

ESSENTIAL CIVIL WAR CURRICULUM

Nursing in the Civil War

By Karen Egenes, RN, EdD

Resources

If you can read only one book

Author	<i>Title</i> . City: Publisher, Year.
Schultz, Jane E.	<i>Women At the Front: Hospital Workers in Civil War America</i> . Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004.

Books and Articles

Author	<i>Title</i> . City: Publisher, Year. “Title,” in <i>Journal</i> ##, no. # (Date): #.
Adams, George Worthington	<i>Doctors in Blue: The Medical History of the Union Army in the Civil War</i> . Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980.
Alcott, Louisa May	<i>Hospital Sketches: An Army Nurse’s True Account of Her Experiences During the Civil War</i> . Chester, CT: Applewood Books c/o Globe Pequot Press, 1996.
Coddington, Ronald S.	<i>Faces of Civil War Nurses</i> . Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2020.
Cunningham, H. H.	<i>Doctors in Gray: The Confederate Medical Service</i> , Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1986.
Denney, Robert E.	<i>Civil War Medicine: Care & Comfort of the Wounded</i> . New York: Sterling Publishing, 1995.
Faust, Drew Gilpin	<i>Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South</i> . Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997.

Hancock, Cornelia	<i>South After Gettysburg: Letters of Cornelia Hancock from the Army of the Potomac, 1863-1865.</i> Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015.
Hilde, Libra R.	<i>Worth a Dozen Men: Women and Nursing in the Civil War South.</i> Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2013.
Holland, Mary Gardner	<i>Our Army Nurses: Stories from Women in the Civil War.</i> Roseville, MN: Edenborough Press, 1998.
Humphreys, Margaret	<i>Marrow of Tragedy: The Health Crisis of the American Civil War.</i> Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013.
Leonard, Elizabeth D.	<i>Yankee Women: Gender Battles in the Civil War.</i> New York: W.W. Warton, 1994.
Maher, Mary Denis	<i>To Bind Up the Wounds: Catholic Sister Nurses in the U.S. Civil War.</i> Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1999.
Pember, Phoebe Yates	<i>A Southern Woman's Story.</i> Columbia: University of South Carolina Press 2002.
Straubing, Harold Elk	<i>In Hospital and Camp: The Civil War Through the Eyes of its Doctors and Nurses.</i> Harrisburg, PA : Stackpole Books, 1993.
Young, Agatha	<i>The Women and the Crisis: Women of the North in the Civil War.</i> New York: McDowell, Obolensky, 1959.

Organizations

Organization Name	Description, Contact information including address, email
The American Association for the History of Nursing	<p>The American Association for the History of Nursing has many nurse historian members who have extensive research and publications about various aspects of nursing during the US Civil War.</p> <p>The Association can link interested persons to nurse historians who have a particular focus.</p> <p>Their contact information is: PO Box 7 Mullica Hill, NJ 08062, 609-519-9689</p> <p>Their website is:</p>

<p>US Army Heritage and Education Center</p>	<p>https://www.aahn.org/</p> <p>US Army Heritage and Education Center is a web site that presents photos of Civil War Nurses. It also presents information about roles women played.</p> <p>Their contact information is: U.S. Army Heritage and Education Center 950 Soldiers Drive Carlisle, PA 17013-5021. (717) 245-3972.</p> <p>Their website is: https://ahec.armywarcollege.edu/exhibits/CivilWarImagery/</p>
<p>US National Library of Medicine</p>	<p>US National Library of Medicine web site presents information about the work of African-American Civil War Nurses.</p> <p>Their contact information is: 8600 Rockville Pike Bethesda, MD 208</p> <p>Their website is: https://www.nlm.nih.gov/exhibition/bindingwounds/nursing.html</p>

Web Resources

URL	Name and description
<p>https://www.battlefields.org/learn/articles/female-nurses-during-civil-war</p>	<p>The American Battlefield Trust web site presents detailed information about Civil War Medicine and procedures such as amputations that are often referred to in the memoirs of Civil War nurses.</p>

Other Sources

Name	Description, Contact information including address, email
<p>Hospital Sketches by L. M. Alcott</p>	<p>Hospital Sketches by Louisa May Alcott provides a vivid description of the work and experiences. It is available online from the University of Pennsylvania.</p> <p>https://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/alcott/sketches/sketches.html</p>

Scholars

Name	Email
Karen Egenes	Kegenes@luc.edu

Topic Précis

At the onset of the Civil War, neither the Union nor the Confederacy had a provision for military nurses. At that time, there were no nursing schools, no trained nurses, and no nursing credentials. The title nurse was also rather vague and could refer to a person actually engaged in the care of the sick and wounded, as well as a laundress, a cook, or a housekeeper, or a camp follower or prostitute. Members of Catholic religious communities were the only women in the Union or the Confederacy who had received any formal education in nursing. And nursing was not considered a vocation suitable for proper women. However, at the outbreak of the war, hundreds of women responded to newspaper accounts of inadequate medical treatment of soldiers and insufficient medical supplies. Doctors in both armies had profoundly negative attitudes towards female volunteer nurses. At the start of the war agencies and groups of private citizens began relief efforts, while nursing care was provided by fellow soldiers. In April 1861 Dorothea Lynde Dix was appointed Superintendent of Female Nurses of The Army and on June 13, 1861 the United States Sanitary Commission was officially sanctioned by Lincoln. Although Dix lacked prior education in nursing, she nevertheless had acquired organizational skills through previous humanitarian activities. In a circular issued by Dix on July 24, 1862, she stated that women applicants for military nursing positions must be older than 35, “plain-looking”, dressed in “plain colors” (preferably brown, gray, or black) with no “ornaments” such as hoop skirts, bows or jewelry. Applicants were further required to have habits of “neatness, order, sobriety, and industry.” Preference would be given to persons with “good conduct, superior education and serious disposition.” The South had no such central organization, instead Relief Societies were formed by volunteers provided nursing care. As the war progressed, a number of leaders of the nursing profession rose to prominence. Among these were Phoebe Pember, matron of Hospital #2 at Chimborazo hospital in Richmond. Louisa May Alcott, famous for her post war novel *Little Women*, left a vivid description of her time as a nurse, almost dying from typhoid pneumonia contracted in that service. Mary Livermore, known for her postwar activities in the suffragette movement, was an important nursing leader at the Sanitary Commission. Mary Ann “Mother” Bickerdyke was matron at the justly famous Gayoso Hospital in Memphis. As the war progressed nursing became more professional and independent in providing care to their patients. Addressing the Sixth Annual Convention of the Nurses' Associated Alumnae (later the American Nurses' Association) on June 10, 1903 Mary Livermore said that although the nurses of the Civil War had cared for the sick and wounded, they knew they

lacked the education they needed for their work. She added that “although she had risen to become the superintendent of nurses, she knew little more than the most ignorant nurse there.”
