is this paragraph,
9which concerns Miss, Miss Constance Sheltman. It said, “Miss Constance Sheltman (and I
10quote), who spent 3 years in the Near East, said the children so helped will become just what the
11American children, who are educated and given clean minds and bodies, will become. The
12dinner served to the people at this Golden Rule dinner back in 1924 was made up of the food
13such as served to the refugees and orphans, and it cost about 4 cents a plate. Uh, the cups used
14were made from condensed milk cans by the orphans in the Near East. Girl Scouts served the
15meal. The, uh, ballroom of the club was donated, and the foodstuffs were donated by the grocer’s
16baking company, the Piggly Wiggly stores, and the Quaker Maid stores. That is a very brief
17comment on the fact that, obviously, Constance continued her interest in the Near East Relief. [-
18eventy nine 6:56], I asked Constance, now Mrs. White, by letter to tell us a little bit about her
19service overseas. It was all, of course, in the pursuit of this historical interview project. She
20replied in a letter, uh, that she had been communicating with WOSL Headquarters and hoped to
21get her classification as an occupational therapist straightened out. They had an-, they had it in
22error at WOSL Headquarters. And this communication with WOSL coincided with the letter,
23which I requested, um, information from her and she writes in her letter – (and I quote) “I regret
24to say I got muddled and am only now getting unmuddled. In rereading your letter of November
2530th, I find you sent me the blank. At any rate, not long ago I made it to the bank to find my
26service record, so I could get all details correct, as much as possible; and, much to my sorrow,
27could not find it. In moving from various places, it has probably been misplaced, is now in one
28of the hundreds of files in Charles’ large filing cabinets. This is a long, drawn-out tale and a
29sorrowful one. I wanted to get what information I could from it even though I was incorrect, for
30when I returned from overseas, I tried to collect a United States bond, which I bought while in
31service and sent my service record to the Veteran’s Administration to prove it. When I was re-,
32returned – uh, when it was returned to me, the front sheet was missing. It didn’t have my proper
33identification number and had me sailing to Europe on a ship I never heard of, also an incorrect
34date. Incidentally, I never got my bond. Your husband, having been in the army, knows what
35bedraggled state our service records get into. I was in the medical department of the army as an
36occupational therapist, but my number and my du-, dates of service in different hospitals, etc.,
37are all forgotten.

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39Another problem incidentally occurred when I came home from Constantinople in 1923. At that
40time, my wartime diary I had taken with me, as well as the Near East, uh, Relief diary and every
41scrap of paper was removed from my trunk by Turkish Customs.

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1Poor Dorothy, if you can make head or tails of this, you are doing well and why I went into such
2detail or, rather, tried to, I don't know. Pu-, please excuse a longwinded lady and an ancient one,
3for I am now 87."

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5Constance became a member of the Louisville Unit in the 1950s and continued so until she
6retired from the printing business. At which time, she decided that she would take a little trip
7with her sister overseas to revisit the scenes of her former service and to also visit a nephew, who
8happened to be, uh, stationed in England at that time. It was a great delight to us to have her
9letters. She wrote very well and, um, we were even more fascinated by the fact that she went to
10Greece, uh, to review her years of service there. And, finally, we had the excitement of getting
11from her an invitation – no, note an invitation – an announcement of her marriage to Charles T.
12White. This took place when she was in her 60s and Charles White was a member of the Near
13East Relief working staff and had married a friend of hers back just after the first World War.
14Constance had remained, through her friend, a, a friend of his and, uh, she, of course, kept up
15with his activities. She saw him again in Greece and they were delighted with each other,
16obviously, and they were married, and we were all so thrilled for her.

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18She subsequently led a most exciting life. When most people think of six-, of you retiring in your
1960s, you retire to the rocking chair, but not so of Constance or her husband. He continued active
20in the Near East Foundation and was sent to various parts of Europe, uh, and, uh, to Africa, even,
21as a trouble-shooter for the, for the foundation long after he should have retired. And we, we
22never got over the, the postcards and letters from such places as [Oogadooga 12:38] [inaudible
2312:39] or Cypress or Greece or Iran. Uh, her comments on Iran were all very fascinating,
24particularly in regard to, uh, the experiences she had there. Unfortunately, the letters that she
25wrote are not now extant. She did say, however, in a letter that she wrote to me in 1978 that, um,
26she felt so sad about Iran – this was, of course, after the revolution.

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28“He worked there 6 years,” she said, “and I was with him a year and a half. At that time, the shah
29seemed to be idolized by his people and he and the U.S.A., through the Near East Foundation
30and AID, did so much helping them in agriculture, sanitation, home economics, um, medical
31help, etc., that one wonders why some of this is not mentioned. But the Muslims there were
32always fanatics and I never felt safe on the streets. I’m afraid of them everywhere, for that
33matter, and don’t blame the Israelis for some of their intransigence, but what a subject for a
34Christmas letter.”

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36Constance is still alive but in fragile health in McLean, Virginia and we do hear from her
37sometimes by way of her sisters, who still live in, uh, Louisville and sometimes by letter at
38Christmastime. We, uh, find her a charming woman, uh, still, as reflected in her letters, as we
39found her a charming woman when she was with us in body. She still remains a member of this
40unit.

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