

University at Albany, State University of New York

Scholars Archive

History Honors Program

History

5-2022

Battlefield Women: How Nurses, Soldiers, and Spies Challenged Gender Roles during the American Civil War

Kaitlyn Thomas

The University at Albany community has made this article openly available.

Please share how this access benefits you.

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarsarchive.library.albany.edu/history_honors

Recommended Citation

Thomas, Kaitlyn, "Battlefield Women: How Nurses, Soldiers, and Spies Challenged Gender Roles during the American Civil War" (2022). *History Honors Program*. 30.

https://scholarsarchive.library.albany.edu/history_honors/30

This Undergraduate Honors Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the History at Scholars Archive. It has been accepted for inclusion in History Honors Program by an authorized administrator of Scholars Archive. Please see [Terms of Use](#). For more information, please contact scholarsarchive@albany.edu.

**Battlefield Women: How Nurses, Soldiers, and Spies Challenged Gender Roles
during the American Civil War**

An honors thesis presented to the
Department of History,
University at Albany, State University of New York
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for graduation with Honors in History

Kaitlyn Thomas

Research Mentor: Laura Wittern-Keller, Ph.D.

Research Advisor: Michitake Aso, Ph.D.

Abstract

My research has focused on specific women in the Civil War that held the occupation of soldier, spy/scout, nurse or camp follower during the war and how their work in the war challenged the gender roles of the 1800s. I argued that the war has been an agent of change as women were able to hold male dominated roles that were involved in the war. While most of these women had not gone in with the intention of challenging those gender roles, those women had indirectly done so. To help with this project I have analyzed many sources to help prove this idea. For my secondary sources I had looked at books such as *Women on the Civil War Battlefield* by Richard Hall that discussed the role of women on the Civil War Battlefield and analyzed their contributions to the war. I have also analyzed sources that deal with gender and sex relations during the 1800s to bring in context to the situation. For primary sources, I have analyzed the memoirs, diaries and letters of these women to see how they describe the jobs that they did during the war and how they approach it. My research has covered the Civil War years and the few years following the war to establish how these women had gone in not as agents of change but to aid in the war. The outcome of that help challenged the gender roles of the 1800s.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the people in my life who made this possible. First, I would like to thank my friends in the Honors Thesis Seminar, Melanie Atkinson, Cameron Cupp, MJ Johnson and Aida Hrustic for the constant support and encouragement throughout this process. From the beginning when this project was an idea to the end with the finished paper, they were the sounding board I always needed. Their words of advice were my anchor throughout this crazy year.

To Dr. Wittern-Keller and Dr. Aso, thank you for your guidance and patience. Without your commentary, insights and inspiration this project would not have made it to where it is now. Thank you for listening to my rambling ideas and helping me create them into tangible arguments for my paper. You both were truly the best advisors for this project.

To my friends, Jude Klein, Alexandra Frumusa, Alexandra Yeager, Meghan Rees and Lauren Pikul. Also, to my friends in Democracy Matters and my parents. I want to thank all of you for listening to my late-night babbling on this project. While you may not have wanted to be educated in this subject, you held your tongue and helped me back up when I thought I was down on my luck.

Without these people and others this project would have remained as an idea and nothing more. I am extremely grateful for all of their advice and I wish them all the best in their adventures. Thank you.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	2
Acknowledgments.....	3
Table of Contents.....	4
Introduction.....	5
Gender in the 1800s.....	11
Gender Roles for Women on the Battlefield.....	16
The Women with their Boots on the Ground.....	18
Loreta Janeta Velazquez.....	20
Sarah Rosetta Wakeman.....	28
The Women No One Expected.....	33
Sarah Emma Edmonds.....	35
Belle Boyd.....	39
Nurses and Medical Professionals.....	43
Mary Edwards Walker.....	45
Ada W. Bacot.....	49
The Women in the Camps.....	53
Susie King Taylor.....	55
Conclusion.....	59
Bibliography.....	62

Introduction

“What did women know of war anyway? What could they do? Of what use could they be?”

- Clara Barton.¹

While these questions are not relevant today, they were persistent in the beginning of the Civil War. During war times, women were expected to be dutiful housewives and remain on the home front because it was believed women could not perform the same tasks as men during war time. Women were viewed as delicate and were thus secluded to the private sphere where their only focus would be the household and the family. What helped to further this belief was that society, which was dominated by men, held the belief that women could not physically handle the intricacies of war. Even with the momentum of the Women’s Suffrage Movement in the early-1800s, women were held as second-class citizens in comparison to men. When the Civil War erupted, the ideology placing women in society was forsaken as men as men were sent to the front lines in both the Confederacy and the Union and both sides relied on women’s involvement.

More women began working in businesses and factories, rationing their food and sending clothing and other materials towards the front lines. Women took on the roles that were abandoned by the men when they were sent to the front lines. This aspect of the home front was expected for women to take as their job was to maintain the home

¹ Oates, Stephen. B. *A Woman of Valor: Clara Barton and the Civil War*. (The Free Press. New York, NY. 1994.) Pg 10. This quote is in regard to a sarcastic comment she made of the men’s argument of why she cannot enter the war.

and society in the absence of men. However, there were women who had taken their involvement in the war a step further. While it was expected for women to remain on the home front, there were specific women who had entered the battlefield thus challenging further the ideals of a woman's role during war time. These women held many different roles in the war but this paper will focus on the women who were directly involved with the battlefield such as the soldiers, the spies and scouts, the nurses and the camp followers. Each of these roles were previously excluded to only men. While the occupation of camp follower and medical professional was more accepting of women entering the field, female spies had to operate precariously, and female soldiers had to be disguised as men to protect themselves from both their opponents and allies. These women were involved in the battlefield, and they were able to hold these positions due to the war.

Every single woman contributed to the war effort and their role was instrumental to both the Union and the Confederacy. With these women entering the Civil War battleground with the previously mentioned roles, they were transcending the gender roles prescribed to women in the 1800s. In this paper, I analyze how the war was an agent of social change as women were able to take male dominated positions that challenged the gender roles of the 1800s. My paper focuses on women on the battlefield because their narrative is rarely told in the perspective of challenging against the gender roles of the time. Most historians who have discussed women on the battlefield during the Civil War do not address how battle front women were able to go against the roles they were supposed to hold during this time. In his book *Women on the Civil War Battlefield*, historian Richard Hall mentions the important contributions

women on the battlefield as an afterthought². These women wanted to contribute to the war the best way that they knew how, and in doing so, simultaneously broke against women's gender norms of the time. This paper seeks to not only tell their narratives but show how they were able to break against the standards for women at the time. They were able to do this by entering into positions within the Union or Confederate ranks during the Civil War that enabled them to step outside the domestic sphere and into the public.

This paper focuses on the changes of gender during the Civil War focusing on a select group of women including Loreta Janeta Velazquez, Belle Boyd and Mary Walker to show how women used the war to leave the confines they were subject to in American society. The first section will be devoted to gender roles for women before the Civil War. This section will analyze the roles meant for women in Victorian America as wife and mother. This section will also look at how women were to behave in society in regard to sex and public life. By drawing on works from Nina Silber and other historians who study gender during the Civil War through primary sources such as advertisements and handbooks. This will provide background information and build the foundation that I will use to show how certain women on the battleground were able to break against societal norms.

The next section will focus on gender roles during the Civil War as women, particularly wives and mothers, began breaking out of the private sphere. Here we will focus on four different subsections of female soldiers, spies/scouts, nurses and camp

² Hall, Richard. *Women on the Civil War Battlefield*. Modern War Studies. Lawrence, KS:P University Press of Kansas, 2006.

women to show how they were able to break the bonds of societal pressures for women at the time. Each section will delve into its specific role and how the women in those roles altered the idea behind it. Each section will examine at least one woman and how her involvement in the war was an act of social change because of the position they held. Since most of these women held positions that were traditionally held by men, how they interact with their job in the war and the tasks they had to do speak enormously on the type of social change they were indirectly contributing to the war. Especially as each woman's involvement was unique not only because of their position and gender but also their socioeconomic status. The end of each section will look into what the women that were highlighted achieved after the war and if they reverted back to the confines of the gender roles of the 1800s or if they chose to continue as agents of change for women. A perfect example of this would be Doctor Mary Walker who advocated for Dress Reform after the war and was a supporter of the Women's Suffrage Movement.

The paper concludes with reiterating not only what the paper has argued but the importance surrounding the argument. The conclusion will also go into detail the impacts these women had to both the Civil War and gender roles for women during the war. The conclusion will also look to see if the idea of gender was changing after the war, whether there were regional differences or not. While the conclusion will not spend a lot of time on how gender changed after the war we would look to see if those changes attributed to the change of gender in America especially as the Women's Suffrage Movement reached its peak with the passing of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920.

This paper is a challenging one as it tackles the issue of gender during the 1800's and how the Civil War was an opportunity for some women to escape their societal roles of gender at the time. As previously stated, many historians have analyzed gender and its relation to the Civil War but have considered the concept that the war was an escape for certain women from the societal gender roles as an afterthought. I intend to take that argument head on and analyze how women were able to do just that. Due to that feat, I am pulling both primary and secondary sources that will give me the best evidence to support just that. For primary sources I will be looking at the personal narrative's women kept either during the time they were involved in the war, such as letters from Ada Bacot, or after the war that reflect on their service, as in the case of Sarah Emma Edmonds' autobiography. The primary sources will be an array of letters, autobiographies and diaries. These primary sources are essential to my argument as the narratives these women give contain phrases or passages that either discuss how they resent the roles for women or show how they defied them.

My secondary sources are related to the background information of gender roles during the 1800's as well as providing background information on the different women that I will be covering in my paper as they are either biographies or they cover a vast array of women under one subject such as DeAnne Blanton and Lauren M. Cook's book *They Fought Like Demons: Women Soldiers in the American Civil War* that discusses the narratives of female soldiers during the Civil War. A few of my secondary sources cover women on the battleground as a whole in the Civil War and their contributions. While there are many historians that I will be referencing throughout my paper; Elizabeth Massey and Richard Hall will be the historians I will be referencing the most in

my paper. Elizabeth Massey was one of the first female historians to write about women in the Civil War in 1966. Finally, Richard Hall's work is a case study to prove whether the personal narratives that these women gave were true or not as they may have embellished their narratives.

Finally, all of this culminates to why does this matter? Why should we care about these women and the contributions they gave to the Civil War? Why is gender a factor in the ability these women had to be involved in the war? What is the importance of their role in the war? The narratives of these women and their service to both the Confederacy and the Union is just as important as their male counterparts. I would argue their roles were more important because of the consequences that would befall women as a result of their ambition to join the war services. The fact that women such as Esther Hill Hawks, Sarah Rosetta Wakeman and Susie King Taylor were able to hold prominent positions in the Union and Confederacy despite the expected role for women in wartime is remarkable. These women pushed against the societal expectation set for them women by taking traditionally male roles in the war. Unfortunately, this narrative often excludes women of color as their narratives overlooked and they often could not dictate it since most Black Americans could not read or write. There were some that could, such as Harriet Tubman, but historians have not found their work. This is an area that needs further research to have a well-rounded account. After the war, some of them continued to push against those barriers while others did not but the Civil War was a chance for them to prove themselves and begin testing the boundaries set by society. Their contributions to the Civil War should not go unnoticed.

Gender in the 1800s

To understand the changes of gender by women on the battlefield we have to look at what women's roles were before the Civil War as well as what it meant to be a woman in Victorian America. It is common knowledge that men and women were not seen as equal. While men worked and provided for the family, a woman was to maintain the home and raise the children, to make sons functioning members of society and daughters' future wives and mothers for men. That was certainly the case with American society: even with women entering the workforce, the idea that a woman's duty to her family was first was deeply ingrained in society. This section will help to shed light on those intricacies by talking about not only the roles of single women in society but also the roles of women as wives and mothers as there were rules for each category. To start, let us begin with the different spheres of society.

American society was divided into the public and private spheres. This is mainly due to the rigid rules men had created for women in both the family and society which caused a societal and emotional rift between men and women that were expressed within the domains of the public and private spheres.³ In Jacquie Smyth's essay "Transcending Traditional Gender Boundaries: Defining Gender Roles Through Public and Private Spheres" she goes into detail on the different characteristics that accompany both the private and public spheres and the differences between them. The public sphere dealt with business and politics as in the public duties of society. Smyth takes this basic interpretation further with the men as the head of the family, business, society and church as men controlled both the leadership and the financials within those

³ Smith-Rosenberg, Carroll. *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* 1st ed. New York: A.A. Knopf, 1985. Pg 60.

categories.⁴ This sphere was predominantly held by men as they were involved in business and leadership in those different areas. In contrast, there was the private sphere which dealt with the home and was centered around children and the family. Thus, the private sphere was predominantly held by women and children. Smyth explains that in this sphere women had a limited role that excluded them from politics and mostly business as they were wards of their husbands and were expected to follow the same stance as their husbands.⁵ Women were rarely seen in the public sphere and they handled very little business; the most they handled was rationing money for food, furniture and other household purchases. In the private sphere, women were essentially cut off from public life and were sequestered to the home.

The differences in the public and private spheres demonstrated what women were allowed do in society. Of course, there were moments where women entered the public sphere, but it was rare and often led to agitation among members of society as it went against the standards that had been set. This divide between men and women was exhibited in sexuality, marriage and child rearing as men were dominant in each aspect while women held a submissive role. It was not until the Revolutionary War that the private sphere began taking attributes of the public sphere and it began with the concept of Republican Motherhood.

The concept of Republican Motherhood was not fully developed by historians until 1974. However, it revolves around the idea that mother's life was dedicated to knowing and teaching civic virtue as she taught her sons what it was and would

⁴ Smyth, Jacquie. "Transcending Traditional Gender Boundaries: Defining Gender Roles Through Public and Private Spheres". 2008. <file:///C:/Users/210034229/Downloads/9010-Article%20Text-15328-1-10-20151010.pdf>. Pg. 1.

⁵ I.d. 1.

reprimand her husband if he defied it.⁶ In other words, the mother of a household was in charge of ensuring the family followed its civic duty to the Republic. This is especially important as women were finally given the chance to pursue an education, but only to the extent to educate their sons to be functioning members of the public sphere and to teach their daughters to fulfill their role as a future Republican Mother. This idea was an entirely American ideal as there were no contemporary European influences.⁷ However, before this, women were rarely educated as their education centered around the home and those lessons were passed down to their daughters.⁸ Now that women had an essential role, as deemed by the public sphere, they were able to become educated in politics, business and other aspects in order to educate their sons. It may seem a small victory but it is an important one as this pushed closer together the public and private sphere.

While the idea of Republican Motherhood and the different spheres existed before the 1800s, they provide context for what gender roles women were placed in during the 1800s. In the nineteenth century, women largely remained in the private sphere as they were surrounded by other women and children and were bound to their home, church and visiting other women's homes.⁹ It was harder for a married woman or a married woman with children to break out of the private sphere and their role to their husbands. However, single women were able to find ways to break away from the

⁶ Zagari, Rosemarie. "Morals, Manners, and the Republican Mother." *American Quarterly* 44, no. 2 (1992): 192–215. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2713040>. Pg 1.

⁷ I.d. 2.

⁸ Smyth, Jacquie. "Transcending Traditional Gender Boundaries: Defining Gender Roles Through Public and Private Spheres" 2008. file:///C:/Users/210034229/Downloads/9010-Article%20Text-15328-1-10-20151010.pdf. Pg 1.

⁹ Smith-Rosenberg, Carroll. *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* 1st ed. New York: A.A. Knopf, 1985. Pg 61.

preconceived notions of being a wife and mother and they were called “New Women”.¹⁰ These women were traditionally young and unmarried and they were seen as rejecting the social conventions that were to be imposed on women at the time such as being a wife and mother as few of them did marry and even fewer became mothers when married.¹¹ Even before the Civil War, women were showing their discontent with the roles that were prescribed to them by society and men as they found small ways to resist. Some women even joined the workforce whether that was working in small shops or entering factories. While they mainly did not rise to a leadership role, as that was reserved for the men, they were able to be apart of both spheres by entering the workforce. This provided them with some independence.

Despite these advancements, the rules dictating how a woman should behave in Victorian society reigned supreme. Carroll Smith-Rosenburg explained in her book *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* how male medical professionals used the argument that genitalia determined gender and thus gender determined one’s role in society.¹² Due to this, gender determined economic opportunity and social order in society. Combining this with the notion of female hysteria that came from female sexuality and menstruation the subordination of women to men in society was reinforced. Male physicians continued with this analysis of women as fragile and domestic due to women’s unique physiology of menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth, and menopause and this carried into women’s sexuality stating that “Women’s only sexual desire, these doctors argued, was reproductive”.¹³ In other words, the early nineteenth

¹⁰ I.d. 176.

¹¹ I.d. 176.

¹² I.d. 23.

¹³ I.d. 23.

century saw male doctors using the reproductive physiology of women to make women subservient to men. Male physicians had then used the physiology of women to advance psychological practices that further enforced the idea of women being subservient to men. This then brought on the idea of the Cult of True Womanhood which attacked women if they strove for an education or employment and struck fear in the idea of a “non-reproductive woman”.¹⁴ The idea of true womanhood carried on the characteristics that male doctors had believed were inherently “feminine” such as being emotional, gentle, and completely dependent on men. This tied in with the idea of the Ideal Mother where mothers were to be independent, protective, and devout her life to her family.¹⁵ Both of these ideologies were expected for women to follow as both relied on women to be the strength of the family and to care for their children while supporting their husband who maintained his role in the public sphere.

As women were being discriminated against in society and the medical field, they were also being repressed legally in America. It was expected for women to be married and become dependent on men and with that came the legal adoption of coverture in the marriage system. Coverture made it possible for women to not hold property or a bank account in their name as their legal rights would be taken over by their husband and if the marriage ended in divorce, she would lose any and all rights to her children.¹⁶ Coverture ensured that in marriage, the man and woman would become one and that one was the husband so any type of legal action the wife would like to take had to be

¹⁴ I.d. 23.

¹⁵ I.d. 199.

¹⁶ Peg A. Lamphier and Rosanne Welch. *Women in American History: A Social, Political, and Cultural Encyclopedia and Document Collections [4 volumes]*. Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO. 2017. <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=1447096&site=ehost-live>. Vol.1 pg 103.

approved by the husband.¹⁷ This was the doctrine for married women as single, divorced or widowed women had the ability to handle their affairs without the need of a husband or male role in it.¹⁸ With the burgeoning Women's Suffrage Movement in the late-eighteenth to early-nineteenth century, the idea of coverture was seen as an outdated practice. The institution of coverture was becoming less prominent, however, it was not completely abolished in the United States until after the Civil War when laws giving women more control in the public sphere were enacted. While some laws had passed, such as the 1848 Married Woman's Property Act in New York, that had advanced the rights for women, it was only at a state level. The ideas of women being subservient to men in the eyes of the law remained intact.

Despite the fact the Women's Suffragists Movement was advancing in the nineteenth century, the idea of women as docile beings that serve at the pleasure of their husbands and men was largely maintained. The idea of different spheres continued to exist as well as the idea of True Womanhood and the Ideal Mother. Although the other legal and social practices began dying out, the idea of women being meek was the standard. When war broke out in 1861, men were able to see women as more than their roles as a wife or mother but as these strong and assertive women who were able to fight in the war whether for the Confederacy or the Union. The women that were involved in the battlefield helped to dispel the ideas of what a woman could be and how they act.

Gender Roles for Women on the Battlefield

¹⁷ I.d. 103.

¹⁸ I.d. 103.

The gender roles of the early to mid-1800s remained the same as tensions rose between the North and South over the issues of slavery. It was not long until the South began to secede from the Union starting with South Carolina in December of 1860 with ten other states following after in 1861.¹⁹ War then came with the Confederate attack on Fort Sumter on April 12, 1861 that ended with Union defeat.²⁰ The Union redirected their efforts to the war and the newly-formed Confederacy had the added bonus of forming their country as well as allocating resources to the war effort. Due to the demand of the Civil War, many historians have made the claim that the war stalled movements that were gaining momentum during the 1800s. For instance, Richard Hall in his book *Women on the Civil War Battlefield* states that, “the war otherwise stalled the momentum of the women’s movement, dissipating its energies in the enormous task of fulfilling the immediate needs of the war effort”.²¹

At first, I completely disagreed with this idea that Hall had brought forward but upon further analysis I understood that he meant the overall movement had paused. There were fewer rallies and protests as those involved in the women’s movement had turned to aid in the war effort. However, I do not think that the women’s movement was completely hindered by the Civil War. If the war had blocked the movement women would not have been able to serve in either army as nurses, spies, scouts and other personnel. While the overall movement had paused, individual women were able to

¹⁹ “Secession, United States.” *Library of Congress*. Accessed February 1, 2022.
https://www.loc.gov/rr/geogmap/placesinhistory/archive/2011/20110314_secession.html#:~:text=On%20December%2020%2C%201860%2C%20the,in%20the%201891%20Atlas%20to.

²⁰ “Civil War Begins.” U.S. Senate, November 30, 2021.
https://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/minute/Civil_War_Begins.htm#:~:text=At%204%3A30%20a.m.%20on,beginning%20of%20the%20Civil%20War.

²¹ Hall, Richard. *Women on the Civil War Battlefield*. Modern War Studies. Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2006. Pg 206.

make advances as they entered into the battlefield as nurses, spies, scouts, camp women and as soldiers. This section will delve into the stories of those women and how their service elevated them above the roles that women were supposed to hold not only as wives and/or mothers but the preconceived notions that women were fragile and could not enter into the multiple male dominated spaces in the Confederate and Union armies.

These women were not only able to perform their jobs under scrutiny but even impressed their male counterparts and officers. This section is divided into four sections on women soldiers, spies/scouts, nurses and other medical professionals and camp women as each section will focus on four women whose acts of service went beyond the bounds of what a woman's role was and how they were to act. Some of their narratives dip into the discussion of their role as women and how it contrasts to their role in the armies as well as how most of them felt a sort of liberation in joining the war effort as they escaped their roles as women in American society. To begin this section, I looked into the women soldiers who were disguised as men and fought alongside them to advance either the Confederacy or Union in battle.

The Women with their Boots on the Ground

It is hard for Americans today to believe that there were women who disguised themselves as men and fought in the Civil War. However, in the 1800s it was not an outrageous idea. In Barton and Cook's book, *They Fought like Demons: Women Soldiers in the American Civil War*, female soldiers and sailors were often depicted in Victorian age ballads, poetry and other forms of art.²² These women were largely based

²² Blanton, DeAnne, and Lauren M. Cook. *They Fought like Demons: Women Soldiers in the American Civil War*. Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2005. Pg 3.

off of real female heroines from other wars such as Catalina de Erauso who was a conquistador in the New World.²³ Nevertheless, while it was popular for female heroines to exist in fiction and the past, they did not fit into the ideals that existed in Victorian Age America for women. Women were not allowed to join in the ranks in either the Confederacy or Union and so for those that did join they had to dress as men to do so. It was surprisingly easy for women to slip into the ranks as men with army doctors very rarely practiced exams on soldiers before they entered into the regiment. Both the Confederacy and Union required medical exams to be practiced to enter but they more often than not consisted of checking for height, the number of teeth a soldier had and if they had a working finger for the trigger.²⁴ This was due to the high demand for soldiers and only those that had obvious physical disabilities, such as being blind, were excused from joining the military. Women also found other ways of avoiding the physical examinations by having another soldier help them or sometimes even the doctors would assist in hiding their identities to fill the ranks.

Women had joined the military for different reasons just as men. Some had joined with patriot fervor towards the Union and Confederacy and wanted to aid their side of the conflict in anyway they could. Some have joined so they could remain close to family members or loved ones, some craved adventure, some wanted the pay that came with entering the military as well as the benefits. Despite these reasons, women had continued to enter into the conflict and hide themselves among the ranks. Countless women were able to hide their identity throughout their time in the army however, there were women who were discovered in the ranks whether as prisoners of

²³ I.d. 3.

²⁴ I.d. 27.

war, when they were wounded or when they were casualties of the battle. Other ways for women to be dismissed from the military would be illness or childbirth or simply they mannerisms they held gave them away as women. Due to this, women in the military had to be careful on their disguise and identity to ensure they would not be discovered.

These elaborate disguises coupled with the lack of medical examinations led to many women having the ability to enter the Confederate and Union army. Along with adopting typical male mannerisms and hiding typical female mannerisms, many female soldiers were able to keep their identity a secret. Due to this, there is no accurate number of how many women were soldiers in either army. Thus, the numbers have been contested as some have estimated around 400.²⁵ Some have debated that there were at least a thousand, this is a claim Hall makes.²⁶ Whether there were a couple hundred or a couple thousand there were women that had entered the Civil War on both the Union and Confederate side dressed as men. Some of those women had written their experience or their families had preserved their accounts which historians use to greater understand women's involvement in the battlefield. Two of the women I am highlighting to show the different experiences are Loreta Janeta Velazquez and Sarah Rosetta Wakeman as both women not only had different experiences in the war but both went against the mold that existed for women at the time with their involvement.

Loreta Janeta Velazquez (1842-1923)

One of the most famous women that had entered the war under the pseudonym of a man was Loreta Janeta Velazquez. Her experience in the war has caused tension

²⁵ Righthand, Jess. "The Women Who Fought in the Civil War." Smithsonian.com. Smithsonian Institution, April 7, 2011. <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/the-women-who-fought-in-the-civil-war-1402680/>.

²⁶ Hall, Richard. *Women on the Civil War Battlefield*. Modern War Studies. Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2006.

between Civil War historians as they dispute whether the claims in memoir, *The Woman in Battle: A Narrative of the Exploits, Adventures and Travels of Madame Loreta Janeta Velazquez* were true or not. Many historians, such as Hall, have stated that her narrative is filled with hyperbolic and self-aggrandizing speech. While other historians, such as Blanton and Cook, have stated that most of Velazquez's memoir is corroborated by contemporary sources.²⁷ This disagreement between historians is not reserved just for Velazquez as other women in the Civil War who published memoirs after the war struggled to have their experience accepted. This largely stems from the belief that women were seen as weak and men could not believe that they had accomplished the tasks that they had. Even though there were women in stories as heroines

Velazquez wrote that she came from a noble Castilian family from her fathers side while her mother was of French and American descent.²⁸ Velazquez was born on June 26th, 1842 in Havana, Cuba.²⁹ Shortly after her birth the family relocated to Texas which at the time was a part of Mexican territory.³⁰ Velazquez was given a proper education with an English governess and continued her education after she relocated to New Orleans, Louisiana to live with her Aunt.³¹ Unlike the other women in this narrative, Velazquez always wanted to be a soldier. At an early age, she admired women who had entered battle such as Catalina de Erauso and Appolonia Jagiello but she believed the

²⁷ Blanton, DeAnne, and Lauren M. Cook. *They Fought like Demons: Women Soldiers in the American Civil War*. Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2005. Pg 2.

²⁸ Velazquez, Loreta Janeta. *The Woman in Battle : A Narrative of the Exploits, Adventures, and Travels of Madame Loreta Janeta Velazquez* New York: Arno Press, 1972. Pg 50.

²⁹ I.d. 51.

³⁰ I.d. 51.

³¹ I.d. 52.

most distinguished woman to enter battle was Joan of Arc.³² Velazquez believed that she was a fierce warrior and had great power even going as far to say that she had a desire to emulate her “glorious deeds”.³³ We can see that Velazquez was greatly influenced by these women as she went on to become a soldier in the Confederate army. Even more so she wanted to emulate Joan of Arc.

Velazquez felt a strong connection and admiration towards her as she stated, “and many a time has my soul burned with an overwhelming desire to emulate her deeds of valor, and to make of gold among the women who had the courage to fight like men - ay, better than most men - for a great cause, for friends, and for the fatherland”.³⁴ Not only did Velazquez want to live up to the morals that Joan of Arc had but believed that women had the ability to hold that power and to even have that power over men. This was in stark contrast to how women were supposed to be submissive towards men and certainly not be considered strong enough to even overpower men. Velazquez certainly had no intention of fitting into the ideals of how a woman was supposed to act in her early years. However, she fell in love with American soldier John Williams and they were married on April 5th, 1856.³⁵ It was not until she married her husband did she fall into the roles of how a woman was to care for her husband and her role expanded as she had her children. Velazquez was content in her role as wife and mother until her children died and her grief consumed her but reignited her desire to join the battlefield.³⁶ Once Velazquez had lost her role as a mother her desire to adhere to

³² I.d. 36.

³³ I.d. 36.

³⁴ I.d. 37.

³⁵ I.d. 59.

³⁶ I.d. 50.

the roles of women in society diminished. While Velazquez had seemed to forgo her convictions, she clearly must have believed in them for them to be reignited.

Velazquez rejoined with the values she and Joan of Arc held dear as she remained loyal to Texas as they seceded from the Union, coaxing her husband to join with her stating that, "I was resolved to forsake him if he raised his sword against the South".³⁷ Once again, Velazquez went against the ideals that were held for women as she put her loyalty to her country before her husband. Especially considering Velazquez had insinuated that she would have fought against her husband had he remained in the Union to keep intact not only Texas's independence but the Confederacy's independence from the Union. She continued to go against the wishes of her husband as she plotted to join the Confederate forces when her husband left for his deployment.³⁸ Velazquez was no longer serving for her husband and her children but for herself. She joined the army because she wanted to and felt a need to serve Texas. She was no longer the dutiful wife who followed her husband and cared for his every need. Velazquez became self-serving as she put her plan in motion to enter the military as she did not care whether her husband supported her decision or not.

On their fifth wedding anniversary, Williams was going to Richmond with Confederate Generals to begin the campaign of the South. While Williams was disheartened to be leaving the United States in honor of the Confederacy, Velazquez had persuaded Williams, "but, that deed having once been consummated, it was not difficult for me to persuade him to offer his sword to the South".³⁹ Once again,

³⁷ I.d. 51.

³⁸ I.d. 51.

³⁹ I.d. 52.

Velazquez was stepping outside of her role as a submissive wife to her husband as she convinced him to join the Confederacy. As previously stated, she wanted to be near her husband and join him on the battlefield to fight for the Confederacy and she raised the discussion of her joining the war effort back in conversation before he left. Williams tried to discourage her from entering but then had Velazquez dress as a man and interact with other men to convince her that she could not handle being in the Confederate Army.⁴⁰

She committed to the act of appearing and acting as a man. She tucked her hair under a wig, wore a mustache and she wore one of her husband's suits and they walked into a bar room as she tried to have the walk of men.⁴¹ This is the first instance of Velazquez dressing as a man and she was not horrified by her appearance as she had said, "As I surveyed myself in the mirror I was immensely pleased with the figure I cut, and fancied that I made quite as good looking a man as my husband".⁴² While this experiment was meant to deter Velazquez from joining the Confederacy it actually invigorated her more to join in her part. She believed that since she could look like a man, act like a man and even convince a group of soldiers that she was a man she would surely be able to convince the other men and generals of the Confederate Army. Her husband had intended for this experiment to help Velazquez realize that she could not handle being in the military but she instead told him that she would do anything to stay with him and to support the Confederacy.⁴³ However, his plan had backfired and

⁴⁰ I.d. 53.

⁴¹ I.d. 64-65.

⁴² I.d. 64.

⁴³ I.d. 66.

Velazquez went to join the Confederacy without his consent.⁴⁴ On her way to New Orleans, she had padded her uniform so it gave the appearance of being more filled out with muscle and bought fine wire nets to wrap around her torso to give her the shape of a man with a band around the waist to help her figure.⁴⁵ She was spared from having to additionally hide her feminine voice as many men in the army were young enough to have a deep voice. She then coined herself with the name Harry T. Buford and deemed herself ready to enter into an army camp. The elaborate disguise she wore was to ensure that she would not be discovered unlike some female soldiers such as Mary Smith. Luckily for Velazquez, she was successful in her disguise.

With her disguise she became immersed into camp life. She listened to the vulgar talk that men in the camp had towards women but was surprised when some of them spoke of how they would be impressed of a woman hiding in the ranks and fighting, although many believed it a disgrace for a woman to do such a thing and Velazquez did not back down from the challenge.⁴⁶ Before she stepped on the battlefield, she scoured across the South recruiting young men for the Confederate army and filled her regiment as they left Richmond to battle in what would be known as the Battle of Bull Run. She had gone to work with Brigadier General Bonham of the Confederacy where she was complimented as “the right sort to have around when a fight is going on”.⁴⁷ Before the battle, she had been involved in small clashes with Union forces where she held her guard and shot at the soldiers to defend her country. While she may have been honoring her duty as a soldier, she had not been involved in conflict

⁴⁴ I.d. 56.

⁴⁵ I.d. 58.

⁴⁶ I.d. 60.

⁴⁷ I.d. 96.

yet and wanted to distinguish herself as a soldier in front of the general. Velazquez proved that women have the capabilities to enter battle and fight even proving braver than the Union men as some of them were hesitant or fled.⁴⁸ Velazquez wanted to prove herself as a capable soldier and warrior and she had done just that before she had even entered into battle yet. She soon proved herself in battle as well as she entered into the Battle of Bull Run eager to prove herself to the men that surrounded her. Velazquez was braver than some of the men in her regiment as she “wished that I could feel a little fear, if only for the sake of sympathizing with the poor devils”.⁴⁹ The battle was actively underway with Confederate forces attempting to retreat so General Stonewall Jackson and his regiment could enter into the fray. The battle continued on with Velazquez in the most vicious pit of the battle and instead of fear, she was elated to be in the battle. She wrote in her autobiography that the risks she had taken to be on the battlefield were worth it as she was able to be an “actor” in the war.⁵⁰ Velazquez had certainly superseded the connotations that women were “fragile” and “domestic” with her first battle.

Velazquez felt pride in being an active participant in the war and was held in high regard by the Generals in the army. She believed that after the Battle of Bull Run she would retire out of uniform and move on to a new role in the Confederacy that would be better suited for a woman, in other words, using her femininity to her advantage. Yet, the battle had the opposite effects, “the battle of Bull Run, however, only quickened my ardor to participate in another affair of a similar kind, and the months of enforced

⁴⁸ I.d. 97.

⁴⁹ I.d. 100.

⁵⁰ I.d. 104.

inaction, which succeeded that battle, had the effect of making me long, with exceeding eagerness, to experience again the excitement which thrilled me on the sultry July day”.⁵¹ Velazquez had no intention of ending her military career as she had a taste of fighting, superseding once again the idea that women were these delicate creatures that could not handle violence or blood. Although Velazquez was dressed and acted as a man, she still identified as a woman showing that women held the same traits as men and craved the need for battle like the men she fought with. This attitude carried with her in the future battle of Ball’s Bluff where she excelled as a leader taking over a company where their commanding officers had died as she ensured the men were together in the clash.⁵² Velazquez held herself in high regard as once again she had held her ground in battle while some men had acted “cowardly” in battle. She was in charge of a company after the battle by General Evans as she had proved herself a capable leader.⁵³ Velazquez had overcome the rules of how women were to act in society as she had defied her husband, joined the military, fought Unionists and led companies in battle.

Even though Velazquez had proven herself as a capable soldier and was held in high regard by her superior officers, her military career had ended. She believed her skills with disguise and her bravery would be better suited in another skill set as she retired the name of Harry T. Buford to become a spy for the Confederacy as a woman. Velazquez states in her autobiography that she wished she had been born a man, “This is what is the matter with nearly all the women who go about complaining of the wrongs

⁵¹ I.d. 115-116.

⁵² I.d. 121.

⁵³ I.d. 122.

of our sex".⁵⁴ Velazquez understood the challenges that existed for women and that women wished to be men so they could have the same opportunities that men had. While she understood that there were advantages she had as a woman in regards to the war effort, she wished she had been a man because not only would she have been able to remain a soldier but she would have been given the respect of a fellow male soldier. Velazquez had proven herself as a fine soldier, devoted to her country and her regiment. She exhibited traits that at the time were characterized for men and was even more fearless than some of the men in battle as she did not falter in the army. Her service should not have gone in vain as she proved that women were in the army, whether as Confederates or Unionists, and that they were just as capable as men to fight.

Sarah Rosetta Wakeman (1843-1864)

Another Union soldier in disguise was Sarah Rosetta Wakeman who was born in Afton, New York where she was the eldest of her eight siblings and went through schooling and domestic work for the family.⁵⁵ Her father had incurred debt and Wakeman would have struggled to get married as she had "no prospects for marriage" due to her father's debts.⁵⁶ Wakeman understood the jobs that were traditionally held by men paid more and so she decided to dress as a man and work towards Binghamton, New York and send money to her family.⁵⁷ Wakeman also explained to her family that

⁵⁴ I.d. 130.

⁵⁵ Scroggins, Eloise. "Wakeman, Sarah Rosetta [Lyons Wakeman] (1843-1864)". *An Encyclopedia of American Women at War: From the Home Front to the Battlefields*, 2013. Pg. 581

⁵⁶ Wakeman, S. R., & Burgess, L. C. (1994). *An Uncommon Soldier: The Civil War Letters of Sarah Rosetta Wakeman, Alias Private Lyons Wakeman, 153rd Regiment, New York State Volunteers*. Minerva Center. Pg 9.

⁵⁷ I.d. 10.

she would have better opportunities to find a job and make more money if she left Afton.⁵⁸ Already, Wakeman went against what was expected for a woman her age. She would have been expected to stay at home and work there until she found a man that would marry her and she would then leave with her husband and work on his property. For her to leave and be independent from the patriarchal rule of her father was unusual.

She eventually left her family and went under the name of Lyons Wakeman as she became a boatman on the Chenango Canal.⁵⁹ Like Edmonds, she understood that it was not only safer to work as a man in a job that traveled but that he would be paid more simply because she presented herself as a man. What is unusual is that her family knew that she was dressed as a man but continued to write to her and accept her money from her job on the canal. Most women would have been shunned by their family for dressing as a man and while her family saw her as “somewhat of a black sheep and her adventure in male attire as a bit strange” they did not avoid staying in contact with her.⁶⁰

While on the Chenango Canal she was encouraged to enlist by the 153rd New York Regiment as they promised a stipend of \$152.00.⁶¹ Unlike our other heroines who craved adventure, Wakeman wanted to help take care of her family and secure money for her family to help pay off her father’s debts. She joined the regiment and was soon sent to Washington beginning her military career. While no one in the military knew of

⁵⁸ I.d. 31.

⁵⁹ Scroggins, Eloise. “Wakeman, Sarah Rosetta [Lyons Wakeman] (1843-1864)”. *An Encyclopedia of American Women at War: From the Home Front to the Battlefields*, 2013. Pg. 581

⁶⁰ Wakeman, S. R., & Burgess, L. C. (1994). *An uncommon soldier: The Civil War Letters of Sarah Rosetta Wakeman, Alias Private Lyons Wakeman, 153rd Regiment, New York State Volunteers*. Minerva Center. Pg 1.

⁶¹ I.d. 10.

Wakeman's disguise as a man, her family was aware that she was in the military and received the money she got from her service.⁶² Now this was highly unusual as many women that had entered the service did so in secret and rarely told anyone to make sure that they were not discovered. While in the regiment she wrote to her family regularly to ensure that they were receiving the money she received from the Union army. In her letters she details how her regiment is beginning to go into battle as they have marching orders and their weapons.⁶³ Wakeman wrote to her family that she is perfectly content about the fact that she will be going into war soon and that she is not concerned with her outcome in the conflict.⁶⁴ In each of her letters she signs off with her birth name and not the name she assumed when joining the regiment, Lyons Wakeman. It was well known that letters from soldiers were intercepted and read to ensure that soldiers were not leaking private information [provide a source for this]. Thus, questioning how she was never discovered in the regiment.

In her letters to her parents, she wrote about how she is not afraid to go into the field, "I don't feel afraid to go. I don't believe there are any Rebel's bullet made for me yet. Nor I don't Care if there is".⁶⁵ Wakeman exuded a type of confidence that even men in the Union army did not have. It is not recklessness because she was not going out of her way to find danger or dangerous situations but rather she understood that there was a chance she would not survive. She even wrote to her parents how she wished to join the fighting soon stating, "I shall be satisfied and not until we have to go".⁶⁶ Once again,

⁶² I.d. 1.

⁶³ I.d. 28.

⁶⁴ I.d. 28.

⁶⁵ I.d. 42.

⁶⁶ I.d. 43

this showed her spirit and conviction to do well in her regiment. She craved battle and wanted to prove herself in battle just as Velazquez craved for it. Wakeman had enjoyed herself in the regiments. While she wrote about how she had “sinned” while being in the regiment she followed it by stating that she was the happiest she had ever been in her life with a lot of money and friendships with the other men in the regiment.⁶⁷ She even went as far as to say that she considered re-enlisting not only for the bounty but because she enjoyed the soldier life so much.⁶⁸

While Wakeman does not go into detail on what aspects of the soldier life that she enjoyed it was not hard to imagine it is due to the level of independence she receives as a man in the regiment. Also, the financial independence of not relying on her father or a job traditionally held by women that is paid less than if a man held the position. She even stated later to her mother and father in a letter that she does not want to go home and she had “enjoyed my self the best since I have been gone away.”⁶⁹ She found freedom away from the patriarchal rule of her father and, as previously stated, gained economic freedom as a man as she earned a higher wage as a man in the Union army than she could have as a woman, especially as her job before the war as a domestic worker. Wakeman enjoyed the lack of constraints there were for men when compared to women and the freedom of being in the war from her family. She defended herself not only in battle but also in the regiment as the men would get unruly towards one another and she was not afraid to fight back if they brought that behavior to her.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ I.d. 58.

⁶⁸ I.d. 58.

⁶⁹ I.d. 58.

⁷⁰ I.d. 60.

One of the last letters Wakeman wrote to her family was in 1864 after the Battle of Pleasant Hill in Louisiana as she went in depth on her involvement in the battle and what happened to members in her company. This was the last battle for Wakeman as her company was traveling in the South and multiple people in her regiment contracted disease and died, one of those being Wakeman.⁷¹ She had entered into the 153rd Regiment hospital complaining about chronic diarrhea and was sent to the U.S.A General Hospital in New Orleans, Louisiana where she stayed for a month until her death on June 19, 1864.⁷² Despite staying in the hospital, Wakeman's identity as a woman was never discovered, or at the very least never reported and she was buried under "Lyons Wakeman".⁷³ While Wakeman did not survive the war and did not actively seek to challenge the ideas of gender by entering the army, she certainly did that when her letters were discovered. She proved that women could fight like men and that many women were hidden in the ranks especially since there were two women in the 153rd Regiment, Wakeman and Jennie Hodgers.

Both of these women are a small minority of the women that were dressed as men and joined in battle fighting amongst men and never discovered. Velazquez and Wakeman had entered the war for different reasons, the former for adventure while the later for money, but both women did not enter with the intention of challenging what it meant to be a woman in the 1800s; they inadvertently had done so with their role in the war. Neither woman were discovered and if they had been, the punishment would have ranged anywhere from a stern discussion to an execution. Velazquez had always

⁷¹ I.d. 81.

⁷² I.d 81-82.

⁷³ I.d. 82.

dreamt of adventure and wanting to enjoy the same experiences that her favorite heroines had. That dream was already breaking the mold of what it meant to be a woman as she did not fantasize about finding a husband and having children. Even when she had fulfilled the duties of a woman in the 1800s by having a family she still craved for adventure and accomplished that against the wishes of her then husband. Wakeman's story was in the war was to take care of her family and provide for them as she sent the money she made in the military back to her family. Both women were commended for their bravery and work in the military proving that women were more than the characteristics that men had prescribed them with. With their published letters and memoirs recounting their stories, it helped to show that women had the same capabilities as men.

The Women No One Expected

While women were allowed to volunteer their services to the Union and Confederate armies, they were still underestimated by soldiers and political leaders due to the preconceived notions that women were "delicate" and "domestic". It was believed that women did not have the capabilities to assert themselves into public life and due to this they were the perfect spies for both the Union and the Confederacy. Spies were necessary for both efforts as they not only passed important notes and information along state lines but also would work inside the homes of prominent political leaders to gather intelligence to report back. Women were the perfect spies for both the Union and the Confederacy as they were underestimated by soldiers at the various checkpoints on both sides.

However, it was easy for women to be accused of being a spy as the behavior or a spy went against the morals held for women in the 1800s. It was seen as suspicious if a woman was staying in the camps, met with soldiers and generals, or received men at strange hours in the night.⁷⁴ As a result of this, women had to be careful when they were collecting and relaying information to not draw extra suspicion on their activities. However, those that were suspected could face scrutiny from the press as they would be seen as adulterers and if it was announced that they had committed espionage they would be branded as a liar.⁷⁵ Women in society were to be seen as virtuous and when they were discovered for espionage they were often shunned by society. For the women that were discovered it stayed with them for years and the community would keep that brand on them. Thus, it was ideal for female spies to keep their identity and occupation a secret to save themselves from public ridicule. The characteristic of remaining virtuous was often advantageous for women as before they were suspected of espionage, they would lie to protect themselves or their mission or try to discover military tactics to relay back and they would not be suspected as men and society viewed women as being honest to keep their virtue.

While the exact number of female spies in the Civil War is unknown there were many that gained popularity after the war ended as they challenged the biases men held for women. A prime example is Harriet Tubman as her story as a spy for the Union is well known. For the Union, Sarah Emma Edmonds became famous as she was a nurse, spy and soldier. She had gone in disguise as a man and had eventually re-entered into the Union army as a woman. Along with Edmonds, Belle Boyd was a

⁷⁴ Massey, Mary Elizabeth. *Women in the Civil War*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994. Pg 87.

⁷⁵ I.d. 87-89.

famous Confederate spy as she had started her career in the Confederacy at the age of seventeen and although she was discovered multiple times, she was a valuable asset for the Confederacy as she often risked her life to relay information. These women went against the molds for women not only for the role they held in the war but because their role was unique to breaking the ideals that had existed for women. They had to deceive the opposing side to ensure that the information they were relaying and themselves were not compromised. Their remarkable stories pushed the bounds of the gender roles for women in the 1800s.

Sarah Emma Edmonds (1841-1898)

Another woman who hid among the Union troops was Sarah Emma Edmonds who had adopted the male pseudonym Private Frank Thompson while in the Union army. Unlike our other heroines, Edmonds was born in New Brunswick, Canada in December of 1841.⁷⁶ She was born into a farming family where she worked in the fields with her sisters and father during the day and tended to the house at night while also going to grammar school.⁷⁷ At the age of seventeen, Edmonds' father had arranged for her to marry an elderly widower and she had rejected the notion.⁷⁸ Gansler in the biography *The Mysterious Private Thompson: The Double Life of Sarah Emma Edmonds, Civil War Soldier* wrote that Edmonds did not want to have the same fate as her mothers and sisters even stating that she did not think marriage was not good for her.⁷⁹ This was practically unheard of, to reject the patriarchal head of the house and

⁷⁶ Scroggins, Eloise. "Edmonds (Seeyle), Sarah Emma [Franklin Thompson] (1841-1898)." An Encyclopedia of American Women at War: From the Home Front to the Battlefields, 2013. Pg 203

⁷⁷ I.d. 203.

⁷⁸ Gansler, L. L. (2005). *The Mysterious Private Thompson: The double life of Sarah Emma Edmonds, Civil War Soldier*. Free Press. Pg 6.

⁷⁹ I.d. 6.

disobey the idea that women needed to be married went against the notions that had been ingrained in women's lives for decades. Edmonds had escaped the arranged marriage by dressing as a man and worked as a Bible salesman.⁸⁰ This was considerably dangerous as it was illegal in Great Britain, and its territories, to dress as a man.⁸¹ She sold Bibles in the surrounding areas of New Brunswick and Nova Scotia and hid her identity remarkably well.⁸² She adopted the name Frank Thompson while adopting the characteristics of a man to ensure that she would not be caught as well as making it harder for her father to find her whereabouts.⁸³ In 1860 she had moved to Flint, Michigan and then enlisted into the Michigan Second Infantry a month after war was declared.⁸⁴ Edmonds was not discovered because there was no physical exam to enter into the company.

There are differing accounts on the roles Edmonds held during the war. Most historians are of the understanding that she held the position of a nurse and spy but many disagree on whether she was a soldier. This is due to her being a part of the Second Michigan Infantry and so she is misconstrued as a soldier when in reality she was in the infantry as a nurse. When Edmonds had decided to enter into service she was not looking for personal glory but looking into what she could do to help the situation and to be involved in what was unfolding in America.⁸⁵ She first started in the Union army as a male nurse in the makeshift hospitals that were established in

⁸⁰ I.d. 9

⁸¹ I.d. 9-10.

⁸² I.d. 16.

⁸³ Harper, Judith E. *Women During the Civil War an Encyclopedia*. New York: Routledge, 2004. Pg 125.

⁸⁴ I.d. 125-126.

⁸⁵ Edmonds, Sarah. Emma, E. *Nurse and Spy in the Union Army: The Adventures and Experiences of a Woman in Hospitals, Camps, and Battle-Fields*. W. S. Williams & Company, Hartford, Connecticut. 1864. Pg 18.

Washington D.C. During this time, she still remained dressed as a man and presenting herself as Private Thompson as revealing herself to be a woman would have had dire consequences. She was soon asked to become a spy in the Union army where she would be deep in Confederate territory. She was questioned on her intellectual knowledge and was not forced to undergo a physical examination so her alias was kept intact. Even though Edmonds was believed to be a man in the Union, she went in disguise behind the Confederate lines as she dressed herself as a contraband slave and had painted her skin black and wore a wool wig to present herself as a Black man.⁸⁶ While it is frowned upon to portray in blackface today, it was certainly an acceptable practice in the nineteenth century as many black Americans were not seen as people in the country. Edmonds completed the disguise by donning a southern dialect and a new name just as our female soldiers had done. With the new identity as Cuff she worked her way into the contraband camps in the South.

She had left the camp and headed to Richmond where her disguise was convincing as she was treated not how a woman would be but a Black man in the Confederate state. She was put to work with other slaves and noticed the differences attributed with the white and black ranks as the rations for the contraband camps were less than the white armies.⁸⁷ Edmonds work in the brigade was to clean the weapons, organize their resources as well as supplying the officers with whatever materials they might need. Even though this work is similar to the work camp followers would have, because the encampment believed she was a woman they tasked her with jobs that would have been tasked to men such as carrying heavy loads of materials throughout

⁸⁶ I.d. 106-107.

⁸⁷ I.d. 112-113.

the encampment. Due to Edmonds impersonating a Black man, she was easily forgotten by the white commanding officers and it was easy for her to gather information such as the movement of Lieutenants and actions the Confederate armies were going to be taking towards the Union forces.⁸⁸

Edmonds had returned to camp where the next day the Confederates had advanced on the Union encampment and she was ordered to do several tasks including going to the front with a musket, deliver orders to other Generals and help carry the wounded to the medical tents.⁸⁹ Edmonds once again demonstrating the fallacies with the ideas of what women were in society and that they have every capability of being in the war. Had she not been in disguise, the soldiers and other officers would have been shocked that a woman would not only be able to follow these orders but perform them to perfection surrounded by the chaos of battle in Yorktown. After the battle, Edmonds took on another disguise to reenter into Confederate land as a female Irish foot peddler as she would follow the army and sell them food.⁹⁰ She entered into the headquarters in search of Major McKee to send him and his men to a house. Edmonds had requested a horse and had written, "I really felt mean, and for the first time since I had acted in the capacity of spy, I despised myself for the very act of which I was about to perform".⁹¹ She had gained favor and trust from the Confederate soldiers in the encampment and she had felt terrible about the fact that she was going to release this information to her commanding officer. She later no longer feels regret as they curse against the Union but

⁸⁸ I.d. 117.

⁸⁹ I.d. 125.

⁹⁰ I.d. 147.

⁹¹ I.d. 168-169.

while this may be seen as a moment of weakness for Edmonds it is actually a moment of strength. She stands by her convictions and does not falter as any other spy.

She reports this information back to the Union army and takes a leave of absence to return to a hospital as a nurse. Her identity as Private Thompson was labeled as a deserter and thus went back to the Union as herself and remained in this role until 1864 when she married Linus H Seelye.⁹² After the war, she had written and published her autobiography *Nurse and Spy in the Union Army* detailing her experience as a nurse and spy in the Union army. Edmonds had certainly fought against the ideals of the 1800s for women. She had accomplished this by not only dressing as a man and entering into service but performing the duties behind the Confederate lines all without being detected by the rebel army. Even when she had been in disguise as a female Irish peddler she had relayed information back to the Union army and had done so without revealing her identity. Edmonds journey had begun with challenging the gender roles of the 1800s and she had continued to do so throughout the war.

Belle Boyd (1844-1900)

One of the most prolific Confederate spies was Marie Isabella “Belle” Boyd who was born in Martinsburg, Virginia on May 9th, 1844.⁹³ She was born into a wealthy business family where she was sent to Baltimore, Maryland to complete her education at Mount Washington College for Young Ladies.⁹⁴ Boyd was very proud of her family and spoke highly of her father. Similar to Velazquez, she held deep loyalty for her home

⁹² Scroggins, Eloise. “Edmonds (Seelye), Sarah Emma [Franklin Thompson] (1841-1898).” *An Encyclopedia of American Women at War: From the Home Front to the Battlefields*, 2013. Pg 203.

⁹³ Scroggins, Eloise. “Boyd, Marie Isabella ‘Belle’ (1844-1900).” *An Encyclopedia of American Women at War: From the Home Front to the Battlefields*, 2013. Pg 97.

⁹⁴ I.d. 97.

state even going so far as to saying that Virginia society was great and that the town she was from was great.⁹⁵ She returned back to her family's home in Virginia when the war broke out as many of her family members enlisted to the Confederate cause.⁹⁶ In the beginning of the war she remained at home with her family until Union soldiers drunkenly came to her home after hearing that she had Confederate regalia hanging in her bedroom.⁹⁷ Once there, the Union troops attempted to raise a Union flag on the Boyd home until he was shot and killed by Belle Boyd when she was seventeen years old.⁹⁸ She was not arrested as the commanding officer had deemed that the action was justified.⁹⁹ There were many deciding factors as to why the Commanding Officer had not taken action against Boyd but the most important circumstance was because he believed that it was not honorable to attack a member of the “weaker sex” no matter what the act was.¹⁰⁰

The aggression and need to protect her home from the Union soldiers that came on her property is a trait that typically men would hold as men were the protectors and providers of the home while women maintained it. Boyd certainly went outside the bounds of her role as a woman by not only defending her home but even talking back to the Union soldiers who had infiltrated her home. This had already cemented her as a woman who does not follow the conventional rules of how a woman was to act. After

⁹⁵ Belle Boyd, “Belle Boyd in Camp and Prison Vol. 1,” Documenting the American South (The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1998), <https://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/boyd1/boyd1.html#boyd1-1>, 38.

⁹⁶ Scroggins, Eloise. “Boyd, Marie Isabella ‘Belle’ (1844-1900).” *An Encyclopedia of American Women at War: From the Home Front to the Battlefields*, 2013. Pg 97.

⁹⁷ I.d. 97.

⁹⁸ I.d. 97.

⁹⁹ Belle Boyd, “Belle Boyd in Camp and Prison Vol. 1,” Documenting the American South (The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1998), <https://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/boyd1/boyd1.html#boyd1-1>, 70.

¹⁰⁰ Eggleston, Larry G. *Women in the Civil War: Extraordinary Stories of Soldiers, Spies, Nurses, Doctors, Crusaders, and Others*. Jefferson, N.C: McFarland, 2003. 93.

this incident, Boyd was helped to nurse Confederate soldiers back to health in the area and began listening to Union soldiers for important information that they shared between one another. She began by taking correspondence between Generals in the Confederate army between the Union and Confederate lines. Boyd had certainly played into the part of a delicate woman, "I played my *rôle* of submission as gracefully as I could; for where resistance is impossible it is still left to the vanquished to yield with dignity."¹⁰¹ She knew that if she had fought back that the soldiers arresting her would be apprehensive of her and so by remaining in the traditional, domicile role of a woman she was able to gain their trust as she later listened in on a meeting between the Council of War with General Shields of the Union army and wrote down the important notes of the meeting before taking a horse and riding herself to the home of Colonel Ashby of the Confederate army to deliver this news to him.¹⁰²

This was a skill that Boyd has been made known for by many Civil War historians. She had a way for tricking the soldiers that she would pass at the checkpoints and she would flirt with them or act unconcerned when she was stopped resulting in the soldiers dismissing her without checking the notes and correspondence she had, essentially aiding her in her mission. I believe this to be unique as she used societies expectations for women to her advantage and played into the behaviors associated towards women in the 1800s. She continued her work as a courier for the Confederacy as she would hide important letters and packages in her clothes and with her Black servants to keep Union soldiers from searching them.¹⁰³ Boyd understood that

¹⁰¹ Belle Boyd, "Belle Boyd in Camp and Prison Vol. 1," Documenting the American South (The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1998), <https://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/boyd1/boyd1.html#boyd1-1>, 98.

¹⁰² I.d. 106-108.

¹⁰³ I.d. 114.

she was a popular name among the Union army in the Shenandoah Valley, even having the name “the rebel spy” among the troops.¹⁰⁴ Nevertheless, she continued with her mission as she was filled with patriotic fervor. She knew that the Union soldiers would not search her slaves and that they would not search her without cause and so they allowed her through the lines.

Before being captured and thrown into a Union prison, she escaped and delivered an important correspondence surrounding a regiments movement that were integral to prevent the Union army from destroying the surrounding infrastructure. She writes in her memoir how she walked into a skirmish between Union and Confederate forces at a hospital and was shot at by Union forces but she continued on her journey stating that what kept her going was “Hope, fear, the love of life, and the determination to serve my country to the last”.¹⁰⁵ Here, we can see that Boyd carried the similar personality traits that men are often characterized with, courageousness, determination and patriotism. Additionally, she was respected for the work that she had done for the Confederacy as she received a letter from Jackson commending her bravery and service for the Confederacy.¹⁰⁶ General Banks had also said that she was one of the courageous people in Virginia and that she would be sorely missed by the Confederate forces.¹⁰⁷ Having received these compliments from higher ranking generals shows that her gender was a forethought. They saw her duties as a spy first and her gender second as she pushed away the conceptions that women were these simple creatures that needed to be protected. Boyd had showed that those characteristics are simply

¹⁰⁴ I.d. 84.

¹⁰⁵ I.d. 133.

¹⁰⁶ I.d. 142.

¹⁰⁷ I.d. 148.

misconceptions. Boyd had continued her work in the war as a spy until the end of the war when she was exiled to Canada for her work in the war.¹⁰⁸ She eventually reunited with her fiancé in London where they were married and she had written her autobiography.¹⁰⁹

Both women were clear examples of the work female spies had to endure in the Civil War. They had pushed the ideas of how women were to behave in the 1800s not only because of the role they held but because that role required deceit to be successful. Women were expected to uphold morale and truth and they had directly gone against that because of their occupation of spy. Edmonds had wanted to escape from what was expected for women and had helped a country she was not even a citizen of. Boyd renounced the ideals for both women and Southern women as she had dismissed the behavior of how elite Southern women were supposed to act to serve the Confederacy. Their work had pushed against the gender roles of the 1800s and their published work certainly helped erase the persona that women were these delicate entities.

Nurses and Medical Professionals

In today's narrative, it is easy to believe that many women were nurses during the Civil War and that it was an accepted role for women to hold as today women make up the majority of nurses in medical hospitals. However, nursing was not readily accessible to women just as other battlefield occupations. The medical field had been restricted to just men as the first woman to earn a medical degree was only twelve

¹⁰⁸ Scroggins, Eloise. "Boyd, Marie Isabella 'Belle' (1844-1900)." *An Encyclopedia of American Women at War: From the Home Front to the Battlefields*, 2013. Pg 98.

¹⁰⁹ I.d. 98.

years prior to the war. There were very few women before the war that had a medical degree and an even fewer number who had medical training from an institution for nursing while the vast majority had used the practices that had been passed down by family members. In fact, it was not until Florence Nightingale's work in the Crimean War that acceptance for women in the role of nursing began as Nightingale had proven that women can remain respectable while working as a nurse in war time.¹¹⁰ However, men were still convinced that women could not handle the job of nursing and women were originally barred from entering into the Civil War as medical professionals.

Women were originally barred from entering as medical professionals because the work that was required was dirty and unfit for a woman to do. As Marilyn Culpepper had stated in her book *Trials and Triumphs: Women of the American Civil War*, "Civil War nurses were trailblazers in a field heretofore strictly reserved for men. Hospital nursing was definitely not considered a "proper" occupation for "genteel" women at the time".¹¹¹ While both the Union and Confederacy began allowing women to enter into roles as medical professionals, it was only because both sides were in desperate need for people to occupy roles as medical professionals.¹¹² Hundreds of women began to enter into the medical field and even a few entered into the war effort as doctors having received their degree before the war started. These women were instrumental to the war effort as their skills in the medical field helped to save dozens of men who were injured on the battlefield. Many of these women faced discrimination and judgment for

¹¹⁰ Culpepper, Marilyn Mayer. *Trials and Triumphs : Women of the American Civil War*. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1991. Pg. 316.

¹¹¹Id. 315.

¹¹² U.S. Army Heritage and Education Center. (n.d.). *Women Nurses in the Civil War*. Women nurses in the Civil War. Retrieved January 31, 2022, from https://ahec.armywarcollege.edu/exhibits/CivilWarImagery/Civil_War_Nurses.cfm#:~:text=At%20the%20beginning%20of%20the,Army%20nurses%20in%20June%201861.

their role. Some women, such as Mary Walker, did receive praise from her colleagues and male patients for her involvement as she had proved herself as a capable physician even to be on par with her male colleagues.

They were certainly under greater scrutiny because unlike female soldiers and spies, their role was not to impersonate someone. The female medical professionals were to be seen solely for their skills and often their skills were overlooked because of their gender. That is why their role in the war is so important, because they were challenging the gender roles of the 1800s by entering into a male dominated role when without any disguise or deceit to make it easier for them to assimilate into the role. The two women this paper will highlight will be Dr. Mary Walker who was one of the first female physicians in the Union army and Ada W. Bacot who was a Confederate nurse. Both women challenged the gender roles of the 1800s with their involvement in the war and while their original intention in the war was to help the soldiers they had inadvertently proved that women can enter and work in the same spaces as men during war time.

Mary Edwards Walker (1832-1919)

Another doctor that volunteered to join the Union army was Mary E. Walker. Walker was born on November 26th, 1832 in Oswego Town, NY.¹¹³ She was raised in a well off family as her parents encouraged her and her siblings to be independent and allow for free-thinking as they were staunch abolitionists.¹¹⁴ Her father read medical books and left them throughout the house, combined with her passion with the women's

¹¹³ Harris, Sharon M. *Dr. Mary Walker an American Radical, 1832-1919*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2009. Pg 1.

¹¹⁴ Scroggins, Eloise. "Walker, Mary Edwards (1832-1919)." *An Encyclopedia of American Women at War: From the Home Front to the Battlefields*, 2013. Pg 583.

suffrage movement happening in Seneca Falls she dreamt of becoming a doctor.¹¹⁵ It was clear from her early life that her family highly encouraged her to speak her mind and be an agent of change which went against the wallflower persona women were to hold in nineteenth century society. After her formative years being taught with her siblings, she was then educated at the Falley Seminary in Fulton, New York.¹¹⁶ When her education there was done she began teaching in Minetto, New York and only took the position to raise money to send herself to medical school to pursue her dreams as a doctor.¹¹⁷ She was soon accepted into Syracuse Medical College and graduated in 1855 with her medical degree as she was also given the certificates necessary to practice medicine and surgery in New York State.¹¹⁸

After receiving her degree, Walker still was determined to advance the stances for women by advocating for dress reform and even writing in *The Sybil* which was a journal dedicated to dress reform as well as other social movements that were for the advantages of women. While writing in *The Sybil* and advocating for dress reform, she continued to practice as a doctor up until the beginning of the Civil War. Before the war had even begun she was an advocate for social change for women and certainly challenged the gender roles of the 1800s by advocating for women to wear clothing other than dresses as well as advocating for women to have a more prominent stance in the public sphere. When the Civil War had begun, Walker wanted to aid in the conflict in any way that she could, soon realizing that the best skills she could offer to the Union

¹¹⁵ I.d. 584.

¹¹⁶ Harris, Sharon M. *Dr. Mary Walker an American Radical, 1832-1919*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2009. Pg 7-8.

¹¹⁷ I.d. 7-8.

¹¹⁸ I.d. 12.

army would be her medical skills. She had closed her private practice and went to the Union army to work as a physician, going against the preferred ideal for female physicians to take on the role of nurses in the army.¹¹⁹

Here I would say is the first instance of Walker challenging the gender roles of the 1800s with her work in the war. It was expected for female physicians to offer their services as a nurse rather than a doctor. Even though there was still contention for female nurses in the military, it was more acceptable than for there to be female doctors as the title of physician has high authority in army hospitals. Yet, because the physicians were women, they would be in the occupation of nurses because of the belief that women could not handle the duties associated with being a physician. Walker, nevertheless, went to the Union army requesting to be a physician and was denied due to her gender and because of her advocacy for dress reform.¹²⁰

She soon found work as a volunteer surgeon after her dismissal from the Secretary of War and was performing her tasks of treating patients. When Dorothea Dix, the Superintendent of Army Nurses in the Union army, had visited the hospital Walker was working at she was displeased that Walker was treating the soldiers because she was “attractive”, this being a concern many doctors had towards female nurses at the time.¹²¹ However, her attractiveness nor her status as a woman in the hospital deterred the soldiers that she treated as they treated her with the same respect that they would a male physician. As Walker had stated in her reminiscence with the Union army, “[a]s soon as the soldiers learned of my being a physician they were very much pleased, and

¹¹⁹ I.d. 31.

¹²⁰ I.d. 32.

¹²¹ I.d. 34.

whenever they felt worse in the night so that they wished to have a surgeon called I was the one that was sent for".¹²² Although Walker held the same title as the other male physicians, she was given the same respect as them which was surprising as a woman. Due to the treatment female physicians were given by the government, it would be easy to assume that they were also treated terribly by the patients. However, Walker continued to uphold the duties of her position and thus proved herself to her superiors.

Other surgeons had commented on her skills such as the assistant surgeon in charge of the Providence Hospital in Rhode Island who had written on Walker's behalf praising her as a "intelligent" and "judicious" physician.¹²³ She provided medical care and performed surgeries despite being under fire and performed the duties necessary to her job. However, because of her status as a woman she was still not treated the same as her male colleagues by governmental officials and was still underpaid by them. It would have been easy for her male colleagues to ignore her treatment as it did not directly affect them, however that was not the case as the chief surgeon had Walker made his unofficial assistant surgeon even though she had not been appointed to the position, even going so far as to offer part of his salary as compensation.¹²⁴ The reason I am highlighting how her male colleagues had reacted to her is because they did not focus on the fact that she was a woman. They respected her skills as a surgeon and focused on that rather than her status as a woman.

¹²² "Mary Edwards Walker Papers", "Reminiscences 'Incidents Connected with the Army'", n.d. 28: L: 1, Box #4, Folder #8, Syracuse University Library (Manuscript Collections). Pg 2.

¹²³ "Mary Edwards Walker Papers", "Letters - 1861", Dec. 11th, 1861. 28: L: 1, Box #1, Folder #9, Syracuse University Library (Manuscript Collections).

¹²⁴ "Mary Edwards Walker Papers", "Reminiscences 'Incidents Connected with the Army'", n.d. 28: L: 1, Box #4, Folder #8, Syracuse University Library (Manuscript Collections).pg. 2-3.

Although she had been taken seriously as a doctor in the hospital as well as earning respect from her fellow doctors and patients, her medical opinion was overruled especially with the influx of patients that would enter the hospital due to illness or injury. An example of this would be she had advocated against amputating a patient's limb as it was only a gash but she would have been banned from the hospital and no longer work there.¹²⁵ Understanding that there was still a hierarchy of power, she simply applied the antiseptic and helped to remove the limb from the patient. However, she was emboldened from that case as she sought to ensure that patients would not have their limbs removed if it was not medically necessary.¹²⁶ Even though that seems an obvious conclusion for a surgeon she was directly questioning another physicians' medical advice. Not only was that bold to do in the medical community but even more so as a woman to come out and state that when women were not accepted as physicians was an act of bravery. She continued to fight for the rights of her patients even when they were in direct contradiction with her male colleagues. Walker remained in the Union army as a physician and at the end of the war took on the role of an activist as she fought for female nurses to have pensions as well as for male soldiers who were going to be denied by the Union army.¹²⁷ After the war she was dedicated to the dress reform movement and continued to fight for this until her death in 1919.

Walker had challenged the gender roles of the 1800s not only because of her occupation as a doctor but also by fighting against the ideas of what a physician was in the Civil War and in the Union army. Walker fought for a place in the Union army and

¹²⁵ I.d. 5.

¹²⁶ I.d. 5.

¹²⁷ Harris, Sharon M. *Dr. Mary Walker an American Radical, 1832-1919*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2009. Pg 71.

did not stand down when she was challenged by the male physicians and governmental officials. Even though that was not her goal when joining the Union army, she had inadvertently done so by entering into a male dominated space and unabashedly remained in that space and her work did not go in vain.

Ada Bacot (1832-1911)

Lastly, this section ends talking about the Confederate nurse Ada Bacot. Bacot was born on December 31st, 1832 into a wealthy South Carolina plantation family.¹²⁸ Bacot was given a privileged life as she was formally educated with a governess and then was sent to St. Mary's Academy in Raleigh, North Carolina.¹²⁹ There is not much known about her early life until she married her second cousin Thomas Wainwright Bacot Jr. in 1851 and Thomas had bought a plantation for them in South Carolina.¹³⁰ By the time it was 1860, Bacot had lost her husband and both of her children and was feeling alienated from her family, in particular her brother Peter whom she was closest to.¹³¹ The war had begun and she became Vice President of a society dedicated to the aid of Confederate soldiers where she and other women organized sending cloths and other goods to the front lines for Confederate soldiers.¹³² This was the kind of duties that women on the home front would contribute to the war effort. However, she craved to show any support for the Confederacy and so she went to Virginia to join a hospital as a nurse as it was a "suitable job" for Confederate women during the war.¹³³ While

¹²⁸ Bacot, Ada. *A Confederate Nurse: The Diary of Ada W. Bacot 1860-1863*. University of South Carolina Press. 1994. Pg 2.

¹²⁹ I.d. 2.

¹³⁰ I.d. 4.

¹³¹ I.d. 4-5.

¹³² I.d. 46.

¹³³ I.d. 12.

nursing was a new field for women to join, it was acceptable in society for women to work for the war effort in that capacity as they were not involved with the fighting and politics surrounding the war effort. Also, they would perform certain caring duties that match with the ideas of how women were to act in society.

Bacot began her career as a nurse at Monticello January 27th, 1862, and soon went into the role of caring after the wounded soldiers. Bacot had described that her roles with them entailed bringing them food and water as well as staying by their side to comfort them.¹³⁴ Although these characteristics are reminiscent of characteristics that women held in the private sphere, it is the act of the role that Bacot held that was remarkable. It was remarkable for her to serve as a medical professional without any prior knowledge or education in it as well as supporting the doctors on staff. She cared in particular for Dr. McIntosh who became ill during the war and she helped nurse him back to health. She continued with her role of taking care of the other soldiers as when they were transported to the hospital she was working at that she would change their clothes, bathe them and would assist the doctor in treating their wounds before she would dress their wounds.¹³⁵

These were duties that she would repeat caring after both the doctors and the patients. This was not an easy task as she often was taking care of soldiers and other personnel from sunup to late at night. Bacot described the exhaustion that came with working as a nurse as she would look after tens of patients running around and ensuring that soldiers were not just receiving proper medical care but also were

¹³⁴ I.d. 79.

¹³⁵ I.d. 102.

comforted and cared after.¹³⁶ She often would get sick and run-down taking care of these men but she continued on with her tasks and did not stop performing them despite how she felt. Once again, proving that women were not weak in handling the roles of a war time nurse. Men had believed that these women could not handle the tasks of war time as they would not be able to rest and would be shown gruesome images of mangled men. Yet, Bacot had simply put on a brave face and continued on with her work as her duty first and foremost was for the Confederacy.

Many of Bacot's letters are about her day-to-day life and her treatment towards the soldiers in the hospital. She does however make political stances in her diary entries as believes in the institution of slavery and that Black people are inferior to white people. Bacot also held very strong beliefs on a woman's role and what their role should be in the Civil War. Bacot had stated in one of her letters that women should only receive protection if they behave how a woman should behave.¹³⁷ In other words, women should remain in the confines of the gender roles of the 1800s by remaining docile to men and not stepping outside of that ideal. While the women that have been discussed in this paper have not been as vocal politically, they have not been as outspoken on the behavior of women or role in the war. This is most likely due to the fact that Bacot was a white upper-class woman in the Confederacy, and she would have been raised in aristocratic southern culture. Thus, she would have wanted to uphold the ideals that existed for women at the time.

¹³⁶ I.d. 100.

¹³⁷ I.d. 96.

Bacot's time as a Civil War nurse came to an end in 1863 as she remarried Thomas Clarke until he was killed in 1864 and she then married his brother James.¹³⁸ She had moved with him and their children to a plantation in South Carolina where they remained until her death in 1911. While Bacot had not been as progressive as the other women in this paper when it came to the advances for women, her role in the war certainly challenged those gender roles simply by holding the job she had and continuing her work as a nurse despite the obstacles of men, sickness and the battle. She believed women had a certain role to hold in society but in the end her involvement challenged what it meant to be a woman and how women were to act especially in war time.

It would be redundant to state how important medical professionals were to the Civil War effort in both the South and the North. Without medical professionals such as physicians and nurses the casualties from the war would have greatly increased and the outcome of the war would have been even more of a travesty. Regardless, they pushed past the gender roles of the 1800s as they held predominantly male roles in the war. Other historians agree as Nina Silber had stated, "the vast majority of Civil War nurses and aid activists managed to stretch the boundaries of acceptable behavior for women like themselves".¹³⁹ It was due to their work in the Civil War that pushed the idea that women could both hold traditionally male dominated occupations and work alongside men. Their work in the war made it more acceptable for women to enter into the medical field as well as for women to have an education to enter into those fields.

¹³⁸ I.d. 184.

¹³⁹ Clinton, Catherine, and Nina Silber. *Battle Scars: Gender and Sexuality in the American Civil War*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006. Pg 106.

The Women in the Camps

There was one battlefield role that was largely accepted by the military leaders and that was camp women. These women went by many names such as camp women, vivandieres, Daughters and Mothers of the Regiment but their main role was to care for the soldiers of the regiment that they followed. Their duties would entail cooking, feeding, cleaning and even helping the wounded soldiers of the regiment. Their duties fell into place with the duties that were expected of a wife and mother and so that raises the question of how were these women different from those that remained on the home front? Why are they included with women on the battlefield when they have the same roles as women that were on the home front? While they were not on the battlefield as soldiers or exchanging important information their role in the war was critical as they ensured that the soldiers, commanding officers and medical professionals in the camps were well taken care of. While their role may be seen as “domestic” and not groundbreaking it was a necessary role for the armies and these women gained respect for the work they did for the soldiers.

It does not help that historians, particularly male historians, have contributed to the dismissal of the importance camp followers were to the Civil War. Richard Hall in his book *Women on the Civil War Battlefield* may have a dedicated section to camp followers but he does not paint them in a flattering light, “In all likelihood most were only parade-ground ornaments before the regiments left training camp and headed for the front lines”.¹⁴⁰ While there were certainly women who most likely did not have an important role in the regiment, to make a general statement that most of these women

¹⁴⁰ Hall, Richard. *Women on the Civil War Battlefield*. Modern War Studies. Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2006. Pg 27.

held an “ornamental” role in the regiment is not only sexist but heartbreaking. Although these women were not on the battlefield, they held an important role as they helped to ensure the survival of the regiment and without them it is possible that neither side would have been as successful.

Unfortunately, there is little research done on these women as there is little sources confirming their existence let alone personal accounts that describe their experience in the war such as our other heroines. There are a lot of theories as to why that is the case but it is most likely because they did not believe their role in the war was vital as they were taking care of the soldiers just as they would their family back on the home front. Massey believed that it was because their records were most likely destroyed or kept with family secrets.¹⁴¹ Regardless, their story deserves to be discussed. Thus, this story will be highlighting the work of Susie King Taylor who was a camp follower with the 1st South Carolina Volunteer regiment.

Susie King Taylor (1848-1912)

Susie King Taylor was one of the few African American women to keep a detailed memoir of their involvement in the war titled *Reminisce of my life in camp with the 33d United States colored troops* that she had published in 1902. This is most likely since Black people were discouraged from learning how to read and write while Taylor was fortunately taught how. Due to this, historians have a detailed account of Taylor’s experience in the war because she had this ability. Most black women, especially during the Civil War, were not addressed by their name as Ella Forbes had dictated in her book

¹⁴¹ Massey, Mary Elizabeth. *Women in the Civil War*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994. Pg 76.

African American Women During the Civil War many black women were addressed by their race or the name of their husband.¹⁴² In some cases, they were not addressed at all and their accounts are forgotten because of this. Hopefully, those accounts can be recovered and further research can be held on their service in the war.

Taylor was born into slavery on August 6th, 1848 in Liberty County, Georgia.¹⁴³ She was born into slavery on the Grest farm where her mother worked in the house as a waitress for the Grest family.¹⁴⁴ Taylor spoke highly of the matron of the Grest family, Mrs. Grest, and how she treated her family nicely and allowed the children to climb on her bed until her husband came home and the children would have to lay on the floor.¹⁴⁵ Due to the slave law in Georgia, Taylor and her siblings were raised by their grandmother in Savannah and they were taught how to read and write by a free woman who was a friend of Taylor's grandmother.¹⁴⁶ Her grandmother was very adamant on Taylor and her siblings having the ability to read and write and would often ask people in secret to help teach them as it went against Georgia state law at the time. In 1862, Taylor traveled with her uncle's family to the Georgia Sea Islands where she established a small school under Union occupation.¹⁴⁷ While she was there, she was enlisted as a laundress for the soldiers in the 1st South Carolina Volunteers camp in Beaufort, South Carolina where she met her husband Edward King who was a sergeant in the regiment.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴² Forbes, Ella. *African American Women During the Civil War*. New York: Routledge, 1998. Pg 38.

¹⁴³ Taylor, Susie King. *Reminiscences of My Life in Camp with the 33d United States Colored Troops, Late 1st S. C. Volunteers*. Boston, 1902. <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/007673481>. Pg 24

¹⁴⁴ I.d. 24.

¹⁴⁵ I.d. 24.

¹⁴⁶ I.d. 27.

¹⁴⁷ Harper, Judith E. *Women During the Civil War an Encyclopedia*. New York: Routledge, 2004. 368.

¹⁴⁸ I.d. 368.

Taylor was hired as a laundress for the regiment but she took on additional roles in the regiment as the war continued on. Taylor ensured that the soldiers had food, blankets, tobacco and other supplies not only to guarantee the survival of the soldiers but to bring them comfort in the regiment. Taylor also had to organize and guarantee that the soldiers had all of their equipment and that they were not damaged.¹⁴⁹ She was also charged with cleaning their guns and muskets and filling them with gunpowder so if they were under attack they would be ready to fight.¹⁵⁰ Although this may seem trivial, Taylor was charged with making sure these men were able to fight and there would be no hindrance in their capabilities to do so. Not to mention, she was not trained to do these jobs and learned while she was with the regiment. Taylor also had no previous knowledge as a nurse but it was soon a job she had taken while moving with the regiment. She looked after the men in the regiment that had common diseases such as varioloid.¹⁵¹ She cared for the sick men and the doctors often cooked them food. Even though this role falls into line with the roles women held in society, she was under extraordinary circumstances that made her duties as a laundress and nurse in the regiment more difficult. She was often shot at by Confederate forces as she was a part of the regiment and due to her living quarters were near the Colonel's, she feared that she would be killed as a casualty.¹⁵²

Part of Taylor's job was also spent caring for the doctors that were working on patients and ensuring that they were well taken care of. Similar to women mentioned in

¹⁴⁹ Taylor, Susie King. *Reminiscences of My Life in Camp with the 33d United States Colored Troops, Late 1st S. C. Volunteers*. Boston, 1902. <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/007673481>. Pg 60.

¹⁵⁰ I.d. 52.

¹⁵¹ I.d. 41.

¹⁵² I.d. 48.

the nurses section, she would cook for the doctors and if they were sick she would help care for them to regain their strength and health. She would also cook for the staff that were not doctors such as other regiment followers and volunteers that with the regiment.¹⁵³ Taylor took pride in her job and rarely complained in her memoir of the conditions she worked in as well as the tasks that she had to work in. Her work in the regiment did not go unnoticed as she was complimented by the soldiers and commanding officers in the regiment with a group of men saying to Taylor, “we know that, you were the first woman we saw when we entered camp, and you took an interest in us boys ever since we have been here, and we are very grateful for all you do for us”.¹⁵⁴ These men were far from home and Taylor was able to not only guarantee their survival in the regiment but offer them a comfort that helped make the days bearable for them. She challenged the ideals of gender with her role in the regiment and working in the horrendous conditions of the camp.

When Charleston was taken over by the Union army, Taylor was in charge of caring for the sick and wounded in the Confederate hub all while facing discrimination from the residents of Charleston.¹⁵⁵ Despite the hostility from the Southerners, she continued on with her work aiding the sick and wounded soldiers. Taylor was one of hundreds of women that followed regiments in the army and was crucial to the success of the regiment. Women in the regiment were tasked with caring for the soldiers whether by cooking, cleaning, organizing or caring after them as a nurse. Whilst these tasks are similar to what women had to do when they were on the home front, especially when

¹⁵³ I.d. 62.

¹⁵⁴ I.d. 58.

¹⁵⁵ I.d. 74-75.

living under a man, they often had to do those tasks under pressure when the regiment was in battle.

For Susie King Taylor, after the war joined a group of African American citizens and ex-soldiers on a steam ship heading from Savannah, Georgia to Darien, Connecticut as a trip and she continued to travel after including Beaufort in South Carolina and Florida where she was the pilot of the ship.¹⁵⁶ After traveling on the ship, Taylor and her husband relocated to Savannah, Georgia where she opened a school for African American children and she also taught older students how to read and write.¹⁵⁷ Teaching was a profession that was slowly allowing women into as teachers. While most of her students went to a free school that was opened around this time, it was still impressive for black woman to open a school in the south as well as being paid to do so. Soon after, her husband died and she went to the country to teach for a year before she returned back to Savannah and taught a night school for African American adults to learn.¹⁵⁸ Unfortunately, she was unable to keep the doors open and went into working for prosperous white families in the south whether as a laundress or as a servant.¹⁵⁹ She ended up moving up north and joined the Women's Relief Corps.¹⁶⁰ It was clear Taylor had no desire to go back to the life of a wife and mother and sought to help people. While many of her attempts did not succeed, her service was commendable as she strived to ensure others were well taken care of.

¹⁵⁶ I.d. 87-88.

¹⁵⁷ I.d. 88.

¹⁵⁸ I.d. 91.

¹⁵⁹ I.d. 91.

¹⁶⁰ I.d. 95.

When compared to Belle Boyd and Loreta Velazquez, it is easy to believe that these women and their roles in the war were not as important. That their role as women of the regiment did not make an impact in the Civil War, especially in respect to the roles of gender for women as they did tasks that they would on the home front. Their role was seen as unimportant, as previously stated by Richard Hall. However, it is very clear that these women did more for the war effort than remain passive in the regiment. As seen with Taylor and the other women in the regiment, they often dealt with other tasks such as nursing or in the case of Brownell, fighting against the opposing side.

Conclusion

Not all of these women continued to have daring adventures after their days of service. Velazquez, for instance, traveled around Europe and South America after her service before settling down and marrying once again. However, there were women who were involved in the battlefield who continued to defy the odds and fight against the feminine ideals of the nineteenth century such as Walker who was a suffragette that fought for the right for women to vote as well as dress reform for women in the medical field. So many women remained active participants not only in the private sphere but the public sphere as well as they continued to defy the roles expected for them.

Their involvement in the war furthered the women's movement. Most of these women did not have the intention of challenging the gender norms of the nineteenth century with their involvement but nonetheless they did simply by their actions. By joining into the conflict of the war and taking jobs that were traditionally held by men, soldiers, spies, scouts and nurses, they had challenged the roles for women. They had entered into the public sphere and became active players in the intricacies of war. Their

roles were crucial to the war effort and often received compliments by male soldiers and commanding officers who understood that their roles were critical. Their actions alone show the changing tide that was coming with the role of women in society. Then there was the emotional aspect of women who never viewed themselves in the traditional gender role of women, Velazquez, Walker and Edmonds to name a few, that rejected the idea of being subservient to men and bending to their wills. Combining that mental aspect with the action of joining the war shows that their participation in the war challenged the idea of women in the public sphere, even if this involvement was not in outright defiance to the rules of society.

With the end of the Civil War and Reconstruction era, it was time to ignite progression back into the American people. The Suffragette movement was reignited into the women of America and some of those that helped lead the charge were women who were directly involved in the battlefield of the Civil War and advocated for women to have the right to vote. As previously stated, many of the women that have been discussed went on to social reform or defied the expectations of women to remain at home and care for their children while their husbands worked. They advocated for the rights of women, people of color, veterans of the war and many other minority groups. These women were emboldened by their experience to enact change whether for themselves or for others. Both groups of women are remarkable. They withstood extraordinary circumstances to fight in the war whether because they craved adventure or felt a sense of duty they challenged the roles that were expected for them and worked alongside men for either the Union or the Confederacy. They proved to be just as capable as men and in some cases, greater than them.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Bacot, Ada. *A Confederate Nurse: The Diary of Ada W. Bacot 1860-1863*. University of South Carolina Press. 1994.

Belle Boyd, "Belle Boyd in Camp and Prison Vol. I," Documenting the American South (The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1998),
<https://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/boyd1/boyd1.html#boyd1-1>.

Belle Boyd, "Belle Boyd in Camp and Prison Vol. II," Documenting the American South (The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1998),
<https://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/boyd2/menu.html>

Edmonds, Sarah. Emma, E. *Nurse and Spy in the Union Army: The Adventures and Experiences of a Woman in Hospitals, Camps, and Battle-Fields*. W. S. Williams & Company, Hartford, Connecticut. 1864.

"Mary Edwards Walker Papers", "Reminiscences 'Incidents Connected with the Army'", n.d. 28:
L: 1, Box #4, Folder #8, Syracuse University Library (Manuscript Collections).

Taylor, Susie King. *Reminiscences of My Life in Camp with the 33d United States Colored Troops, Late 1st S. C. Volunteers*. Boston, 1902.
<https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/007673481>.

Velazquez, Loreta Janeta. *The Woman in Battle : A Narrative of the Exploits, Adventures, and Travels of Madame Loreta Janeta Velazquez* New York: Arno Press, 1972.

Wakeman, S. R., & Burgess, L. C. (1994). *An uncommon soldier: The Civil War Letters of Sarah Rosetta Wakeman, Alias Private Lyons Wakeman, 153rd Regiment, New York State Volunteers*. Minerva Center.

Secondary Sources

Blanton, DeAnne, and Lauren M. Cook. *They Fought like Demons: Women Soldiers in the American Civil War*. Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2005.

Cleave, Kendra. "Women's Social Movement, 1800-1869." *Encyclopedia of American Social Movements*, 2013.

"Civil War Begins." U.S. Senate, November 30, 2021.

https://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/minute/Civil_War_Begins.htm#:~:text=At%204%3A30%20a.m.%20on,beginning%20of%20the%20Civil%20War.

Culpepper, Marilyn Mayer. *Trials and Triumphs: Women of the American Civil War*. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1991.

Eggleston, Larry G. *Women in the Civil War: Extraordinary Stories of Soldiers, Spies, Nurses, Doctors, Crusaders, and Others*. Jefferson, N.C: McFarland, 2003.

Forbes, Ella. *African American Women During the Civil War*. New York: Routledge, 1998.

Gansler, L. L. (2005). *The Mysterious Private Thompson: The double life of Sarah Emma Edmonds, Civil War Soldier*. Free Press.

Hall, Richard. *Women on the Civil War Battlefield*. Modern War Studies. Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2006.

Harper, Judith E. *Women During the Civil War an Encyclopedia*. New York: Routledge, 2004

Peg A. Lamphier, and Rosanne Welch. 2017. *Women in American History: A Social, Political, and Cultural Encyclopedia and Document Collection [4 Volumes]*. Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO.

<https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=1447096&site=ehost-live>.

Massey, Mary Elizabeth. *Women in the Civil War*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994.

Oates, Stephen. B. *A Woman of Valor: Clara Barton and the Civil War*. (The Free Press. New York, NY. 1994.)

Righthand, Jess. "The Women Who Fought in the Civil War." Smithsonian.com. Smithsonian Institution, April 7, 2011. <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/the-women-who-fought-in-the-civil-war-1402680/>.

Scroggins, Eloise. "Wakeman, Sarah Rosetta [Lyons Wakeman] (1843-1864)". An Encyclopedia of American Women at War: From the Home Front to the Battlefields, 2013.

Scroggins, Eloise. "Edmonds (Seeyle), Sarah Emma [Franklin Thompson] (1841-1898)." An Encyclopedia of American Women at War: From the Home Front to the Battlefields, 2013.

"Secession, United States." Library of Congress. Accessed February 1, 2022.

https://www.loc.gov/rr/geogmap/placesinhistory/archive/2011/20110314_secession.html

#::~text=On%20December%2020%2C%201860%2C%20the,in%20the%201891%20Atl
as%20to.

Smith-Rosenberg, Carroll. *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* 1st ed.
New York: A.A. Knopf, 1985.

Smyth, Jacquie. "Transcending Traditional Gender Boundaries: Defining Gender Roles
Through Public and Private Spheres" 2008.

file:///C:/Users/210034229/Downloads/9010-Article%20Text-15328-1-10-20151010.pdf

Zagarri, Rosemarie. "Morals, Manners, and the Republican Mother." *American Quarterly* 44, no.
2 (1992): 192–215. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2713040>.