

“A BRAVE NEW WOMAN:” PRINT MEDIA’S PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN IN THE
AMERICAN CIVIL WAR

A Thesis

by

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BA, Texas State University, 2008

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

HISTORY

Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi
Corpus Christi, Texas

December 2018

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December 2018

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This thesis meets the standards for scope and quality of
Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi and is hereby approved.



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ABSTRACT

The American Civil War transformed the roles of women in the United States. Their domestic lifestyle was uprooted as many women vacated their domestic duties and joined different public causes to support the war in either the Union or Confederacy. These new roles included serving on the United States Sanitary Commission, as nurses in hospitals and on the front lines, and as women soldiers. This study illustrates how the 19th century print media published favorable stories about women's expanding roles in the Civil War and molded public opinion about white women in a male dominated society. The first chapter will assess the work of other historians on the changing nature of journalism and women's contributions in the war. The second chapter includes the coverage of women by newspapers and periodicals in the public sphere, most notably in the Sanitary Commission, aid societies and as nurses in the hospitals and on the battlefield. The third chapter will focus on the media's portrayal of the experiences of women soldiers in battle and camp life. This affirmative view encouraged greater acceptance of women outside of the domestic sphere. Helped by the favorable portrayal of their efforts by newspapers and periodicals, women seized the opportunity to expand their roles by creating a new sense of respect for their gender, as evidenced by the successful efforts by Civil War nurses to secure pensions for their wartime service.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am in awe of the Civil War women that I had the honor to research for my thesis. Their tenacity, compassion and courage during the Civil War years surpassed my expectations of women's abilities in the 19th century. They are true heroes and I hope this thesis sheds some light on their admirable achievements.

This work would not have been possible without the continuous support from the History faculty at Texas A&M University- Corpus Christi. I would like to thank Dr. Peter Moore, Dr. David Blanke and especially Dr. Robert Wooster, my thesis committee chair and mentor. His continuous support, encouragement and feedback helped me to excel in this project. He provided extensive professional guidance in sharpening my writing and researching skills. He has shown me by his great example, what it means to be a historian.

I also would like to thank my friend and classmate Jamie Lynn Jones on her support and encouragement in my project. Without her, I would not have achieved this goal.

I would like to dedicate this thesis to the two women in my life that made a significant impact. To my grandmothers, Dorothy Jean Sherman and Mary Ann Kane, you guided me with love and support for many years. I am grateful for the life lessons you taught me and to know that even though I am a woman, I can do anything.

I would also like to thank my family, my Mom, Dad and sister, Rachel. I am grateful for your listening ear and encouragement. Finally, to the person that made this journey possible, my best friend and husband, Dustin. Your endless support, encouragement, and love means more to me than you can imagine. You helped me achieve a significant life goal and I can never thank you enough. I am forever grateful for you.

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Introduction

“The result of the war has put into the hands of woman a great power, for it has placed her an equal with man in the eyes of the nation,” wrote the *New York Herald* in 1868. Over the past century and a half, scholarship on the American Civil War abounded with new research evaluating the roles of women, focusing on their participation in the antebellum abolitionist movement. However, recent historians are assessing women during the war years as nurses, sanitation workers, volunteers and soldiers.¹

The Civil War encouraged women to demonstrate their usefulness in American society. This thesis argues that popular media’s positive interpretation of women’s expanding roles in the Civil War molded public opinion about white women in a male dominated society in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. This affirmative view of women encouraged greater acceptance of women outside of the domestic sphere. Women boasted decades of experience organizing for temperance and abolition and the Civil War afforded them similar chances to reveal their talents in the civic arena, resulting in a greater tolerance toward white women in public life. With the favorable portrayal of their efforts by newspapers and periodicals after America’s bloodiest war, women had the opportunity to expand their roles by creating a new sense of respect for their gender, as evidenced by the successful efforts by Civil War nurses to secure pensions for their wartime service.²

¹ “The Era of Petticoat Government,” *The New York Herald*, November 11, 1868.

² Sarah Evans, *Born for Liberty: A History of Women in America* (New York: Free Press, 1989), 114.

This study will analyze newspapers and periodicals' view of white women's involvement in the Civil War. The first chapter will assess the work of other historians on the changing nature of journalism and women's contributions during the war. The second chapter includes the coverage by newspapers and periodicals of women in the public sphere, most notably in the Sanitary Commission, aid societies and as nurses in the hospitals and on the battlefield. The third chapter will focus on the media's portrayal of the experiences of women soldiers in battle and camp life.

Between 1861 and 1917, the print media scrutinized women's Civil War work in public jobs as volunteers for sanitation fairs and aid societies, and as nurses and soldiers. Women ventured into many previously unknown public activities, where they surpassed expectations of their competency in a time of chaos. For instance, newspapers throughout the country published articles about the creation of thousands of aid societies that benefitted the men on battlefields. Furthermore, newspapers in the South promoted women nurses and, as Sarah Evans explains, "recognized the necessity of women nurses and helped to temporarily remove the stigma of such work for them." Mary Cronin estimates that over twenty thousand women engaged in relief efforts in the Union and Confederate states. This work, either as volunteers or nurses, was a vital component of managing the crisis of the war.³

³ Evans, 113, 114 (quotation); Mary M. Cronin, "Patriotic Ladies and Gallant Heroines: Images of Confederate Women in Southern Newspapers, 1861-65," *Journalism History* 36 (Fall 2010): 142, 143; Jane E. Schultz, *Women at the Front: Hospital Workers in Civil War America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 2.

Newspapers and journals also discussed women who became soldiers. DeAnne Blanton and Lauren Cook argue that women soldiers “bore all of the same hardships and dire consequences of soldiering as their male comrades.” During the war, however, neither army officially recognized female soldiers. Years later, newspapers and periodicals formulated a favorable impression about women soldiers in the war. This optimistic view encouraged a greater acceptance of women in the public sphere and helped to promote more opportunities for women for decades following the conflict.⁴

By researching newspapers and periodicals between 1861 and 1917, a distinct perspective emerges. These primary sources provide a vibrant picture of daily life and show how society in general came to understand women’s contributions in the war years. The newspapers range from small town presses to widely read newspapers such as *The New York Herald* and the *Washington Times*. Periodicals reflect a similar diversity. Indispensable to the everyday running of society, this popular media provided invaluable insights into the opinions and attitudes toward women’s efforts during the Civil War.

In researching women’s roles in the Civil War, the coverage of newspapers for this thesis ends with 1917. With the intervention of American forces into World War One, newspapers focused on issues related to the Great War and American forces entering combat. After the First World War ended, newspapers did cover women’s roles in the Civil War again, but not with the same eagerness as before 1917. Understandably, coverage of women’s volunteers in World War One overshadowed attention given their efforts in the American Civil War.

⁴ DeAnne Blanton and Lauren M. Cook, *They Fought Like Demons: Women Soldiers in the Civil War* (New York: Vintage Books, 2002), 205 (quotation).

Northern women's wartime activities dominated the print media from 1861 and 1917. Why was this the case? In part, women were allowed more freedom in the North, where many of the women's movements had originated. Northern society was more accustomed to women stepping out of the domestic sphere. For example, the abolition and temperance movements were based in the North and had great success. This was not the case in the South, where the plantation system kept women more fully in the "cult of domesticity." Moreover, fewer Southern newspapers and periodicals are available to the modern researcher.

In the gendered 19th century society, the print media's portrayal of women aligned with widely accepted views of women's appropriate place. Consequently, women's abilities were foremost documented on the home front. Women were initially expected to stay within what is known as the "cult of true womanhood," which is the sphere of domesticity of home and family life. Frequent discussions in the print media of women's Civil War activities reveal that these efforts fueled the war in a moral, spiritual and physical sense that previously was not recognized in American history. Women helped to persuade men to enter this conflict to help save the Union or in the Confederacy's case, slavery. As the *New Northwest* explained in 1880, "During our own civil war, the women on both sides were among the most ardent in urging friends to enlist and take to the field, and if accounts from the South are to be relied upon, a great many of the women in that section have not given up the struggle yet."⁵

⁵ Judith Ann Giesberg, *Civil War Sisterhood: The U.S. Sanitary Commission and Women's Politics in Transition* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2000), 24; "Mr. Parkman's Objections," *New Northwest*, January 22, 1880 (quotation); "The Sufferers from

The print media also concluded that women made tremendous sacrifices in the war. According to the *Daily Phoenix*, women “denied themselves not only delicacies, but even substantial food also, in order to add to the stock of provisions for the army.” Across all economic classes, they were expected to ration at home to support the troops. As the *Jackson Standard* proclaimed, “the women of the South during our civil war proved that with them patriotism was stronger than vanity.” For example, many well-to-do Southern women gave up their jewelry and family inheritances for the Confederate cause. Similarly, women in the Union often used their fine fabrics to outfit the army with needed clothing materials. Countless women realized that the finer things in life were no longer practical or necessary. The print media made sure that women were recognized for their efforts. As historian Jeannie Attie states, “Union women were heralded for energies that never flagged and patriotic spirits that stayed buoyed for the duration of the conflict.”⁶

Ironically, women’s efforts on the domestic front led to more opportunities in the public sphere. Before the war, Catherine Clinton writes, “females were assigned value in terms of their running a household and producing a family, and little else.” However, the Civil War opened new outlets for them. Winslow Homer portrayed this new undertaking of women in his often-reprinted portrait, “Our Women and the War.” This particular drawing’s title, the “Influence of Women,” portrays Homer’s reasoning for representing the importance of women. The images

War,” *Sun*, April 23, 1898; Jeanie Attie, *Patriotic Toil: Northern Women and the American Civil War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 25.

⁶ “Southern Women in the Civil War,” *Daily Phoenix*, July 19, 1874 (quotation); “The Love of Dress,” *The Jackson Standard*, March 23, 1876; Scott, 69; Attie, 1 (quotation).

depict an optimistic explanation of what women were capable of at the beginning of the war and what they achieved by the end of the conflict. For example, the first image illustrates women helping in the domestic sphere, while the last image is of a nurse assisting a wounded soldier. Equally as important, the other images ranged from sending supplies from their own homes to the soldiers on the battlefields, nursing wounded men back to health, writing letters for soldiers to their loved ones, and supervising and managing households while the men were away fighting. Indeed, many women inspired saint-like portrayals, since “their compassion inspired their patriotism.”⁷

According to the newspapers, women’s sacrifices on the home front intensified as the fighting progressed, and they assumed duties that previously had been considered the exclusive domain of men. On southern plantations, women were now expected to keep the administrative tasks in order and manage the substantial staff in daily operations even as they maintained their own domestic duties of raising children during the war crisis and keeping their homesteads secure from enemy forces. This idea of self-sacrifice set the tone for the print media to take a more positive view of the changing of gender norms during the war years.⁸

According to the *Advocate of Peace*, published by the American Peace Society, “women had to toil and to strive to fill the place left vacant.” They transformed into public servants in

⁷ Catherine Clinton, *Stepdaughters of History: Southern Women and the American Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2016), 44 (quotation); Winslow Homer, “Our Women and the War,” *Harper's Weekly*, 82, 4 (September 1862), Digital Public Library of America, <http://dp.la/item/693c02bc190917b1304fa7ac1921a03e>; Attie, 4 (quotation).

⁸ Clinton, 4; “Patriotism,” *Mitchell Capital*, June 14, 1895.

order to keep their homesteads running, husband's businesses from closing and family life in order. Skeptics often doubted that women could fill the enormous vacancies left by the soldiers. However, women had no other choice as they had to persevere in times of trial to keep things running as smoothly as possible. Moreover, many women made a "conscious decision to make unique sacrifices in defense of the nation." They understood the reality they were living in and knew they were duty bound to make these sacrifices. Because of the print media's coverage of such activities, society came to realize their sacrifices had been vital to managing the enormity of the war crisis.⁹

Media also highlighted women's roles in persuading men to fight. According to the *Anderson Intelligencer*, "women played a great part...they more than anyone compelled every able-bodied man in the South to go into the line of battle." They persuaded, challenged and urged their menfolk to fight for their beliefs and in the North to resist the injustice of slavery and save the Union. In this time of crises, "women welcomed the sudden expansion of the emotional and physical spaces in which they could perform their citizenship." As such, no account on the Civil War is complete without recognizing women's expanded duties on the home front, new roles which enabled them to seek out more opportunities in the public sphere.¹⁰

⁹ Catherine Gurney, "How War Affects Woman," *Advocates of Peace* 6, no. 5 (1875): 30, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27905850>; Attie, 22 (quotation).

¹⁰ "Women and the War," *Anderson Intelligencer*, April 25, 1900 (quotation); "Woman's Work in the Civil War," *Phrenological Journal & Life Illustrated: A Repository of Science, Literature & General Intelligence* 46, no. 1 (July 1867): 33, American Antiquarian Society (AAS) Historical Periodicals Collection: Series 5, EBSCOhost (accessed January 31, 2018),

In addition, technological advances allowed newspapers and periodicals to influence broader audiences in the United States. By acknowledging the importance of women's roles in the American Civil War, newspapers and periodicals indirectly gave women a larger voice. As Anne Firor Scott explains, "wartime experiences prepared a generation of women for the great leap forward they were to make in the postwar decades." They knew their efforts were essential to winning the war and these experiences gave them a broader view of what they could ultimately achieve in American society.¹¹

With the print media's coverage, society recognized that the war changed gender norms and perceptions of women's proper place in the home and the public sphere. According to Scott, "The Civil War provided them with both the impetus and the opportunity to begin to address women's concerns outside of the local context---to begin to look beyond what was traditionally considered women's sphere of influence." During the half century after the war, the frequent newspaper articles and periodicals that referenced the contributions of the "weaker sex" serve as clear evidence supporting Scott's assertions.

As in many things in life, not all of the newspaper reports were favorable to women's efforts in the war years. Many newspapers and periodicals discussed how women mishandled large organizations and the distribution of war supplies. Others insisted that their proper place

<http://web.a.ebscohost.com/ehost/detail/detail?vid=5&sid=9e4869b3-edfd-4911-bd3d-ce608baec362%40sessionmgr4009&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWwhvc3QtbGl2ZSZzY29wZT1zaXRl#d b=h9m&AN=59956537>; Attie, 23 (quotation).

¹¹ Anne Firor Scott, *Natural Allies: Women's Associations in American History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 59 (quotation).

was in the home and the general public did not need their assistance. More frequently, however, the print media offered a more promising outlook on women's efforts during the war.

Additionally, this encouraging view illustrated that women's exertions were "essential to the government's defense." Influenced by newspapers and periodicals, society more readily recognized women's abilities and their pursuit of new opportunities in the post war years.¹²

¹² Judith Ann Giesberg, *Civil War Sisterhood: The U.S. Sanitary Commission and Women's Politics in Transition* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2000), 167; Risley Ford, *American Civil War Journalism* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2012), xiii; Attie, 22 (quotation).

Chapter 1

Changing Journalism and Roles of Women in the Civil War- A Historiography

The crisis of the American Civil War compelled women to demonstrate their worth in American society. Media's positive interpretation of their expanding roles shaped public opinion in the later 19th and early 20th century. Furthermore, the changing nature of journalism emphasized this differing view of women in a male dominated society. In turn, the growing influence of journalism ensured a broader public recognition of women's activities in the war effort.

Several scholarly works evaluate the importance of media's role in the mid to late 19th century America. *Words at War*, a collection of conference papers from the Symposium on the 19th Century Press at the University of Tennessee, discusses media's influence before, during and after the war. "In bringing the political and military conflict into American parlors and living rooms," conclude the volume's editors, newspapers and popular magazines "both solidified and expanded the power of the press as it moved into the modern era." The ability of the newspapers to push people to the brink of war is best seen in Debra Reddin Van Tuyl's "Knights of the Quill," which argues that Southern media's one-sided view of events served to inflame sectional tensions. However, the print media was wary of creating a perception of an impending bloodbath. Newspapers in the South were highly important, since "reader demand for news was demonstrated by the stunning increase in new subscriptions in the early part of the war." People

wanted the news as quickly as possible and each newspaper influenced society's political, social and emotional views of Civil War events.¹³

Another important scholarly work on the media is David W. Bulla's and Gregory A. Borchard's *Journalism in the Civil War Era*, which assesses the influence of both small and large newspapers in carrying "information to a national audience." Reports from the front lines now provided editors with access to publishable war content. Changes in technology made possible different methods of reporting from the battlefields with a more direct outlook on soldier's experiences. New steam presses encouraged more newspapers to print larger editions, which in turn allowed the public to get better news at a faster pace. The new technology also permitted the use of illustrations (woodcuts) that gave readers direct visual images of contemporary scenes, especially on the battlefields. In the case of the Civil War, this made it easier for society to realize the deadly seriousness of combat. As journalism flourished, more reporters were able to find stable jobs, get the news out quicker and provide an efficient way for society to gain valuable and relevant information. The press, as Bulla and Borchard explain, was crucial in publicizing President Abraham Lincoln's wartime successes. These newspapers "would continue

¹³ David S. Sachsman, S. Kittrell Rushing, and Roy Morris, Jr, eds., *Words at War: The Civil War and American Journalism* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press 2008), 9 (quotation), 138 (quotation); Donald E. Reynolds, *Editors Make War: Southern Newspapers in the Secession Crisis* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2006), 27.

to espouse the ideals Lincoln championed during a time when journalism would become a profession and industry.”¹⁴

Risley Ford’s *Civil War Journalism* examines the background of journalists who reported the war and provides a detailed explanation of editors’ rights. Editors had the ability to publish what they thought was the most influential information about battles, generals’ decisions and death tolls. With this power, editors could sway public’s opinion by supporting or opposing the views of either the Confederate or the Union governments. With the use of illustrations, the war came to life for the general public. For example, many sketches captured the sentimentality associated with troops going off to war. Within these same pictures, a romanticized view of the women and children emerged as they sent their loved ones off to battle. This perspective of the excitement of the troops and their families depicts the falsely optimistic assumption that the war would end quickly with little bloodshed. These illustrations gave an innovative outlook to reporting that eventually led to a greater acceptance and understanding of the importance of journalism. This in turn led both Union and Confederate governments to attempt to censor and suppress the press.¹⁵

In his *The South Reports the Civil War*, Andrew Cutler describes the struggles reporters often faced in reporting the Confederate cause and its belief in the institution of slavery. Southern newspapers “in some measure provided the equivalent of literary magazines and magazines of opinion, and their editors tended to be a cross between the statesman-politician and

¹⁴ David W. Bulla and Gregory A. Borchard, *Journalism in the Civil War Era* (New York: Peter Lang, 2010), xvii; 5, 10, 25, 75, 208 (quotation).

¹⁵ Ford, xi, 38.

the man of letters.” With such prestige, Southern reporters had high demands expected of them. Due to the wartime scarcity of paper and ink, and breakdown in transportation through much of the Confederacy, getting the correct news content to the newspapers was a feat. Southern newspapers made few attempts to hide their partisan views in their reporting. At times reporters faced the charge that they were Union spies. In other instances, it was extremely difficult to report the whole truth about a military event due to the difficulty of reaching the front lines. In addition, the rapidly changing military situations on several major war fronts rendered honest reporting difficult. Overall, Southern reporters usually tried to portray conditions as favorably as they could to the Confederacy to boost public morale.¹⁶

Gerald Baldasty, by contrast, focuses on the changing nature of journalism in the post war years. At the beginning of the 1800s, most journalistic endeavors were small weekly newspapers that focused on mainly small town politics (political parties financed these newspapers) and the local news. By the later 19th century, however, newspapers became larger in size and featured a mixture of politics, daily life, crime, entertainment and fashion on both the local and national level. According to Baldasty, “technological innovation, the rise of a market economy, the broad sweep of industrialization, greater leisure time and literacy, and the rise of great cities,” all aided in the changing nature of journalism and the newspaper market. Furthermore, Baldasty also demonstrates that newspapers became commercialized in order to make a handsome profit (advertisers were now the main stockholders, not political parties). Previously, they were created to bring news to the local population with little monetary gain to

¹⁶ Andrew Cutler, *The South Reports the Civil War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), 24 (quotation), 41, 102, 506.

the publisher. By the end of the 19th century, this changed drastically as large newspapers such as *The Evening Post* became increasingly profitable. Many popular newspapers followed the same path and allowed commercialization to influence news reporting. With the use of advertisements, the news “became a commodity, as a commercial product to be shaped, packaged, and marketed with a constant eye to profit.” The commercialization of journalism also afforded the print media the opportunity to discuss groundbreaking news such as women’s rights.¹⁷

Various scholars have also examined women’s competencies to provide resources, time and experience in the war effort. Anne Firor Scott’s groundbreaking *The Southern Lady*, published in 1970, emphasizes women’s hardships before, during and after the war. Her description of southern women’s confining sphere illustrates their complaints about lack of education and mothering duties of both biological children and slaves. According to Scott, the coming of war “speeded social change and opened Pandora’s Box” for women. Expectations of women now incorporated the daily tasks that previously their husbands had dominated. Women filled the vast void that men left as they marched off to battle proving themselves as farmers, shop owners, nurses, managers, organizers, postmistresses and manufacturers. In many instances, women did this without previous experience or knowledge of such public and administrative activities. They resisted discrimination because they were duty bound to the cause’s efforts. Similarly, Alice Fahs documents that “woman's war of sacrifice and suffering complemented a

¹⁷ Gerald J. Baldasty, *The Commercialization of News in the Nineteenth Century* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2014), 4 (quotation), 140 (quotation).

man's war of fighting.” They had to assert a newfound confidence to show others they could meet all expectations placed upon them.¹⁸

With the war’s end, Scott argues that “the first foreshadowing of a new style of woman began to appear.” For example, a South Carolina editor noted that after the war his father now farmed alongside his mother-in-law. With labor at a premium, women fought for gender integration by pursuing jobs in the public sphere that had not previously been acceptable. Women editors like Eliza Jane Povitevent, who edited the *New Orleans Picayune*, secured newfound influence. With the opening of educational and employment opportunities, women gained a voice. “Wherever economic imperatives existed, mores and social barriers gave away,” concluded Scott.¹⁹

Published five years after Scott’s seminal work, Bell Irvin Wiley’s *Confederate Women* documents further scholarship on women’s achievements in the American Civil War. This account examines three well-known women in the Confederacy and their impressive roles in the public sphere of a male dominated society. Mary Chestnut, Virginia Clay, and Varina Davis all provide examples of women who stepped outside of the domestic sphere and took on important duties done previously by their husbands. Wiley’s research also includes a chapter on women soldiers, nurses and volunteers in the war effort. He states that a “few determined and resourceful

¹⁸ Anne Firor Scott, *The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics 1830-1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 78 (quotation); Alice Fahs, “The Feminized Civil War: Gender, Northern Popular Literature, and the Memory of War, 1861-1900,” *Journal of American History* 85 (March 1999): 146 (quotation).

¹⁹ Scott, *The Southern Lady*, 81, 83, 102, 107, 110, 119, 129 (quotation).

women” broke through the barriers of prejudice and discrimination. Wiley’s conclusion suggests that the American Civil War suspended the bondage of patriarchy upon women and allowed them further experiences in the public sector of American society. As men came back from the war, according to Wiley, they quickly realized what women had accomplished in their absence. Women’s triumphant endeavors led to the “fact that they made far more progress in the forty-nine years between 1865 and World War I than in the seventy-eight years from the Revolution to 1861.”²⁰

Catherine Clinton’s more recent *Stepdaughters of History* discusses Southern women’s involvement in the war and how the aftermath of the war affected conventional female roles in American society. During the war, women “were required to shoulder inordinate wartime burdens on the home front....sacrifice became the watch word.” They had to pursue innovative roles outside of their normal place in society. Wartime sacrifices made these duties necessary and proper within the sphere of women’s domestic duties. As a “band of sisters,” these women emerged as one identity during the war years. Women from all economic backgrounds needed each other in times of trial, with the loss of loved ones and with the changing nature of their domestic duties on the home front. These women had to proceed at times with caution into this unknown world, but they also gained valuable skills. Furthermore, Clinton discusses the changing boundaries of female propriety, labelling those that pushed past it as “impermissible

²⁰ Bell Irvin Wiley, *Confederate Women* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1975), 144, 149 (quotation).

patriots” who defied customs and traditions and engaged in activities that were not previously allowed by societal norms.²¹

Published in 1989, Sarah Evans’ *Born for Liberty* encompasses a history of women’s activities in America over several decades, and suggested new avenues for researching the Civil War era with a different perspective. Women’s contributions to the Civil War, she argues, involved the formation of aid societies in both North and South and the recruitment of nurses for the wounded. With this public organization of women, new possibilities opened up outside of the domestic sphere. They gained “organizational experience and new skills,” which provided them with opportunities such as nursing, teaching and gaining government clerkships. Evans suggests that their voices were “prepared to claim new liberties in a postwar world.” Everything rapidly changed as men came back from the battlefields and women strove to prove their efforts were not in vain.²²

The growing importance of newspapers made their portrayal of women, whose roles were rapidly changing, even more crucial. In *Daughters of the Union*, Nina Silber argues that Civil War Northern women suspended the propriety of gender norms and seized more female independence in society through their own contributions and sacrifices to the war effort. Silber offered some of the earliest scholarly assessments of the Northern perspective of women. In her words, women had to “learn to step, albeit tentatively, beyond the domestic circle to consider the national and ideological dimensions of the conflict.” This included running households, farmsteads and businesses without male supervision, which highlights their contributions to the

²¹ Clinton, 1 (quotation), 41, 3.

²² Evans, 114, 118 (quotation).

war effort. Each of these sacrifices opened new doors for women and facilitated their advance in the male dominated public sector.²³

Jean Attie's captivating *Patriotic Toil* also examines the work of Northern women for the Union cause, especially in creating, organizing and managing aid societies. Attie also recognizes the importance of print media. "It was not long before newspapers assessed women's patriotic efforts," concludes Attie, "by comparing them with the achievements of women in neighboring communities." As she observes, newspapers persuaded women not only to take part in the war effort, but to also surpass other communities in their war contributions. Women's domestic skills were equally vital to winning the conflict. For example, women's sewing kept soldiers in uniforms, hospitals with enough bed sheets, and bandages for the wounded. In addition, Attie points out that thousands of women met the call for garments for departing troops leaving for war. Attie explores how female domestic duties had to take a step back at times as public duties became increasingly crucial. She also emphasizes the Sanitary Commission's influence and how it changed the landscape of benevolent work done by women. Previously, this type of political and social organization of women had not been done on a national scale, and Northern women used this opportunity to prove their abilities.²⁴

Through their participation in the war effort, women demonstrated their competence to American society. One of the most profound ways they achieved this was as nurses. Jane Schultz's *Women at the Front* explores the contributions that women provided as nurses on the

²³ Nina Silber, *Daughters of the Union: Northern Women Fight the Civil War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 29.

²⁴ Attie, 1, 2, 3, 17, 37 (quotation).

battlefront. In this analysis, Schultz depicts the struggles (it was thought that women did not have the proper training or strength for a nursing job) that women faced as nurses on the front lines and how they adjusted to this public duty. They proved their worth by being strong workers, gaining the trust of their patients, and cooperating with the hospital staff they worked with each day. Furthermore, Schultz concludes that the “war may not have led directly to more jobs for women in the postwar era, but the much-touted example of their wartime achievement created at least initially an atmosphere of tolerance as they sought work outside the home.”²⁵

Southern women’s roles during the American Civil War led them to secure additional public roles in the post war years. Karen Cox’s *Dixie Daughters* discusses the United Daughters of the Confederacy’s attempts to immortalize the Confederacy as a whole. As Cox demonstrates, “Confederate women’s experience as nurses, laborers in munitions factories, and members of soldiers’ aid societies gave them the necessary skills and confidence to meet the social and cultural needs of the region in the war’s aftermath.” The United Daughters of the Confederacy allowed women new avenues to demonstrate their influence by changing attitudes towards the Confederacy’s loss by erecting monuments and helping veterans secure pensions. By emerging in these public roles, women changed the perceptions not only of Southern culture, but white womanhood.²⁶

²⁵ Schultz, 6.

²⁶ Karen Cox, *Dixie's Daughters: The United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Preservation of Confederate Culture* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003), 10 (quotation), 11, 76, 160.

Similarly, Will Kaufman's *The Civil War in American Culture* exemplifies the retelling of the war from different perspectives. In his chapter, "The Regendered Civil War," Kaufman acknowledges the contradictory views of women's roles. Women were expected to stay within the domestic sphere. At other times, such as a war crisis, they were pressed into service performing duties that were otherwise considered a part of the man's realm. According to Kaufman, such "is only one indication of the war's destabilizing impact upon patriarchal structures and assumptions." Kaufman also discusses the secrecy of women serving as soldiers in the war. The War Department denied that any woman took up arms and tried to conceal these records. In light of previous constraints regarding their place in society, women felt they had waged a "private rebellion against public conventions." By adjusting their lifestyles, they balanced domestic and public duties. Periodicals and newspapers documented women's participation in the public sphere of society, suggesting that "female progress achieved much within the context of conflict" such as the Civil War.²⁷

Mary Cronin's "Patriotic Ladies and Gallant Heroines: Images of Confederate Women in Southern Newspapers" describes the domestic side of the war including running households without male supervision, rationing goods and stabilizing the homestead. For example, Cronin discusses the *Mobile Register and Advertiser*, which praised women for "their unending willingness to wield their own weapons—the needle, the spindle, and the loom—to help

²⁷ Will Kaufman, *The Civil War in American Culture* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), 94 (quotation), 105; Susan-Mary Grant, "When the Fires Burned Too Close to Home: Southern Women and the Dislocations of the Home Front in the American Civil War," *Women's History Review* 26, no. 4 (August 2017): 573 (quotation).

husbands, fathers and brothers.” Women’s increased emotional and physical roles on the homestead allowed men to feel comforted as they were away fighting in the war. Many Southern newspapers lauded the efforts of women. The *Baton Rouge Daily Advocate* portrayed women’s duties on the home front with “themes echoed during the war---patriotism, religion, self-sufficiency, self- sacrifice, and devotion to the Confederate Cause.” In 1861, the Georgia-based *Macon Daily Telegraph* stated that women willing to aid in the war effort linked directly “to the soldiers’ morale.” The *Selma Morning Reporter* echoed the same sentiments, “women’s unending sacrifices for the Confederacy provided the incentive for soldiers to perform deeds of heroism and valor.” Each of these southern newspapers provided a positive image of women’s wartime duties. Moreover, a higher regard for women’s aptitudes accompanied the new roles they assumed. Women became the forefront of the war effort and were praised for their unending devotion to the troops and the cause. According to the *Daily Southern Crisis*, a woman who produced 216 pairs of socks for the troops received the following praise, “Her devotion reminded me of the mothers of Sparta! Such women make a people great.” Additionally, Cronin insists that, “homebound women were the civilian engine of the war effort.”²⁸

Civil War scholarship has also examined women soldiers. Most comprehensive is Richard Hall’s *Women on the Civil War Battlefield*. Building upon earlier research, Hall provides a definitive examination of the services of women on the frontlines in the American Civil War ranging from nurses, spies, daughters of the regiment, and soldiers. Involvement in

²⁸ Mary Cronin, “Patriotic Ladies and Gallant Heroines: Images of Confederate Women in Southern Newspapers, 1861-65,” *Journalism History* 36 (Fall 2010): 145 (quotation), 141 (quotation), 139, 142 (quotation).

various antebellum organizations involving temperance and the abolition of slavery encouraged many women to participate in public life. Numerous women thus started out in the war as nurses or volunteers. Yet some felt left out of the actual war effort, so they disguised themselves as men and joined the army, convincing their comrades that they were of the same sex and could serve with distinction. Whereas previous scholarship on this topic had estimated only 250 women soldiers, Hall's new research led him to conclude that over a thousand women served in this capacity.²⁹

As Hall notes, newspaper articles from the latter 19th century reveal veteran soldiers' awe once they found out that they had fought alongside women outfitted as men. Many saw no difference in a woman soldier's skills compared to a white man. Hall demonstrates it was relatively easy for a woman to dress up as a male soldier. Modesty was a crucial part of society at this time (Victorian ideals at their finest) and women soldiers used this strong sense of respectability to aid in their male disguises. As the initial excitement wore off, both the Union and Confederacy had to fill their ranks, and women realized that the government would take anyone who looked like an able-bodied man. Many women could disguise their gender with looser clothing and shorter hair. It was difficult to prove who the actual women were or if their gender was ever revealed during their military service. Once a woman soldier was discovered, they were secretly or quietly discharged, mainly so the commander could conceal the fact that they had allowed a woman to serve in their unit. Yet most men had a hard time imagining women taking up arms and bearing the same load as them; as such, many women concealed their

²⁹ Richard H. Hall, *Women on the Civil War Battlefield* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006), 3, 11.

gender far longer than they ever imagined. “Even in camp,” Hall notes, “male soldiers often were slow to recognize that a fellow soldier had feminine characteristics, perhaps finding it unimaginable that a woman would have the audacity to masquerade as a man and have the endurance to succeed at it under harsh conditions.” Additionally, male soldiers had a hard time realizing that some women disguised themselves in order to serve on the front lines with their husbands. Most soldiers saw these “couples” as merely friends and nothing more. Noting there are more accounts of women soldiers in the Northern armies than in the Confederate units, Hall attributes this to the better preservation of Union records.³⁰

In *They Fought like Demons: Women Soldiers of the Civil War*, DeAnne Blanton and Lauren Cook argue that the telling of women soldiers’ exploits outside of the domestic realm has long been overdue. As contemporary letters revealed few insights into female soldiers, like Hall they depend largely on postwar newspapers. Blanton and Cook suggest many reasons why women joined the war effort, most notably following loved ones into battle, leaving behind undesirable home conditions or having a strong sense of patriotism to serve their country. In contrast with Richard Hall, however, they assert: “The Civil War was an opportunity of hundreds of women to escape the confines of their sex.” For many dressing as a man offered a new sense of freedom, for now they had a chance to see society in a different perspective and were free to do as they pleased. These women wanted to prove they were just as capable as white men. Blanton and Cook did an especially effective job in breaking down the women soldier’s experiences once their gender was discovered. As they conclude, “Some women soldiers were lauded, and others were condemned.” By focusing their research on postwar newspapers,

³⁰ Hall, 18, 15, 25, 30, 57, (quotation), 58, 65.

Blanton and Cook provide a deeper insight into the emotions and challenges women faced as soldiers through the newspaper articles published after the war.³¹

Laura Gansler's *The Mysterious Private Thompson: The Double Life of Sarah Emma Edmonds, Civil War Soldier*, focuses on one of the famous women soldiers, Sarah Emma Edmonds, who grew up on a farm where she learned to ride a horse and shoot a gun. These abilities gave her an advantage into the male world. She knew her life would be planned out if she stayed home and married the man her father had selected. Therefore, she packed up her bags and headed out to live life as a man with her newfound privileges. Sarah transformed herself from being a male book sales clerk into a Civil War soldier. In her account, she spoke of her happiness in joining camp life as a male where no gender limitations were placed on her or expected of her. She did have to be very careful and not show her domestic skills (such as cooking or sewing) in case someone recognized her ability to perform these tasks better than most men. Also known as Private Frank Thompson, Sarah Emma Edmonds was later buried in Houston's Washington Cemetery with full military honors, "the greatest honor she ever received or could imagine."³²

Although much scholarship has dealt with women's roles in the American Civil War, the coverage of these services by the print media, more particularly on how such portrayals impacted

³¹ Blanton and Cook, 2, 5, 7, 129 (quotation).

³² Laura L. Gansler, *The Mysterious Private Thompson: The Double Life of Sarah Emma Edmonds, Civil War Soldier* (New York: Free Press, 2005), 6, 219 (quotation); Melissa J. Strong, "The Finest Kind of Lady": Hegemonic Femininity in American Women's Civil War Narratives," *Women's Studies* 46, no. 1 (January 2017): 14.

woman's roles after the Civil War, has received less attention. My own research builds on the work of previous historians and creates a more in-depth argument of the print media's role in shaping society's view of women in the post-war years. By scouring newspapers and periodicals, my research involves a deeper connection of exactly how the print media influenced the interpretation of women's activities in the war. Covering a wide range of years for both newspapers and periodicals, it incorporates domestic, public and battlefield evidence to support this argument. With the coming of the war, many women were no longer complacent in their traditional domestic roles in American society. The war provided them with the opportunities to prove their worthiness and to resist gender injustice. For many women, war work allowed them to gain a "novel feeling of national usefulness and community prominence." Much of this shift was promoted by the favorable portrayals of their wartime activities in the print media.³³

³³ Attie, 254, (quotation).

Chapter 2

Women in the Public Sphere

Latter nineteenth century newspapers and periodicals pursued an avid interest in women's roles in public life. Why did the print media advance the changing roles of women? In part, this agenda stemmed from changing gender roles during the American Civil War. The war crises allowed white women to uproot traditional norms, which previously were confined by strict customs of household management and child rearing. How was this achieved among the customs and laws of the nineteenth century? Women began organizing in groups in the early 19th century and used these newfound skills to promote certain political, societal and personal agendas. Women realized "that they possessed influence; that as organizations they could ask and gain, whereas women they received no attention." They used this new knowledge to challenge societal constraints as they assumed duties in organizational management, nursing and government jobs. Furthermore, with the onset of war, women knew they had the intellectual, physical and emotional abilities to assist in the war effort on every level. Newspapers and periodicals realized this and published numerous articles about the changing roles of, and attitudes toward, women.³⁴

The print media recognized that women's relief work in the Civil War provided a prominent means of illustrating their talents. According to the *Dona Ana County Republican*, "women throughout the country organized soldiers' aid societies, sewing circles, fairs and entertainments of various sorts for the purpose of furnishing the brave boys both necessities and delicacies." Recognizing the needs of soldiers on the battlefields, women helped to generate the

³⁴ Scott, *Natural Allies*, 2 (quotation).

vitaly important United States Sanitary Commission and pursued its goals with the “utmost efficiency.” Created on June 9, 1861 by President Abraham Lincoln, the Sanitary Commission produced much needed uniforms and gathered military materials and necessary food supplies for hundreds of thousands of Union soldiers over the next four years. The vast organization had 12 major branches in some of the largest cities in Union. Women organized and managed many of these regional branches. Furthermore, several of these aid societies organized themselves without waiting for formal guidance. Although all major decisions required approval by the large all-male executive board, countless regional branches used their own authority to execute local decisions. By the end of the war, the print media calculated that aid societies housed under the Sanitary Commission successfully raised between \$15 million and \$50 million in goods and services.³⁵

Numerous articles discuss the famous war patriot, Mary Livermore, who had a large part in constructing this organization. She initiated a request for help and the response was prompt as thousands of women came forth to support. Her skill at organization and time management proved vital in the war years. In addition, Livermore relied upon “devotion and patriotic spirit” to keep it running. Her documentation of the war years in her account, *My Story of the War*, provides direct access to wartime experiences from a women’s perspective. According to historian Melissa Strong, Mary Livermore’s experience “exploits conventional femininity and reveals expanding roles” for women. Her time spent with the Sanitary Commission allowed

³⁵ “Our Women in War,” *Dona Ana County Republican*, April 14, 1898 (quotation); Giesberg, vi; “Women’s Work in the Civil War,” *Ottawa Free Trader*, June 22, 1867; Attie, 2, 3; Giesberg, 6 (quotation), 7, 10; Scott, *Natural Allies*, 65.

future historians to understand women's significant influence in the war years. In addition, the print media published Mary Livermore's memoir and she received public acclaim for her documentation of her war activities. This account helped to mold society's view of women in the war and their expanded sphere resulting from wartime needs.³⁶

Newspapers and periodical publications touting the Sanitary Commission often emphasized the work of women. Local branches allowed women to connect with other like-minded women and create "an effective network of supply that provided critical support to the U.S. Army" and a "cross-class sisterhood." They managed the aid societies by completing reports, staffing the necessary bureaucracy and balancing budgets. According to the popular periodical, *Hours at Home*, "they showed a perfect aptitude for business and proved by their own experience that men can devise nothing too precise." It is difficult to overestimate the amount of work done by the women in the North and for the Sanitary Commission during the war. Their legacy included "giving all the leisure they could command, and all the money they could save and spare, to the soldiers for the whole four years and more of the war."³⁷

³⁶ *Maine Farmer*, May 5, 1898,

<https://manowar.tamucc.edu/login?url=https://search.proquest.com/docview/135901045?accountid=7084>, (quotation); Strong, 3 (quotation), 4.

³⁷ "Woman's Work in the Civil War," *Hours at Home: A Popular Monthly of Instruction and Recreation* (June 1867): 155 (quotation),

<https://manowar.tamucc.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/90456854?accountid=7084>.

The Sanitary Commission created lasting impressions during the war, as countless Americans realized the role of women in providing troops with proper supplies and provisions. The *Chicago Medical Examiner*, for example, highlighted Elizabeth Blackwell's participation. Blackwell created the Women's Central Association of Relief, which allowed men and women to work alongside each other with the U.S Army's Medical Department and care for the wounded troops. This type of organization allowed women to "integrate personal, political, and professional goals." If Elizabeth Blackwell's "plan succeeded," wrote the *Examiner*, "it would indicate that the war had indeed offered the opportunity to overlap the separate institutions and the unique political experiences of women and men." By using women's "extensive domestic skills," they could achieve larger goals. Assisted by the print media's coverage of their activities, women such as Blackwell and Dorothea Dix enjoyed greater political influence in Washington D.C.³⁸

Contemporary articles also reminded the public that the Sanitary Commission helped the government to assist beleaguered soldiers. According to *The Saturday Evening Post*, "the wounded all say that they can never thank the Sanitary Commission enough." The Sanitary Commission delivered immeasurable relief to soldiers by the way of essential provisions. For example, when President Lincoln called for 75,000 men in 1861, a thousand volunteers showed up in Cleveland without blankets. The Sanitary Commission and its corresponding aid societies

³⁸ Giesberg 22, 32, 33 (quotation); "Editorial, Sanitary Commissions and Fairs," *Chicago Medical Examiner* 6, no. 6 (1865): 376, <https://manowar.tamucc.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/136483518?accountid=7084> (quotation); Attie, 33, 39 (quotation).

gathered enough blankets for all the volunteers before they were shipped off to the war front. Equally important, these aid societies “gathered funds and supplies from all parts of the country, inspected camps, provided clothes, delicacies for the sick, transportation for the men on leave.” In addition, women offered the care and nurturing which brought immense relief to soldiers far from their families and home. Frederick Law Olmsted, the Executive Secretary of the U.S. Sanitary Commission, “admitted that without the women’s unceasing effort, the work could not have gone on.”³⁹

After the war’s close, print media continued to emphasize the work of women in comforting Civil War soldiers. In 1868, the *New York Herald* stated that the president of the Sanitary Commission, Henry Whitney Bellows praised the female war workers for their “faithfulness.” In 1899, *Frank Leslie’s Popular Monthly Periodical* was still highlighting the contributions of women involved in the Sanitary Commission in saving thousands of soldiers left to die on the battlefields. Similarly in 1907, the *Macon Telegraph* published an article on women’s work during the war stating that, “Women of wonderful executive ability and great personal courage found in the sanitary commission...evinced a spirit unparalleled in the history of the war.” This enormous organization and management structure was complex, but was appropriately managed by women. It also printed a statement by Alfred Bloor that “The chief work in the practice of the Sanitary Commission was exceedingly well done by women, and

³⁹ “Great Sanitary Fair,” *Saturday Evening Post* (June 1864), 3 (quotation) <https://manowar.tamucc.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/126495670?accountid=7084>; Scott, *Natural Allies*, 59; Northend, 17 (quotation); Scott, *Natural Allies*, 65, 68 (quotation).

comparatively ill done by men.” Many women who worked in the different branches of the aid societies felt compelled to voice their opinions and were “very secure in their authority.”⁴⁰

Official recognition for the Sanitary Commission had been slow during the war, since it was mainly women’s work. Many believed that such an organization, spearheaded by women, could not bring the changes or benefits to the war effort that was expected. The print media, by contrast, found ways to emphasize its contributions, often through their articles about the famous Sanitary Fairs. For example, in 1863, *Our Acre and its Harvest* reported that the Northwestern Sanitary Commission in Chicago raised about \$80,000. Other aid societies realized the need for Sanitary Fairs and used similar tactics in their own regions. How did they recognize this phenomenon? Newspapers all over the country documented the success of these fairs in helping to raise monetary donations for the wounded soldiers. For example, the Northern Ohio Society raised \$100,000, which it used to buy supplies and medical necessities for troops. According to the *Free South*, in 1864 alone, these Sanitary Fairs brought in close to a million dollars, with the Pioneer Fair as the last one of the year held in Chicago. Furthermore, the *Chicago Eagle* quoted the famous Mary Livermore stating, “There had been a great deal of anxiety on our part, for the starting of the fair had involved a debt of \$10,000. But there were no fears after the first day,

⁴⁰ “Plymouth Church,” *The New York Herald*, November 24, 1873 (quotation); Anna Northend Benjamin, “Women as Army Nurses,” *Frank Leslie's Popular Monthly*, 48, 5 (September 1899): 17, <https://manowar.tamucc.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/136911811?accountid=7084>; “Women in the Civil War and After,” *Macon Telegraph*, May 26, 1907 (quotation); Scott, *Natural Allies*, 68; Giesberg, 85 (quotation), 88.

when we took \$25,000.” These fairs proved to be essential in allowing women to help in the war effort, as the print media made clear.⁴¹

Newspapers and periodicals recognized women’s labor as vital to the war effort in both the North and South. The *Macon Telegraph* illustrated this type of recognition by publishing an article that included President Abraham Lincoln stating, “If all that has been said by orators and poets since the creation of the world in praise of women were applied to the women of America, it would not do them justice for their conduct during the war.” *The Continental Monthly* also commended women’s efforts. “Let sanitary fairs and commissions, let soldiers’ aid societies from one end of the land to the other, and in every nook and corner of it, let our hospitals everywhere attest that is heartfelt love and devotion on the part of our women,” it proclaimed. Women’s efforts made the war more bearable for everyone involved. Furthermore, according to the *Macon Telegraph*, the legacy of the Sanitary Commission “turned a scattered constituency of soldiers’ aid societies into a dynamic network of relief that sponsored a novel effort to train women as professional nurses, provided information and advice to soldier’s families, brought quality supplies from the home front to the soldiers and helped support community welfare programs.”⁴²

⁴¹ Scott, *Natural Allies*, 61, 62; “Clippings,” *The Free South*, April 9, 1864; “Mrs. Mary A. Livermore,” *Chicago Eagle*, March 9, 1895, (quotation).

⁴² “Women in the Civil War and After,” *Macon Telegraph*, May 26, 1907 (quotation); “American Women,” *The Continental Monthly; Devoted to Literature and National Policy*, 6, no. 4, (October 1864): 428 (quotation); Giesberg, 169.

Print media recognized that these aid societies filled a gap by aiding troops and facilitated the government's efforts to make the war more bearable. In South Carolina alone, 150 aid societies were created in the first two months of the war. The Florence, South Carolina aid society, for instance, provided food for prisoners of war who were sick with typhoid fever. Even though they were considered the enemy, these women still took great care of the wounded troops. Following the war, numerous aid societies evolved into what became known as "Ladies Memorial Associations." These Associations were particularly significant in the South, and southern newspapers trumpeted their successes in reburying soldiers in appropriate burial grounds and erecting monuments in honor of the fallen. In so doing, women transformed their wartime duties into something that provided crucial assistance to the memorialization of the war.⁴³

The print media continued to document women's public activities after the war. As explained by the periodical, *The Forum*, "the remarkable success of the Sanitary Commission taught the women of the country what they could do in a business and executive way." This led many women into the jurisdiction of social services, where they enjoyed much influence in American society in the latter 19th century. Women were commonly praised for their ability to bring social reform and change. Added *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, the social services flourished: "it was largely as a result of the demands of the

⁴³ Cox, 9; Scott, *Natural Allies*, 69, 71.

women citizens that much of this social service has been assumed, once assumed, it is practically impossible to carry it on without women.”⁴⁴

The American Civil War also had a profound and lasting effect on the nursing profession. The increased demands for nurses allowed women to enter this honorable vocation during the war years. Following the war, the print media recognized women nurses as equal participants in this profession. At the beginning of the war, women from all over the country accepted the calls for volunteers and applied to be nurses. These nurses were trained (or as much as they could be in a time of crisis) and sent to battlefields, into the hospital wards and as transport women for wounded soldiers. These women provided care and comfort for those soldiers who needed it in a time of chaos and unrest. A prime example is illustrated by the *Macon Telegraph* in 1907, “The good nurse bending over a wounded soldier whom she has raised to a half sitting position in order they he may drink the cup which she holds to his lips.” The perceived limitations of their gender were temporarily forgotten, as new responsibilities demanded their continued presence in

⁴⁴ Helen Watterson, “Women’s Excitement Over “Woman,” *Forum* (September 1893): 75-86,

<https://manowar.tamucc.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/90964212?accountid=7084> (quotation); Neva R. Deardorff, “Women in Municipal Activities,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 56 (1914): 75, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1011980> (quotation).

helping the troops. Additionally, “they would not only serve, but recruit others to follow their examples, demonstrating the domino effect of the war.”⁴⁵

Women’s ability to take care of soldiers did not go unnoticed by the print media. For example, the press recognized that existing medical personnel and facilities could not possibly help all of the wounded men, and women nurses provided essential care by filling this daunting vacancy. Previously, only nuns had nursing experiences or skills that gave them the capability in aiding in a war crisis. This changed during the war, when women proved to be proficient in handling the enormous number of wounded soldiers and the long working hours in the hospital wards. Contemporary reports suggested that many women fulfilled these duties with grace and without complaint. According to the *Daily Inter Ocean*, many a veteran “remembers the nurse in the hospital who dressed his wounds and ministered to his comfort with uncomplaining patience and unceasing vigilance.” Women nurses provided a unique sense of comfort through their compassionate attention to the wounded. “Gender roles were often reversed,” noted *The New York Tribune*, “men were powerless and effeminized, while the women who served them found strength as their advocates.”⁴⁶

The postwar media continued to emphasize women’s contributions to nursing. As *The Idaho Statesman* reported in 1914, Secretary of War Simon Cameron had appointed Dorothea Dix as Superintendent of Women Nurses. She hired women as she saw fit for nursing positions

⁴⁵ Women in the Civil War and After,” *Macon Telegraph*, May 26, 1907 (quotation); Clinton, 56 (quotation).

⁴⁶ Schultz, 3; Clinton, 56; “Woman’s Kingdom,” *Daily Inter Ocean*, June 7, 1890 (quotation); “Mrs. Staton’s Address,” *New York Tribune*, May 11, 1866 (quotation).

in military hospitals in the North. Dix decided to establish tough standards for her nursing wards; “no woman under thirty years of age need apply to serve in a government hospital. All Nurses are required to be very plain looking women.” Such requirements discouraged single or very young women from applying in an effort to prevent sexual improprieties resulting from their close contact with men. Newspapers also recognized the women who transported wounded soldiers, worked in makeshift hospitals in the camps, and followed troops to the frontlines in order to care for the wounded. Women’s efforts were significant, according to the *Springfield Republican*, “Remember the little army of nurses who gave many lives, with a courage not surpassed on the field.”⁴⁷

Women of all backgrounds sought to help with the nursing duties in the war. According to the *Marshall County Republican*, Almira Fifield, a young girl in Indiana, begged to enter the nursing field. Vehemently insisting on being allowed to assist in the war, she thought this was the most efficient place for her to help the Union soldiers. Even though she was “too young and too handsome,” her innate ambition to care for wounded soldiers allowed her to gain admission into the Union hospitals on conditional status. She proved to be one of the best nurses and was even asked to supervise and manage the other nurses on the surgeon’s ward. The Surgeon praised “her ability and faithfulness, wondering at her skill, so perceptible, that he placed her in charge

⁴⁷ “To Honor Brave Women of Civil War,” *Idaho Statesman*, April 19, 1914 (quotation); “Women’s Place and Heroism on the Battlefield Now Recognized,” *Omaha World Herald*, August 26, 1906; “Gen. Hawley’s Oration,” *Springfield Republican*, September, 30, 1885 (quotation).

of a ward.” Sadly, she succumbed to diseases in the hospital, and passed away due to her refusal to rest and recover her own health.⁴⁸

The *Daily Public Ledger* recounted a similar example involving Ms. Sophia McClelland, a member of the Sanitary Commission who traveled with the Army of the Cumberland. She used her own resources to create a makeshift hospital for wounded soldiers in Indiana. To gain access to the wounded, after the battles commenced, she required a pass from General William Nelson. Ms. McClelland asked for “passes for my little company within your lines; we desire to reach Fort Donelson....to care for and bring in the sick.” General Nelson suggested that the war was not a place for women, but she insisted otherwise: “General, we have not come to be entertained, but on a mission of mercy.” She convinced him of her good intentions and obtained the pass needed to help the wounded soldiers.⁴⁹

Women in the South had a different experience in nursing. The *Macon Telegraph* pointed out that since the war was fought on their own land, women only had to walk outside their homesteads to tend to the wounded. As a result, these women’s “privatized domestic pursuits were now thrust onto center stage of southern life and were not in violation of their subordinated domestic status.” In addition, roughly a thousand women became nurses in the Confederate hospitals. Numerous well-to-do women from all religious backgrounds served as nurses and recruited others to help in the war effort as the need grew. A prime example of Confederate nursing was a Miss de Laney of Richmond, known as “the angel of the Confederacy.” She came to the hospitals with the desire to care for the dying and the sick. Other women like de Laney

⁴⁸ “The Boys in Blue,” *Marshall County Republican*, January 23, 1868 (quotation).

⁴⁹ “Mercy’s Mission,” *Daily Public Ledger*, March 22, 1894 (quotation).

confronted devastating complications due to the absence of organized aid efforts in the Confederacy, and the trials of an ineffective Confederate government. *The Youth's Companion* asserted that "southern women, like the Northern women, did their duty, and their sufferings and sacrifices were beyond description."⁵⁰

Another example of nursing in the Confederacy is depicted by the creation of Richmond's Robertson Hospital, a small private institution which eventually secured government subsidies. Sally Tompkins, the unmarried daughter from a very upscale Confederate family, managed it with grace and an impressive sense of organization. According to the *Times*, she, "like the pampered boys who made such glorious soldiers,... rose above shrinking and fear, and was one of the most capable nurses from 1861 to 1865." Tompkins set up separate wards to help different types of wounds and by the end of the war, they had assisted over 1200 soldiers. Tompkins received a captain's commission from President Jefferson Davis. According to the *Times Dispatch*, "she was one of the very few Southern women who ranked as an officer in the Confederate Army." She was also awarded a salary for her services, but she refused it.

⁵⁰ "Women in the Civil War and After," *Macon Telegraph*, May 26, 1907; Catherine Clinton and Nina Silber, *Divided Houses: Gender and the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 15, (quotation); Clinton, 56; "The Civil War," *Women's Memorial*, Last modified 2017, Accessed March 7, 2018, <https://www.womensmemorial.org/history/detail/?s=civil-war>; "Two Women in the Civil War," *The Youth's Companion* 72, no. 28 (July 1898): 336 (quotation), <https://manowar.tamucc.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/127104116?accountid=7084>.

According to Tompkins, her “aim and object was to help all I could, not to be paid for it.” She was known for her devotion to the Confederate cause and was acknowledged as a “legendary Confederate Patriot.”⁵¹

Further examples of women nurses are depicted in the *Canton Advocate*. The story of Mary Walker encompassed a harsh truth behind the reality of women’s war efforts. For most of her life, Walker wanted to become a doctor. However, with the realities of the 19th century gender norms, that was not possible. When the Civil War broke out, Walker found a way to practice medicine under the guise of acceptable gender norms. Walker’s inherent desire to take care of wounded soldiers was illustrated with her spending her own money to keep up traveling expenses with the army. She was awarded a medal for her services and the *Canton Advocate* even touted that “had Lincoln lived he would have undoubtedly have bestowed upon her a position of trust.”⁵²

Others, such as Mother Mary Bickerdyke rescued wounded soldiers from the battlefields under enemy fire and was wounded herself several times. She was one of the first women to enlist as a nurse for the Union cause, according to the *Baltimore American*. The *Wilkes-Barre Times* recorded that after the Battle of Shiloh; Mother Bickerdyke was discovered giving soup and whiskey to desperate soldiers in need. When she was asked who gave her the authority to do so, her response was poignant: “I have received my authority from the Lord God Almighty; Have you anything that ranks higher than that?” Furthermore, the *Macon Telegraph* pointed out that

⁵¹ “The Robertson Hospital,” *The Times*, June 30, 1896 (quotation); “Home in Richmond,” *The Times Dispatch*, June 2, 1907 (quotation); Clinton, 56 (quotation).

⁵² “Dr. Mary Walker,” *Canton Advocate*, August 16, 1883 (quotation).

Bickerdyke received her own memorial statue for her wartime services in 1908. Even though it was many years after the war, her contributions were still being recognized by the print media. The *Idaho Statesman* stated that the monument's design "shows a wounded soldier on the battlefield who has been lifted tenderly to a half sitting posture by a female army nurse, who holds a cooling drink to his lips." This dedication to Bickerdyke sets a prime example for future honors for other women who provided "inspiration in the glorious and self-sacrificing deeds of the women of the war."⁵³

Another example of the media's recognition of women's roles in the Civil War is illustrated in *The Worthington Advance*, which published an article on Florence Nightingale, a crucial advocate and reformer in the nursing vocation. Her previous nursing experiences demonstrated that women nurses were a necessity, especially in times of crisis such as the Civil War. With her influence, "the ungrudging acceptance of the services of women nurses in the Civil War was chiefly due to the prejudices overcome, the results attained, the admiration extorted by this gentle, resolute and gifted English women who had shown the way." Her legacy

⁵³ "Memorial Shaft for Mary Bickerdyke," *Baltimore American*, June 3, 1906; "War Women of America," *Wilkes-Barre Times*, April 12, 1917 (quotation); "Women in the Civil War and After," *Macon Telegraph*, May 26, 1907; "Memorial in Honor of a Civil War Nurse," *Idaho Statesman*, March 19, 1905 (quotation); Northend, 22 (quotation); "Mother Bickerdyke," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, March 5, 1864.

was evidenced through every woman who volunteered her time, hard work and compassion toward the fallen troops.⁵⁴

Women nurses often faced harsh discrimination due to their gender and were perceived as improper if they attended male soldiers. Many feared such work would change the view of women's respectability in society. Yet, as the war progressed, it became apparent that women were needed and their efforts were integral in helping the wounded. In 1884, the *National Tribune* illustrated this change by stating, "Did Miss Elenor Murdock, of this city, who left a home of affluence to nurse the sick and wounded soldiers in their respective hospitals lose any of her womanly dignity? I can safely say "No!" Women's place was progressing forward, but their decorum was not altered."⁵⁵

In addition, Louisa May Alcott, who wrote the famous novel, *Little Women*, served for six weeks in a Union hospital during the war. Her account of her experiences, *Hospital Sketches*, served to "disrupt gender in order to make space for multiple constructions of femininity," according to the historian Melissa Strong. Originally published in the *Commonwealth* newspaper, Alcott's account of her wartime service (under the character name Tribulation

⁵⁴ "A Great Nurse," *Worthington Advance*, August 10, 1900 (quotation); Mary E. Healy, "Woman in War-Time," *The Ladies' Repository; a Monthly Periodical, Devoted to Literature, Art and Religion* (June 1867): 338, <https://manowar.tamucc.edu/login?url=https://search.proquest.com/docview/90416052?accountid=7084>.

⁵⁵ "Pension Report," *National Tribune*, December 17, 1896, (quotation), <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82016187/1884-04-24/ed-1/seq-2/>.

Periwinkle) illustrates how women deconstructed the proper place of women in society by taking on public jobs such as nursing. It attracted “much attention and were many of them extensively copied into other papers.” Ironically, in Alcott’s memoirs, her father stated that he was sending off his “son” to the frontlines, when in reality it was Louisa going off to serve as a nurse in the Union hospitals. This comparison illustrated that the women serving in nursing roles were equivalent to a man fighting on the battlefields. Strong also makes the case that, with Louisa May Alcott’s influence, “war memoirs chronicled women’s entry into a wider variety of professions.”⁵⁶

In addition, the publicity associated with Alcott’s widely advertised work depicts the importance of the media’s influence on the changing view of women’s roles in the public sphere. According to the *Omaha Daily Bee* in 1888, they discussed that Alcott’s experiences “were faithfully recorded in *Hospital Sketches*...and no one ever heard her complain of the discomforts arising from this sacrifice of that which is only less in value to life itself.” Furthermore, the *San Francisco Call* stated that the *Hospital Sketches*, “made of largely of home letters, had an immense sale.” With the popularity of this account on her wartime activities, Alcott was asked to write a story for girls (Her famous *Little Women*). A final note on the popularity of this memoir is illustrated by James Redpath’s (a popular journalist who created his own publishing firm)

⁵⁶ Melissa J. Strong, ““The Finest Kind of Lady”: Hegemonic Femininity in American Women’s Civil War Narratives,” *Women's Studies* 46, no. 1 (January 2017): 15, 16 (quotation), 18 (quotation), accessed July 6, 2017, America: History & Life, EBSCOhost; “New Books,” *The Daily Green Mountain Freeman*, November 9, 1863, (quotation); Louisa May Alcott, *Hospital Sketches*, (Boston: James Redpath, Publisher, 1863), xi.

mass publication of this account. This memoir became an important element in post war society since with every sold copy, the publisher “stated that a fair copyright is promised to be devoted to the support of orphans of the war.” Louisa May Alcott envisioned a society that allowed more rights for women and she achieved this, at least on a small scale through her writing.⁵⁷

Although nursing provided an important career field for women in the post-war years, the print media provided another example of women’s changing roles in the public sphere. As the *Columbus Journal* explained in 1888, women were changing the nature of government jobs at all levels. During the war, they were first employed in place of men who left to fight. However, once the war ended, women proved they were capable of completing the work in an efficient and organized manner. Many men did not come home and women filled the vacancy left by them. In 1883, for example, the *Daily Dispatch* noted, “in the Treasury department at present probably 30

⁵⁷ Louisa May Alcott, *Hospital Sketches* (Boston: James Redpath, 1863), xi;

“Reminiscences of Miss Alcott,” *Omaha Daily Bee*, March 19, 1888, (quotation)

<https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn99021999/1888-03-19/ed-1/seq-6/#date1=1860&index=10&rows=20&searchType=advanced&language=&sequence=0&words=Alcott+ALCOTT+hospital+Sketches+sketches&proxdistance=5&date2=1925&ortext=Hospital+Sketches&proxtext=&phrasertext=&andtext=Alcott&dateFilterType=yearRange&page=1;>

“Louisa May Alcott,” *The San Francisco Call*, June 9, 1900, (quotation),

<https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85066387/1900-06-09/ed-1/seq-9/#date1=1860&index=11&rows=20&searchType=advanced&language=&sequence=0&words=Alcott+ALCOTT+Hospital+Sketches&proxdistance=5&date2=1925&ortext=Hospital+Sketches&proxtext=&phrasertext=&andtext=Alcott&dateFilterType=yearRange&page=1.>

percent of the employees are females, and in all the departments in the aggregate 20 percent at least are females.” Women received appointments to clerkships in almost every state. Women’s efforts merited “credit that in the face of opposing influences she has demonstrated her ability to do so much of the work required in the service of the government.” In an article from the *Saline County Journal*, a comical perspective emerges in regards to women’s work, “Ability does not always wear breeches.” Women might not have been known to wear the pants in the family as seen in this quote, but the newspapers recognized that women were emerging in a man’s world by demonstrating their abilities during and after the Civil War.⁵⁸

As the print media examined women’s work in the war, they offered new interpretations of their abilities. In 1867, the *Godey’s Lady’s Book and Magazine* published an article on *Women’s Work in the Civil War* about women’s respectable work during the war years, which provided two hundred stories about women and their efforts in the Sanitary Commission, aid societies and as military nurses in the hospitals and on the battlefield. This periodical stated, “that there was a necessity for this book.” Society needed to have documentation of women’s deeds in the war. They eloquently describe how the women “faithfully ministered to them in sickness, dressed their wounds, nursed and nourished them in the struggle with death.” *Women’s Work in the Civil War* documents famous wartime heroes such as Clara Barton, Dorothea Dix, Helen L. Gibson, Mary Livermore, and many others. These women turned wartime emergencies into something bearable for wounded troops and those needing supplies. Such publications

⁵⁸ “Women of Progress,” *Columbus Journal*, March 7, 1888; “Women in the Government Departments,” *Daily Dispatch*, April 22, 1883 (quotation); “Ability Has no Sex,” *Saline County Journal*, February 4, 1886 (quotation).

frequently described in the contemporary media, proved crucial to exemplifying the immense efforts of women during the war years.⁵⁹

In 1883, another prominent publication, the *National Tribune* issued a public call for documentation, correspondence or any other pertinent information about women's labor in the war. Mrs. Mary Whitney Wescott wrote this request in order to gain material to be submitted to the "compilation of the history of the Loyal Women of the Civil War." She also stated that a permanent fund was being created for the Ladies Relief Corps of the Grand Army Republic, further suggesting a new acceptance of women stature in public life. According to the *Cincinnati Daily Star*, "American women, after yielding to the ranks of the gathering army husbands, brothers, fathers, sons and lovers, proceeded to organize relief for them, and they did it with a self-controlled and rational consideration of the wisest and best means of accomplishing their purpose, which showed them to be in some degree the products and representatives of a new social era and political development." In the eyes of the print media, women had exceeded expectations in their national service.⁶⁰

Another viewpoint on the importance of media's publications were the reviews of books published about women's wartime activities. For example, the frequently reviewed *Woman's*

⁵⁹ "Godey's Arm-Chair," *Godey's Lady's Book and Magazine*, no.5 (May 1867): 472, <https://manowar.tamucc.edu/login?url=https://search.proquest.com/docview/126041077?accountid=7084>.

⁶⁰ "Nebraska," *National Tribune*, April 19, 1883, <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82016187/1883-04-19/ed-1/seq-6/>; "Patriot Women," *Cincinnati Daily Star*, June 8, 1877 (quotation).

Work in the Civil War was essential in providing concrete evidence of the effort made by women. An accumulation of their contributions to the war was significant in helping society realize the importance of their efforts. The media published this book during the post war years and its compilation of women including Clara Barton, Mary Bickerdyke, and Mary Livermore. The actual book noted several important aspects of women's war efforts, "day after day, year after year, women served in summer's heat and winter's cold, at their desks, corresponding with auxiliary aid societies, taking account of good received for sanitary supplies, re-packing and shipping them to the points where they were needed, indicting and sending out circulars appealing for aid, in work more prosaic but equally needful and patriotic with that performed in hospitals...all for the soldiers." One review touted this book as a "well-merited tribute to a large number of noble and heroic women who distinguished themselves in many different ways during our recent war." Another example reinforces the importance of these publications in molding society's view of the constantly changing gender roles. As the reviewer explained, "the authors and publishers felt that they were paying a debt which the nation owes to these heroic women, and their good taste and judgement have led them to pay it in a manner that the nation need not be ashamed of." The fact that newspapers and periodicals published reviews of this book suggests that the print media was important in molding society's view of gender in the post war years.⁶¹

⁶¹ "Woman's Work in the Civil War: A Record of Heroism, Patriotism, and Patience," *Ladies' Repository* 27 (November 1867): 699, American Antiquarian Society (AAS) Historical Periodicals Collection: Series 5, EBSCOhost (accessed June 21, 2018).

As Anne Firor Scott has argued, the war years “gave numerous women not only an opportunity to develop administrative skills, but provided impressive evidence that they could function as administrators, record keepers, policy makers-in short, as people who could achieve results in a sphere often denominated male.” According to the *Ladies’ Home Journal*, women became part of the working class due to the need for stable wages in the post war years. The changing landscape of home life was altered significantly by the passing away of the male breadwinners. Women had to make ends meet and “took up a fight for a living.” This was done as they “pushed into all professions and trades: there have been women judges, women blacksmiths, and women horse doctors.” Newspapers and magazine reports often emphasized that women ventured across cultural and economic boundaries in quest of work. Women from different backgrounds had to find jobs in the working class (such as seamstresses) or in the professional classes (for example, nurses or doctors). In the South, women left the plantation culture and “went to industrial mills to become seamstresses and factory workers, both skills they had learned during the war.”⁶²

⁶² Scott, *Natural Allies*, 77 (quotation); "The American Woman in the Market-Place," *The Ladies' Home Journal* (April 1900): 4, <https://manowar.tamucc.edu/login?url=https://search.proquest.com/docview/137000578?accountid=7084>; Alexis Girardin Brown, “The Women Left Behind: Transformation of the Southern Belle, 1840-1880,” *Historian* 62 (June 2000): 775, <https://manowar.tamucc.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=ahl&AN=3421431&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

During and after the Civil war, women proved they were competent and asserted their respectability in the public sphere in a variety of fields. As the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* wrote in 1890, “since the close of the Civil War women have been employed in various offices, and have done their work so well that neither political party has ever thought of denying them the right to such positions.” They proved their value by working tirelessly in fields once dominated by men and in the post war years, were able to keep many of the respectable jobs they launched during the war. Concluded the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, “the efficiency of public service has nowhere been greater than where they were employed.” It was imperative that the public realized that “a woman’s hand doing man’s work” was a positive and even a tolerable thing in the public sphere. Many women feared that, “by investing time and energy to scratch out their stories, they did not know if their efforts might end up disappearing or being erased.” The print media’s publication of countless stories of Northern and Southern women’s experiences ensured that women’s efforts became a fundamental part of the Civil War narrative. These women at first proceeded with caution, but by embarking out on their own, made their experiences indispensable by “leaving a powerful testimony for subsequent generations.” These testimonies of war activities gave hope to future generations of women who proceeded forth in changing the nature of gender norms in society. The war years became a turning point for numerous women who realized they could advance in the public sector as nurses, government workers or managers of large organizations (which is comparable to their work in the aid societies during the war).

More importantly, many men started to tolerate this change in gender status and were “compelled to admit” that women’s contributions had been noteworthy.⁶³

⁶³ “Female Ferocity,” *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, April 30, 1890, <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83045604/1890-04-30/ed-1/seq-4/>; “The Hon. C. Mamer and Women’s Sphere,” *Sun*, April 15, 1890 (quotation); “The Women who fight the Battle of Life Alone,” *Wahpeton Times*, January 26, 1888; “A Southern Literary Woman in the Civil War,” *The Dial; a Semi - Monthly Journal of Literary Criticism, Discussion, and Information* 36, (March 1, 1904): 159 (quotation), <https://manowar.tamucc.edu/login?url=https://search.proquest.com/docview/89666083?accountid=7084>; Clinton and Silber, 101; Clinton, 19 (quotation), 21 (quotation); Scott, *Natural Allies*, 74.

Chapter Three

Women on the Battlefield

In addition to their administrative, medical, and war-related services during the Civil War, perhaps a thousand women saw action on the war front. Gender discrimination did not stop them from entering the conflict, inspired by their robust patriotism, loyalty to family members, and desire to step away from conventional norms or sense of adventure. The print media had a large part in making their services known to the public. According to the *Oregonian* in 1902, evidence of women who “fought in the war was told in the testimony of many old soldiers, corroborated by Government records.”⁶⁴

Journal entries, letters, and personal memoirs provide intriguing glimpses into the lives of women warriors. Furthermore, contemporary newspapers offer additional insights of the experiences of women soldiers from both the Union and Confederacy. During the latter part of nineteenth century, society came to realize soldiers were aging and their memories were fading. A collective memory had emerged throughout the years, and newspapers, through their surprising willingness to discuss women soldiers and this unconventional gendered identity were vital in providing new perspectives.

As newspapers and periodicals recognized women, the American Civil War opened up new possibilities. Gender roles expanded as women fought for a place on the battlefield and struggled to prove their worth in society. As Catherine Clinton has explained, these “women defied the dictates of their day---to participate or contribute outside the boundaries of female

⁶⁴ “Heroic Women at Cannon’s Mouth in Civil War,” *Oregonian*, June, 4, 1911.

propriety.” Their experiences as soldiers and afterwards in American society depicted their determination to create a new gender identity. As Charles S. Muir wrote in 1956, “The male of the species, in his brawny egotism, has to be reminded from time to time that he has not made history alone.” The historical memory of the American Civil War is fundamentally altered through the documentation of women’s contributions in the public sphere, especially as soldiers.⁶⁵

Published reports of female soldiers began to appear during the war. In 1862, the *Charleston Mercury* posted a story about a young widow named McDonald who disguised herself as a male soldier. She served as a private and dressed in proper regimental clothing in Colonel William P. Boone’s 28th Kentucky Infantry Regiment (Union). She was discharged from her regiment upon discovery of her sex. Additionally, the *Daily Chronicle and Sentinel* published a romantic story of a Mrs. Blaylow who followed her husband to war. When her husband was drafted, she cut her hair, put on men’s clothing and enlisted alongside him. She did everything he did and convinced the regiment that she was a man. It was to everyone’s surprise that when her husband was discharged for being wounded, she came forth with the same request on the grounds of her gender. This caused quite a shock among the regiment. However, it was noted, “that the boys were sorry to part with such a good soldier, but they were unable to determine which she loved best, Blaylow or the Confederacy.”⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Clinton, 41 (quotation); Charles S. Muir, *Women: The Makers of History* (New York: Vintage Press, 1956), 26 (quotation).

⁶⁶ *Charleston Mercury*, January 16, 1862; “A North Carolina Amazon,” *Daily Chronicle and Sentinel*, May 15, 1862, (quotation).

As the war progressed, further documentation of women soldiers was published. According to *the Savannah Republican* in 1862, a female prisoner was brought into town wearing a uniform. She stated that she had been “following the Third Regiment of East Tennessee Renegades in Kentucky” for several months. She was identified as Sallie Taylor and was from a respectable family in Anderson County. She had ascertained good information on the movement of the enemy. Additionally, in August 1862 the *Chicago Times* posted a story about the Washington Provost Marshal finding two suspicious soldiers in uniform, which were discovered to be females. To everyone’s surprise, these two women soldiers had followed the army for several months and actually fought in battle. Eventually, they were given the proper apparel and sent back north to their families without punishment of their disguise. The *Charleston Mercury* published an article about the heroic service of Mrs. Amy Clarke, who volunteered alongside her husband and fought in the Battle of Shiloh. Sadly, her husband was killed and she had to do the burial rites alone. She continued as a soldier with the army under General Braxton Bragg, and ended up being wounded twice. She was eventually discovered by the Union troops and was sent to the North as a prisoner of war. She was not allowed to leave until she donned female attire once again. According to this newspaper article, “among the strange, heroic, and self-sacrificing acts of women in this struggle for independence,” Mrs. Clarke stood out as a heroine in the war.⁶⁷

Women were not legally allowed to enter as combatants and they had to choose different means of disguising themselves in order to fight. By donning men’s clothes, they also had to

⁶⁷ “A Female Prisoner,” *Savannah Republican*, June 27, 1862, (quotation); *Chicago Times*, August 14, 1862; “A Female Soldier,” *Charleston Mercury*, January 8, 1862, (quotation).

create fictitious names to put on the muster rolls. Many women soldiers were able to pass inspections when they joined the army because the inspectors were not as thorough as they should have been. For example, The *Savannah Republican* published in June 1861 an article about a Mary W. Dennis who successfully concealed her gender from the inspection of the regimental surgeon. Surprisingly, she ended up becoming the 1st Lieutenant of the Stillwater Company. With this shocking realization that women had eluded the inspections standards, a new policy was introduced. According to the *Oregonian*, on August 3, 1861, the War Department insisted that proper and thorough inspections be conducted to “discover any deception or fraud to have been practiced.” If a woman was found to be disguised as a man, she was to be immediately reported and sent home with only “substances and transportation” to make the trip, with no other compensation for time spent in the army. Despite such efforts, it was relatively easy for a determined woman “to resemble a beardless youth and to disguise her sex by wearing baggy clothes.”⁶⁸

By the end of the war, numerous accounts of women soldiers had been documented and published. According to the *Nashville Dispatch* in 1864, it was noted that the “official records at Washington state that upward of 150 female recruits have been discovered since the commencement of the war.” Most of these women had entered service under false names and disguised as male soldiers. Surprisingly, “over seventy of these martial ladies, when their sex

⁶⁸ “An Amazon,” *Savannah Republican*, June 5, 1861, (quotation); “Heroic Women at Cannon’s Mouth in Civil War,” *Oregonian*, June, 4, 1911; Clinton, 45 (quotation); General Orders of the War Department by Adjutant General Thomas, August 3, 1861, *OR*, 3, I: 384-385, 721-722.

was discovered, were acting as officers servants.” For many of them, it was months or even years before their true gender was discovered. According to another edition of the *Nashville Dispatch*, one such woman demanded back pay for her five months of service as a soldier. President Abraham Lincoln felt that Major Pauline Cushman had done her duty and served her country faithfully and “therefore directed the payment of the balance.”⁶⁹

Another example of a woman on the frontlines was published by the *Dubuque Herald* in 1862. According to this account, Mrs. Belle Reynolds, wife of Lieutenant William Reynolds of Co. A, 17th Illinois, followed her husband through majority of the battles he fought in. She was at the front lines helping the wounded soldiers with the best of her nursing abilities. The Governor of Illinois heard about her heroic deeds and “presented her with a commission as a Major in the army.” This surprising event was published by numerous newspapers illustrating the importance of women’s heroism in the war.⁷⁰

Despite such reports, the details of women soldiers’ experiences initially remained sketchy. Decades later, however, newspapers and periodicals publicized the experiences of women who served alongside men in military units. According to the *Chicago Tribune*, it was “notorious that in the late American Civil War, the women on both sides were more passionately warlike than the men.” Motivation for women soldiers came from many different sources. Many

⁶⁹ “Female Soldiers,” *Nashville Dispatch*, May 31, 1864 (quotation); *Nashville Dispatch*, September 29, 1864.

⁷⁰ “Women’s Place and Heroism on the Battlefield Now Recognized,” *Omaha World Herald*, August 26, 1906; “A Woman Appointed Major,” *Dubuque Herald*, May 1, 1862 (quotation).

women soldiers seem to have joined to follow their loved ones or husbands to war, and as such were able to keep up their male disguises with help from their husbands. According to a 1920 edition of *The Washington Times*, Elizabeth A. Niles disguised herself as a man to follow her husband to the front with the 4th New Jersey Infantry. They were on their honeymoon when the war began and she refused to leave his side. Elizabeth chose to hide her femininity by disguising herself as his male counterpart. Others joined for the adventure aspect of fighting for the cause. Loretta Vasquez, joined the Confederate army to do something exciting. In her memoir, she stated, “I plunged into adventure for the love of the thing.”⁷¹

In the North, print media revealed that, Jennie Hodgers, also known as Private Albert Cashiers, joined the cause due to persuasion from army recruiters. Hodgers was already dressing as a man before the war and was persuaded to enlist since she carried her disguise successfully. According to the *Daily Gate City Press*, Albert Cashiers was not discovered to be a woman until the age of 73, when she was sent to live in a Soldiers’ home and ended up in the hospital for a broken leg. When her true identity was revealed, a captain from her old company (Co. G, 95th Illinois) came to identify her as the soldier who performed honorably through majority of the

⁷¹ “Military Objections,” *Chicago Tribune*, April 1, 1872 (quotation); “Woman who Fought in Civil War Beside Hubby Dies, Aged Ninety-two,” *The Washington Times*, October 4, 1920, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84026749/1920-10-04/ed-1/seq-15/#date1=1789&index=4&rows=20&words=A+Elizabeth+Niles&searchType=basic&sequence=0&state=&date2=1963&proxtext=Elizabeth+A.+Niles+&y=17&x=19&dateFilterType=yearRange&page=1>; Loretta Janeta Velazquez, *The Woman in Battle* (Richmond: Dustin, Gilman & Co., 1876), 34-37.

Civil War. She was even granted a military pension under the name Albert Cashiers. As, this *Daily Gate City* publication proclaimed, “Albert Cashiers was brave or even braver than a man. She took terrible risks in the war and conducted herself as a noble soldier, one whose exploits are told of to this day.”⁷²

As years passed, the print media published more revelations about women soldiers. According to the *Daily Independent* in 1894, “recently published statistics of the United States Army shows that no less than 150 women disguised as men served in the Army during the Civil War.” One of these women soldiers was Sarah Rosetta Wakeman, who became Private Lyons Wakeman. She served honorably in the 153rd New York Regiment for majority of the war. In her case, evidence of her service is seen in letters she wrote to her family during the war years. These letters were kept hidden and were never published by the general print media. They are not a general tell all of all women soldier’s experiences, but they do give insights to what might have transpired. Sarah writes of the hardships of camp life where many times there were limited

⁷² DeAnne Blanton, “Women Soldiers of the Civil War,” *Prologue: The Journal of the National Archives* 25 (Spring 1993): 38, 39; Janet Kaufman, “Under the Petticoat Flag: Women Soldiers in the Confederate Army,” *Southern Studies* 23 (Winter 1984): 363-75; “Feminine Warriors Fought Bravely,” *Evening Star*, July 22, 1923, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83045462/1923-07-22/ed-1/seq-69/#date1=1789&sort=relevance&rows=20&words=Albert+Cashier&searchType=basic&sequence=0&index=15&state=&date2=1963&proxtext=Albert+Cashiers&y=0&x=0&dateFilterType=y&earRange&page=3>; “Woman who Fought as Soldier is Dead,” *The Daily Gate City*, October 12, 1915 (quotation).

sleeping quarters; where soldiers had to sleep outdoors on the ground in chilly temperatures. She also describes the alluring amount of money she could make as a soldier--thirteen dollars a month and \$152 signing bonus if she joined. Women could not make this type of salary in the domestic jobs allowed to them in the 19th century. Astoundingly, her family knew about her enlistment and she seems to have sent them the majority of her pay. One can imagine this was a common thing and families greatly appreciated the money sent to them while the “man” was away from the home.⁷³

In Sarah’s case, she did the best she could by working like a man, dressing like a man, and dying like a man. In 1864 she was buried under the name of Private Lyons Wakeman. No one is sure if her sex was ever discovered. Yet, she bravely fought in her male disguise and stated in a letter on July 2, 1863, “for my part I am ready at a minute’s warning to go into the field of battle and take my stand with the rest.” She was willing to fight and prove to society that she intended to do so. She further stated in a letter to her father, “I don’t fear the rebel bullets nor I don’t fear the cannon.” She was the epitome of a warrior woman who faced the battles with courage. Her letters were vital to understanding a women’s life as a soldier. Even though these letters were not contemporaneously published by the print media, they are important to understanding women’s activities during the war years. Sarah had the chance to live a man’s life

⁷³ “Salmagundi,” *Daily Independent*, October 1, 1894 (quotation); Sarah R. Wakeman, *An Uncommon Soldier: An Annotated Edition*, edited by Lauren C. Burgess (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1994), 1-13, 25, 37, 41.

and experience society without limitations. This was certainly an accomplishment for a woman in the 19th century.⁷⁴

Due to the secrecy usually surrounding women soldiers in the Civil War, it seems surprising that there were reports on women soldiers in the *Official Records on the War of the Rebellion*. In these records, a report by Colonel J. P. Sanderson discusses a Lieutenant Rawley, a women soldier serving in the Civil War. Her real name was Mary Ann Pitman, and this report documented her time with the Confederate forces and explains how she raised her own cavalry company. After the Battle of Shiloh, her company was placed under the leadership of General Nathan Bedford Forrest, and she was promoted to first lieutenant. Surprisingly, General Forrest knew she was a woman dressed as a male soldier. He had her dress as a woman to gain valuable supplies needed for the company. Pitman was allowed to go back and forth in her disguise and stayed under his command for a year. As the *Burlington Weekly Hawk-Eye* explained, “this woman was attached to the command of the rebel Forrest, as an officer, under the name of Lieutenant Rawley, but because her sex afforded her usual facilities for crossing our lines, she was often employed in the execution of important commission.” Pitman’s male disguise was eventually discovered and she was seen as a rebel having ventured back and forth between enemy lines. This article was published in 1864, which illustrated that the print media did have influence on the interpretation of women soldiers even during the war years. Some were

⁷⁴ Wakeman, 1-13, 25, 37, 41.

accepted for their break with propriety, while others were condemned for their actions against conventional societal norms.⁷⁵

An interesting perspective of women's rights on the battlefield is portrayed in *A Woman's War Record*, by Septima Collis. As noted in the *Richland Beacon* in 1889, Ms. Collis followed her husband, General Charles H.T. Collis, to war on several occasions and marched alongside the troops. She initially left the regiment because of her pregnancy and the need to care for her small child. At least once, she had to beg permission from Major General George Meade to return to the Army of the Potomac to attend to her sick husband. Even though she did not have to disguise herself, she did have to consider it due to the barriers against her sex. In her personal records, she described the war as a "great satisfaction that these war experiences have fitted me to climb a mountain, sleep upon a bare floor, or ride twenty miles in a rain storm, and overcome situations which, without them, I never would have surmounted." In its review of her work, the *Springfield Republican* characterized her as a "woman of much spirit and hardihood," and noted that her activities included "sharing her husband's quarters when she could...nursing him in illness, accompanying him when she might, and leading a life full of incident, danger, and often enjoyment." In 1917, Ms. Collis died and the *Omaha Daily Bee* described her importance as an

⁷⁵ Examination of Mary Ann Pitman by Col. J. P. Sanderson, Provost Marshal General, Dept. of Missouri, June 20, 1864, *OR*, 2, 7: 345-355; "The Witness and their Testimony," *Burlington Weekly Hawk-Eye*, October 29, 1864 (quotation).

author of many books and “a friend of President Lincoln and Generals Grant, Sherman and Sheridan.”⁷⁶

As the print media emphasized, women soldiers were not expected to fight in the war, but many gladly did so if given the chance to leave their domestic life behind. *The Daily Ardmoreite*, published a semi-comical dialogue offering a glimpse into such attitudes fitting the piece, “She Silenced Greeley.” In arguing that a woman should not fight, Horace Greeley asked, “What would you do, for instance, in the event of war?”...and the woman replied, “Just what you would do Mr. Greeley, I should stay in an office and write articles urging others to go and fight.” Ironically, many women did the exact opposite of Greeley and took up arms for either the Union or the Confederacy. For example, the *Nashville Dispatch* published a small clip about a woman returning to Pennsylvania after serving in the war for 18 months. Her sex was not discovered

⁷⁶ “A Woman’s War Record,” *Richland Beacon*, November 1889; Septima Collis, *A Woman’s War Record*, (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1889), 25-32, 56; “Biographical Book,” *Springfield Republican*, January 16, 1890 (quotation); “Mrs. Septima Collis Dies: Widely Known Member D.A.R.,” *Omaha Daily Bee*, July 30, 1917, (quotation) <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn99021999/1917-07-30/ed-1/seq-1/#date1=1789&index=6&rows=20&words=Record+War+Woman&searchType=basic&sequence=0&state=&date2=1963&proxtext=A+Woman%27s+War+Record&y=0&x=0&dateFilterType=yearRange&page=1>.

until “she took part in three battles, and was wounded twice, first about the eye, and then in the arm, the latter would compel her to disclose her sex.”⁷⁷

Another example of publications about women soldiers is seen in the *New Northwest* newspaper. In 1880, one Mr. Parkman asserted that since women could not fight in battle, they should not be able to vote. This newspaper published a retort to Mr. Parkman’s assumptions, stating that, “In the first place, women can fight. His experience with the fair sex must be extremely limited if he thinks the combative spirit was left out of their composition.” The author of this engaging piece described these women as fighting on the battlefields, but clothed in “ordinary attire, or disguised in the garment of the stronger sex.” Even more importantly, these accounts were documented and published in print media, informing the public that women had literally joined the war. In 1863, the *Peoria Morning Mail* depicted this sentiment: “A Pennsylvania girl, who has been serving as a soldier in the Army of the West for ten months, says that she discovered a great many females among the soldiers, one of who is now a Lieutenant. She has assisted in burying three female soldiers at different times, whose sex was unknown to anyone but herself.”⁷⁸

For the first time in their lives, many women could take up “arms” both figuratively and physically. For many, the war provided this chance to ignore conventional standards. For example, the *Nashville Dispatch* described one woman taking up arms for her country. “Jennie

⁷⁷ “She Silenced Greeley,” *Daily Ardmoreite*, November 21, 1899; *Nashville Dispatch*, April 16, 1863 (quotation).

⁷⁸ “Mr. Parkman’s Objections,” *The New Northwest*, January 22, 1880 (quotation); “Female Soldiers,” *Peoria Morning Mail*, May 16, 1863 (quotation).

D. Hart is the third party, and for some time past has been acting as the orderly sergeant of company D, Jenkin's cavalry, commanded by Captain White. She provided herself with male attire, and being rather masculine in her appearance, deceived the rebel recruiting officer, and was enlisted in the service."⁷⁹

During the 1890s newspapers began publishing articles about women soldiers more frequently. Most of American society still considered women as part of the domestic sphere, but the war provided an outlet to contradict past perspectives. For instance, an October 1894 piece written by H. Hallmark for *The Washington Times* related the ordeal of a soldier giving birth to a daughter and what a sight that was to behold for the hospital staff. This particular soldier had effectively concealed not only her gender, but her pregnancy. Many officers and fellow soldiers described the bravery of this and other women soldiers as being "equal to men" in enduring the hardships of camp life and battle of those years. The article also noted that the famous nurse, Clara Barton, had encountered many women soldiers who were transported to her hospital due to battle wounds.⁸⁰

Furthermore, in 1896, *The Washington Evening Star* ran a story titled, "The Dead Soldier was a Woman," which caused an uproar because it examined the passing of a military veteran, Otto Schaffer. Otto was well known in a small community in Kansas, and was assumed to have

⁷⁹ "Capture of Female Rebels," *Nashville Dispatch*, May 18, 1863, (quotation); Kaufman, 104 (quotation).

⁸⁰ H. Hallmark, "Were Feminine Warriors," *The Washington Times*, October 21, 1894, <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn87062244/1894-10-21/ed-1/seq-12/>; "Heroic Women at Cannon's Mouth in Civil War," *Oregonian*, June 4, 1911.

been a man. When they took him in for burial services, they found quite a surprise in that the man was actually a woman. As the article noted, men of the Grand Army of the Republic came out for Otto's funeral and gave him a proper burial as a respected soldier, the recent revelation notwithstanding. This soldier suspended propriety for many years and successfully kept her identity secret. Even with this disclosure, she still enjoyed the respect of her comrades.⁸¹

The *Evening Star* also printed a short article about a women soldier named Mary Stevens Jenkins. This comical piece, written in 1896, conveyed the story of Mary Jenkins who enlisted in a Pennsylvania regiment in order to follow her loved one to war by disguising herself as a man by cutting her hair and donning men's clothes. She was wounded and met many of the same challenges as the men in her unit, including the young man she followed into war. She was later the only woman soldier known to be buried in Ohio. The amusing part of this news story was that Mary Stevens went on to marry Abraham Jenkins, who was known to look like the famous Abraham Lincoln and thus received free train fare wherever he went.⁸²

That same year, *The Star* wrote a thought-provoking editorial that revealed the identity of two women soldiers. The article claimed that these were the only two women commissioned by the Federal government, finding their stories to be true by many accounts from contemporary eyewitnesses. The account was of Frank Thompson, also known as Sarah Edmonds Seeyle, who initially hoped to simply serve as a nurse. Eventually, however, she had to desert her unit in 1863

⁸¹ "The Dead Soldier was a Woman," *The Evening Star*, July 8, 1896, <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83045462/1896-07-07/ed-1/seq-13/>.

⁸² "Served by Her Lover's Side," *The Evening Star*, July 7, 1896, <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83045462/1896-07-07/ed-1/seq-13/>.

in order to conceal her identity as a woman. As this article explained, no one suspected of her being a woman and thought she deserted for other reasons. Her desertion, the paper noted, “was the topic of every camp fire, for Franklin was a great favorite.” Earning an exceptional reputation, she was described “as doing her duty like the man she was supposed to be.”⁸³

Sarah Edmonds Seeyle’s story was indeed remarkable. Because of her military service in the Civil War, years later she applied for and was granted a pension. In her case, she came forth many years later, describing in detail the battles she fought and all that she experienced by concealing her gender. The men in her unit confirmed her service and she eventually became a member of the Grand Army of the Republic, an astonishing feat for a woman, especially one who disregarded societal standards for such a lengthy period of time. Over 175,000 copies of her memoir, *Nurse and Spy in the Union Army*, were published. The proceeds from this book were donated to the U.S Sanitary and Christian Commissions for their care of Union troops.

Advertised by *M’ Arthur Democrat* and the *Wyandot Pioneer* in 1865, a favorable portrait of Sarah Edmonds’ wartime activities were illustrated by detailing the importance of this book. In 1898, the *Kansas City Journal* noted the death of Emma Edmonds Seeyle, as well as the publication of her wartime memoir, *A Nurse and Spy in the Union Army* and how this account opened up new perspectives of women’s war achievements. This account allowed the public to understand why a woman would disguise herself as a male in order to fight. She provided a new sense of what women could accomplished if they broke through traditional gender barriers. Furthermore, with this type of recognition by the print media of this account, a realization

⁸³ “Women in the Army,” *The Star*, May 27, 1896; Hall, 58-59.

dawned that women were not only competent in the domestic sphere, but they too could take up arms and fight for a worthy cause.⁸⁴

This same newspaper account also referred to another woman soldier known as Charles Freeman. Unfortunately, there is no recording of the name of the woman who disguised herself as Charles, since she refused to give her name upon discovery of her gender, fearing that her family or personal connections would have been appalled by her decision to fight in the Civil War. She only had the chance to serve 16 weeks before being discovered at the hospital due to battle wounds. The diagnosis on her military file is quite conspicuous and gives an important insight into how society perceived women soldiers at this time. It stated that next to his/her name “was sexual incompatibility and remittent fever.” The army sent Charles Freeman home stating he was a woman in disguise and had an issue with gender identity.⁸⁵

Later newspaper reports of female soldiers revealed that not all were fully disguised. The *Oregonian* provided two examples of women soldiers who went to war to fight alongside their husbands. The first was Kady Brownell, who followed her husband into battle in July 1861. Being recently married to an army sergeant, she refused to leave his side. They joined the First Rhode Island Infantry. Ironically, Kady was actually an English immigrant, but as the daughter of an English army officer she knew military life well. She decided it was best for her to fight for

⁸⁴ “Women in the Army,” *The Star*, May 27, 1896; Hall, 58-59; “Nurse and Spy in the Union Army,” *M’Arthur Democrat*, July 20, 1865; “Nurse and Spy in the Union Army,” *Wyandot Pioneer*, January 11, 1865; “Kansas Topics,” *Kansas City Journal*, September 18, 1898; Blanton and Cook, 157.

⁸⁵ “Women in the Army,” *The Star*, May 27, 1896 (quotation); Blanton and Cook, 7.

her new country by staying by her husband's side when he entered combat. Refusing to stay at home and "keep house" while her husband was away in battle, she donned pants, and carried a sword. Eventually, she became the flag bearer for their regiment during their First Battle of Bull Run. She fought alongside him as the color bearer for three months until he was wounded and could no longer serve. Kady became known as the "Bride of the battlefield," impressing all those around her with her courage and strength.⁸⁶

Madame Turchin is another example of a women soldier who did not have to disguise her gender. She also followed her husband (a Colonel) to war during the conquest of the Mississippi Valley in 1862. Her husband took ill and she stepped in to lead the soldiers into battle. She had immense military experience from her time in Russia during the Czar's regime, and the troops followed her through 75 miles of terrain from Tennessee to Alabama. She proved a capable leader and her fellow soldiers respected her military decisions. A skirmish ensued and she kept her troops at the front lines as the Confederates fled. During this entire time, she never disguised herself as a man.⁸⁷

In 1911, The *Oregonian* published an article about the fierce fighting women were capable of in the Civil War. At the semi-centennial anniversary of the beginning of the war, the question was asked if any of the women soldiers were still alive and if so, would they come forth to make public their service as battlefield soldiers? Numerous historians and scholars have questioned how these women managed to pass the inspections without notice of their true gender. Over the years, as more evidence was unearthed it became apparent that women soldiers

⁸⁶ "Heroic Women at the Cannon's Mouth in Civil War," *The Oregonian*, June 4, 1911.

⁸⁷ "Heroic Women at the Cannon's Mouth in Civil War," *The Oregonian*, June 4, 1911.

kept their secret for long periods of time to hide their true identities. Most women soldiers were not discovered unless they were wounded or killed in action. According to the *Nashville Dispatch* in 1863, a soldier was killed in action and found to be a woman. She had marched with the army for almost two years before this discovery. As the newspaper noted wryly, “you may imagine their surprise at the discovery.” On the other hand countless other women were never exposed while fighting in battle or as permanent members of a regiment. This became apparent as more scholars produced documentation of women soldiers in both the Union and the Confederacy. However, one can see with the outpouring of newspaper articles, many women did come forth to publicize their contributions on the battlefields and wanted to document their time served in the war⁸⁸

Publication of these stories about female soldiers in the Civil War helped to change society’s views of women. Few Americans had realized in the 1860s that women were capable of becoming soldiers, much less working outside the home. Numerous sectors of society found it difficult to digest this news as it came out over the next few decades through the print media. According to L.P Brockett and Mary Vaughan, authors of a book published shortly after the war, “ladies who from whatever cause...donned the male attire and concealed their sex...[who] did not seek to be known as women, but preferred to pass for men.” Did women want their true gender known while fighting in the Civil War? Initially, the answer was probably no, but, years later they often wanted their service to be known and hoped to receive some type of acknowledgment or in some cases a veteran’s pension. Furthermore, the repeated revelations of

⁸⁸ “Heroic Women at the Cannon’s Mouth in Civil War,” *The Oregonian*, June 4, 1911; “An Incident of War,” *Nashville Dispatch*, June 7, 1863, (quotation).

women soldiers in the Civil War might have persuaded society to tolerate women who sought to break with social norms.⁸⁹

Stories of women soldiers certainly sparked a new analysis of evidence on women's war activities. For instance, The *Daily Los Angeles Herald* wrote that "several women received pensions for their services as soldiers... and it is estimated that not less than 100 women fought in disguise as private soldiers. Some are known to have been killed in battle; the sex of others was detected by surgeons who dressed the wounds; while at least one fought gallantly at the side of the man she loved." With the print media's publication of their wartime activities, women emerged as an important narrative in wartime experiences. It was also recognized that "no war in history, had ever seemed so much a woman's war as the Civil War." As this statement suggests, the Civil War was not simply a man's war.⁹⁰

⁸⁹Linus Pierpoint Brockett and Mary C. Vaughan, *Woman's Work in the Civil War: A Record of Heroism, Patriotism and Patience* (Philadelphia: Zeigler, McCurdy and Company, 1867), 770; Blanton and Cook, 176, 182.

⁹⁰ "Women Warriors," *Daily Los Angeles Herald*, May 31, 1879 (quotation).

Conclusion

Women were significant characters in the historical narrative of the Civil War, and the evaluation of women's participation by late 19th and early 20th century newspapers and periodicals is vital to understanding their role. Women's activities in the American Civil War gave hope to war torn soldiers and communities in distress, as well as voice to women in future generations. Many of these women had a strong sense of patriotism, even though they were on different sides of the conflict. Their actions show that love for their country "warms the blood, strengthens our best purposes, and adds to our sense of personal dignity." They found their own ways to contribute to the war effort and were able to retain their dignity by doing so. This newfound participation opened up numerous opportunities for women in the postwar years. According to the *Daily Inter Ocean*, women did more than previously thought possible: "they went to the front themselves as nurses in the hospital, as agents for the great sanitary commission, and it is now known that many hundreds bore arms and were not less courageous than their brothers." As the report concluded, women began to emerge from "obscurity and are becoming visible in the front ranks, their appearance is hailed as a radical change in the order of things."⁹¹

Press coverage of the creation of the Red Cross Building in Washington D.C. in 1917 provided an excellent example of the popular recognition of women's war efforts. According to

⁹¹ "Patriotism," *Soldiers' Journal*, July 6, 1864 (quotation); Neva R. Deardorff, "Women in Municipal Activities," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 56 (1914): 71 (quotation), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1011980>; "Woman's Kingdom: One Historical Experience That Repeats Itself," *Daily Inter Ocean*, March 25, 1893 (quotation).

the *Idaho Statesman* and the *Butler Weekly Times*, the Red Cross Building stood as a memorial to all the courageous women who aided in the war effort on both sides, North and South. Its original price of \$700,000 was funded by the government and private donors and was within a “stone’s throw of the White House.” Additionally, numerous Civil War organizations sponsored individual windows on the outside of the building. The *Bismarck Tribune* stated that the windows were provided by the “United Daughters of the Confederacy, another by the Woman’s Relief Corps of the North, while the center window was given as their joint gift.” *The Review* explained that on the day of dedication in 1917 by President Woodrow Wilson, a thousand women marched in honor of these valiant members of the American Red Cross. Furthermore, according to the *Daily Kentuckian*, the building became one of the most recognized and honored locations in Washington, D.C. By publicizing the grand opening of this building, the media implicitly advanced the idea that women’s efforts in the public sphere were tolerated and even respected in society. As the *Continental Monthly* noted eloquently, after the war ended women were told, “Your country even now struggling in the throes of its later birth, has desperate need of you.”⁹²

⁹² “To Honor the Brave Women of Civil War,” *Idaho Statesman*, April 19, 1914; Vickie Watson Sopher, Historical Vignette 095 - Memorial to Women of the Civil War, *US Army Corps of Engineers*, February 2005, Accessed January 29, 2018, <http://www.usace.army.mil/About/History/Historical-Vignettes/Civil-Engineering/095-Civil-War-Women-Memorial/>; “General News of the Week,” *The Butler Weekly Times*, October 22, 1914 (quotation); “Mobilization of Women War Workers Held in Washington,” *The Bismarck Tribune*, May 15, 1917 (quotation); “Red Cross Parade in Washington,” *The Review*, May 31,

Furthermore, the increased tolerance of women's expanded sphere was evidenced in press accounts of the Relief Corps, the female auxiliary to the Grand Army of the Republic. According to the *Burlington Weekly Free Press* in 1886, women joined men in generating the branches for the Grand Army of the Republic, which organized movements for voting rights, patriotic education and lobbying Congress for veteran's pensions. Media's portrayal of the Relief Corps was an important thing to note in the post war years. Further media coverage came in a 1902 article in *Washington Times*, which equated women's relief work with that of the well-known Grand Army of the Republic. With the development of post-war relief organizations such as the Women's Relief Corps, the numbers estimated to be around 98,000 members. Their foremost goal was to do charity work for the veterans of the Civil War and for the widows and orphan children affected by the war. Likewise, the Legion of Loyal Women also supported the veterans of the war with supplies and other needs. Many of the same women who joined the post-war relief societies were former army nurses who worked in helping the soldiers on the front lines. Even in 1917, the Women's Relief Corps was memorializing the soldiers of the Civil War. According to the *Bellingham Herald*, it was asking for flower donations for the veteran's

1917; "American Red Cross Building in Washington," *The Daily Kentuckian*, July 28, 1918; "American Women," *The Continental Monthly: Devoted to Literature and National Policy* (October 1864), 434 (quotation),

<https://manowar.tamucc.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/124703024?accountid=7084>.

graves from the Civil War. As the Washington Times article demonstrated, “praise for the work of women extended to the post war years.”⁹³

Another important example of the media’s recognition of women was the national coverage of the pension debate for women nurses. In 1892, several newspapers reported that a Nursing Pension Act had passed, providing women nurses with pensions of \$12 a month for their time served in the Civil War. This 1892 act mainly covered only white middle class women who had served for six months or more and been hired by the War Department. Within the details of this act, women nurses could receive a pension if they were not already drawing pensions as a soldier’s widow and they had “served in regimental, post, camp or in general hospitals.” In so doing, it left out the countless thousands of women who had served as laundresses and hospital matrons. The controversial act sparked heated Congressional debate. Many thought the pension system was too large already and that adding women nursing pensions would burden it further. As historian, Jane Schultz concludes, however, “By legislating the Army Nurses’ Pension Act of

⁹³ “Grand Army Notes,” *Burlington Weekly Free Press*, March 5, 1886; “Women’s War Organizations,” *The Cook County Herald*, December 17, 1904; Frank Moore, *Women of the War: Their Heroism and Self-Sacrifice: True Stories of Brave Women in the Civil War* (1866; rpt. Blue/Gray Books, 1997), v (quotation); “What the Women of Washington Plan for the G.A.R.,” *Washington Times*, August 17, 1902, <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn87062245/1902-08-17/ed-1/seq-19/>; “Women’s War Organizations,” *Hope Pioneer*, December 1, 1904; “Women’s Relief Corps,” *New York Herald*, September 27, 1887; “Flowers Sought for Soldier’s Graves,” *Bellingham Herald*, May 28, 1917 (quotation).

1892, Congress tacitly acknowledged that women's war work had been roughly equivalent to the work of soldiers, a remarkable concession."⁹⁴

Seizing upon this theme, newspapers pointed out the injustice of denying women nurses pensions for their service in the war. The *Columbus Enquirer-Sun*, in support of the passage of the legislation, described a compelling speech delivered by a Confederate male about the necessity of women nurses receiving their rightful pensions. Women in the Civil War had given up their time and money to help wounded soldiers, he explained repeatedly. For example, many women were recognized for giving "of their own means to relieve the sufferings of the sick and wounded soldiers." In many cases, women also cared for wounded prisoners. They treated these men with the same kindness and compassion as if they were fighting on the same side. The speaker describes how his own brother, had been wounded in the Battle of Gettysburg and sent to a "Yankee hospital." Sadly, his brother died there, but one of the Union nurses was kind enough and wrote, "to my mother about the death of my brother, offering her whatever

⁹⁴ "Pension Report," *National Tribune*, December 17, 1896, <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82016187/1896-12-17/ed-1/seq-8/>; "Present Day Thoughts," *Record-Union*, May 25, 1899; "Pension Day in the House," *Daily Charlotte Observer*, June 29, 1892; "Piling up the Pensions," *The State*, June 29, 1892; Jane E. Schultz, "Race, Gender, and Bureaucracy: Civil War Army Nurses and the Pension Bureau," *Journal of Women's History* 6, no. 2 (Summer 1994): 48, Accessed June 20, 2018, Project Muse.

consolations she could.” By reprinting this compassionate speech, the newspaper publicized the cause of pensions for Civil War nurses.⁹⁵

The *Waterbury Evening Democrat* provides a different perspective of the importance of Nursing Pensions. According to this newspaper, Sister Anastasia, a Civil War nurse, was granted a full nursing pension as well as back pay of \$1,220 for her services as a nurse in the medical department of the United States Army. She served honorably from July 2, 1862 until the end of the war and she ended up receiving a full pension of \$12 per month. Previously, she was denied a pension due to the confusion about her identity. She took vows and became a nun after the war, and it was difficult to confirm her previous identity as a war nurse. Once her Civil War services were acknowledged, the government granted her the full pension. With the publication of this importance pension case, more recognition was granted toward women’s nursing services in the Civil war.⁹⁶

In 1915, fifty years after the Civil War concluded, another effort emerged to make sure all women nurses were receiving “proper pensions” for their efforts in the war. This ensued into a large debate in Congress about the ability to prove which women had served honorably in the war as nurses. The records provided by the hospitals were not well kept and this mishandling of the documents led to numerous women being left off the payroll during the chaos of the war years. This prevented them from securing the government’s recognition of their services. That year, President Woodrow Wilson held a remembrance day for all veterans of the Civil War

⁹⁵ “Democrats in Girard,” *Columbus Daily Enquirer*, July 9, 1892; “Legislative Worker for Women,” *The Wichita Daily Eagle*, May 18, 1902.

⁹⁶ “As You Like it,” *Waterbury Evening Democrat*, February 2, 1907.

during which his administration announced its plans for more comprehensive pensions for women nurses who served in the war. As *the Forum* explained, “the work of the women-nurses and physicians in the hospitals gave them the first knowledge of their power in philanthropy.” With the help of the print media, women finally received the deserved recognition of their war contributions by gaining a monetary honor from the government. The *Perth Amboy Evening News* publicized this in October 1915, stating that the G.A.R “was to make an effort to secure proper pensions for Civil War nurses.” This was an important feat for many women who were previously denied pensions due to poor hospital records.⁹⁷

The Civil War provided women with an innovative way to pursue new skills and trades. Public acceptance of those changing roles would not have occurred without the print media’s coverage of their activities during the American Civil War. By publicizing women’s roles in aid societies, nursing and as women soldiers, the print media molded public opinion on women’s capabilities in a public sphere. Numerous newspapers and periodicals provided a new perspective of what women achieved during the war years. Women’s efforts had created “lasting value: how much more this must have been true of women who spent all or most of four years in such new activities?” In the fifty years after the war, the public slowly adjusted its previous views of women. They recognized that women’s efforts during the entire war were significant. Through domestic affairs, public outlets such as the aid societies, the Sanitary Commission and

⁹⁷ “Wilson Receives G.A.R. Veterans,” *The West Virginian*, September 30, 1915; “More Pension Plans,” *Omaha Daily Bee*, February 23, 1910, <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn99021999/1908-08-23/ed-1/seq-25/>; Watterson, 76; “Civil War Nurses’ Pensions,” *Perth Amboy Evening News*, October 1, 1915 (quotation).

as women soldiers, women proved they could succeed. They were new creatures in a post war society and as one scholar has put it, “the story of the war will never be fully or fairly written if the achievements of women in it are untold.” With the print media’s portrayal of their story, more Americans gradually came to accept and even tolerate women’s activities outside of the home.⁹⁸

⁹⁸ Scott, *Natural Allies*, 2; “Our Women in War,” *Dona Ana County Republican*, April 14, 1898 (quotation); Attie, 1 (quotation); Watterson, 76.

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