
She Went to War: Indiana Women Nurses in the Civil War

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The four years of the Civil War provided unprecedented opportunities for Indiana women to expand their traditional domestic roles. As men rushed to volunteer as soldiers following the surrender of Fort Sumter, South Carolina, in April, 1861, women devised ways both to help the war cause and to survive financially. Carrying their domestic skills into the public forum, they organized soldiers' aid societies to make clothing and collect supplies that they then shipped to state supply offices or took to soldiers in southern camps. They conducted bazaars and organized benefits to raise funds. They helped needy families of soldiers by supplying them with food and winter fuel. Often, out of financial necessity, they carried on family businesses, or they took jobs that had previously been largely reserved for men.¹

Confronted with reports of widespread disease in military hospitals and camps and of neglect and chaos following battles, Indiana women also looked for ways to help the stricken soldiers. Many were inspired by Florence Nightingale, the British woman who

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¹ For contemporary accounts of Indiana soldiers' aid societies see Fort Wayne *Dawson's Daily Times and Union*, January 15, 23, 25, February 4, 23, March 1, 29, 1862, June 10, July 15, September 7, 19, 22, October 3, 31, November 30, 1864; *Indianapolis Daily Journal*, January 15, February 4, 31, 1862. Women's employment in the Indianapolis arsenal and as teachers is described in Emma Lou Thornbrough, *Indiana in the Civil War Era, 1850–1880* (Indianapolis, 1965), 166, 502. While Samuel Merrill was with the 70th Regiment, the family-owned bookstore and printing business was managed by his two sisters, Catharine and Julia, and Julia's husband, Charles Moores. Following Moores's enlistment and then death, the two sisters continued to run the business. Gisela S. Terrell, Rare Books and Special Collections librarian, Butler University (Lecture to the Catharine Merrill Club of Indianapolis, April, 1988).

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had led a corps of women nurses on the battlefields of the Crimean War only six years earlier. Some women, especially those who had worked for women's rights during the previous decades, saw the Civil War as a moral crusade, at once the climax of a long struggle to end slavery and a chance for women to prove themselves capable and equal in a man's world. Others saw nursing opportunities as a badly needed source of income. For a mixture of reasons, then, Hoosier women left their homes to try to serve in hospitals and camps.²

As hope for a quick solution to the war disappeared and as Governor Oliver P. Morton's role in helping Indiana soldiers became more sharply defined, Indiana women found themselves in a unique position. The Indiana governor's determination to care for his state's soldiers outside the national bureaucracies of the army and the United States Sanitary Commission resulted in the creation of a separate Indiana Sanitary Commission in March, 1862. In January, 1863, Morton and his sanitary commission began to appeal to women to work as nurses in military hospitals and on hospital ships sent south to care for Indiana soldiers. More than any other state agency the Indiana Sanitary Commission encouraged women to take on the risks and adventure of war.³

Paradoxically, in spite of Indiana women nurses' experiences on the battlefield, their endorsement by state authorities, and their increased public visibility, historians largely excluded them from published accounts of the conflict. In the nineteenth century Catharine Merrill's ambitious two-volume study, *Soldier of Indiana in the War for the Union*, recognized only a small number of women nurses, and William H. H. Terrell's official eight-volume report of

² By 1860 there was widespread familiarity with Florence Nightingale's books, *Notes on Nursing* and *Notes on Hospitals*, and with Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's poem in Nightingale's honor, "The Lady with the Lamp." Bessie Z. Jones, ed., "Introduction," in Louisa May Alcott, *Hospital Sketches* (1863; reprint, Cambridge, Mass., 1960), xxvi. Mary Frame Myers Thomas of Richmond, Indiana, a physician and leader of the Indiana Woman's Rights Association, wrote to Susan B. Anthony on the occasion of the meeting of the Woman's Loyal League in New York on May 14, 1863, "As the war is working out for woman a higher and nobler life while it is destined in the providence of God to free the slave, it will also bring about in a great measure the enfranchisement of women." Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Matilda Joselyn Gage, eds., *History of Woman Suffrage* (6 vols., Rochester, N. Y., 1881), II, 882. A widow with two sons in the army wrote Indiana Governor Oliver P. Morton that she was "in great need" and not able to get enough sewing to support herself. Another nursing applicant wrote that she was a thirty-seven-year-old widow made a poor woman by "adverse circumstances." Mrs. R. J. Ryman to Governor Oliver P. Morton, February 19, 1862, Oliver P. Morton Collection (Archives Division, Indiana Commission on Public Records, Indiana State Library and Historical Building, Indianapolis); Mrs. Sarah Tavenner to Morton, September 24, 1862, *ibid.*

³ See William H. H. Terrell, *Indiana in the War of the Rebellion: Vol. I, Report of the Adjutant General of the State of Indiana* (1869; reprint, Indianapolis, 1960), 394-449.

the war devoted only a single page to the services of Indiana women nurses. Terrell, in fact, mentioned only two women nurses, Hannah Powell and Asinae Martin of Goshen, singling them out because they had died while working in a smallpox hospital in Memphis, Tennessee.⁴ Recent historians, including Mary Elizabeth Massey and Ann Douglas Wood, have recognized the general resistance that women nurses met from male authorities but have failed to consider exceptions to this rule, such as Morton and his appointed agents.⁵

Contributing further to the obscurity of Indiana's pioneer nurses is the fact that few of the hundreds of biographical sketches of nurses published shortly after the Civil War include Indiana women. Brief descriptions of only eight Indiana nurses, plus the Sisters of the Holy Cross, St. Mary's Academy, Notre Dame, have been found. Of all the published personal reminiscences only two are known to mention Indiana women. Mary A. Livermore, the Chicago-based organizer and manager of the Northwest Sanitary Commission, praises the wartime nursing of the Sisters of the Holy Cross in her reminiscences, *My Story of the War*; and a New England schoolteacher-turned-nurse names Indiana women nurses whom she encountered in Nashville, Tennessee, and at Jefferson General Hospital in Jeffersonville, Indiana.⁶

More recent accounts of Indiana's Civil War nurses include studies of Eliza George of Fort Wayne and histories of two orders of Catholic sisters of Indiana. *On the King's Highway*, the history of the Sisters of the Holy Cross, gives a detailed record of the nuns' service during the war and provides biographical information for Mother M. Angela (Eliza Gillespie), director of St. Mary's Academy. Two brief histories of the Sisters of Providence, St. Mary-of-the-Woods, Vigo County, describe this order's work for four years

⁴ [Catharine Merrill], *The Soldier of Indiana in the War for the Union* (2 vols., Indianapolis, 1866, 1869); Terrell, *Indiana in the War of the Rebellion*, 443. Bettie Bates and Catharine Merrill of Indianapolis, who nursed in Kentucky during the winter of 1861-1862, are praised in Theodore T. Scribner and David Stevenson, *Indiana's Roll of Honor* (2 vols., Indianapolis, 1864, 1866), I, 541-42; Jacob Piatt Dunn, *Memorial Record of Distinguished Men of Indianapolis and Indiana* (Chicago, 1912), 254, 265-68; and John R. McBride, *History of the Thirty-Third Indiana Veteran Volunteer Infantry during the Four Years of Civil War . . .* (Indianapolis, 1900), 31. Dunn describes only one other nurse, Eliza George of Fort Wayne. Dunn, *Memorial Record of Distinguished Men*, 791-93. McBride also praises wives of officers of the 33rd Regiment: Mrs. Henderson, wife of Lieutenant Colonel James Henderson; Mrs. Hendricks, wife of Captain Isaac C. Hendricks; and Caroline Coburn, wife of Colonel John Coburn.

⁵ Mary Elizabeth Massey, *Bonnet Brigades* (New York, 1966); Ann Douglas Wood, "The War within a War: Women Nurses in the Union Army," *Civil War History*, XVIII (September, 1972), 197-212.

⁶ Sketches of the wartime experiences of Martha Baker of Concord, Tippecanoe County; Lois Dennett Dunbar of Michigan City; Elenor C. Ransom of Dearborn County; the Sisters of the Holy Cross, St. Mary's Academy, Notre Dame; Vesta M. W. Swarts, M. D., of Auburn; Mary Venard of Terre Haute; and Mary J. Watson of

at the Indianapolis City Hospital; and Ellen Ryan Jolly's comprehensive study entitled *Nuns of the Battlefield* provides further information on the nursing services of these two orders. Particularly valuable is Jolly's identification by name and birthplace of sixty-three Sisters of the Holy Cross. Finally, a volume devoted to Catharine Merrill includes a chapter on her Civil War experiences and briefly mentions other Indianapolis women who served as volunteer nurses.⁷

A few extant primary sources reveal further information about eight Indiana women Civil War nurses. Letters by and about Eliza George in Fort Wayne newspapers and in the papers of Hugh McCulloch, Abraham Lincoln's secretary of the treasury, and of Oliver P. Morton describe some of George's experiences in military and field hospitals in Tennessee and Mississippi, with General William T. Sherman's army in Georgia, and in Wilmington, North Carolina. Reminiscences and letters of Catharine Merrill's older sister, Jane Merrill Ketcham, record daily experiences of a nurse in charge of a field hospital in a female seminary building in Gallatin, Tennessee. Letters of Bettie Bates, who was an Indianapolis friend of the Merrill sisters and who worked in Tennessee and served on hospital steamers, provide insight into Bates's experiences and into those of other women who volunteered as nurses.

Indianapolis are in Mary A. Gardner Holland, comp., *Our Army Nurses: Interesting Sketches, Addresses, and Photographs of Nearly One Hundred of the Noble Women Who Served in Hospitals and on Battlefields in Our Civil War* (Boston, 1895). Linus Brockett and Mary C. Vaughn's *Woman's Work in the Civil War: A Record of Heroism, Patriotism and Patience* (Philadelphia, 1867) includes sketches of Harriet R. Colfax of Michigan City and Eliza George of Fort Wayne. In *Women of the War; Their Heroism and Self-Sacrifice* (Hartford, Conn., 1867), 483, Frank Moore mentions Dorothy Brake of Delphi, Indiana, in a sketch of two Peoria, Illinois, women who served in Memphis hospitals. Mary A. Livermore, *My Story of the War: A Woman's Narrative of Four Years Personal Experience as Nurse in the Union Army . . .* (Hartford, Conn., 1890), 204-205, 218-19. Elvira J. Powers encountered P. H. Roots and his wife, Susan C. Brown Roots; Ellen Rhodes; and Mrs. D. F. Disney, all of Connersville, in Nashville, Tennessee, in the fall of 1864. In the winter of 1864-1865 Powers worked with Ellen Rhodes at Jefferson General Hospital, Jeffersonville, Indiana. There, too, she knew Eliza Hardy of Pendleton and C. Annette Buckel, the superintendent of women nurses. Elvira J. Powers, *Hospital Pencillings: Being a Diary While in Jefferson General Hospital, Jeffersonville, Ind., and Others at Nashville, Tennessee, as Matron and Visitor* (Boston, 1866), 95, 98-99, 121, 192, 197-201.

⁷ Hilary A. Sadler, *Mother George: Fort Wayne's Angel of Mercy* (Fort Wayne, Ind., 1964); Peggy Brase Seigel, "Eliza George: Civil War Nurse," *Old Fort News*, L (No. 2, 1987), 3-8; Sister M. Eleanore, *On the King's Highway: A History of the Sisters of the Holy Cross of St. Mary of the Immaculate Conception, Notre Dame, Indiana* (New York, 1930); Ellen Ryan Jolly, *Nuns of the Battlefield* (Providence, R. I., 1927); J. F. McShane, *The Hand of Providence: A Tribute to the Civil War Nurses of the Sisters of Providence, St. Mary-of-the-Woods, Indiana* (Indianapolis, n.d.); Mary Theodosia Mug, *Lest We Forget: The Sisters of Providence of St. Mary-of-the-Woods in Civil War Service* (St. Mary-of-the-Woods, Ind., 1931); Katharine Merrill Graydon, ed., *Catharine Merrill: Life and Letters* (Greenfield, Ind., 1934).

Letters have also survived from and about Jane Graydon of Indianapolis, a nurse at Crab Orchard, Kentucky, and then at Nashville; C. Annette Buckel, physician and nursing supervisor; Adelia Carter New, one of the few Indiana women nurses known to have worked in eastern hospitals; and Sister M. Angela of St. Mary's Academy.⁸ Other primary sources include letters from women or relatives of women seeking nursing positions, a military pass issued to a female nurse by Governor Morton's Louisville agent, and a list of surgeons and nurses on board a steamship chartered to transport Indiana soldiers from Vicksburg, Mississippi. Finally, three volumes in the nine-volume *Diary of Calvin Fletcher* include references to several Indianapolis women who served as volunteer nurses.⁹

For names of Indiana women nurses the single best source is the Indianapolis *Daily Journal* during the early months of 1863. Between January and March of that year the newspaper lists 124 women nurses, frequently with their home and hospital

⁸ Eliza George's letters are in the Fort Wayne *Daily Gazette*, September 7, 30, 1864, December 18, 1865, May 5, 1866. See also Eliza George to James H. Turner, Nashville, March 22, 1864, Morton Collection; Susan Man McCulloch, Fort Wayne, to Hugh McCulloch, Washington, D. C., June 23, September 24, 1864, McCulloch Papers (Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington); Mrs. E. E. George, Wilmington, North Carolina, to Susan Man McCulloch, Fort Wayne, March 15, 1865, *ibid.* "Reminiscences of Jane Merrill Ketcham," Jane Merrill Ketcham Papers (Indiana Division, Indiana State Library, Indianapolis). Eleven letters written by Jane Merrill Ketcham to her family between December 21, 1862, and February 10, 1863, while she was nursing in Gallatin, Tennessee, are in the John Lewis Ketcham Papers (Indiana Historical Society Library, Indianapolis). Bettie Bates to Berry, February 22, 1863, Morton Collection; Bettie Bates to Mrs. Ketcham, February 25, 1863, John Lewis Ketcham Papers. Six letters of Jane Chambers McKinney Graydon convey the experiences of a sixty-year-old Indianapolis woman who worked in Nashville, Tennessee, hospitals in the winter of 1863. See Jane Chambers McKinney Graydon Papers (Indiana Historical Society Library). C. Annette Buckel to Phillip Hornbrook, December 1, 1864, Morton Collection; Buckel to William Hannaman, March 14, May 30, July 22, December, 1866, *ibid.* Adelia New to W. H. Demotte, August 12, July 24, August 22, 27, 1864, *ibid.*; Adelia New to Oliver P. Morton, February 3, 1865, *ibid.* Letters by and about Elenor Ransom include a testimonial by George O. Jobs, Indiana military agent, and T. P. Robb, the Illinois agent, August 8, 1864, *ibid.*; and Elenor Ransom to W. H. Demotte, Indiana military agent in Washington, D. C., March 21, April 6, 1865, *ibid.* Sister M. Angela (Eliza Gillespie) to Morton, April 29, May 2, 1862, *ibid.* Asahel Stone to Morton, November 7, 1861, *ibid.*; William R. Holloway to Morton, March 2, 1862, *ibid.* In a letter to her mother dated December 18, 1861, Susan E. Wallace describes the services of Mother Angela and thirty nuns, "a flock of white doves," in a Paducah, Kentucky, hospital. See Lew Wallace Papers (Indiana Division, Indiana State Library).

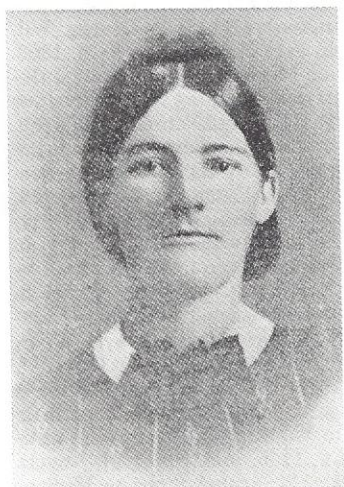
⁹ The Oliver P. Morton Collection includes seventeen letters from women or relatives or friends of women wanting positions as nurses, only one of whom, Dorothy Brake of Delphi, Indiana, is known to have served. The letter written by her brother describes Brake as a widow with one son in the army, "a devoted Christian," and "an excellent nurse." M. Simpson to Morton, Delphi, Indiana, March 31, 1862, Morton Collection; "Military pass for Miss H. McCord for use on a steamer



VESTA M. W. SWARTS



MARTHA A. BAKER



MARY J. WATSON



MOTHER M. ANGELA
(ELIZA GILLESPIE)

Reproduced from Mary A. Gardner Holland, comp.,
Our Army Nurses . . . (Boston, 1895), 144, 228, 216,
570.



HARRIET R. COLFAX



ELENOR C. RANSOM

Courtesy Special Collections Branch, U. S. Army
Military History Institute, Carlisle Barracks,
Pennsylvania.



LOIS H. DUNBAR



MARY VENARD

Reproduced from Mary A. Gardner Holland, comp.,
Our Army Nurses . . . (Boston, 1895), 294, 254.

assignment. In addition, letters and reports published in the *Daily Journal* give a unique account of the women's experiences on board steamships and in military hospitals.¹⁰ Although the Indiana Sanitary Commission apparently made no systematic attempt to record women's experiences during the war, the commission's reports are an invaluable source for names of Indiana nurses and for descriptions of their service. The agent assigned to look after Indiana soldiers in the teeming wartime hospital and supply center at Memphis, Tennessee, for example, listed thirteen Indiana women in his report of September, 1863. Reports sent to Morton during Sherman's campaign to Atlanta in 1864 describe the efforts of Eliza George in caring and cooking for thousands of wounded soldiers near Kingston, Georgia. Inspectors sent to tour eastern camps and hospitals recorded the services of Indiana women in hospitals in Washington, D. C., and at Winchester and City Point, Virginia. Furthermore, lists of supplies sent to strategic hospital centers often included the name of the woman nurse charged with distributing them.¹¹

from Louisville to Cincinnati by authority of Governor Morton," issued by Colonel Jason Ham, Indiana military agent, Louisville, Kentucky, *ibid.* Morton chartered the steamer *City Belle* to transport a medical party and supplies from Madison, Indiana, to Vicksburg, Mississippi, and back between June 25 and July 15, 1863. On board were twenty-five surgeons and nurses, including seven women: Mrs. Teal, Mrs. Stone, Miss Way, Miss Howe, Miss Bates, Mrs. Bales, and Mrs. Brown. Mrs. Stone was the wife of Asahel Stone, Morton's commissary general. It is assumed that Miss Way was Amanda Way of Winchester and Miss Bates, Bettie Bates of Indianapolis. The steamer returned with only fifteen sick and wounded soldiers. *Ibid.* Calvin Fletcher refers to the nursing of Caroline Test Coburn, Jane Graydon, Bettie Bates, Jane Merrill Ketcham, and his daughter-in-law, Emily Beeler Fletcher. Gayle Thornbrough, Dorothy L. Riker, and Paula Corpuz, eds., *The Diary of Calvin Fletcher . . .* (9 vols., Indianapolis, 1972-1983), VII, VIII, IX, *passim*.

¹⁰ Indianapolis *Daily Journal*, January 7, 29, February 6, 21, March 3, 13, 20, 1863. The issue of January 19 gives a humorous account of women nurses traveling by steamboat to Nashville, Tennessee, on the Cumberland River. Calls for women nurses were printed on January 6, 18, 1863, and a report by George Merritt, one of Morton's most assiduous agents, regarding women nurses that he accompanied to Memphis appeared March 23, 1863.

¹¹ Report of George O. Jobs, Indiana military agent, Memphis, to William Hannaman, September 21, 1864, in Indiana, *Documentary Journal* (1864-1865), part II, 175. Jobs listed the following Indiana women then serving in Memphis hospitals: Gayoso—Mrs. Brake, Miss Hovey, and Mrs. Ellen Moore; Jackson—Miss Ellen Cahill and Miss Laura Smith; Washington—Miss Harriet McCord and Miss Marshall; Union—Mrs. Lee and Mrs. Martha Ray; Adams—Mrs. Mannow, Miss Stoffer, and Miss Miller. For report on Eliza George see George Merritt to William Hannaman, Kingston, Georgia, June 4, 1864, *ibid.*, 182-83. The report of Drs. Athon, Wiley, and Riddell to Morton, May 9, 1862, praises the nursing service of Adelia New at Winchester, Virginia, and of Mrs. Caleb B. Smith, the wife of Lincoln's first secretary of the interior, at Washington, D. C., *ibid.* (1862-1863), part II, vol. II, 1227. See also H. B. Hibben to William Hannaman, July 18, 1864, *ibid.* (1864-1865), part II, 195. Indiana women nurses named as distributing supplies for the Indiana Sanitary Commission were as follows: Miss Allen, Louisville, April 10, 1862, April 11, 1863; Sister Angello [Angela], Union Hospital, Memphis, August 11, 1862; Sister St. John, Memphis, December 4, 1862; Mrs. Colonel Coburn, Franklin, Tennessee,

Finally, records of the Adjutant General's Office, the Surgeon General's Office, and the military pension files in the National Archives, Washington, D. C., document the experiences of previously identified women nurses. Alphabetical card files entitled "Hospital Attendants, Matrons and Nurses, 1861-1865" record hospital assignments from muster rolls and payrolls. Records for Union military hospitals included in "Monthly Returns of Nurses, 1861-1865" contain lists of women employed as nurses in military hospitals; and invalid pension applications filed either for women nurses or for their husbands yield invaluable biographical information for sixteen of Indiana's Civil War nurses.¹²

For a war that was fought by over two-and-one-half million citizen soldiers for over four years, even to suggest the number of Indiana women who served as paid and volunteer nurses is folly. In his final report to Morton in 1866 William Hannaman, president of the Indiana Sanitary Commission, reported that his agency sent "about two hundred and fifty" women into service as volunteer nurses between 1863 and 1865.¹³ Before and after the state's efforts to recruit and assign women nurses, however, Indiana women, like thousands of other American women, followed independent routes to nursing experiences. As early as the spring of 1861 when regiments were first organized, women accompanied soldiers to help with practical everyday chores such as laundry and supply keeping and to serve as nurses when needed. Women of all ages wanted to look after "dear relations and friends" in specific regiments. Wives accompanied officer husbands, surgeons, and privates alike. Women worked as nurses at Camp Morton, first a training camp for Indiana volunteers and then a prison for Confederate soldiers on the site of the state fairgrounds at Indianapolis.¹⁴

March 2, Nashville, March 6, 1863; Mrs. E. E. George, Pulaski, Tennessee, January 26, Chattanooga, August 29, Nashville, November 15, 1864; Miss Fussell, Louisville, March 23, 1864; Mrs. E. C. Ransom, Memphis, March 27, 1864; and Miss E. A. Hardy, Clay General Hospital, Louisville, September 15, 1864, *ibid.*, 117-55, *passim*. Reports of Morton's agents appear throughout the *Documentary Journal* from 1861 through 1865.

¹² Records of the United States Adjutant General's Office and of the Surgeon General's Office are part of Record Group 94 in the National Archives, Washington, D. C. In Records of the Adjutant General's Office, the alphabetical file "Hospital Attendants, Matrons and Nurses, 1861-1865" consists of twenty-two boxes of cards. Each card records information from a single payroll or muster roll. In Box 20, "Monthly Returns of Nurses, 1861-1865," thirty-nine women are listed as paid and volunteer nurses in four hospitals in Evansville for October, 1862. See note 24 below. Also in the Records of the Adjutant General's Office, pension files were found for Martha A. Baker, C. Annette Buckel, Harriet R. Colfax, Lois Dennett Dunbar, Eliza Boston Hardy, George W. New, Elenor C. Ransom, Maggie Stauffer, Vesta M. W. Swarts, Mary Venard, Mary J. Watson, Amanda Way, and Sarah M. Wells.

¹³ William Hannaman, president, and Alfred Harrison, treasurer, "Final Report of Officers of the Indiana Sanitary Commission, 1866, to Governor Morton, Transmitted to Secretary of State, Filed August 18, 1875," Morton Collection.

¹⁴ For information on the presence of women with early Civil War regiments see Michigan, Civil War Centennial Observance Commission, *Michigan Women in the Civil War* (Lansing, Mich., 1963), and letters in the Morton Collection.

There were, in fact, so many women with regiments in the field that Dorothea Dix, President Lincoln's superintendent of nurses, issued an order in June, 1861, that only women serving as matrons or laundresses be allowed to stay. In addition, women were to serve as nurses only at base hospitals where they would be supervised and only after being approved by Dix or one of her agents. Reinforcing Dix's attempt at control, General Don Carlos Buell, commander of the Army of the Ohio, issued an order later in 1861 that all women, regardless of position or status, leave the regiments. Subsequently, other generals issued similar bans.¹⁵

In defiance of such regulations wives of Indiana surgeons and officers remained with their husbands and nursed soldiers in field and general hospitals. Adelia Carter New of Indianapolis, wife of Surgeon George New of the 7th Indiana, accompanied her husband's regiment through West Virginia and Virginia, serving as a nurse for three years. Caroline Test Coburn, wife of Colonel John Coburn of the 33rd Indiana Regiment, frequently visited her husband in Kentucky and Tennessee and nursed him and members of his regiment when needed. In November, 1861, two other officers' wives served as nurses for the men of the 33rd, over half of whom lay sick and wounded in the remote village of Crab Orchard in southeastern Kentucky.¹⁶

Although other Indiana women were eager to work as nurses on the battlefield, responses to their offers of help were mixed. In early January, 1862, after an appeal in churches and in the Indianapolis *Daily Journal* for women to help the 33rd Regiment, five Indianapolis women found their way to the almost inaccessible village of Crab Orchard. Accompanied by volunteer surgeons and other citizens from central Indiana, the women took with them large quantities of food and supplies that had been collected as emergency relief for the soldiers. In February, 1861, however, when Indianapolis citizens had made arrangements for care for Indiana soldiers lying partially frozen near Fort Donelson on the Cumberland River in Tennessee, women were excluded. "A number of ladies proffered their services as nurses," the Indianapolis *Daily Journal* reported, "but it was thought that the physicians and male nurses could render all the assistance needed, and their services were, therefore, declined." Women persisted nevertheless,

¹⁵ Minnie Dubbs Millbrook, "Michigan Women Who Went to War," *Michigan Women in the Civil War*, 16, 20, 25.

¹⁶ See notes 8, 11, and 12 above regarding Adelia New. New is also mentioned in Merrill, *Soldier of Indiana*, II, 662. Caroline Coburn's nursing with the 33rd Indiana Regiment is described in notes 5, 9, and 11 above. Other wives of officers of the 33rd Regiment are named in note 5.

and over three hundred nurses joined rescue parties of surgeons sent south on steamships after the battle of Shiloh in April, 1861.¹⁷

While some women found it difficult to serve as nurses, women relatives of stricken soldiers were readily granted passes to travel to southern hospitals and camps as temporary nurses. Morton encouraged families to care for their soldier relatives and, at least in the early years of the war, to bring them home to recover. The widespread chaos and medical neglect resulting from the war minimized not only the social taboos that discouraged women from traveling alone but also the real risks of entering a war zone. Women such as Ellen Cathcart, who was a teacher in Catharine Merrill's school in Indianapolis and who traveled to Gallatin, Tennessee, to nurse her brother, stayed for several weeks to care for other soldiers.¹⁸

Women who tried to comply with Dix's order to work as nurses only in military hospitals discovered that the process of finding a position was confusing and often unproductive. While they knew that staffs of efficient eastern military hospitals included women nurses, they learned that nursing positions in the West were hard to come by. If they wrote to Dix in Washington, she advised them to contact the Western Sanitary Commission in St. Louis or the Northwestern Sanitary Commission in Chicago. Provided that the applicant met certain criteria, the sanitary commissions' agents issued the woman a nursing certificate. A nursing assignment, however, was available only if a hospital physician requested women nurses. If, however, potential nurses wrote to Morton to ask his advice, he and his agents recommended that they apply directly to the supervising physician at the desired hospital.¹⁹

Nursing schools had not as yet been established at the time of the Civil War; therefore, women nurses in military hospitals were not required to have any formal training. Their selection was based on age, appearance, and reputation. The woman applicant

¹⁷ Indianapolis *Daily Journal*, January 7, February 18, 1862. In her biography of Catharine Merrill, Katharine Merrill Graydon names Bettie Bates, Mrs. John Coburn, Mrs. Calvin Fletcher, Jr., Mrs. Jane C. Graydon, and Mrs. J. L. Ketcham as the women who first volunteered to nurse the 33rd Indiana Regiment. Graydon, *Catharine Merrill*, 306n. Other sources suggest that Caroline Coburn was already in Kentucky prior to the call for help. Reports of women nurses sent to Pittsburg Landing or Shiloh are inconclusive. The Indianapolis *Daily Journal* for April 10, 1862, reported that "some forty or fifty nurses" were to leave Evansville on a chartered steamship the next day. Oliver P. Morton's biographer indicated that the governor recruited a force of sixty surgeons and three hundred nurses to care for the sick and wounded. William Dudley Foulke, *Life of Oliver P. Morton* (2 vols., Indianapolis, 1899), I, 165.

¹⁸ Graydon, *Catharine Merrill*, 314.

¹⁹ Geneva Kebler, "A Cool Hand for the Fever'd Brow," *Michigan Women in the Civil War*, 90-91; Asahel Stone, commissary general, to Misses Kellogg and Sanderson, July 24, 1862, James B. Plessinger Papers (Indiana Division, Indiana State Library).

must be at least thirty years old, plain in appearance, plain in dress. Moreover, she needed to convince the agent of the sanitary commission that she was physically and morally equal to the inevitable tests of her strength. Women were advised, too, to carry with them letters of recommendation from their local soldiers' aid society, from their pastor, and, if possible, from a physician acquainted with their skills as home nurses.²⁰

Even for those women certified by sanitary commission officials, there were very few openings. Although military hospitals along the Ohio River and in St. Louis were often overflowing with sick and wounded soldiers, many physicians preferred to follow the military custom of using convalescent soldiers as nurses. In the hospitals that she visited in the winter of 1862, Mary A. Livermore, a leader of the Chicago-based Northwest Sanitary Commission, found that "the greatest prejudice" was "against Protestant women nurses." If medical authorities allowed any women nurses at all, they preferred Catholic sisters, although the nuns, too, were sometimes shunned. As historian Ann Douglas Wood has pointed out, women nurses often had to fight their own war within a war with male medical and military authorities.²¹ Still, a small number of Indiana women gained entry to military hospitals. Tested by the hardships and horrors of war, they convinced medical authorities of the invaluable role that women could play.

Harriet Reese Colfax, a thirty-one-year-old widow from Michigan City, survived two-and-one-half years of arduous nursing in St. Louis hospitals and on hospital steamships. Leaving her young children with her mother, Colfax applied to James Yeatman, president of the Western Sanitary Commission, in October, 1861, and was immediately assigned to the St. Louis City Hospital. Here she was one of a small number of women nurses charged with caring for the thousands of soldiers wounded at the battle of Fort Donelson and suffering from diseases brought on from overexposure. In the spring of 1862 she went out on hospital steamships sent by the Western Sanitary Commission to care for soldiers wounded in the battles for Memphis and at Shiloh. The following summer Colfax began a year of service at Jefferson Barracks, a convalescent hospital outside St. Louis. Throughout her service she was supported

²⁰ Rena Littlefield Miner of Sturgis, Michigan, was repeatedly turned down by William Hannaman, president of the Indiana Sanitary Commission, for being too young. Finally, he accepted her on the condition that she be accompanied by six older women. When the time came for her to report to Indianapolis, however, only one of the older women was still willing to serve as a nurse. Nevertheless, Hannaman assigned Littlefield to a Louisville hospital. Holland, *Our Army Nurses*, 139-41.

²¹ Livermore, *My Story of the War*, 224; Sister M. Patrick (McGockin) and Sister M. Anthony as quoted by Sister M. Eleanore, *On The King's Highway*, 239, 251-52; Wood, "The War within a War," *passim*.

and encouraged by her medical supervisors, one of whom wrote, "No female nurse . . . was more universally beloved and respected, than was Mrs. Colfax."²²

Another young Indiana widow who was certified by the Western Sanitary Commission in the early months of the war and who gained wide acceptance was Lois Dennett, also from Michigan City. In November, 1861, at the age of thirty-two she joined her friend Harriet Colfax at the City Hospital in St. Louis. During that first winter she shared responsibilities with Colfax for caring for as many as three hundred soldiers at a time following the battle of Fort Donelson. In the spring of 1862 when military hospitals were first being established in southern Indiana, she wrote Morton asking his help in getting assigned to a hospital "at Evansville or some other place where nurses are wanted." Although it is not known if the governor influenced her assignment, she was soon placed in charge of an Evansville hospital, acting, in her words, as both "commanding officer and nurse" and as a surgical assistant. In addition, she was given five other hospitals to look after, no small responsibility considering the thousands of patients that were brought to Evansville during the next two years while she remained in service there.²³

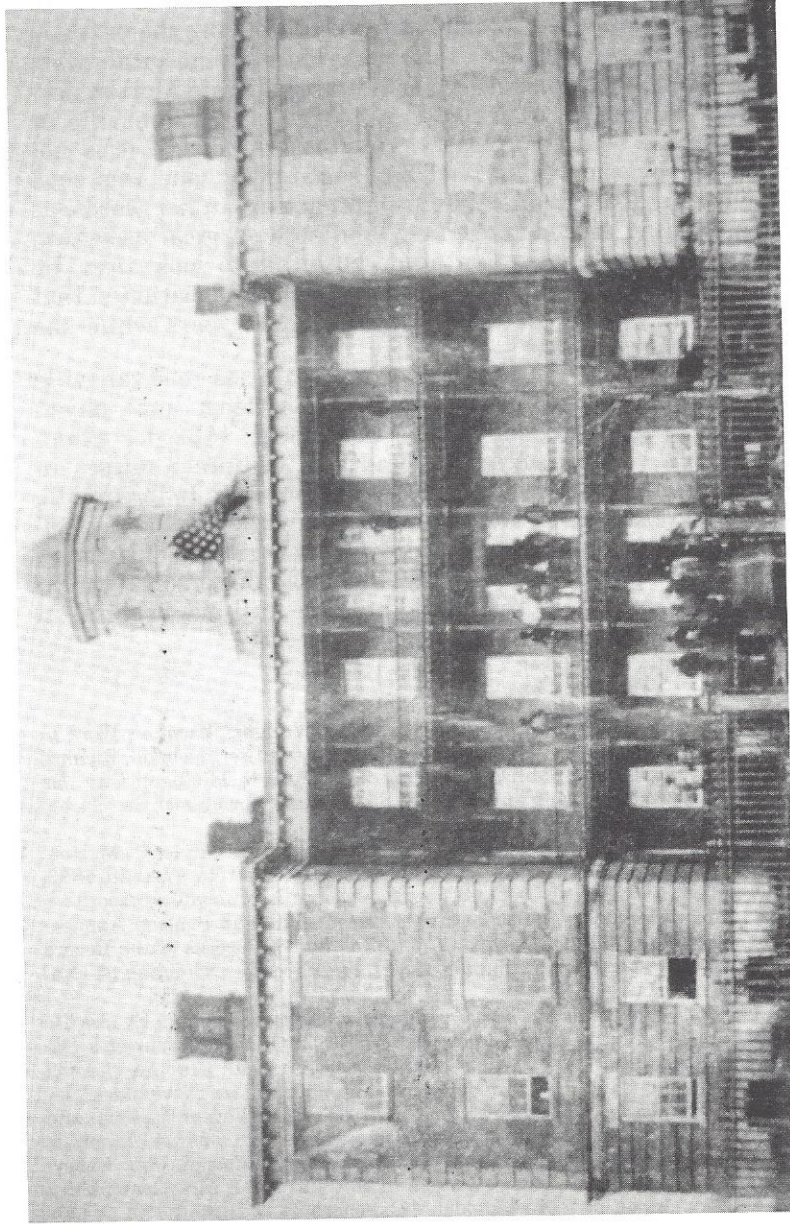
Other women also found nursing opportunities in Evansville military hospitals, which fact suggests that at least some physicians there supported women nurses. In October, 1862, for example, thirty-eight women served as paid and volunteer nurses in Evansville at a time when neither New Albany nor Jeffersonville hospitals employed women nurses. According to available pay records, this selective pattern of employment continued through 1863. Only in February, 1864, when the large Jefferson General Hospital opened in Jeffersonville, did another military hospital in Indiana employ women nurses.²⁴

²² Quoted in "Mrs. Harriet R. Colfax," Brockett and Vaughn, *Woman's Work in the Civil War*, 397. Before his death in 1856 Harriet Colfax's first husband, Richard W. Colfax, briefly owned and published a Whig newspaper in Michigan City. He was most likely a cousin of Schuyler Colfax of South Bend, speaker of the United States House of Representatives from 1863 to 1869.

²³ Holland, *Our Army Nurses*, 295-97; Lois N. Dennett to Oliver P. Morton, April 15, 1862, Morton Collection. Dennett to William H. H. Terrell, April 26, 1862, *ibid.* On December 10, 1864, Lois Dennett married George A. Dunbar, a corporal in Company A, 3rd Iowa Infantry. Lois H. Dunbar Dennett, Invalid Pension Application, Soldier's Certificate 85127, Can No. 17469, Bundle 38, Records of the Record and Pension Office, Records of the Adjutant General's Office, Record Group 94 (National Archives).

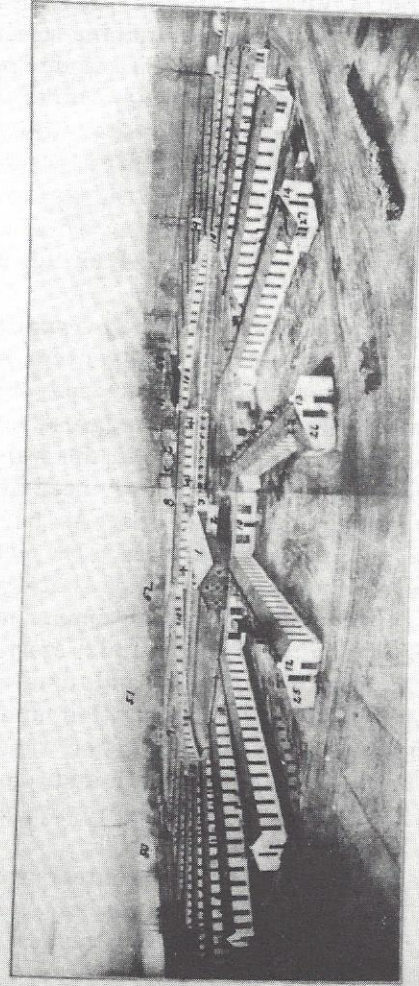
²⁴ On October 17, 1862, women listed as nurses at Hospital No. 5 in Evansville included Mary Woods, Sarah Woods, Mary J. Peck, Jane O. Brien, Henrietta Dommuss, Elissa Johnson, Parmelia Cooper, Salina Sev, Augusta Hadley, Joanna Turner, Mary Phillips, Catherine Ninnemon, Sophia Willa, Clara Newpalace, Susan Barrow, Thirsu Gusset, Sarah Patterson, Mary J. Seay, Esther Phebus, and Dora Marty. Women nurses listed as employed elsewhere in Evansville hospitals for the same time period were Margaret Kane, Margaret Gallespie, Mrs. Garey, Anna Brown, Martha Dirts, and Thuresey Gossit at Hospital No. 1; Mrs. Grote, Mary Hoover, Anna Donelander, Mrs. Kasley, and Mrs. Scherholk at Hospital No. 3; Lois H. Dennett, Celia Nagle, Kate Blanth, Louisa Blanth, Sarah Climer, Ellen Rout,

U.S. MARINE HOSPITAL
EVANSVILLE, INDIANA



Reproduced from Holland Thompson, ed., *Photographic History of the Civil War in Ten Volumes: Vol. VII, Prisons and Hospitals* (New York, 1911), 233.

Jefferson General Hospital
Landing west.



- 1 Chapel & Landing room 150 x 50
- 2 Chaplain office
- 3 Waiting room
- 4 Wardmaster 210 x 30
- 5 Kitchen - engine house - back - same as 180 x 30
- 6 Mess room - nurse sleeping apartments 175 x 50
- 7 Communion Chapel 175 x 50
- 8 Storage room - Carpenter shop - square house
- 9 Postmaster's house
- 10 Corridor outside in front

- 11 Surge, J. Ferguson in charge
- 12-13-14 Ward 24 in number 175 x 50
- 15-16-17 Ward 24 in number 175 x 50
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Although many administrators in military hospitals refused to employ women nurses, Morton in the first months of the war had already begun to depend upon Indiana women to serve as volunteer nurses in state hospitals and in the field. In May, 1861, for example, soon after Indiana's first regiments were organized, the governor asked the Sisters of Providence of St. Mary-of-the-Woods, Vigo County, to take charge of nursing and practical operations at the Indianapolis City Hospital. Until the last Indiana soldiers were mustered out of the army in July, 1865, the Sisters of Providence nursed Union soldiers and Confederate prisoners alike, winning wide respect for their kind, efficient care. In October, 1861, Morton appealed to the Sisters of the Holy Cross, St. Mary's Academy, Notre Dame, to serve as battlefield nurses. Until the end of the war eighty sisters from Notre Dame managed and served in hospitals primarily in Cairo and Mound City, Illinois, in Paducah and Louisville, Kentucky, and in Memphis, Tennessee.²⁵

Although Morton was not the only western governor to establish state offices in major military and hospital centers, send volunteer nurses on hospital ships, or support the services of Catholic sisters in hospitals, he was certainly the most aggressive and the most independent of the war governors. Early in the war frustrations over trying to equip Indiana troops had convinced him of the need to supply Indiana soldiers independently. As he and his agents visited camps and hospitals, impatience over medical incompetence and negligence reinforced his belief that systematically organized medical care should be greatly expanded. A few days after the battle of Shiloh in early April, 1862, Morton urged Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton to recruit additional surgeons for field duty. Impatient over Stanton's hesitation and fearing great losses in renewed fighting, Morton telegraphed the secretary of war on April 21 that he intended to send two additional assistant surgeons to care for the twenty-four Indiana regiments anticipating battle at Corinth, Mississippi.²⁶

Because Morton was unwilling to trust volunteer workers affiliated with the United States Sanitary Commission or an informal system of emergency relief to look after the medical needs of

Lavinia Watson, and Pamela Watson at Hospital No. 1. "Indiana: Evansville, New Albany, Jeffersonville," Box 20, "Monthly Returns of Nurses, 1861-1865," Records of the Adjutant General's Office.

²⁵ Sister M. Eleanore, *On The King's Highway*, 233-68; McShane, *Hand of Providence; Mug, Lest We Forget*.

²⁶ Terrell, *Indiana in the War of the Rebellion*, 439. Ohio and Illinois also supplemented efforts of the United States Sanitary Commission in caring for their state's soldiers. *Ibid.*, 419. The report of C. J. Woods to Morton, December 19, 1862, states that Jason Ham was then opening an Indiana military agency in Louisville and that Ohio and Illinois would soon do likewise. Indiana, *Documentary Journal* (1862-1863), part II, vol. II, 1092.

his state's soldiers, he created, in March, 1862, the Indiana Sanitary Commission and named William Hannaman, an Indianapolis businessman, as president. Hannaman then employed agents both to collect funds and supplies throughout Indiana and to make distributions to armies in the field. He appointed permanent resident agents in a dozen different hospital and supply centers to look after the many needs of Indiana soldiers. Less than a year later, in January, 1863, Hannaman made it known that among those needs were more women nurses for hospitals swollen with thousands of soldiers from General Sherman's army.²⁷

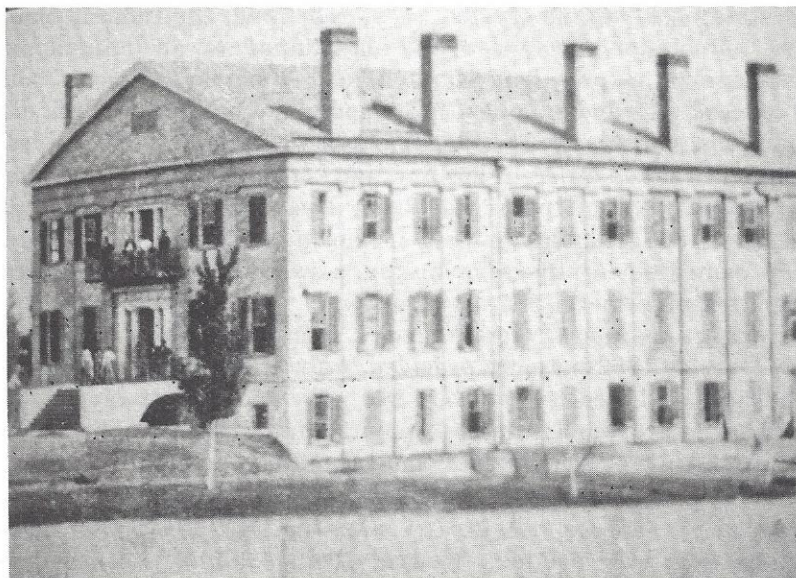
Numerous reports from Morton's agents who were on inspection tours in 1862 not only provided bitter indictments of hospital conditions and medical care but also indicated an underlying disposition toward women nurses. Agents found that both physicians and attendants often exhibited "total want of feeling and sympathy for the condition of the sick." Although adequate supplies had been provided to field hospitals set up after the Battle of Shiloh, good nurses were still needed. "Convalescent soldiers" assigned as nurses were, according to the reports, "better qualified to make subjects for hospitals than to nurse them." Another of Morton's agents concluded succinctly, "From what I have already seen I think the sick need better attention."²⁸

Beginning in January, 1863, and continuing until the end of the war, the Indiana Sanitary Commission recruited and supported women nurses together with surgeons and agents to look after Indiana soldiers in camps, in hospital centers, and on hospital ships. Some of the volunteer nurses—including Amanda Way of Winchester, a temperance and women's rights leader—served for several weeks at a time. Accompanying surgeons, they went with hospital steamships on the Mississippi River as far south as Vicksburg to care for Indiana soldiers on the return journey to northern hospitals. Other nurses volunteered to work for three months at a time in hospitals where the Indiana Sanitary Commission directed them. Many served until the end of the war or until their own health was broken.²⁹ Assignment of nurses, however, was only the

²⁷ Prior to the Civil War, William Hannaman (1806–1880) co-owned a drug business in Indianapolis with Caleb Scudder. Hannaman and Scudder also built a carding and oil mill and manufactured the first flaxseed oil in the Indianapolis area. For many years Hannaman was the director of the Indianapolis branch of the State Bank of Indiana. *Officers of Indiana University* (Bloomington, Ind., 1951), 264.

²⁸ Reports to Morton from J. S. Wilson, James H. Turner, and W. J. Elliott, May 7, June 10, 7, 1862, in Indiana, *Documentary Journal* (1862–1863), part II, vol. II, 1133, 1178, 1185. For quotations supporting women nurses see notes 41, 42, 43 below.

²⁹ For information on Amanda Way see Clifton J. Phillips, "Amanda Way," in *Notable American Women*, ed. Edward T. James (3 vols., Cambridge, Mass., 1971), III, 552–53; and Amanda M. Way, pensioner, Soldier's Certificate 927587, Can No. 19095, Bundle 2, Records of the Record and Pension Office.



McPHERSON HOSPITAL
VICKSBURG, MISSISSIPPI

Reproduced from Holland Thompson, ed., *Photographic History of the Civil War in Ten Volumes: Vol. VII, Prisons and Hospitals* (New York, 1911), 233.

first step. "These self sacrificing [*sic*] women are met at the depot or steamboat landing, and directed to their several fields of usefulness, and are encouraged and sustained in their ministrations of mercy," Hannaman reported. "So far as my knowledge extends," wrote Dr. George O. Jobes, Morton's agent in Memphis, "there is no other State and no Sanitary Commission except our own, that provides for their free subsistence and transportation to and from the hospitals; and whose agents are instructed to encourage and sustain them, and by all means in their power to contribute toward making their sacrifices of personal comfort as light as possible."³⁰

Despite support from the Indiana Sanitary Commission women nurses placed by Morton's agents sometimes found themselves in an awkward position. One such nurse wrote Hannaman from Memphis: "The other ladies are appointed by Miss Dix and have commissions from her. The Directors visited our hospital to-day and inquired by what authority we were here." That Indiana

³⁰ William Hannaman to Morton, December, 1864, in Indiana, *Documentary Journal* (1864-1865), part II, 299; George O. Jobes to Morton, January 1, 1864, *ibid.*, 327.

women nurses were able to gain official acceptance was due in large part to the efforts of a woman physician who worked with medical authorities in supervising and supporting them.³¹ Cloe Annette Buckel, a native of New York state, was a graduate of the Woman's Medical College of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia and had practiced medicine in New York City with Dr. Elizabeth Blackwell. During the first years of the Civil War, Buckel operated a health clinic for women and children in Chicago. In February, 1863, she volunteered her services to Morton and joined a group of physicians and nurses sent to establish hospitals in Memphis. That spring she served on a hospital ship sent to the Yazoo River in Mississippi to care for soldiers stricken with malaria, typhoid fever, and pneumonia. When she, too, became ill, she was forced to return home to rest, but she did not remain up north for long. In July, 1863, Morton gave Buckel responsibility for placing Indiana women nurses in the marine hospital at Vicksburg and elsewhere as needed. By the end of the year, under the authority of the United States surgeon general and Dix, she was placing nursing applicants in Louisville hospitals as well. With the opening of the large modern Jefferson General Hospital in Jeffersonville, Indiana, in February, 1864, she then instructed and supervised women nurses for each of the hospital's twenty-two wards. At the same time she supervised Indiana women nurses in Nashville and Chattanooga, Tennessee, and Huntsville, Alabama.³²

Nurses first sent out by the Indiana Sanitary Commission, like the soldiers who had rushed to volunteer, had no preparation for the hardships and horrors they met. Some, like the "ministering angels" Bettie Bates encountered in Gallatin, Tennessee, in February, 1863, gave up and went home after a few weeks, horrified by crowded and unfurnished excuses for hospitals and by physicians who treated them as nuisances. There is overwhelming evidence, however, that Indiana women had the "real 'grit'" Bates described as required of successful nurses. "It takes real 'grit' to go into one of these houses of suffering," she wrote, "to patiently and cheerfully try to turn everything into the best possible channel, looking straight at the end in view, not a moment at one's self in any way. It is not everybody who has a generous impulse who can be steadily and perseveringly self sacrificing."³³

³¹ Indianapolis *Daily Journal*, May 7, 1863.

³² For information about Cloe Annette Buckel see William Hannaman to Morton, January 2, 1865, in Indiana, *Documentary Journal* (1864-1865), part II, 79; "Final Report of Officers of the Indiana Sanitary Commission to Governor Morton, 1866," Morton Collection; U. S., Senate Committee on Pensions, "C. Annette Buckel," Senate Report 2325, 58 Cong., 2 Sess., 1903-1904 (serial set 4576); Joan M. Jensen, "Cloe Annette Buckel," in *Notable American Women*, I, 265-67.

³³ Bettie Bates to Berry, February 22, 1863, Morton Collection.

When Eliza George first asked for a nursing assignment from the Indiana Sanitary Commission in the early winter of 1863, Hannaman discouraged her because of her age. She was fifty-five years old, an age considered risky for the hardships of war. Besides, Hannaman told her, at the moment there were no assignments available for women nurses. She might, however, apply at the offices of the Northwest Sanitary Commission, in Chicago. George was not discouraged. She brought with her strong recommendations from the Fort Wayne Soldiers' Aid Society, a reputation as a capable home nurse, and like so many other women nurses, strong personal motives. Her daughter's husband, Colonel Sion S. Bass of the 30th Indiana Regiment, had died from wounds received at the Battle of Shiloh, injuries that with careful nursing might not have proved fatal.³⁴

In February, 1863, only a few weeks after her first interview with Hannaman, George received word that more women nurses were urgently needed. Leaving her home in Fort Wayne, she first served in Memphis hospitals where she helped Morton's agent look out for Indiana soldiers. Working with Mary Bickerdyke and Eliza Porter, well-known nurses for the Northwest Sanitary Commission, she established hospitals in Corinth, Mississippi, in the fall of 1863 and then at Pulaski, Tennessee, during the winter of 1863-1864. Because supplies were desperately short and railroad lines were cut, she made frequent trips back to Indiana, traveling mountain roads made almost impassable by Confederate patrols and frequent rain and snow. In the spring of 1864, together with United States Sanitary Commission workers and other Morton agents, George worked on ambulance trains sent out from Chattanooga to bring back soldiers injured in fighting under Sherman in the Georgia mountains. All through the summer until the fall of Atlanta in September, she worked in field hospitals behind the lines, often cooking and caring for thousands of men at a time. On several occasions enemy gunfire barely missed her, and she and other medical workers quickly had to move their tent hospital farther out of range. Curled up in a blanket on the ground at night, she slept within hearing of her patients and the continual drone of black refugees digging and building breastworks for cover. In the winter of 1864-1865, while Confederate General John Bell Hood made a last desperate attempt to regain Nashville, George worked in Nashville hospitals. At the end of the war she went to Wilmington, North Carolina, where eleven thousand Union soldiers from Salisbury prison stockade had been transferred. With a small corps of other medical workers she nursed the emaciated patients until

³⁴ For information on Eliza George see relevant citations in notes 7, 8, and 11 above.

CLOE ANNETTE BUCKEL



Courtesy Archives & Special Collections
on Women in Medicine, Medical College of
Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.



MARY FRAME MYERS THOMAS

Reproduced from Richmond, Indiana, *Evening Item*, August 20,
1888.

her own health was broken by typhoid fever. Despite efforts of a special physician sent by Morton, she died on May 9, almost two-and-one-half years after she had first volunteered, at a time when the nation was simultaneously celebrating military victory and mourning the death of President Lincoln.³⁵

Like Eliza George, Elenor Ransom of Dearborn County began her service as a nurse in Memphis hospitals in February, 1863. Except for short absences caused by her own illness, she served in Memphis hospitals and on hospital steamships until the fall of 1864. Assigned then to New Orleans, she was the only woman nurse in December, 1864, to work on board the steamship *North America* transporting two hundred soldiers to New York City. As Ransom told the story years later, six days out "just off the coast of Florida, the steamer was reported leaking forward. Effort was made to stop the leak, but all in vain, and there seemed no hope." Another ship laden with molasses bound for Maine answered their distress signals; but "when she came alongside, the seas were so heavy the vessels collided, and for a time it was hard to tell which vessel would go down first." Rescue boats sent out to the ship were lost in the storm. In all, 194 soldiers drowned. "... they were taken, and I was saved, which for months seemed to me such a mystery. ... For weeks this terrible scene was kept fresh in my mind by one and another inquiring for friends."³⁶

Mary J. Watson, a young woman whose husband was with the 70th Indiana Regiment in Tennessee, left her home in Indianapolis on January 6, 1863, to serve as a nurse.

After the battle of Stone River there came a call from Governor Morton for twenty-five nurses, fifty surgeons and ward masters, and a large supply of sanitary goods of every description. I was the second one to put my name on the list of nurses to go to Nashville, Tenn., to help take care of the sick and wounded in Hospital 14, which was a five-story building, a female seminary; but now full, from basement to attic of sick and wounded soldiers. There were over five hundred there at one time, so I was told. I think it was true, for every bunk was full, and men were lying in the aisle with nothing but their blankets under them, and each waiting for some poor soul to die or be sent away, so he could get a bed. That looks hard, but it is true.

³⁵ See notes 7, 8, 11, 34 above. The physician sent to care for George was Dr. William H. Wishard of Indianapolis. Merrill, *Soldier of Indiana*, II, 792. In George's letter to Susan Man McCulloch, March 15, 1865, she wrote of the urgent need for money with which to buy food and clothing for the emaciated, starving Union soldiers at Wilmington, North Carolina. She hoped that the McCullochs would "interest our Indiana people at Washington on their behalf . . ." George to Susan Man McCulloch, March 15, 1865, McCulloch Papers. For a further description of the work at Wilmington, North Carolina, see "Mrs. Harriet W. F. Hawley," in Moore, *Women of the War*, 387-96.

³⁶ Holland, *Our Army Nurses*, 511-14, describes Elenor Ransom's disastrous trip on the hospital ship *North America*. A more complete record of her nursing is in U. S., Senate Committee on Pensions, Senate Report 1791, 49 Cong., 2 Sess., 1886-1887 (serial set 2457).

I could not go up or down stairs but I would often meet the men nurses carrying some poor fellow to the dead-house. . . . I remained at the hospital from January until some time in March, when I was taken sick with typhoid fever, and had to leave for awhile. Then Governor Morton and William Hannamann sent me down to Murfreesboro, Tenn. to nurse in the field hospital in the fort. . . . When I went my husband was lying at the point of death in the fort. . . .

I drew sanitary supplies for the sick, and did everything in my power for them. I stayed with the brigade until it was ordered to the front to join Sherman in his march to the sea³⁷

Mary Venard of Terre Haute was one of fourteen women nurses who left for Nashville in early February, 1863. "I was then forty-one years of age," she wrote years later.

I was first sent to Nashville, Tenn., for three months, but stayed six. Was in the Howard High School Building, and had charge of the Diet Kitchen, but at the same time I did a great deal of nursing. . . . From Nashville I returned to my home, where I remained ten weeks; then received strict orders to go immediately to Natchez, Miss. I was in the Marine Hospital and the fort was built up around us. This was the fall after the siege of Vicksburg, and for days we expected to be attacked, and had everything in readiness to be removed at a moment's notice. . . . The surgeon in charge proposed that if we were attacked, I should leave immediately with him in the ambulance. His very kind offer I declined, telling him if I *had* to leave, it would be at the last moment; then I would run down the hill, and, if necessary, defend myself.³⁸

In July, 1864, twenty-three-year-old Vesta Swarts of Auburn tried to join her husband, David J. Swarts, an assistant surgeon with the Indiana 100th Regiment then serving with Sherman's army in Georgia.

When I reached Indianapolis I learned that communication was cut off, and that it would not be possible for me to get through. While hesitating, and wondering what I should do, Governor Morton suggested that I report in person to the Christian Commission agency at Louisville, Ky., as he thought that Annie Wittenmeyer, who was doing grand work for the soldiers, would find a place in some hospital where my work would be needed. This I decided to do, and in a few days . . . I began work at Brown U. S. General Hospital, near Louisville, Ky.

About October of the same year I was transferred to Crittenden U. S. General Hospital, at Louisville, where I remained until March 27, 1865, when being unfit for duty, on account of poor health, I was honorably discharged and returned to my home.³⁹

³⁷ Holland, *Our Army Nurses*, 217-18.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 255. Appointed by William Hannaman, Mary Venard managed a home for refugees in Indianapolis during the last year of the war. When it closed in April, 1865, she worked at a home for destitute women and then helped close Camp Morton. *Ibid.*, 254-57; Indiana, *Documentary Journal* (1864-1865), part II, 79; Mary Venard, pensioner, Soldier's Certificate 854239, Can No. 17525, Bundle No. 19, Records of Record and Pension Office.

³⁹ Holland, *Our Army Nurses*, 145. Vesta Swarts had served as principal of Auburn High School at the beginning of the Civil War, but after the war she studied medicine at the Fort Wayne Medical College, graduating in 1882. She obtained further medical training from the University of Michigan and practiced in Auburn for more than thirty-two years. Vesta M. Swarts, pensioner, Soldier's Certificate 816645, Can No. 62485, Bundle No. 6, Records of the Record and Pension Office.

Dr. Mary Thomas of Richmond, a pioneer woman physician and champion of women's rights, took supplies for Morton to Indiana soldiers at Vicksburg in the summer of 1863. En route back to Indiana she had responsibility for nursing fifty of the two hundred wounded and sick soldiers on board the steamship. One of her patients was so crazed and so violent with sunstroke that the officers tried to restrain him. Before they tied him down, Thomas took him in her charge, controlled him, and saw that he was safely forwarded to his home. For the last year of the war Thomas and her physician husband, Owen Thomas, directed a hospital for freed slaves in Nashville, Tennessee. Their two daughters served as teachers among the freedmen.⁴⁰

As indicated in their published reports, Indiana military and medical officials never regretted the Indiana Sanitary Commission's support for women nurses. After an inspection of Memphis hospitals in October, 1863, a military officer wrote to Morton, "From what I saw, I am satisfied that great advantage to the sick and wounded is derived by having lady nurses in the hospitals, as well as a large saving of sanitary supplies, and I wish to urge this upon our Sanitary Commission."⁴¹ Jobes, the Memphis agent for the Indiana Sanitary Commission, reported in January, 1864:

As auxiliaries in the discharge of the duties of this office, they [women nurses] have rendered me valuable assistance, but, to the sick and wounded soldiers in the wards, their services have been above price. Their delicate skill in the preparation of diets, their watchful attention to the slightest want, their words of sympathy and encouragement, have made the hospitals a home; and, in hundreds of instances, have almost lured the poor sufferer back from death unto life.⁴²

In his final report for the Indiana Sanitary Commission in 1866, Hannaman stated that the earlier prejudice against women nurses had greatly disappeared. Praising the service of Indiana's Civil War nurses as he had done for the past three years, he wrote, "No soldier upon the battlefield deserves more credit for bravery; none proved themselves truer patriots."⁴³

Some of Indiana's women nurses were individually rewarded with official praise from supervising surgeons, from the Indiana Sanitary Commission, and later from grateful veterans. Eliza George's Fort Wayne friends and the Indiana Sanitary Commission

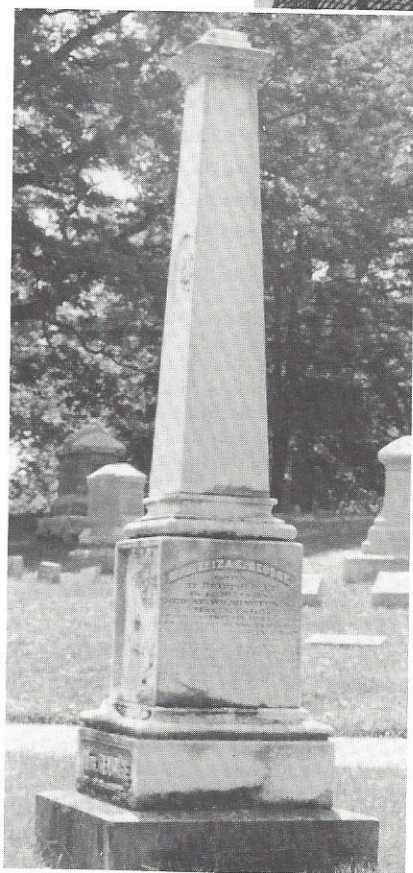
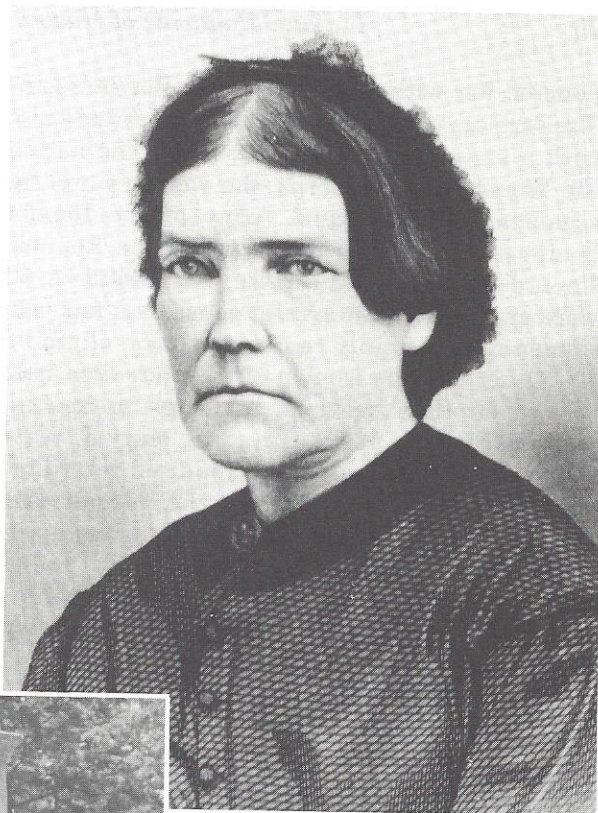
⁴⁰ Mary Thomas devoted most of the war years to collecting and delivering supplies to military camps, serving as a volunteer nurse, and, as superintendent, directing a hospital for refugees in Nashville. Florence M. Adkinson, "The 'Mother of Women,'" *Woman's Journal*, September 29, 1888.

⁴¹ Captain H. B. Hill to Morton, October 27, 1863, in Indiana, *Documentary Journal* (1864-1865), part I, 311.

⁴² George O. Jobes to William Hannaman, January 1, 1864, *ibid.*, 327.

⁴³ "Indiana Sanitary Commission Final Report of Officers, 1866," Morton Collection.

ELIZA GEORGE



Reproduced from [Catharine Merrill], *Soldier of Indiana in the War for the Union* (2 vols., Indianapolis, 1866, 1869), II, following 792.

Photograph courtesy Peggy Brase Seigel.

honored her with a statue in Fort Wayne's Lindenwood Cemetery. The services of all Catholic sisters of America were commemorated with a statue in Washington, D. C. The national headquarters of the Women's Relief Corps, the women's auxiliary to the veterans' organization; the Grand Army of the Republic; and the Terre Haute post of the Grand Army of the Republic recognized Mary Venard's outstanding service. A handful of other women nurses were granted special invalid pensions a few years before American women nurses finally received pension eligibility in 1892.⁴⁴

Other Indiana women nurses, however, received little tangible reward for their services. Although broken in health from their war experiences, many, including Mary J. Watson of Indianapolis, were unable to establish the required record of six months of paid hospital service to qualify for the meager twelve-dollar monthly pension. Except in military hospitals their service had been voluntary. Like the unnamed wife of a 27th Indiana Infantry soldier who had tried to nurse her dying husband in Virginia, other women had to endure years of nightmares after facing the horrors of war. Upon reaching her husband's unit after his death, the wife was imprisoned with other members of his regiment in Libby Prison in Richmond, Virginia, and was raped by its director.⁴⁵

Still, women nurses had shown a heroism equal to that of any soldier. Often given responsibility for preparing food, they established well-regulated hospital kitchens that gave soldiers alternatives to the heavy unhealthy food that was standard military fare. Working side by side with physicians after battles, they cleaned and bandaged wounds and challenged unnecessary amputations.

⁴⁴ William Hannaman's report of January 2, 1865, names nineteen Indiana women deserving of "especial notice": Mrs. E. E. George, Miss C. A. Buckel, Miss Jeannette Hovey, Mrs. Ransom, Mrs. Brake, Miss Fussell, Miss Hardy, Miss Ross, Miss Miller, Miss Staufer, Miss Venard, Miss Stires, Miss Cahill, Miss Winder, Miss Howe, Miss McCord, Mrs. Rumsey, Miss Hannah Powell, and Miss Asinae Martin. Indiana, *Documentary Journal* (1864-1865), part II, 79. Indiana women nurses known to have received pensions prior to 1892 are Elenor C. Ransom and Elizabeth Rumsey. Pension files for each are in the National Archives. For further descriptions of their experiences see U. S., Senate Committee on Pensions, Senate Report 1791; and U. S., Senate Committee on Pensions, Senate Report 1072, 51 Cong., 1 Sess., 1889-1890 (serial set 2709).

⁴⁵ Although Mary J. Watson was crippled and "very needy" in her old age, she was refused an invalid pension because she was unable to furnish satisfactory evidence of six months of paid nursing service. The Major Robert Anderson Chapter of the Women's Relief Corps in Indianapolis helped her by buying medicine. Mary J. Watson, pensioner, Soldier's Certificates No. 1, 138, 371, Can No. 1445, Bundle No. 59, Records of the Record and Pension Office. C. Annette Buckel's responsibilities as a nursing supervisor and her training as a physician did not sway the United States Senate Committee on Pensions to grant her a monthly pension of twenty-four dollars, the amount paid to a soldier. She was instead granted the twelve-dollar-per-month amount allowed women nurses. U. S., Senate Committee on Pensions, Senate Report 2325. The incident at Libby Prison is described in Green V. Woollen, "A Recollection," *War Papers Read before Indiana Commandery, Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States* (Indianapolis, 1898), 428-32.

They cooked soup and prepared coffee in huge vats for soldiers desperately in need of nourishment. They comforted dying soldiers. They wrote letters home. They encouraged and cheered depressed and lonely soldiers. They risked their own health by working in smallpox hospitals and amid malaria and typhoid fever victims. And wherever they could, they cleaned up the filth and stench typical of hospitals in the early part of the war. Moreover, Indiana women had played a strategic role in Governor Morton's aggressive organization to help Indiana soldiers.⁴⁶ For women whose lives had been sheltered and limited, memories of their nursing service were reward enough. For others, experiences as nurses in the Civil War were stepping stones to new opportunities.

⁴⁶ In addition to Eliza George, nurses known to have died in service are Hannah Powell and Asinae Martin of Goshen; Sisters Fidelis (Bridget Lawler) and Elise (Unity O'Brien) of the Sisters of the Holy Cross; Sister Mary Rose (Margaret O'Donoghue), Sisters of Providence. Terrell, *Indiana in the War of the Rebellion*, 443; Jolly, *Nuns of the Battlefield*, 135, 140, 316.

Governor Thomas Posey: The Son of George Washington?

John Thornton Posey*

A biographical sketch published in 1906 in the *National Cyclopaedia of American Biography* opens as follows:

POSEY, Thomas, soldier and last territorial governor of Indiana (1813-16), was born on the Potomac, in Virginia, July 9, 1750. His mother was Elizabeth Lloyd, of a family of high social standing, but except that little is known of his origin. He is said to have been the natural son of George Washington.¹

Such claims or inferences that George Washington was the father of Indiana Territorial Governor Thomas Posey began to appear in print as early as 1871 and have been repeated in many biographical sketches and newspaper articles as recently as 1984.² During the first half of the twentieth century at least three leading biographies of George Washington raised the issue.³ Where did these reports originate, and what, if any, evidence has been produced to support their allegations?

Posey was a distinguished officer of the American Revolution. After serving as commissary general to Andrew Lewis in the battle of Point Pleasant in Lord Dunmore's Shawnee expedition of 1774, he raised a company of frontiersmen, was commissioned a captain in the 7th Virginia Regiment of the continental line, and participated in the ousting of Dunmore from Gwynn's Island in 1776. Selected as one of eight company commanders in Colonel Daniel Morgan's famed Rifle Regiment, Posey fought in New Jersey and then in the two battles leading to General John Burgoyne's surren-

* John Thornton Posey is a retired insurance attorney. He is currently working on a biography of his forebear, Governor Thomas Posey.

¹ *National Cyclopaedia of American Biography* (New York, 1906), XIII, 265.

² *Cincinnati Daily Commercial*, March 28, 1871; Thomas A. McMullen and David Walker, *Biographical Directory of American Territorial Governors* (Westport, Conn., 1984), 152.

³ John C. Fitzpatrick, *George Washington Himself* (Indianapolis, 1933), 155; Rupert Hughes, *George Washington: Vol. II, The Rebel and the Patriot, 1762-1777* (New York, 1927), appendix II, "The Poseys," 651-56; Nathaniel Wright Stephenson and Waldo Hilary Dunn, *George Washington: Vol. I, 1732-1777* (New York, 1940), 269n; see also Louis Martin Sears, *George Washington* (New York, 1932), 70-71.

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