Early in 2016, the Electronic Records Division of the National Archives and Records Administration received an unusual collection of donated electronic records. The original paper records, found to be radioactive, were discovered by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) during cleanup operations at the Bloomsburg, Pennsylvania Safety Light Corporation Superfund site. These records document the perspective of the United States Radium Corporation (USRC) and its predecessor, the Radium Luminous Material Corporation (RLMC), on the story of the radium luminous paint dial painters, popularly known as the Radium Girls. These digitized records are now available in the National Archives Catalog as [Records Related to Radium Dial Painters, 1917-1949](https://catalog.archives.gov/id/40978844) (National Archives Identifier 40978844).
Following Marie Curie's discovery of the element radium in 1898, scientists and entrepreneurs sought to understand and exploit the element's properties. Many young women were employed in dial painting studios, applying paint containing radium to a number of products, including watches and instrument dials. For some time after its discovery radium was considered safe and was even advertised as a beneficial substance.

During the early 1920s, a growing number of scientists and physicians began to question the benefits of radium and, slowly, acknowledge its link with the debilitating illnesses afflicting dial painters. Complaints and lawsuits by former employees against the USRC began to proliferate in 1923.
The USRC never admitted any liability for the illnesses of the dial painters and settled the suits brought against it out of court. The most famous settlement went to Grace Fryer, Katherine Schaub, Edna Hussman, Albina Larice, and Quinta McDonald in June of 1928.
In this case, which received substantial attention in the press and from the New Jersey Consumer's League, the dial painters received $10,000 (some sources state the amount was as high as $15,000), a $600 annuity while they lived, and the coverage of their medical expenses, subject to the approval of a committee of three doctors.

While a few dial painters received substantial settlements, generally such suits and claims resulted in much smaller compensations. Three of the earliest suits against the USRC were brought by Marguerite Carlough, the family of her sister Sarah Maillefer, and the family of Hazel Kuser. Carlough’s heirs received $9,000. The family of Hazel Kuser received $1,000 and Sarah Maillefer’s survivors received $3,000, each estate signing releases protecting the company from further litigation.
The majority of dial painters received no compensation from the company. In 1980, U.S. Radium was substantially reorganized and ultimately dissolved into new corporations. Its former radium processing facilities, which included the dial painting studio of Orange, New Jersey, where Grace Fryer and her compatriots worked, became a Superfund cleanup site. The EPA completed the cleanup in Orange during 2006, and cleanup work at the Bloomsburg, Pennsylvania facility, which is still ongoing, is where the collection was discovered. The radioactive paper records have been disposed of accordingly, but thanks to the Safety Light Corporation’s donation of the documents, and the EPA’s scanning of them, the history has been preserved and made available in the National Archives Catalog...
as *Records Related to Radium Dial Painters, 1917-1949* (National Archives Identifier 40978844).

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*This post was excerpted from a blog post on The Text Message by Zachary Dabbs, processing archivist at the National Archives in College Park. Read Zachary’s [full post](https://example.com) to learn more about these records.*

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