

# Women on the Western Frontier



Frontier Army Museum  
Fort Leavenworth, KS

*“The isolation of the cavalry posts makes them quite inaccessible to travelers, and the exposure incident to meeting warlike Indians does not tempt the visits of friends or even of the venturesome tourist. Our life, therefore, was often as separate from the rest of the world as if we had been living on an island in the ocean.”*

-Elizabeth Bacon Custer, “Boots and Saddles”, 1885.

There are many ways to describe life on the western frontier during the 19th century. Comfort and luxury would be at the very bottom of the list. As people emigrated west, they faced many difficulties including but not limited to natural disasters, disease, lack of clean water, no shelter, and numerous other dangers. Living out west was treacherous, even more so for women. On the frontier there was a higher ratio of men to women and a disproportionate share of younger adults. This meant that younger women on the frontier married older men and had more children. Women were expected to take care of the family and household chores while also participating in the harsh labors of farm and pioneer life. The amount of grit and tenacity that frontier women possessed is unfathomable.

This booklet highlights only a minuscule amount of the countless brave, strong, and independent women that called the American frontier their home. The idea for this project originated from the “The Girl I left Behind Me: Frontier Army Wives 1817-1917” booklet written by the original Frontier Army Museum support group the Musettes. The museum wished to expand on this topic to include additional 19th century frontier women stories and voices. We hope this collection of short biographies sparks joy and inspires you to discover more amazing stories of women on the western frontier.

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# Women on the Western Frontier

Compiled, edited, and written by the Frontier Army Museum, 2024

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# Army Spouses

***Alice Kirk Grierson*** by Alicia Embrey and Stacey Medve



*Alice Kirk Grierson, History  
of American Women*

Alice Kirk Grierson lived a hard life on the frontier, enduring financial loss, personal difficulties, and frequent separations from her husband and family. She gave birth to seven children, four of whom lived to adulthood. While her life tells of great hardships, it also speaks of a woman who was tough, intrepid, and had great strength of character. Her peers described her as supportive, determined, unflappable, and a truly remarkable woman.

The eldest of thirteen children, Alice was born in 1828 in Youngstown, Ohio to a wealthy, devout Christian, upper-middle class family. In 1854 Alice married Benjamin Henry Grierson, a childhood friend who lacked the piety Alice's father required of a son-in-law. Alice overcame her father's objections to marry the music teacher.

After serious financial setbacks, Grierson joined the Union Army in 1861 as an unpaid aide in the Illinois Infantry Regiment. The Army quickly promoted him to Major and then Colonel due to his uncanny leadership ability. This provided the Griersons with their first steady income. It also provided Alice with her first taste of life as an Army wife. She raised her family alone while her husband was away at war.

After his distinguished service in the Civil War, Col. Benjamin Grierson continued his career in the reorganized Army with the encouragement of his wife. He assumed command of the Tenth Cavalry, a regiment of all black soldiers later known as the Buffalo Soldiers.

Alice began her frontier army life in 1866 when she and her three children joined her husband at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. Although the Griersons' stay was short, they both contributed greatly to the organization and recruitment of quality soldiers that would form the famous Tenth Cavalry.

Over the next twenty years, the Griersons' travelled throughout the western frontier including Fort Riley, Kansas (1867), Fort Gibson, Fort Sill, Indian Territory (1868 and 1869), Fort Concho and Fort Davis, Texas (1875 and 1882). The Army also assigned them to the Arizona Territory. As the railway expanded west, it brought a wide variety of social and cultural activities to the frontier. Although Alice enjoyed her time in the territories, unfortunately financial concerns overshadowed their lives.

Sadly, Alice never lived to see her husband's dream of promotion to General come true. She died on 16 August 1888 after a long-ignored illness. Twenty months later, Colonel Grierson received his promotion to Brigadier General. Alice Kirk Grierson was a supportive wife, loving mother and a friend to all those she met. General Grierson credited his promotion to his wife's unwavering support. His success as an officer and as a man was due to Alice's tireless efforts during their life together.

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## ***Elizabeth Bacon Custer*** by Megan Hunter

Elizabeth “Libbie” Bacon’s legacy will forever be linked to her intense and strong bond with her husband General George Armstrong Custer. Born in 1842 in Monroe, Michigan, Libbie was the daughter of Daniel Bacon a wealthy and influential judge. She unfortunately lost her mother and three siblings before the age of thirteen. As the only surviving child, Judge Bacon doted on his daughter and wanted only the best for her.



*Elizabeth Bacon Custer, Library of Congress LC-BH831*

When Libbie met 1st Lt. George Custer in the fall of 1862, she felt an instant connection. At the time Libbie’s father disapproved of Custer due to his family’s local income status. When

the Army promoted Custer to Brevet Brigadier General in 1864, Libbie’s father finally gave his blessing. Libbie married Custer on 9 February 1864 in Monroe, Michigan.

Although she lived in comfort for most of her life, she happily joined her husband in the field whenever possible. Although Libbie wrote about prairie fires, earthquakes, cholera epidemics, and other natural disasters she considered separation from her husband to be the worst of them all. "It is infinitely worse to be left behind, a prey to all the horrors of imagining what may be happening to one we love," Libbie wrote years later.

The Custers lived in Kansas from 1866 to 1871, with the 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry headquartered at Fort Riley. The 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry’s role included protecting settlers on the trails and railroad workers out west. During this time the US Army participated in tense and violent campaigns against the Southern Cheyenne, Sioux, Comanches, and other Native American tribes.

While stationed with the 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry, Libbie made sure to participate in all camp social activities. Some of the activities included billiards, croquet, target shooting, and even buffalo hunting. "This wild jolly free life is

perfectly fascinating," Libbie wrote a friend in 1869. "We dress as we like and live with no approach to style."

In October of 1867, the Army arrested and court-martialed Lt. Col. Custer at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. The charges included "... *absence without leave, conduct to the prejudice of good order and military discipline, and the unmerciful treatment of deserters.*" The Army found him guilty on all charges and sentenced him with suspension of rank and pay for one year.

Nine years later, Lt. Col. Custer and the 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry met their downfall at the Battle of Little Bighorn. Custer and the men of the 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry died at the hands of Lakota and Cheyenne warriors in Montana Territory.

Even after his passing, Libbie served her husband loyally. She worked tirelessly to defend her husband's reputation through lectures, books, and magazine articles. Libbie defended her husband's honor for 52 years up until her death on 4 April 1933 at the age of 90.

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## ***Harriet Lovejoy Leavenworth*** by Nancy Miller

The day Harriet Lovejoy married Major Henry Leavenworth, her life as an army wife began. The day after her wedding she accompanied her husband and 430 soldiers from Delaware County, New York for the 1814 campaign against the British during the War of 1812. Through the war, she nursed wounded and dying soldiers. In 1815, the couple welcomed their daughter Alida.



*Painting of Harriet Lovejoy Leavenworth,  
Frontier Army Museum collection*

In 1817 the Army sent Colonel Leavenworth to the Northwest Territory as an Indian Agent. Two years later, Harriet and their daughter joined Col. Leavenworth in Prairie de Chien, Wisconsin and later Fort Snelling, Minnesota. On the journey to join her husband, she and Alida traveled in wagons from New York to New Orleans then in a steamboat up the Mississippi River to St. Louis, Missouri. Col. Leavenworth sent fourteen Native Americans to meet and escort his family along the last leg of the journey. For 33 days they traveled in an Indian palanquin. Harriet was the first white woman to cross through that remote wilderness.

As a frontier officer's wife, Harriet hosted visiting government officials and travelers. She added style and grace to the mundane life of the frontier. Though the Leavenworth's time at Fort Snelling was brief, Col. Leavenworth left a tribute to his wife dedicating Lake Harriet in Minneapolis, Minnesota to her.

In 1820 the Leavenworth's left for Jefferson Barracks, Missouri. Frequent separations resulted from expeditions and Indian affairs. Seven years later, Colonel Leavenworth crossed the Missouri River to establish "Cantonment Leavenworth". There is no evidence that Harriet and Alida accompanied him on the trip. The Army later renamed the cantonment Fort Leavenworth in 1832.

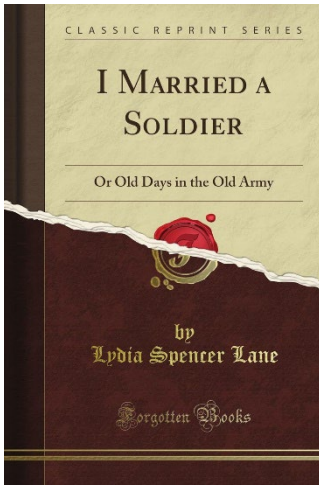
Harriet's life as a Frontier Army wife ended in 1834 with the untimely death of General Henry Leavenworth while he was on expedition in Indian Territory. She and Alida returned to New York state bringing with her the remains of her husband. General Leavenworth's remains were later transferred to the National Cemetery at Fort Leavenworth.

Alida died only five years after her father at the age of 24. Harriet did not follow her family in death until 1854 at the age of 63. Harriet and her daughter are both buried in Newburgh, New York.

History remembers Harriet as a kind and consoling nurse to the wounded and dying soldiers during the War of 1812 as well as a loving and supportive Army spouse. Harriet added to the quality of life for the early northwest Frontier Army. She organized entertainment to keep life pleasant. She felt responsible for the moral and educational standards for the adults as well as the children at Fort Snelling. She was not only a wife and mother, but she was also a Frontier Army wife.

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*Lane's book I Married a Soldier*

***Lydia Spencer Blaney Lane*** by Jeanne  
DeRuyscher

"Our heroes mounted their horses and away they rode into the wilderness, to be gone for weeks or months, as the case might be ... ", wrote Lydia Spencer Blaney Lane in her simple history "I Married a Soldier", first published by the prestigious firm of J. B. Lippincott in 1893.

Lydia Spencer Biddle Blaney was the youngest daughter of Mary Elizabeth Biddle and Major George Blaney, U.S. Engineer Corps. She had an eastern upper-middle class background, a good

education, and a sharp intelligence.

Her future husband was William Bartlett Lane, a Kentucky native. Lane saw action in the Mexican American War and had assignments in five other states before being posted to Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania in the fall of 1852. Lieutenant Lane and the nineteen-year-old Lydia were married on 18 May 1854, beginning a military journey which would last for sixteen years.

Lydia accompanied her husband on each of his assignments to military garrisons in Missouri, Texas, and New Mexico most of which they stayed less than six months at a time. She chronicled the 'good, the bad, the ugly, and the magnificent' of the frontier army life, ultimately loving her military experiences. Lydia crossed the Great Plains by wagon seven times, traveled nearly 8,000 miles and became a seasoned veteran and observer of life on the frontier.

The unexpected was the standard for Plains' travel. Lydia recorded the events with clarity. In her Plains crossings, she noted vast numbers of buffalo, prairie fires, flash floods, "awful Kansas storms," primitive childbirths, tragic accidents, and deaths. She also recorded the death of an acquaintance from Pennsylvania, a descendant of the legendary Molly Pitcher of Revolutionary War fame, and her subsequent burial along the trail.

Not wanting the 'Old Army' to fade entirely from memory, Lydia initially wrote her memoirs for her children and grandchildren. "I Married a Soldier" has been cited in various publications on Frontier Army and western life. She provides invaluable insights on personalities of her day: Captain Yates, Seventh Cavalry (who died with George Custer at the Battle of Little Big Horn); Kit Carson; Colonel and Mrs. James Magoffin; "Prince John" Magruder; and General H. H. Sibley, among a host of acquaintances from more than twenty frontier garrisons.

She was wife, mother, seasoned traveler, pioneer, an Anglo-American woman in New Mexico, and in later years, an author and grandmother.

An army wife to the end, she wrote, "I for one never regretted having done so. [marrying an army officer] and loved everything connected to the army; the officers ... soldiers, mules, horses, wagons, tents, camps, every and anything, so I was in the army and part of it." Lydia Lane, age seventy-nine, died 27 June 1914, on the eve of another war in which 'her army' would fight.

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## ***Rachel Hertzog Cooke*** by Cherri Kimerer

In September 1827 Major John Dougherty, Indian Agent to the upper Missouri Indians, and his wife, the former Mary Hertzog, moved to the newly established Cantonment Leavenworth. When Mary's sister, Rachel, came to "visit" in the summer of 1830 the Dougherty home became the center of the social life of the post.



*Flora Cooke, daughter of Rachel Cooke,  
Encyclopedia Virginia*

The 6th Infantry arrived by barge to Cantonment Leavenworth in the summer of 1829 and immediately left for escort duty on the Santa Fe Trail. Upon their return to the post in

late fall, Second Lieutenant Phillip St. George Cooke described their situation, "[we] took quiet possession of the miserable huts and sheds left by the 3rd Infantry the preceding May ... ". After Rachel's arrival, however, Cooke wrote, "Blessed with a harmonious and congenial though small society, the days, the months, flew by. Our duties performed and studious improvement not neglected, the pleasures of female society gave the great zest to our diversions and exercises". Rachel and Phillip were married in her sister's home at Cantonment Leavenworth on 28 October 1830, the first recorded marriage on the post.

Rachel spent the next eight years following her husband as he transferred from one post to another. She suffered through several long absences while Lieutenant Cooke went on recruiting duty and several expeditions in Indian Territory. She nursed her husband through a bout of cholera and bore two children. The Cookes were living at Fort Gibson, Indian Territory in September 1838 when Rachel was wounded when a pistol her husband was holding accidentally discharged. "The ball entered her jaw about an inch and a half and passed out through the under lip carrying away one half of her teeth." Captain Cooke requested emergency leave to take his wife

back east to a surgeon-dentist. This request was not approved until January 1839, four months after the accident. They went east for corrective surgery and returned to Fort Gibson in November 1839. In February of 1840 their third child was born at Fort Wayne, Indian Territory.

Cooke's Company K was transferred to Fort Leavenworth in October 1840 and stayed until 1846 when they transferred to Fort Crawford, Wisconsin. The Cooke's fourth child was born at Fort Leavenworth in March 1842. Cooke moved his family to St. Louis during the Mexican American War. The next four years they lived at Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania.

Rachel and her family were deeply affected by the Civil War. When Virginia issued the call for her native sons to return to support the South, Rachel's husband remained with the Union. However, Rachel's son, John; son-in-law, J.E.B. Stuart; and son-in-law army surgeon, Dr. Charles Brewer served the Confederacy. To further separate this army family Rachel and Phillip's last child married Major Jacob Sharpe of the 56th New York Union Army. Rachel paid the highest price an army wife can pay, her family members fought against each other during the deadliest war in American history.

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# Pioneers

**Tabitha Brown** by Christian Roesler



*Tabitha Brown, National Parks Service*

Tabitha Brown played a significant role in Oregon state history and is memorialized at the Oregon State Capitol. Of the 158 named citizens, she is one of six women who were integral to the early settlement of the Oregon Territory. In 1846, the 66-year-old widow moved west along with some of her extended family. As a teacher, Tabitha understood the importance of education. Her heart broke for the children orphaned on their journeys westward.

In 1848, Tabitha's vision of an orphanage and boarding school came to life. Tabitha took no salary for the first year with donations furnishing her shelter and school building. As the school's only teacher, Tabitha provided educational opportunities to all children, rich or poor, orphaned or parented. The school boarded 30 students, ages 4 to 21, both male and female. The following year, the school received a board of trustees and in 1849 they successfully chartered for the establishment of Pacific University in present-day Forest Grove, Oregon.

Tabitha Moffat Brown died in Salem, Oregon on 4 May 1858, at the home of her daughter, Pherne Pringle. Her family buried her in Salem's Pioneer Cemetery with the inscription: "Mother Symbol of Oregon, Co-Founder of Pacific University, Forest Grove, Oregon."

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## ***Virginia Reed*** by Christian Roesler

“...Dont let this letter dishaten anybody and never take  
no cutofs and hurry along as fast as you can.”

*Virginia Reed, May 16, 1847, Napie Valley, CA*



At the age of 12, Virginia Reed and her family departed Independence, Missouri to start anew out west. Reed's family traveled with the infamous Donner-Reed Party whose members were trapped in the Sierra Nevada Mountain range in the winter of 1846-1847.

The parties migrated west in the spring of 1846, but due to several problems their progress was slow. The Donner party elected to follow a new route called the Hastings Cutoff rather than follow the more established trails. The wagon train arrived at the Sierra Nevada Mountain range in

early November but became trapped by snowfall.

With food rations running low, the parties reportedly resorted to cannibalism to stay alive during the winter of 1846-1847. In the middle of February 1847, four months after the train was initially trapped, the first relief party arrived. Of the 87 members of the party, 48 survived the ordeal including Virginia.

Young Virginia wrote letters during and after her journey providing insight into the hardships and joys experienced by emigrants. She lived a long, full life in California where she married and had nine children. She became the first woman on the west coast to operate a fire insurance business. Virginia passed away in 1921.

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## ***Elizabeth Schenk Smith*** by Christian Roesler



*Elizabeth Schenk Smith, CGSCF*

Elizabeth Schenk Smith was born and raised in an army family and eventually married a soldier. She lived all over the world, including residing in a tent near the Mexican border during the Mexican Expedition (1916). Elizabeth traveled to Fort Leavenworth, Kansas after World War I when her husband attended the School of the Line and then the General Staff School.

In 1919, the U.S. Congress passed the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment giving women the right to vote. This monumental change motivated Elizabeth and several other women to meet and discuss what this

meant for the Army spouses. Eventually these meetings formed the Fort Leavenworth Women's Club, today known as the Fort Leavenworth Spouses' Club. The club focused on issues such as equal pay, wellbeing of mothers and infants, prohibition of child labor, and educating voters. Elizabeth also cofounded the Fort Leavenworth Parent-Teachers' Association, the first organization of its kind in the state of Kansas.

Elizabeth stayed active in military life, even after her husband's death. During World War II, at the age of 60, she learned braille and used her new skills to copy books for blind students. Elizabeth passed away in 1978 at the age of 96 and was buried with her husband at Arlington National Cemetery.

On 20 May 2021 Fort Leavenworth inducted Elizabeth Schenk Smith into its Hall of Fame for her service and dedication to improving the lives of army spouses. Elizabeth is the second civilian to be inducted into the Hall.

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# Soldiers & Military Support

*Albert Cashier* by Megan Hunter

## Woman Soldier in 95th Ill.



ALBERT D. J. CASHIER  
OF  
COMPANY G, 95TH ILLINOIS REGIMENT  
Photographed November, 1864



ALBERT D. J. CASHIER  
OF  
COMPANY G, 95TH ILLINOIS REGIMENT  
Photographed July, 1913

*Albert Cashier, Illinois State Historical Library*

Born Jennie Irene Hodgers in Clogherhead, County Louth, Ireland on 25 December 1843, Albert Cashier emigrated to the United States and served in the U.S. Army during the Civil War.

Cashier, 18 at the time, enlisted on 6 August 1862 in the 95<sup>th</sup> Illinois Infantry. They served in approximately forty battles including the Siege of Vicksburg.

During this campaign, Cashier fell ill with gastral issues and entered a

military hospital, somehow managing to evade detection.

Cashier's reasoning for disguising as a man is not truly known. One idea is that they wanted to join the military for the excitement. Another could be the freedoms and rights afforded to men during this period. As a man, Cashier could vote, have a bank account, and be paid a decent salary. An enlisted soldier made \$13 a month, which at the time was double what a female made as a laundress or seamstress.

After the war, Cashier returned to Belvidere, Illinois for a time, working and continuing to live as a man. At the age of 70, they were moved to Watertown State Hospital for the Insane in East Moline, Illinois in March 1914. Discovering Cashier as female, the hospital made them wear women's clothing after more than fifty years dressing as man.

The Veteran's Pension Board investigated Cashier for fraud since females were not allowed to officially join the army. Former comrades confirmed

that Cashier was in fact the person who had fought in the Civil War and the board decided in February 1915 that payments should continue for life.

Albert Cashier died on 10 October 1915, and was buried in uniform. His tombstone inscribed "Albert D. J. Cashier, Co. G, 95 Ill. Inf." Cashier was given an official Grand Army of the Republic funerary service and was buried with full military honors.

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## ***Jack Bee Garland*** by Megan Hunter



*Jack Bee Garland, National Park Service*

Jack Bee Garland served as a medic in the Spanish American War and during the aftermath of the San Francisco 1906 earthquake. Assigned female at birth, Garland lived their life as a male. His community only learned of his transition after his passing in 1936. Jack Bee Garland spent much of his life devoted to social work and taking care of others as a dedicated journalist and philanthropist.

In April 1898 the United States declared war against Spain. Although the Army did not allow females to fight in the war, Garland wanted to contribute. He worked on a ship bound for Manila called “City of Para”. The captain required all members of the crew to receive vaccinations. In fear of becoming ill and getting discovered, Garland disclosed his identity to the ship captain. Ship security escorted him off the boat when it arrived in Honolulu, Hawaii.

Garland, with the help of friends, stowed away in the ship again. When the ship arrived in Manila, military police arrested him. He explained that the reason he wore men’s clothing was to better fulfill his duties as a newspaper correspondent for The San Francisco Chronicle. No law existed in California or Manila that dictates what clothing someone wore, the military police allowed Garland to go free.

Garland got an up-close perspective of the war. He served with the Red Cross to aide soldiers after some of the most challenging battles. Fellow soldiers admired Garland for his fearlessness and was referred to as “Lieutenant Jack”. The soldiers in his unit even pooled their money to give him a gold medal. After 10 months in the Philippines, Garland boarded transport back to San Francisco in August 1900.

Garland lived the remainder of their life as a man. In 1936 he collapsed on the sidewalk in San Francisco in at the age of sixty-six, passing away shortly after.

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<https://www.nps.gov/people/jack-bee-garland.htm>, Last updated: January 2022.
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## ***Frances Clayton*** by Julie Rosenhan



*Frances Clayton in Uniform*

War has traditionally been seen as a man's world. Living in squalid conditions, wielding weapons in defense of their country, charging into battle to die tragic, yet heroic deaths are all a large part of the history of men. Conventionally, women participated in the periphery of war, as nurses, laundresses, prostitutes, and those who stayed home to maintain the home. But women have not always been content to stay in the shadows while war raged.

Though forbidden by both the Union and Confederate armies during the U.S. Civil War, women on both sides disguised themselves as

men to fight. One such woman was Frances Louisa Clayton, born in Minnesota around 1830. The facts of Frances's life and military service are hard to verify. What we know of her comes from a small number of newspaper articles and a few eyewitness accounts.

It is believed that she enlisted in a Missouri regiment in 1861 alongside her husband, whose name has been recorded as "John" or "Elmer" in different sources. Reportedly they went to Missouri to better conceal Frances' gender. Frances served under the name "Jack Williams." For twenty-two months they fought side-by-side. During the Battle of Stones River in Tennessee (31 December 1862 – 2 January 1863), Frances' husband was shot and killed. She later disclosed that not only had she witnessed her husband's death, but that when the call to fix bayonets came, she stepped over his body to charge.



*Frances Clayton in female clothing*

Frances served in eighteen battles between 1861 and 1863, when she was discharged. She spent much of 1863 traveling around the Midwest, seeking help to receive back pay and bounty money owed to her and her husband. As she travelled, she spoke to reporters about her life as a Union soldier. From 1863-1865, her name and stories appeared in newspapers across the country. Several of these articles printed contradictory information. This, along with the lack of official documentation have made it very difficult for historians to verify Frances's stories. Though questions of authenticity plague her story, the photographs shown here are some of the most well-known of women soldiers in the Civil War. The photos were taken in 1865 by Samuel Masury at his studio in Boston, Massachusetts.

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## ***Army Laundresses*** by Constance M. McDonald



*Civil War Union Laundress and family,  
Library of Congress.*

Of all the wives who refused to be left behind in the East as their Frontier Army husbands lived in the West, the women who served as Army laundresses were the only women recognized by the army and given legal status. The rest of the women were classified as "camp followers". The British custom of regarding laundresses as army essential personnel was adopted in the United States early.

Because many of the women who wore the legal title of army laundress had little education and less time to leave behind their memoirs; journals of other post inhabitants and records are the main sources in learning about the ladies who legally lived with the army.

Many of the laundresses were the wives of enlisted men. The chance for much needed income placed the enlisted wife in front of the washing tubs. An official laundress received quarters, fuel, fresh bedding straw, one daily ration, and services of the post surgeon. Her married enlisted soldier lived together in her quarters.

The quarters provided for the laundresses and their families ranged from bad to worse. They were often the source of complaints about the "looks of the garrison". In 1874 the laundress quarters at Camp McDowell were described by the post surgeon as "unfit to live in".

The daily rations received by the ladies of the suds sounded as bad as their living conditions. At Fort Abe Lincoln in the 1870's the rations consisted of bacon, beans, hardtack, and beef three times a week. This was an improvement compared to what the laundresses of 1857 received: meat, bread, and whiskey.

The conditions for the laundress area were a constant concern for the post surgeons. Thanks to these men, conditions slowly but steadily improved



from the "diphtheria ridden squalors" to acceptable housing for the frontier.

The behavior, however, of the laundresses was a constant concern for the post commanders. These women were under the military law of each post. One laundress, Hannah, was court-martialed for using disrespectful language to the officer of the day. Her sentence was later remitted.

Serious consideration was given to stopping the laundress custom in 1876. General J.C. Kelton told the House Committee on Military Affairs that laundresses, "afforded the only assistance on post when death or childbirth occurred in the officers' families." If the laundresses were gone, "it must follow. . . the wives and families of the officers must leave most of our garrisons, and it is very certain in their stead will come immorality, dishonor, and dishonesty."

The Banning Committee of 1876 recommended the end of the army laundress. General Order 37 stated, "Hereafter women shall not be allowed to accompany troops as laundresses." Historian Miller Stewart summarized, "Their lives were difficult, but they deserved better treatment ... " They were indeed, Frontier Army wives who wished not to be left behind.

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# Native Americans

***Dr. Susan La Flesche Picotte*** by Julie Rosenhan

In the 19th century, there were very few professional opportunities for women of any kind, but especially for American Indian women. Dr. Susan La Flesche Picotte broke many barriers in her lifetime. She became the first American Indian woman in the United States to receive a medical degree, and she opened the first hospital on a reservation. For over 16 years she worked tirelessly to provide medical care to the people of the Omaha Reservation and surrounding countryside.



*Dr. Susan La Flesche Picotte, image Courtesy of  
The National Library of Medicine*

Born in 1865, to Chief Joseph La Flesche (Iron Eyes) and his wife, Mary (One Woman), Susan grew up on the Omaha Reservation in northeastern Nebraska. Her father pushed her and

her siblings to obtain as much education as possible. She attended a Presbyterian Mission School on the reservation until age 14, where she learned English and French. She was then sent back East to the Elizabeth Institute for Young Ladies in New Jersey. At the age of 17 she returned home and taught at the Quaker Mission School on the reservation. With the encouragement of a colleague, Alice Fletcher, La Flesche went back East to Virginia's Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute. At Hampton School she was encouraged by Martha Waldron, the school's resident physician, to apply to the Woman's Medical College of Pennsylvania. She was accepted and two years later in 1889, she graduated the three-year course early and at the top of her class.

She remained in Philadelphia to complete a one-year internship. At the conclusion of that year, she returned home to the Omaha Reservation in Nebraska. As a young girl, Susan witnessed the terminal struggle of a

Native woman when a white Indian agency physician who had been summoned, never came. Sadly, the woman died and haunted Susan for years. She vowed to use her medical degree to help her people.

As the sole physician for the Omaha Agency, Dr. Susan (as her people called her) was responsible for more than 1,300 people on a reservation stretching nearly 1,350 square miles. Her office was located in the government boarding school. Many of the people who visited her were sick with tuberculosis or cholera, others simply needed a place to rest or a nutritious meal. Tribal members looked to her not only as their beloved doctor, but as a business consultant, lawyer, accountant, and mediator. She waged public health campaigns for hygiene practices to contain contagious diseases and worked endlessly, without success, to end the sale of alcohol on the reservation. In 1906, she led a delegation to Washington D.C. to lobby for the prohibition of alcohol on the reservation, arguing that alcohol caused irreparable damage to the health and safety of the community.

In 1894, she married Henry Picotte and together they moved to the reservation settlement of Bancroft, Nebraska. There she opened a private medical practice where she saw and treated not only tribe members, but anyone who needed medical attention. In 1913 she fulfilled a longtime dream to open a hospital on the reservation. It was the first hospital built on Indian land with privately raised funds. Susan died in September of 1915.

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## ***Sarah Winnemucca*** by Megan Hunter



Sarah Winnemucca, 1883. National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution

Born into the Northern Paiute tribe, Sarah Winnemucca Hopkins, birth name Thocmentony (Shell-flower), became a writer, activist, lecturer, and educator. Sarah describes her early life in her memoir “Life Among the Piutes: Their Wrongs and Claims”. This memoir is the first known autobiography written by a Native American woman.

Sarah wrote “I was born somewhere near 1844 but am not sure of the precise time. I was a very small child when the first white people came into our country. They

came like a lion, yes, like a roaring lion, and have continued so ever since, and I have never forgotten their first coming.”

Sarah’s grandfather, Chief Truckee, established a working relationship with white settlers that began exploring the area. Chief Truckee guided U.S. Army Captain John C. Frémont during his 1843–45 survey and map-making expedition across the Great Basin to California. Sarah continued this relationship into adulthood working with white settlers to create a better life for her fellow Native Americans.

While living and working in a white settler’s home at the age of 13, Sarah improved her English and learned more about European American ways. She became fluent in writing and reading English.

At 27, Sarah began working in the Bureau of Indian Affairs in 1871 as an interpreter. She persuaded reluctant bands to relocate and negotiated with the Army for increased supplies and protection around reservation boundaries. During the Bannock War in 1878, Sarah worked as a translator for General Oliver O. Howard of the U.S. Army. Her roles also included Indian scout and messenger.

The tension between Native American and white settlers grew as more emigrants moved into occupied native lands. Many tribes resisted the

transition. Those tribes that resisted were taken to incarcerations sites such as Vancouver Barracks located in the Pacific Northwest. Sarah began advocating for the humane treatment of confined Native Americans. In 1880 Sarah met with President Rutherford B. Hayes to discuss the release of her people from the Yakama Reservation and allow them to return to their native homelands. Sadly, the President did not grant her this request.

In 1883, Sarah began travelling throughout major cities of the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic lecturing on the injustices against Native Americans. Performing nearly 300 lectures on the topic. She spent one year in San Francisco lecturing. Unfortunately, her pleas fell on deaf ears and no assistance was given to the tribes.

Sarah soon shifted from activist to educator. She returned to Pyramid Lake and along with her brother built a school for Indian children at Lovelock, Nevada. The school was named the Peabody Indian School, named after the benefactor Mary Peabody Mann. The school's mission was to promote the Paiute culture and language. The school closed in 1887 and the children transferred to a facility in Grand Junction, Colorado.

Sarah died from tuberculosis in 1891 at the age of 46. Posthumously Sarah was awarded several achievements including induction into Nevada Writers Hall of Fame (1993), induction into the National Women's Hall of Fame (1994), and in 2005, the state of Nevada contributed a statue of Winnemucca to the National Statuary Hall Collection in the U.S. Capitol.

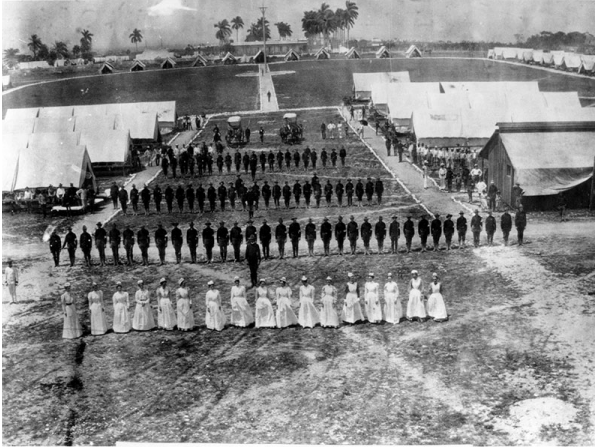
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# Medical

## *Spanish-American War Nurses* by Megan Hunter

The United States declared war against Spain on 21 April 1898. Fought in both Cuba and the Philippine Islands, this was the first overseas conflict



HOSPITAL FIELD, 1st DIV, 7th ARMY CORPS, CAMP COLUMBIA,  
HAVANA CUBA 1899

*1899 Hosp. Field 1st Div. 7th Army Corps Camp Columbia,  
Havana, Cuba. Center of Military History.*

fought by the U.S. Battling overseas in a foreign environment came with an array of issues including influx of soldiers, strained resources, logistical problems, and spread of diseases such as Yellow Fever, Typhoid, Malaria, and Dysentery.

With in the large influx of soldiers and strain on resources, diseases in camps both stateside and

overseas flourished. Most deaths occurred from disease rather than combat wounds. Overwhelmed, the U.S. Army was in desperate need of qualified nurses.

The surgeon general requested and promptly received congressional authority on 28 April 1898 to appoint female nurses under contract at a rate of \$30 per month and a daily ration. More than 1,500 women signed up for service. These trained nurses treated combat injuries along with debilitating diseases. During the war 153 nurses died from disease during their service. One nurse, Clara Maass died from Yellow Fever after volunteering to be bitten by mosquitos during Army research of the disease.

Due to the exemplary performance of these Army contract nurses, the U.S. military realized it would be extremely advantageous to have a corps of

trained nurses, familiar with military ways, on call. This led the Army to establish a permanent Nurse Corps in 1901.

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## ***Dorothea Dix*** by Julie Rosenhan

Dorothea Dix, a social reformer, advocated for improvement in treatment of the mentally ill. Her efforts led to international change in the living conditions and care of these populations. Dorothea also championed women nurses during the Civil War in her role as administrator of military hospitals.

Born on 4 April 1802 in Hampden, Maine, her childhood was marked by unhappiness and abuse, with a mother who was chronically ill and a volatile father. Both parents suffered from alcoholism, which left young Dorothea to take care of her two younger siblings. Despite her father's shortcomings, he taught Dorothea how to read and write.



*Dorothea Dix, Library of Congress.*

At age 12, Dorothea's family sent her live with her wealthy grandmother in Boston, who encouraged her interests in education. Dorothea started teaching school at age 14 and eventually established a series of schools in Boston and Worcester. She developed curriculums and published textbooks. Dorothea's health plagued her with depression and tuberculosis through the 1820s and 30s. In 1836, she closed her schools and on the recommendation of her physician and set off for England to improve her health.

The 18 months that Dorothea spent in England changed her life. While there she spent time with social reformers who were dedicated to improving life for the mentally ill. After touring the "madhouses" of Britain, she committed herself to the movement of reformation of hospitals and asylums. After returning home in 1840, Dorothea taught inmates in an East Cambridge prison. She was taken aback by the abysmal conditions and the inhumane treatment of prisoners. Dorothea then visited every public and private facility in Massachusetts she could, documenting the brutal treatment of inmates and the disgusting conditions in which they lived. Dorothea presented her findings to the Massachusetts legislature and



demanded that officials act. As a result, the legislature set aside funds for the expansion of the state mental hospital. Dorothea toured asylums, hospitals, and prisons across the United States and Europe, campaigning for the improvement of these institutions everywhere she went. Dorothea established humane asylums in more than ten states and inspired the building of new hospitals for the mentally ill in Europe.

Dorothea volunteered her services to the United States Union forces when the Civil War broke out in 1861. The Union Army appointed her as superintendent of nurses. In this role she set up field hospitals and first-aid stations, recruited nurses, set up training programs, and managed supplies. Dorothea's administrative skills were incredibly valuable to the Union Army, but her rigid and intense nature often left her at odds with army officials. Widely disdained by male doctors, she was none-the-less successful in her push for formal training.

After the war she continued her work as a social reformer, especially as a proponent of better care for the mentally ill. This work culminated in the betterment of many hospitals in both the United States and Europe. After contracting malaria in 1870, she ceased her extensive travelling and settled in Trenton, New Jersey. She continued to write and offer advice to other reformers. She died on 17 July 1887.

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## ***Susie King Taylor*** by Julie Rosenhan



*Susie King Taylor, Library of Congress*

Born on 6 August 1848, Susie King Taylor, née Baker, lived as a slave on a Georgia plantation for the first seven years of her life. In 1855 she was allowed to live with her free grandmother in Savannah. Though it was illegal for African Americans to be educated at the time, Susie attended two secret schools taught by black women. She remembered “we went to school every day about nine o’clock, with our books wrapped in paper to prevent the police or white persons from seeing them.”

In April 1862, at the age of 14, Susie became free when her uncle led her and other slaves out to a federal gunboat operating in the waters near Confederate-held Fort Pulaski, off the coast of Georgia. They soon went to live on St. Simon’s Island, Georgia where they joined thousands of other African American refugees seeking safety behind Union lines.

It was on St. Simon where Susie first saw Federal troops. She soon attached herself to the 33rd United States Colored Infantry Regiment (also known as the First South Carolina Volunteers) when she married Sergeant Edward King in 1862. African American troops did not receive pay for the first 18 months of service. So, wives were “obliged to support themselves and children by washing for the officers of the gunboats and the soldiers and making cakes and pies which they sold to the boys in camp.” Susie also assisted with cleaning the soldier’s guns. She served as a nurse at a hospital in Beaumont, South Carolina for African American soldiers. There she met and worked with the renowned Civil War nurse, Clara Barton. For years she worked as a nurse for the Union Army but was never paid for her service. “I gave my service willingly for four years and three months without receiving a dollar. I was glad...to care for the sick and afflicted comrades” she wrote years later.

Her biggest contribution to the war effort was her teaching. Her ability to read and write so impressed the officers of the unit that they asked her to become a teacher for the soldiers and camp followers. She gladly accepted and became the first black teacher of freed black students in Georgia. The unit's white commander, Colonel Thomas Wentworth Higginson, later wrote of his men, "their love of the spelling-book is perfectly inexhaustible."

Susie and her husband, Edward, remained with the 33rd until it was mustered out of service in 1866. Afterwards, the couple moved to Savannah, Georgia where Susie opened a private school for children of former slaves. Sadly, Edward died soon after their move to Savannah, and a few months before their first child was born. Despite this setback, Susie worked as an educator for several years in Georgia. She scraped by until 1868 when declining enrollment at her school forced her to find another occupation. She then became a domestic servant to a wealthy family with whom she moved to Boston in the early 1870s. She met and married Russell Taylor in Boston, and became involved with the Women's Relief Corps, a national organization for female Civil War veterans. She was president of the Corps in 1893. She published a memoir of her experiences during the Civil War titled, *Reminiscences of My Life in Camp with the 33rd United States Colored, Troops, Late 1st S.C. Volunteers*. She died on 6 October 1912 and is buried at the Mount Hope Cemetery in Boston.

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## ***Dr. Mary Walker*** by Megan Hunter

There are many words to describe Dr. Mary Walker, including American feminist, suffragist, suspected spy, prisoner of war, and surgeon. Born in



*Dr. Mary Walker, Library of Congress*

1832 to two progressive parents, Mary was raised alongside her six older brothers and sisters, to pursue an education. She first earned her teaching degree but later at the age of twenty-one attended medical school. Walker graduated with honors from Syracuse Medical College in 1855. She was the only woman in her class.

After graduating, Dr. Walker married a fellow medical student, Albert Miller. She kept her last name and wore pants under her skirt instead of a traditional wedding dress. Together they opened a joint private practice in Rome, New York. Unfortunately, the practice saw hardship as the public would not accept a female

doctor.

When the Civil War broke out in 1861, Dr. Walker did not hesitate to join the Union effort. The Army did not allow women to work as surgeons, so Dr. Walker took a civilian role as a nurse. Wanting to make a difference, Dr. Walker served near the front lines including the Battle of Bull Run in 1861, the first major battle of the Civil War. The battle proved to be an indication of the long, bloody Civil War ahead with the Union forces suffering 460 deaths and over 1,000 injured soldiers.

Later Dr. Walker worked in the Patent Office Hospital in Washington, D.C., eventually having her skills recognized as a medical professional. In September of 1863, the Army hired Dr. Walker as a contract assistant surgeon, making her the first female surgeon of the United States Army.

Although Dr. Walker volunteered for the Union Army, she often crossed battle lines to provide medical care to soldiers from the Confederacy. In April of 1864, after attending to a Confederate soldier, Dr. Walker was arrested on suspicion of espionage. The confederacy held her captive for four months before her release in a prisoner exchange. After her release, Dr. Walker continued her medical service in the war and became the assistant surgeon of the Ohio 52nd Infantry.

After the end of the war, President Andrew Johnson awarded Dr. Walker with the Medal of Honor in 1865. The award was rescinded following the Army's 1916-1917 Review of Medal of Honor awards stating her status as a civilian for the reason. Dr. Walker refused to return the medal and continued to wear the medal until her death in 1919. President Jimmy Carter restored Dr. Walker's Medal of Honor status in 1977. Today Dr. Walker is the only woman to ever receive the Medal of Honor.

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