

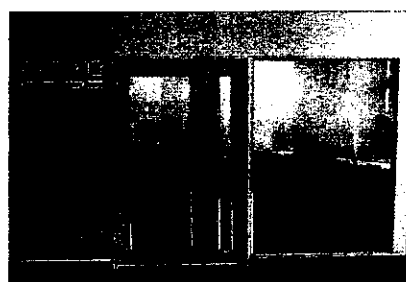
The Archives of the Japanese Red Cross Society from 1877 to 1945

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Introduction

The Japanese Red Cross Society (JRCS) was established as the Philanthropic Society in 1877 to care for the sick and wounded during the Southwestern Rebellion, the last rebellion in Japan, whether friend or foe. In 1886, the Japanese Government acceded to the Geneva Convention of 1864 and adopted the Red Cross emblem. In 1887, therefore, the Philanthropic Society changed its name to what it is called today. Until World War II, the JRCS focused on wartime relief operations, the original purpose of its foundation, while since the 1880s it has been engaged in disaster relief and other peacetime operations. Since the end of the Second World War, the Society has constantly been engaged in peacetime operations.

The JRCS archives tell the Society's long history, but unfortunately they have been scattered and now kept at two places, namely Japanese Red Cross Toyota College of Nursing, located in Toyota City, and the JRCS Headquarters in Tokyo. This article explains what the Japanese Red Cross archives are, how they have survived, and why they are now kept separately at two different places. Then, it explains, in particular, the archives on wartime relief operations, which remains almost intact, and on relief activities at natural disasters. Lastly this article limits its scope to the archives of historic significance from 1877 to 1945.



Red Cross Archive Room,
JRC Toyota College of Nursing

1. Overview of the Japanese Red Cross Archives

The Japanese Red Cross archives documents from the its establishment up to World War II are included in numbered black files. In terms of their content, these documents are classified into two major categories. One is wartime relief documents, and each of their files has a number, for instance, "Wartime 123." The other is documents other than wartime relief documents, which are called "general documents". Each of the file that includes general documents is simply numbered. Varied in content, the documents in these files mainly consist of approval documents, reports, letters, minutes, and communications with JRCS chapters and overseas Red Cross Societies.

The archives have become scattered and lost on an extensive scale four times. First, the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923 caused fire in many parts of Tokyo, which burned the JRCS Headquarters as well as some documents. The second loss took place immediately after the end of WWII. Many of the documents disappeared, probably burned by the JRCS staff. The third came in 1963, when, chiefly for financial reasons, JRCS' museum and library were closed, and many of their exhibits and historical materials were sold. The fourth occurred in 1974 to 1977, when the JRCS Headquarters building was reconstructed. Despite efforts to preserve documents, a large volume of documents were discarded. In particular, 3,551 files of general documents were preserved in 1947, but with 2,104 of them having been disposed of, only 1,151 files survived the reconstruction. The wartime relief documents, on the other hand, escaped the fate

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of being discarded.

Among the documents that escaped being disposed of at that time, 296 files, which are extremely important to the JRCS, are held by its Headquarters and available for reference at its Information Plaza. All other documents were donated to Museum Meijimura, which is located in Aichi Prefecture and preserves and exhibits buildings of the Meiji Era, in 1974. They would otherwise have been all discarded. Later, Meijimura continued to hold and preserve these documents, and in January 2005, all these historical materials were transferred to Japanese Red Cross Toyota College of Nursing and are currently stored at the Red Cross Archives Room in the College's library. The room houses 745 files of wartime relief documents and 1,151 files of general documents for a total of 1,896 files.

2. Documents on Wartime Relief

(1) Southwestern Rebellion

A rebellion occurred in 1877, as samurai of Kyushu who were not satisfied with the modernization of Japan fought with the newly established Imperial Government. Documents on relief operations during the Southwestern Rebellion are important as they are related to the foundation of the Philanthropic Society and are held by the JRCS Headquarters.

(2) Sino-Japanese War

A war broke out between Japan and China of the Qing Dynasty in 1894, which resulted in the victory of Japan in 1895. The JRCS offered its assistance to the wounded and sick, both at home and overseas. Particular emphasis should be placed on the dispatch of female nurses to military hospitals at home who took care of male soldiers, which was unthinkable at that time.

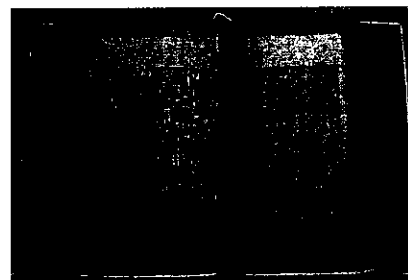
There are 120 files of documents on relief operations during the Sino-Japanese War. They consist mainly of communications between the JRCS and the Government, as well as between the JRCS Headquarters and chapters concerning the dispatch of relief teams, relief-related documents and journals, documents on the conferment of rewards for services rendered, and those related to military medals and donations.

(3) Boxer Rebellion

As the Boxer Rebellion took place in 1900, the JRCS sent newly built hospital ships "Hakuai-maru" and "Kosai-maru" to China in order to bring the wounded and sick, including Westerners, to Japan. There are 50 files of documents on relief operations during the Boxer Rebellion. They comprise documents on relief teams, the hospital ships, and the promotion and demotion of relief staff members and the conferment of rewards for services rendered by them.

(4) Russo-Japanese War

The Russo-Japanese War started in 1904 and with almost complete defeat of the Baltic Fleet by the Japanese at the Battle of Tsushima, a peace treaty was signed at Portsmouth, USA, in 1905, bringing the war to the end. JRCS relief team, incorporated into military medical service, took care of the wounded and sick. The JRCS treatment of wounded and sick Russian prisoners of war was, in particular, highly reputed at that time.



A document describing the treatment of Russian prisoners of war

A total of 524 files remain with respect to relief operations during the Russo-Japanese War. The huge volume of files include documents related to communications with the Government, disciplinary punishments, and visits by foreign volunteer nurses; those related to the conferment of rewards for services rendered; reports by hospital ships, patient transport columns, and relief

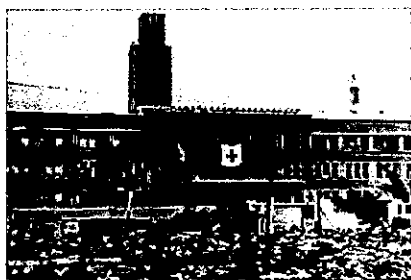
teams; monthly patient reports; reports on bonuses given in recognition of services; and curricula vitae for the members of relief teams.

(5) First World War

Japan fought with Germany at Qindao, then a German colony, in 1914. The fighting ended shortly, which resulted in the defeat of the Germans. It was the first time for the JRCS to send female nurses to Qindao, outside Japan, to take care of wounded and sick Japanese and Germans. It was also important that Japanese Red Cross relief teams, comprising mainly of female nurses, were sent to England, France and Russia to assist wounded and sick soldiers of the respective countries. Fifty-one files exist of relief operations during World War I. They are made up of reports on hospital ships, Navy hospitals, Qingdao relief teams, and those dispatched to England, France, and Russia.

(6) Siberia Intervention

With the Russian Revolution of 1918, Western States and Japan sent troops to Siberia. The JRCS sent relief teams to Siberia as well as Northern Sakhalin from 1918 to 1925. During the relief operation, hospital trains were made use of. The dispatch of female nurses during the First World War was small in number, while during the Siberia Intervention the number of female nurses sent to Siberia greatly increased. Unlike the previous wars and incidents, documents on relief operations during the Siberia Intervention are not put together in the form of wartime relief documents, but the general documents include some of them. There are also some documents concerning Polish orphan relief operations relative to the Siberia Intervention.



Hiroshima Red Cross Hospital
withstanding the destruction of an
atomic bomb

(7) Manchurian Incident to Second World War

Japan fought a series of war from 1932, starting from the Manchurian Incident, and ending in its disastrous defeat of the Second World War in 1945. The JRCS assisted the wounded and sick during this period on a massive scale. The number of relief staff, mostly nurses, counted more than 30 thousand, among whom almost 1,100 died during or after relief operations.

The number of documents of this period which the Toyota College of Nursing keeps in its Archives is small. In fact, there is no report on the JRCS wartime relief operations during these events at the College. This is because the JRCS' documents on relief operations during the Sino-Japanese War and World War II were separated from its other documents and kept at the JRCS Headquarters, as reports of 955 relief teams engaged in relief activities have been used as the JRCS Headquarters operation materials and have not been opened to the public until recently.

3. Documents on Relief Activities at Natural Disasters

Japan is prone to natural disasters, and since the foundation of the JRCS, it has been continuously engaged in activities for victims of natural disasters. The first time the JRCS undertook a relief operation for such victims was when the JRCS sent three doctors for victims of the eruption of Mt. Bandai of northern part of Japan in 1888. Though small on scale, the JRCS Headquarters has the documents on the activity, since it was the first time for the JRCS to send a relief team for a relief operation in a natural disaster, and therefore it was important. The *Ertugrul*, a Turkish frigate paying a courtesy visit to Japan, sank off the coast of Japan in 1890, and most of the crew died. The JRCS sent a relief team consisting of doctors and nurses to assist the survivors. It was the first time for the JRCS to treat the survivors of the shipwrecked, and it was also the first time to assist those wounded and sick of foreign nationality. There is a file of documents on the relief activities of the *Ertugrul* at Toyota.

Northern part of Japan has been repeatedly destroyed by tsunami, the most recent example of which is the Great East Japan Earthquake of 2011. In 1896, a large-scale tsunami destroyed Sanriku area, northern part of Japan, which killed more than twenty thousand people. The JRCS conducted extensive relief operations, which was the first occasion to alleviate the suffering of victims of a large-scale tsunami. Toyota College keeps 8 volumes of documents on the relief activity.

In 1923, Tokyo and its surrounding area were hit by a powerful earthquake, which caused more than one hundred thousand deaths, most of whom were victims of fire. The JRCS conducted large-scale relief operations, and almost all of its chapters sent relief teams to the devastated area. The scale of the relief was so massive that expenditure for the operation was equivalent to the relief activities at the Russo-Japanese War which lasted for two years. There are 3 thick files of documents on the earthquake kept at Toyota.

3. Access to the Japanese Red Cross Archives

A researcher should first contact the library of the Toyota College (email address: libr@rctoyota.ac.jp) well in advance of his or her visit. He or she fills in a form to use the documents. There is no restriction on the use of the documents, but they are available in microfilm, in order to preserve the original documents. For information on the documents kept at the JRCS Headquarters, please contact its Information Plaza (email address: info@jrc.or.jp)