

“This young Lady...is what all you ladies shld be’: Roman Catholic Sister Nurses and Gendered Hierarchy in the American Civil War”

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Introduction

On November 29, 1859, twenty-year-old Barbara Dosh became a novitiate of the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth in Nazareth, Kentucky. She took the religious name Mary Lucy.¹ Orphaned at a young age, Dosh had always relied on the local sisters' benevolent service. First at St. Vincent's Orphan Asylum, where she became one of "near sixty destitute little beings who [had] few to think of or love them," and later at St. Vincent's Academy, where she comported herself as the "star pupil" in music and "all kinds of domestic work that a female should know."^{2,3,4} In August 1861, with a new habit, she missioned to Paducah, Kentucky to care for soldiers fallen ill in the first months of the Civil War. Her assigned charges all had typhoid fever. By late fall, Mary Lucy joined them. She succumbed to the fever on December 29, 1861—the first and youngest sister nurse to die in the Civil War.⁵

Like many, Mary Lucy Dosh's life was cut short by the war between the states. Her death and burial, however, offer insight to how hospital men and Civil War citizens perceived the Catholic sister nurses thrust into their daily sight by the illness and injury of war. Four days after Dosh's death, an honor guard of Confederate and Union soldiers called a truce and accompanied the young nun's body up the Ohio River on a U.S. gunboat. They carried her on to St. Vincent's Academy, her final resting place, and attended her burial.⁶ So powerful were the soldiers' sentiments of reverence for Dosh that, for a short time, men from both sides of the divided

¹ Anna Blanche McGill, *Sisters of Charity of Nazareth* (New York: The Encyclopedia Press, 1917), 82-83.

² Sister Catherine Spalding to Mrs. Maria Crozier, 25 February 1846, Folder 19, Letters of Mother Catherine Spalding, The Sisters of Charity of Nazareth Archival Center, Nazareth, Kentucky.

³ Sister Laretta Maher, "Recollections of Sister Mary Lucy Dosh" 1929, Folder 21, The Sisters of Charity of Nazareth Archival Center, Nazareth, Kentucky.

⁴ Sister Catherine Spalding to Mrs. Harbison, 3 March 1857, Folder 19, Letters of Mother Catherine Spalding, The Sisters of Charity of Nazareth Archival Center, Nazareth, Kentucky.

⁵ Anna Blanche McGill, *The Sisters of Charity of Nazareth, Kentucky* (New York: The Encyclopedia Press Inc., 1917), 151.

⁶ Ellen Ryan Jolly, *Nuns of the Battlefield* (Providence: The Providence Visitor Press, 1927) 8-9.

country halted the Civil War. So deep were their convictions of Sister Dosh's goodness and merit that the soldiers provided her a military funeral.⁷

In this work, I offer that the veneration and praise received by Mary Lucy Dosh were not confined to a single hospital or a single sister nurse. Throughout the American Civil War, over 600 Roman Catholic sister nurses spread themselves across the divided country's war hospitals.⁸ Their tradition of benevolent service secured them room in a space alongside white, middle-class, Protestant women just entering the public nursing scene. As both sets of women navigated the cultural and martial expectations of their posts, hospital men and Civil War citizens compared and contrasted the two groups and categorized them in a gendered manner most familiar to nineteenth-century citizens thinking of femininity—a model of perfect womanhood. In the end, Roman Catholic sisters sat at the apex. As Protestant women were upsetting the status quo in their newfound entrance to public nursing, Catholic nuns simply continued their expected work while demonstrating hyper-feminine qualities.⁹

Secondary literature about Civil War sister nurses is sparse compared to the expansive study of Civil War medicine. Very few works about sister nurses contain critical analysis; even fewer venture into a gendered analysis of the sister nurse experience. The first full length book to address sister nurses' Civil War service was *Angels of the Battlefield: A History of the Labors of the Catholic Sisterhoods in the Late Civil War*, published in 1897 by George Barton. Barton, like many of the historians who followed him, wrote extensively of the “good work” done by sister nurses in the final years of the war. This hagiographic approach allowed him to contend that anti-

⁷ Sister Laretta Maher, “Untitled Affidavit” 30 December 1929, in Davis Studio, LLC, 2013, “Civil War Truce” Mobile application software.

⁸ Mary Denis Maher, *To Bind Up the Wounds: Catholic Sister Nurses in the U.S. Civil War* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 1989), 69.

⁹ In this work, the terms “nun” and “sister” are used interchangeably to denote a woman religious of the Roman Catholic church. This is a stylistic choice. However, it is important to note that until 1983 these terms had separate and distinct meanings. “Nuns” had stricter vows of obedience, poverty, and enclosure while “sisters” had simple vows and were more engaged in charitable works and community life.

Catholic sentiment peaked in the years leading up to the war, but the courage, skills, and compassion exhibited by Civil War sister nurses reversed many derogatory assumptions about the Catholic Church. While I agree with Barton's assertion that "self-denial was a feature of their daily life, and the fact that they had taken vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience peculiarly fitted them for a duty that demanded personal sacrifices," his declaration that sister nurses erased some or all of the United States' mistrust toward Catholicism leans on no substantive evidence.¹⁰ Still, Barton's realization that the difference between how soldiers and hospital men perceived sister nurses and their Protestant colleagues lay in their very dissimilar lifestyles is key to my research.

In 1927 Ellen Ryan Jolly published the next comprehensive history of Civil War sister nurses, *Nuns of the Battlefield*, after a nearly ten year mission to erect a national monument in their honor. In this work, Jolly sought to depict the honorable service and sacrifice of all orders that provided sister nurses to serve in the war. While Barton had contended there were only four large orders of sister nurses, Jolly proved the collaboration of 21 orders. Still Jolly, writing to secure a congressional monument, wove a narrative of sister nurse self-sacrifice, skilled labor, and deference. She had to prove to Congress that these women so positively affected Americans during their wartime service that they deserved their own monument. Most important of Jolly's work is the tremendous source trail she left for future researchers. Today, even the smallest convent archives contain folder after folder of Ellen Ryan Jolly's correspondences and requests for documents. Her mission's place in Civil War memory is further discussed in chapter four.

Many other early works about Catholic sister nurses also follow the above models of glorification. James Walsh's *These Splendid Sisters* (1970) is one example; another sample is

¹⁰ George Barton. *Angels of the Battlefield: A History of the Labors of the Catholic Sisterhoods in the Late Civil War*. (Philadelphia: Catholic Art Pub. Co., 1897), 3.

Michael Fitzpatrick's "The Mercy Brigade" (1997). While I agree with and appreciate these scholars' attempts to record the charitable service of sister nurses in the Civil War, early historical works on these women lack critical analysis. Even some works published after the emergence of women's or gender history do not attempt to undergo any type of gendered analysis to better understand the experience of sister nurses as females in the Civil War.

Oppositely, since the emergence of women's and gender history, gender-centered analysis has dominated works about Protestant nurses in the Civil War. In the 1972 article "The War within a War: Women Nurses in the Union Army," Ann Douglas Wood argues that female Civil War nurses, who entered professional relief work due to their domestic attributes, acted deliberately to assume authority in military medicine. Their previous exemption from professional medicine combined with a domestic goal to make war hospitals more like nurturing homes justified their attempts to "cut through the red tape"¹¹ that men had placed around medical service and assure for themselves a permanent place in the profession. Other books and articles follow her lead, transforming over time as the field evolved.¹² Wood's work focused on northern, elite, white nurses, but later scholarship pays more attention to black and white nurses of all socioeconomic classes, and on both sides of the Mason-Dixon line.

The leading example of this transformation is Jane Schultz's 2004 *Women at the Front: Hospital Workers in Civil War America*. Schultz provides a full history of the women who served as nurses, laundresses, cooks, matrons, and a variety of other jobs in Civil War hospitals. While working to augment the original two-hundred word paragraph noting the medical service of women in *Medical and Surgical History of the War of the Rebellion*, Schultz pays close

¹¹ Ann Douglas Wood, "The War within a War: Women Nurses in the Union Army." *Civil War History* 18 (1972).

¹² See: Mary Elizabeth Massey, *Bonnet Brigades: American Women and the Civil War* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1967), also Kristie R. Ross, "'Women are needed here': Northern Protestant Women as Nurses During the Civil War 1861-1865" Ph.D. Diss. Columbia University, 1993.

attention to race, class, and region. In doing so, her narrative sharply contrasts with earlier Civil War nursing works that only explore northern medical care or white women's work in medical care. Overall, she argues that the varied backgrounds of female nurses and hospital workers fueled conflict among nurses and between hospital women and doctors. In doing so, Schultz exemplifies how class, race, and gender work together to reveal encompassing themes in hospital life.

While it is easy to see this transformation in the history of Protestant Civil War nursing, a gender-centered analysis is still rare in works detailing sister nurse service. In 1989 Mary Denis Maher wrote *To Bind Up the Wounds: Catholic Sister Nurses in the U.S. Civil War*. Widely considered to be the most encompassing work on Civil War sister nursing, Maher argues that the Catholic sister nurses of the Civil War set a standard for nursing in the United States, reversed negative attitudes towards nuns and female Catholics, and won understanding for the Catholic Church in America. It offers what feels like a more modern revision of earlier works. Maher is excellent in her discussions about the experience of sister nurses, but her overall argument is very close to the theses offered by earlier historians.

Still, a few articles on nineteenth century nuns strive to really use gender as a category of analysis. The article "Maternity of the Spirit: Nuns and Domesticity in Antebellum America" by Joseph Mannard is a great example. Mannard studied the relationship of nuns and the nineteenth century definition of domesticity to conclude that though sisters did not run household or live a necessarily domestic life, they promoted an ideal definition of domesticity among the women and girls they cared for in hospitals, orphanages, and schools. Additionally, Mannard points out that although nuns were free from the constraints of domesticity, there is no evidence to suggest they challenged their submissive role to male officials in the church.

While Mannard's work attempts to show intersections of gender and the experience of the nineteenth-century nun, it is an exception. Many more recent articles and books still stick to a generic re-telling of the ideas that Barton and Jolly introduced. While the study of Protestant nursing in the American Civil War has expanded under a gendered—as well as racial and socioeconomic—analysis, scholarship on sister nurses has remained almost as it was in 1897. It is past time to reassess the history of Civil War sister nursing.

This study consists of four chapters. The first chapter discusses the training, charitable work, and way of life of Catholic nuns in the nineteenth century. This allows a better understanding of how sisters' traditions, vows, and training formulated a way of life that many nineteenth-century citizens might associate with perfect womanhood. Nuns provided free, benevolent services to the poor or ill in their communities; took vows of obedience, chastity, and poverty; and lived in communal settings with long-established hierarchies of authority. Sources and descriptions from nineteenth-century convents reveal here that the traits required of nuns by their way of life matched cultural expectations communicated to all white, middle to upper-class nineteenth-century women in domestic guides, religious tracts, and women's magazines.

Chapter two discusses sister nurses' entrance to Civil War nursing. Most importantly, it demonstrates that after a brief period of initial shock or aversion caused by the mid-nineteenth century's rampant anti-Catholic literature, doctors and soldiers happily welcomed Catholic nursing sisters to war hospitals. In contrast to the sister nurse experience, Protestant women's entrance to war nursing is also discussed. By all accounts, Protestant nurses faced much more pushback from military men than the sister nurses at hand.

Chapter three further explores the experience of sister nurses in Civil War hospitals. It focuses heavily on how doctors, patients, and citizens perceived, praised, and held up the sister

nurses in their presence. Hospital men’s comparisons of sister nurses and Protestant nurses paint a clear picture in this chapter of the gendered hierarchy that established itself as the war went on.

Finally, chapter four travels ahead to a relevant account in Civil War memory. At the close of the Civil War, sister nurses returned home and continued their quiet pre-war work. Meanwhile, many Protestant nurses chose to write and publish war memoirs. By exploring this phenomenon, historians can begin to understand how constructions of Civil War memory “forgot” the sister nurses that once occupied a hierarchized space above Protestant nurses. Additionally, chapter four recounts the Nuns of the Battlefield monument’s voyage to fruition in the early twentieth century.

In addition to secondary literature, this senior thesis makes extensive use of letters, diaries, memoirs, newspapers, and government and military documents. Most of the primary sources come from six archives in Missouri, Indiana, Maryland, and Kentucky. The following chapters offer a counter to the typically hagiographic nature of sister nurse scholarship while simultaneously suggesting a new approach when considering the importance of gender expectations in nineteenth-century America. Through this comprehensive investigation, we can begin to understand the northern surgeon who entreated his female attendants to embody the zeal of a Sister of Charity, saying “This young Lady...is what all you ladies [should] be.”



Chapter One:

Precious Jewelry Twofold: Roman Catholic Sisters and Perfect Womanhood in the Nineteenth Century

On October 17, 1860 young Adeline Bayly wrote home to her brother, Josiah Muse. “The girls are learning ‘housekeeping,’” she reported, “The senior and first class young ladies made some nice ginger cakes and 12iscuit. The second class, some baked tomatoes, and the third some short cakes and baked potatoes.”¹³ Bayly was a student at St. Joseph’s Academy, a Catholic school for girls in Emmitsburg, Maryland. Founded by Elizabeth Seton in 1809 as the nation’s first free parochial school for girls, the Academy served as an example of the Catholic Church’s devotion to service.¹⁴ If asked about her school’s defining factor, Adeline Bayly might have mentioned her teachers—the Daughters of Charity. Clad in stark white cornettes adopted from their fellow sisters in France, the Emmitsburg nuns were the hands, eyes, and feet of Catholic benevolence in the area.

Throughout the nineteenth century, Catholic sisterhoods like the Daughters of Charity served in hospitals, orphanages, schools, asylums, kitchens, and of course, churches throughout the country. Though teaching, nursing, childcare, and other types of private and domestic labor were part of the nineteenth-century prescription for ideal women, Catholic nuns filled these roles in the public arena. As women without normative homes, they justified their work outside the home as gender-appropriate charity.¹⁵ Despite this distinction, nuns ascribed to cultural ideals of nineteenth-century womanhood and trained girls and women like Bayly in housewifery and

¹³ Adeline Bayly to Josiah Muse, 17 October 1860, Box 3 (7-5-1), Folder 18, Civil War Collection. Provincial Archives of the Daughters of Charity, Emmitsburg, Maryland.

¹⁴ Mary Agnes McCann, *The History of Mother Seton’s Daughters* (New York: Longmans, Green, and Company, 1917), 28.

¹⁵ Carol Coburn and Martha Smith, *Spirited Lives: How Nuns Shaped Catholic Culture and American Life, 1836-1920* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 7.

proper female conduct.¹⁶ Compounding on the cultural ideals that shaped nuns' behavior were additional religious vows. Understanding how nineteenth-century Roman Catholic nuns worked through a model of Victorian womanhood paired with complimentary expectations that required heightened humility, obedience, chastity, and selflessness can help us consider how these sisters were seen as "perfect women" in the Civil War hospital.

The January 1856 issue of *Godey's Lady's Book* described the character traits necessary for every good woman in a poem titled "The Young Ladies Toilet." To fulfill her womanly promise, ladies needed to possess qualities like "Attention and Obedience—[A] matchless set of earrings," "Neatness and Industry—[An] indispensable pair of bracelets," "Principle—[A] ring of tried gold," and "Piety—A precious diadem."¹⁷ With such charms, a woman could expect value, dignity, admiration, respect, and everlasting life. If a woman chose daily to wear these embellishments, she could live as the epitome of womanhood. This poem demonstrates the cultural expectations placed on white, middle to upper-class women in the nineteenth century. While we know that cultural ideals don't necessarily illustrate most women's historical reality, these expectations highlight the widespread archetypes that this class of women were oft compared against in nineteenth-century culture.

Historian Barbara Welter outlined these cardinal virtues—which she called piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity, in her 1966 work "The Cult of True Womanhood."¹⁸ After analyzing women's magazines, ladies' guides, gift annuals, and religious literature of the time, Welter concluded that these virtues "spelled mother, daughter, sister, wife—woman. Without

¹⁶ Joseph Mannard, "Maternity of the Spirit: Nuns and Domesticity in Antebellum America." *U.S. Catholic Historian* 5 (Summer/Fall 1986): 305-324.

¹⁷ "The Young Lady's Toilet," *Godey's Lady's Book*, January 1856, <http://www.accessible.com.proxy1.library.eiu.edu/accessible/docButton?AAWhat=doc&AAWhere=11&AABeanName=toc1&AANextPage=/printFullDocFromXML.jsp&AACheck=2.230.10.0.0> (accessed February 12, 2016).

¹⁸ For complications on "The Cult of True Womanhood," see Carol Lasser, "Beyond Separate Spheres: The Power of Public Opinion," *Journal of the Early Republic* 21 (Spring 2001): 115-123. Also see Mary Kelley, "Beyond the Boundaries," *Journal of the Early Republic* 21 (Spring 2001): 73-78.

them, no matter whether there was fame, achievement or wealth, all was ashes.”¹⁹ Though critique of Welter’s separate spheres ideology has abounded since the article’s release, I hold that the ideas presented in her work are relevant and useful in understanding these expectations’ widespread pervasiveness. Focusing on the era’s prescriptive literature is key as I attempt to understand how widely circulated and accepted ideas about what it meant to be a “true woman” affected the perception of nuns in Civil War hospitals.²⁰

American nuns in the nineteenth century lived up to the virtues of “true womanhood” doubly. First, as women and second as women religious. Growing up in traditional households, all nineteenth-century sisters had a typical gender socialization. However, after entering religious life, sisters took vows requiring interminable religiosity, purity, and obedience. The next pages will explore how the above discussed traits—represented as treasured jewelry in the *Godey’s Lady’s Book* poem—manifested themselves in the religious training and lifestyle of nineteenth-century American nuns.

Piety or religiosity, the “precious diadem” that “secured [women] an everlasting crown” defined Catholic sisters’ way of life.²¹ For nineteenth-century nuns, service and faithfulness to God and the church was the *raison d’etre*. With the piety of the Virgin Mary as their exemplar, nuns followed strenuous prayer and praise rituals, took multiple religious vows, and practiced austere denial of worldly comforts.²² An 1848 manual originally published for the Sisters of Charity outlines the hyper-religious “rule of life” that guided everyday life for nuns. They were to pray while rising and dressing; before and after eating; before participating in recreation; before, during, and after mass; before and after confession; upon retiring for the evening; and, of

¹⁹ Barbara Welter, “The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860” *American Quarterly* 18 (Summer 1966): 151-174.

²¹ “The Young Lady’s Toilet,” *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, January 1856,

²² Mary Denis Maher, *To Bind Up the Wounds: Catholic Sister Nurses in the U.S. Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1989), 19-20.

course, in a multitude of other situations. A closer look at the many stages of this lifestyle illustrates the piety that characterized nineteenth-century nuns.

Upon entering religious life, young sisters underwent three to six months of postulancy, a trial period of convent life. Postulants lived and worked with professed sisters so they could begin to grasp an understanding of living a strictly religious life. After this brief introduction, prospective sisters received their habits and chose a specific religious name.²³ Adoption of a new name came from the biblical example of Abram, whose name was changed after entering a covenant with the Lord.²⁴ For postulants, taking a religious name signified entrance into a new life—one of mindful piety and steadfast religiosity. It also signified their transition into the next stage of sisterhood, the novitiate. For the next two years, novitiates underwent serious study of theology, church history, and their order's history. They also received instruction about proper prayer and religious ritual, and how to behave properly as religious women.²⁵ Through postulancy and the novitiate, soon-to-be sisters reinforced the gendered lessons on piety they received while growing up outside convent walls. After two and a half years assimilating to sisterhood, novitiates took their first set of vows. The vows promised temporary chastity, poverty, and obedience for a set number of years living and working as a full member of the order. After those years, the sister could choose to leave the community or make the final profession.²⁶

The extreme piety required by nineteenth-century Roman Catholic nuns is evident in examining their training and assimilation practices, but religious women's lives after vows could

²³ Coburn and Smith, *Spirited Lives*, 72.

²⁴ George Stewart, *Marvels of Charity: History of American Sisters and Nuns* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, Inc., 1994), 29.

²⁵ Coburn and Smith, *Spirited Lives*, 73.

²⁶ Eileen Brewer, *Nuns and the Education of American Catholic Women 1860-1920* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1987), 18.

be considered even more pious. For entire lifetimes, professed women religious arose from sleep nightly for midnight prayers and chants, sometimes even spending the entire night praying in chapel.²⁷ Days were often spent observing “strict silence” in the name of religion.²⁸ At least once a month, some orders set aside a special time to “prepare for death.”²⁹ In fact, Sisters lived according to a schedule that revolved entirely around religious practice. Days started with prayer followed by meditation and morning mass. At meal times, sisters listened to spiritual readings. After the allotted hour of recreation each day, there would be more time for rosaries, penance, chapel, and night prayers. Many women religious also spent time in theological study each day.³⁰ Sometimes, the sisters’ level of piety was so great it had a negative influence on their health. In writing about the daily activities of nineteenth-century nuns, Mary Ewens adds that “the combination of long hours of prayer and strenuous activities for the neighbor caused severe tension in early American religious houses...causing detriment to [sisters’] health.”³¹ Though cultural idealism named all white, middle-class women as “angels” in their homes, nineteenth-century women religious certainly projected a heightened level of piety in their daily lives.

If piety was first in directing and defining the lives of nineteenth-century sisters and nuns, obedience—the “Matchless pair of Ear-rings” that gave “attentive lessons”—came in at a close second.³² Life in a convent reflected the hierarchical and patriarchal nature of the Catholic Church.³³ As mentioned earlier, women religious took vows of obedience when entering full

²⁷ Mary Ewens, *The Role of the Nun in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Arno Press, 1978),

²⁸ Coburn and Smith, *Spirited Lives*, 74.

²⁹ Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul, *St. Vincent's Manual: Containing a Selection of Prayers and Devotional Exercises, Originally Prepared for Use of the Sisters of Charity in the United States of America* (Baltimore, John Murphy: 1848), 602.

³⁰ Brewer, *Nuns and the Education of American Catholic Women*, 19.

³¹ Ewens, *The Role of the Nun*, 113.

³² “The Young Lady’s Toilet,” *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, January 1856, <http://www.accessible.com.proxy1.library.eiu.edu/accessible/docButton?AAWhat=doc&AAWhere=11&AABeanName=toc1&AANextPage=/printFullDocFromXML.jsp&AACheck=2.230.10.0.0> (accessed February 12, 2016).

religious life. From postulancy or novitiate to the rising ranks of Mother or Provincial, women religious always occupied a subordinate position to higher-ranking sisters or the convent's overseeing priests or bishop.³⁴ In their subordinate role, "a sister immediately obeyed her superior, humbly and without complaint or murmur," whether the command was "important or trivial, agreeable or disagreeable."³⁵ One Sister of Mercy put this concept very plainly: "Obedience makes us religious."³⁶

In "The Cult of True Womanhood," Welter writes: "Woman understood her position if she was the right kind of woman, a true woman."³⁷ For nuns, this position meant total acquiescence to all authority figures and avoiding any type of singularity that would make one stand out among the others. Sisters were dissuaded from showcasing any special talents or acting out in a manner different from the other sisters, as these behaviors indicated that a nun was not totally subsumed in her work and role. This mindset also contributes to the sparse amount of personal writings produced by sisters during the nineteenth century. Keeping a diary of personal feelings and thoughts would not have been seen as self-effacing behavior.³⁸ Notable works like *The Civil War Annals* only exist because male church officials directly requested that the sisters record their Civil War experience.³⁹ During the war, sister nurses' obedience to the war hospital hierarchy shone as one of their most pleasing behaviors to the male doctors they worked with. Sister nurses' inability to subvert doctors' orders will be addressed more thoroughly in chapter three.

³⁴ Stewart, *Marvels of Charity*, 29.

³⁵ Brewer, *Nuns and the Education of American Catholic Women*, 19.

³⁶ The Sisters of Mercy of Chicago, *Reminiscences of Seventy Years (1846-1916)*(Chicago: F.J. Ringley, 1916), 192.

³⁷ Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood," 159.

³⁸ Coburn and Smith, *Spirited Lives*, 80-81.

³⁹ Father Francis Burlando to the Daughters of Charity, Emmitsburg, Maryland, 30 October 1866, Box 1 (7-5-1), Folder 13, Civil War Collection. Provincial Archives of the Daughters of Charity, Emmitsburg, Maryland.

Principle, the “ring of tried gold [that] ‘twill sin restrain and peace of conscience give,” was another important and relevant part in the life of nineteenth-century women religious.⁴⁰ Bound by vows of chastity and society’s expectations for unmarried females, women religious were exceptionally safe from the tears that accompanied a “loss of purity.”⁴¹ Much like piety, purity or “principle” was stressed from the moment girls or women entered convent life. In church history, a veil or habit symbolized a woman’s unavailability for marriage.⁴² As discussed earlier, electing to receive the habit and become a novitiate was a monumental step for women religious, signifying their piety and also, their unavailability for sex. In some orders, candidates for sisterhood received a wedding band along with the habit and paid a dowry, representing their celibate “marriage” to Christ or the church.⁴³

As discussed by Eileen Brewer in *Nuns and the Education of American Catholic Women*, avowing chastity did not only refer to abstaining from sexual intercourse, but also to maintaining proper and chaste conduct in all company. For this reason superiors limited sisters’ contact with males who weren’t priests or bishops. When sisters had to be totally alone with priests or other male church officials, such as in confession, a grate or lattice was placed between the two parties.⁴⁴ According to Brewer, “one who so much as ‘fixed her gaze’ upon a man received admonitions and penance.”⁴⁵

In Welter’s discussion on purity, she brings up the moral dilemma faced by women in their attempts to safeguard their purity:

Purity, considered as a moral imperative, set up a dilemma which was hard to resolve. Woman must preserve her virtue until marriage and marriage was

⁴⁰ “The Young Lady’s Toilet,” *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, January 1856.

⁴¹ Welter, “The Cult of True Womanhood,” 154.

⁴² Ewens, *The Role of the Nun*, 90.

⁴³ Stewart, *Marvels of Charity*, 29.

⁴⁴ Ewens, *The Role of the Nun*, 191.

⁴⁵ Brewer, *Nuns and the Education of American Catholic Women*, 19.

necessary for her happiness. Yet marriage was, literally, an end to innocence. She was told not to question this dilemma, but simply to accept it.⁴⁶

As women who never entered traditional marriage, sisters did not face the repercussions of this moral dilemma. Additionally, though unmarried, they were not viewed in the same harsh light as “spinsters” in nineteenth-century society. Living chaste, charitable lives, they could be seen as perpetually wholesome women, capable of being pure while still fulfilling society’s expectations of them as women religious. Later in Civil War hospitals, sister nurses were welcomed while Protestant women who were not considered “matronly” were discouraged from nursing service.⁴⁷

The final virtue of nineteenth-century womanhood recognized by scholars is domesticity or “Neatness and Industry”—the pair of bracelets worn together.⁴⁸ Without normative homes, women religious fit into the realm of domesticity differently than they did religiosity, purity, and obedience. Still, they can be seen as promoters of and prescribers to this nineteenth-century virtue. Joseph Mannard, author of “Maternity of the Spirit: Nuns and Domesticity in Antebellum America” argues that though nuns could not fit wholly into the realm themselves, they untiringly taught proper domestic roles to the girls and women they ministered to in schools, orphanages, hospitals, and asylums.⁴⁹ Thus, young female students like the aforementioned Adeline Bayly learned “housekeeping” skills like how to bake ginger cakes and cook baked potatoes. Additionally, academy curriculum included domestic subjects like classical languages, drawing, instrumental music, vocal music, and needle-work.⁵⁰ Despite sisters’ unique way of life, Mannard argues that they promoted traditional family structure and gender roles.⁵¹ While

⁴⁶ Welter, “The Cult of True Womanhood.,” 158.

⁴⁷ Dorothea Dix, “Circular No. 8” (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Surgeon General’s Office, 1862).

⁴⁸ “The Young Lady’s Toilet,” *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, January 1856.

⁴⁹ Joseph Mannard, “Maternity of the Spirit: Nuns and Domesticity in Antebellum America.” *U.S. Catholic Historian* 5 (Summer/Fall 1986): 305-324.

⁵⁰ Brewer, *Nuns and the Educations of American Catholic Women*, 48-60.

⁵¹ Mannard, “Maternity of the Spirit: Nuns and Domesticity in Antebellum America.,” 305-324.

Protestant women were expected to be nursing their families in the home and teaching their daughters housewifery, nuns were performing these same labors, unpaid, in a domestic extension.

As Roman Catholic nuns continued their nursing service at the outbreak of the Civil War, they were compared to the white, middle class Protestant women who were just entering the nursing profession. As women governed both by societal gender prescriptions and the requirements of religious life, sister nurses were seen as possessing advanced or perfect qualities of a “true woman” in comparison to their Protestant counterparts—they simply possessed the precious jewelry of womanhood twofold. As the war went on and Protestant women faced austere conditions and clashes with doctors and other hospital men, the hyper-feminine traits of women religious allowed them to be occupy a rank higher than Protestant nurses on their gender hierarchy.

Chapter Two

“We found in the Sisters...a corps of faithful, devoted, and trained nurses”: Roman Catholic Sister Nurses enter the American Civil War

During the last month of the Civil War, Sister J.S. of the Daughters of Charity recalled her entrance to war nursing at Satterlee Hospital in Philadelphia: “We landed on the grounds at 10 o’ clock, the place was so large that we could not find the entrance. The workmen looked at us in amazement, thinking perhaps we belonged to the Flying Artillery.”⁵² Sr. J.S. was one of twenty-five Daughters of Charity requested by U.S. Surgeon General William A. Hammond to take over operations at Satterlee, the Union’s largest hospital, in May 1862. Working one sister to a ward, the group nursed Union and Confederate men, distributed medications, assisted doctors, cooked, laundered, cleaned, and offered spiritual assistance to the waning. In a letter to Abraham Lincoln just a few months later, General Hammond confided “we found in the Sisters of Charity a corps of faithful, devoted, and trained nurses ready to administer to the sick and wounded.”⁵³

Sister J.S.’s recollection and General Hammond’s praise work together to characterize sister nurses’ entrance to hospital service in the American Civil War. Initially, sister nurses faced shock or outright aversion to their presence. Certainly, Satterlee’s workmen were stunned when they encountered the “Flying Artillery”—Sister J.S.’s reference to the white, wide-reaching cornettes of the Daughters of Charity. However, as the sisters’ ability, devotedness, and

⁵² Sister J.S., “Notes: Satterlee Hospital, West Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.” April 1865. Box 4, Folder 4, Civil War Collection, Daughters of Charity Provincial Archives, Emmitsburg, Maryland.

⁵³ William A. Hammond to Abraham Lincoln, 16 July 1862, Series 1. General Correspondence. 1833-1916. The Abraham Lincoln Papers at the Library of Congress, <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/alhtml/malhome.html>. Here, Hammond refers to the Daughters of Charity as Sisters of Charity. When founded, the sisterhood in Emmitsburg was known as the Sisters of Charity. However, in 1850 the group united with the French Daughters of Charity, changing their name and rules and adopting the distinguishable white cornette.

traditional feminine qualities became apparent, their presence became welcomed and sought-after in war hospitals across the Union and Confederacy. This chapter will explore sister nurses' entrance to civil war nursing with special interest in how civil war citizens' initial shock transformed into appreciation or understanding. Also, to better understand how Victorian expectations of womanhood were manifest in public nursing work, sister nurses' Civil War entrance will be contrasted with the war nursing debut of middle-class, white, Protestant women.

As nursing sisters entered hospital service, they came into contact with more Americans than ever before—raising eyebrows and suspicion along the way. Most of the aversion they met came in the form of initial shock to the sisters' appearance or a general misunderstanding of convent life. Lieutenant Colonel William Ballentine of the 82nd Ohio Volunteers camped near the Daughters of Charity “nunnery” outside Emmitsburg, Maryland in the days before the Battle of Gettysburg. While writing a letter home to his friend Luther Winget, he took time to describe his first encounter with Catholic nuns:

They wear black dresses (without any hoops), with white aprons, a cape coming over the shoulders and coming to a peak at the waist. And a white bonnet in the shape of a scoop shovel (only more so). It has a cape also which comes down to the shoulder. The bonnet is the ugliest piece of furniture I ever saw.⁵⁴

While the general appearance of the sisters offended Ballentine, he went on to report that “they are said to be very kind and very good nurses.”⁵⁵ Like many U.S. citizens of the nineteenth century, Ballentine may have been influenced by anti-Catholic and anti-nun literature that had been circulating homes and newspapers since German and Irish immigration worked up a wave of nativist sentiment in the 1830s and 40s.⁵⁶ The most famous of these “exposé” works was *The*

⁵⁴ Lt. Col. William Ballentine to Mr. Luther Winget, 30 June 1863, Box 1 (7-5-1), Folder 4, Civil War Collection. Provincial Archives of the Daughters of Charity, Emmitsburg, Maryland.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Mary Denis Maher, *To Bind Up the Wounds: Catholic Sister Nurses in the U.S. Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), 16.

Awful Disclosures of Maria Monk, published in 1836. The book, authored by a woman who claimed to be an escaped Religious Hospitaller of St. Joseph from Montreal's Hôtel Dieu, claimed that sisters catered to the sexual needs of Catholic priests. In one of the most lurid scenes in the book, Monk described the disposal of infants born out of priest and sister relations in the convent:

They were taken, one after another, by one of the old nuns, in the presence of us all. She pressed her hand upon the mouth and nose of the first, so tight that it could not breathe, and in a few minutes, when the hand was removed, it was dead. Then she took the other, and treated it in the same way. No sound was heard, and both the children were corpses. The greatest indifference was shown by all present during this operation; for all, as I well knew, were long accustomed to such scenes. The little bodies were then taken into the cellar, thrown into the pit I have mentioned, and covered with a quantity of lime.⁵⁷

Experts promptly found Monk's *Awful Disclosures* to be false,—the woman had never joined convent life with the St. Joseph's Religious Hospitallers—but this sensationalist literature still made rounds in American homes.⁵⁸ American Protestant newspapers even reprinted their favorite excerpts. *The Downfall of Babylon*, a newspaper published by Samuel B. Smith, “a late popish priest,” featured shocking Monk-inspired illustrations in a front-page series that stretched April to November, 1836. The pictures depicted nuns tied down on beds, hanging by their feet from iron rings in the ceiling, dropping babies in pits, and suffering in specially designed “purgatory rooms.”⁵⁹ In another exposé novel titled *The Escaped Nun*, a woman self-described as “one who has passed through a variety of transformations, including that of a *Sister of Charity*” described a punishment in which she was forced to lie in a coffin surrounded by candles as other

⁵⁷ Maria Monk, *Awful Disclosures of Maria Monk, or, The Hidden Secrets of a Nun's Life in a Convent Exposed* (Manchester: Milner, 1836), 155-56.

⁵⁸ Ray Allen Billington, “Maria Monk and her Influence.” *The Catholic Historical Review* 22 (1936), 283–296.

⁵⁹ *The Downfall of Babylon*, April 2- November 12, 1836. Box 1, Folder “Smith, Samuel B., *The Downfall of Babylon*, New York.” The George C. Stewart Research Collection. Avila University Archives, Kansas City, Missouri.

nuns doused her with holy water.⁶⁰ After the ritual, the community refused to communicate with the chastised nun. When passing through the narrow halls, sisters “stood close with their backs to the wall, holding their veils and their clothes for fear they should touch [her].”⁶¹ With all the speculation, fabrication, and general ignorance surrounding convent life, it is understandable that American men and women exhibited unease when first encountering sister nurses in war hospitals.

If not aversion or shock, the sisters attracted curiosity as they traveled into areas without much knowledge of Catholic laypeople. In *The Civil War Annals*, an unpublished manuscript of sister nurse recollections gathered after the war, one sister nurse remembered her journey to a Georgian war hospital in 1863:

We were, to many a great curiosity, so as that wherever we stopped, a crowd gathered round us, of men, women, & children. Upon one occasion leaving to wait 2 hours for a car, the curious examined us closely, saying: what, or who are they? Are they men or women? Oh! what a strange uniform this company has adopted & e. surely the Enemy will run from them. Once or twice, they pushed roughly against us to see whether we were human beings or not. A Sr. spoke to one, and, many at this, clapped their hands & shouted aloud: She spoke! She Spoke!⁶²

As time went on and sisters’ presence became commonplace, shock and aversion levels subsided. After the war, one sister recalled: “They who at first spurned our kindest efforts, would tell us after wards, that our Religion was so calumniated by those who were ignorant of it, that, *they* had looked on us in horror until they saw for themselves what Catholics were.”⁶³ Of course,

⁶⁰ Josephine Bunkley, *The Escaped Nun, or, Disclosures of Convent Life and the Confessions of a Sister of Charity : Giving a More Minute Detail of Their Inner Life and a Bolder Revelation of the Mysteries and Secrets of Nunneries Than Have Ever Before Been Submitted to the American Public* (New York: DeWitt & Davenport Publishers, 1855), 190.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 127.

⁶² The Daughters of Charity, *The Civil War Annals*, 1866, 216. Box 1 (7-5-1), Folder 13, Civil War Annals Collection. Provincial Archives of the Daughters of Charity, Emmitsburg, Maryland.

⁶³ The Daughters of Charity, *The Civil War Annals*, 1866, 175. Box 1 (7-5-1), Folder 14, Civil War Annals Collection. Provincial Archives of the Daughters of Charity, Emmitsburg, Maryland.

anti-Catholic sentiment existed in the United States well into the twentieth century. However, many men and women who benefitted from the sisters' presence described a change of heart. A wounded man in a southern war hospital reserved this changed sentiment for the sisters alone: "Srs of Charity are like pure Gold, but the Catholics ought to be burned alive for their badness."⁶⁴

As Catholic sisters established themselves as Civil War nurses, Protestant women began professional nursing service en masse for the first time in the United States. Due to the immense conflict at hand, the inability of the war department to handle growing medical needs per the traditional guidelines, and women's insistence and perseverance in being accepted to war nursing work, women were welcomed and authorized as nurses for both Union army.⁶⁵ However, the gendered expectations for women described in the previous chapter created some backlash and eventually a hierarchy that ranked nursing women based on their adherence to traditional gender prescriptions. By taking a closer look at the gendered atmosphere of Civil War hospitals, we can begin to understand why Walt Whitman, a volunteer war nurse himself, attested that "young ladies, however refined, educated and benevolent, do not succeed as army nurses," while, "Mothers, full of motherly feeling...bringing reminiscences of home, and with the magnetic touch of hands, are the true women nurses."⁶⁶

Soon after the war's beginning, women across the Union began volunteering in hospitals without official appointments or organized distribution. In response, Surgeon General R.C.

⁶⁴ The Daughters of Charity, *The Civil War Annals*, 1866, 220. Box 1 (7-5-1), Folder 14, Civil War Annals Collection. Provincial Archives of the Daughters of Charity, Emmitsburg, Maryland. Chapter Three further discusses the degree to which hospital men disassociated sisters with the Catholic faith in order to better accept their ministrations.

⁶⁵ Frank Freeman, *Gangrene and Glory: Medical Care During the American Civil War* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2001).

⁶⁶ Walt Whitman, *The Wound Dresser: A Series of Letters Written from the Hospitals in Washington During the War of the Rebellion* (Boston: Small & Maynard, 1898), 42.

Wood appointed long-time asylum reformer Dorothea Dix to the oversee female nurses' appointment to war hospitals.⁶⁷ Acting as the Superintendent of Army Nurses, Dix proposed a set of stringent guidelines. In addition to being between thirty and forty-five years of age, Dix required applicants to supply written testimonials indicating high levels of "morality, sobriety, honesty, and trustworthiness."⁶⁸ Also, under Dix's regulations, women were to possess subordinate qualities and to "dress plain (colors brown, grey or black), and while connected with the service no ornaments of any kind."⁶⁹ Hannah Ropes, a Massachusettsan nursing in Georgetown's Union Hotel Hospital, wrote to her son Edward describing Dix's policies in action: "Miss Dix does not allow young people in the hospital unless very ugly; but she lets me stay during the daytime, which is not very complimentary to my good looks."⁷⁰

As the Union's convoluted medical situation expanded, orders passed that effectively undermined Dix's power and allowed surgeons to take on their own attendants. Still, Dix's campaign to place only candidates that exhibited qualities most closely related to "true womanhood" in war hospitals indicates a concern for traditional gender role adherence as Protestant women moved from private sphere to public.

Fear that hospital life would damage middle-class women's delicate virtue or wholesome reputation constituted one area of backlash nursing women faced. As discussed by Jane Schultz in *Women at the Front*, both Northern and Southern women met an ongoing discourse over the dangers women faced living and working in hospitals with soldiers and medical men alike. Hospital life, many feared, would jeopardize purity, a cardinal virtue of nineteenth-century

⁶⁷ Jane Schultz, *Women at the Front: Hospital Workers in Civil War America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 15. From the beginning of Dix's appointment, "Sisters of Charity" were placed out of the realm of her control, as they received their orders from the Surgeon General or military hospital surgeons directly.

⁶⁸ "Women Nurses," *The National Republican*, June 12, 1861, 2.

⁶⁹ "Circular No. 8," *Cleveland Morning Leader*, August 20, 1862, 2.

⁷⁰ Hannah Ropes to Edward Ropes, 19 January 1863, in John R. Brumgardt, ed. *Civil War Nurse: The Diary and Letters of Hannah Ropes* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1980), 123.

womanhood. One unstated fear, according to Frank Freemon, was the exposure of young women to “the naked male body.”⁷¹

Another concern voiced by war surgeons and doctors involved the insubordination and unwillingness to follow military command chains exhibited by nursing women. Even Surgeon General Hammond expressed his apprehension in hiring Protestant nurses in a letter to President Lincoln: “For the future, however, I will endeavor to obtain Protestants, but it will be a difficult task as they will not subscribe to the same discipline, nor undergo the same hardships [as sister nurses].”⁷² Mary Livermore, an agent of the Northwestern branch of the United States Sanitary Commission, remembered a doctor’s comment on Protestant women’s insubordination and sister nurses’ obedience in her memoir:

Your Protestant nurses are always finding some mare’s-nest or other...They all write for the papers, and the story finds its way into print, and directly we are in hot water. Now, the ‘Sisters’ never see anything they ought not to see, nor hear anything they ought not to hear, and they never write for the papers.⁷³

One specific area of conflict between Protestant nurses and their medical superiors concerned food distribution. In a few cases, surgeons reported subscribing a particular diet to a convalescent only to have a nurse contradict orders and offer patients homemade delicacies and richer, more nourishing foods.⁷⁴ In another example involving food distribution, Mary A. Bickerdyke—known as Mother Bickerdyke to the soldiers she treated—charged her surgeon superior with stealing the delicacies sent to her by the Chicago Sanitary Commission. After multiple instances of missing food, Bickerdyke set up what Mary Livermore deemed a “dangerous ruse” to determine the culprits:

⁷¹ Freemon, *Gangrene and Glory*, 52.

⁷² William A. Hammond to Abraham Lincoln, 16 July 1862, Series 1. General Correspondence. 1833-1916. The Abraham Lincoln Papers at the Library of Congress, <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/alhtml/malhome.html>.

⁷³ Mary A. Livermore, *My Story of the War: A Woman’s Narrative of Four Years Personal Experience As a Nurse in the Union Army, and in Relief Work at Home, in Hospitals, Camps, and the Front, During the War of the Rebellion* (Hartford: A.D. Worthington & Company, 1889), 224.

⁷⁴ Schultz, *Women at the Front*, 131-32.

Purchasing a quantity of tartar emetic at a drug store, she mixed it with some stewed peaches that she had openly cooked in the kitchen, telling Tom, the cook, that ‘she wanted to leave them on the kitchen table to over night to cool.’ Then she went to her own room to await results. She did not wait long. Soon the sounds of suffering from the terribly sick thieves reached her ears, when, like a Nemesis, she stalked in among them. There they were, cooks, table waiters, stewards, ward-masters,—all save some of the surgeons—suffering terribly from the emetic, but more from the apprehension that they were poisoned. ‘Peaches don’t seem to agree with you, eh?’ she said, looking on the pale, retching, groaning fellows with a sardonic smile. ‘Well let me tell you that you will have a worse time than this if you keep on stealing! You may eat something seasoned with ratsbane one of these nights.’⁷⁵

While Bickerdyke’s case is an example of extreme insubordination, it is well-noted that female nurses sometimes butted heads with their hospital superiors. Lack of subordination, another cardinal virtue of Victorian womanhood, affected how Protestant nurses were perceived in war hospitals in comparison to their Catholic counterparts.

As the war went on, soldiers, surgeons, and other hospital men perceived Protestant and Catholic female nurses on a hierarchical scale informed by their imbedded understanding of “true womanhood” and Victorian gender prescriptions. While Protestant women were understood to be stepping outside their traditional realm and into the war hospital, Catholic sister nurses operated in war hospitals as an extension of their religious duty. In the next chapter, the nuances of this hierarchy will be addressed to better understand the construction of sister nurses as perfect women in the Civil War hospital.

⁷⁵ Mary A. Livermore, *My Story of the War: A Woman’s Narrative of Four Years Personal Experience As a Nurse in the Union Army, and in Relief Work at Home, in Hospitals, Camps, and the Front, During the War of the Rebellion* (Hartford: A.D. Worthington & Company, 1889), 481.

Chapter 3

“[Oh] you are just like my mother to me!”: Hospital Men and Civil War Citizens Perceive the Sister Nurses

Brigadier General Lew Wallace of Indiana fell quite hard for a certain “poetic maiden” during a visit to a Paducah, Kentucky war hospital in December 1861. Writing home to his step-mother, Wallace could not leave out any details about the woman with the “beautiful Madonna face.” He described her as a delicate and refined nurse no more than twenty years old, who moved “softly among the rough men to speak comforting words, write their letters, console the dying with prayers, and send off a lock of hair from the forehead of the still sleepers passed beyond her ministrations.” She had a bright smile, “milkwhite teeth without a flaw, dimples... [and] lovely brown eyes.” So that nothing would be missing from his awestruck description, Wallace included her name: Sister Beatrice, a nursing nun of the Sisters of the Holy Cross. Understanding his plight in adoring a woman promised to the church, Wallace lamented: “Were I a man I should try to win this fair sweet saint from her vows, and set her in a shrine for my worship, somewhere near the old birch trees of Indiana.” However, resigned to her situation, he finished: “She stands in the place of mothers who cannot come, and mourns in their stead, ‘most of all for the many lost souls.’”⁷⁶

To Lew Wallace, Sister Beatrice represented everything a woman should be. With her self-sacrificing work, flawless beauty, pious intentions, pure heart, and motherly care, she embodied purity, religiosity, obedience, and domesticity—cardinal virtues prescribed for perfect

⁷⁶ Union Brigadier General Lew Wallace to Zerelda Gray Sanders Wallace, 18 December 1861, Box J3.1, Folder 3, The Civil War I, The Sisters of the Holy Cross Archives and Records, South Bend.

Victorian womanhood.⁷⁷ During the Civil War, the war hospital became a place where white, middle-class, Protestant women and Catholic sisters worked alongside each other to nurse Union and Confederate men. Naturally, the hospital men and Civil War citizens who came in contact with these two groups compared, contrasted, and categorized them in a gendered manner most familiar to nineteenth-century citizens thinking of femininity—a model of perfect womanhood. In the end, Roman Catholic sisters sat at the apex of this gendered hierarchy. While Protestant women were viewed as upsetting the status quo in their newfound entrance to public nursing, Catholic nuns simply continued their expected work while demonstrating hyper-feminine qualities.

This chapter will explore the ways hospital men and civil war citizens categorized, perceived, and described Catholic sister nurses after they established their presence in war hospitals. Through exploring remarks on the womanly nature of sisters; the willingness of soldiers to see sister nurses as motherly figures; and direct comparisons made between Protestant nurses and Catholic sister nurses, we can begin to see how nursing nuns found themselves at the top of the gendered hierarchy aforementioned. Additionally, this chapter will address how Civil War soldiers sought to consciously remove sister nurses from the realm of Catholicism to better fit them into their understanding of perfect womanhood.

Early in the war, the *Indianapolis Daily Journal* reported on conditions at the newly occupied Indianapolis Hospital. After listing recent deaths and sicknesses currently present in the wards, the article ended with a few words of praise:

⁷⁷ Barbara Welter, “The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860” *American Quarterly* 18 (Summer 1966): 151-174. Though critique of Welter’s separate spheres ideology has abounded since the article’s release, I hold that the ideas presented in the work are relevant and useful in understanding “perfect womanhood” as prescribed to white, middle class women in the nineteenth-century. Welter’s restricted use of prescriptive literature is key to my work as I attempt to understand how widely circulated and accepted ideas about what it meant to be a “true woman” affected the perception of nuns in Civil War hospitals. For historiographical complication of separate spheres ideology, see Carol Lasser, “Beyond Separate Spheres: The Power of Public Opinion,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 21 (Spring 2001): 115-123.

In conclusion, we feel that we have performed only a plain, straight-forward duty, and that whatever success may have attended the management of the Hospital is due in great degree to the noble and self-sacrificing efforts of the meek and worthy women—the Sisters of Providence.⁷⁸

Though traditionally a teaching order, the Sisters of Providence had been requested to take over daily operations at the hospital by the attending surgeons, Dr. Kitchen and Dr. Fletcher.⁷⁹ This is just one example of Civil War citizens willingness to praise sister nurses for traits often associated with proper womanhood. While the hospital men had only performed a normal duty, the meek, self-sacrificing, and worthy sister nurses were to thank for the hospital's success.

Other instances of general praise come from the recollections of sister nurses themselves. Sister Matilda Coskery of the Daughters of Charity recalled an incident that occurred as a group of sisters made their weekly nursing visit to a nearby war prison. The prison's original officer in command had been replaced with another, who tried to deny them entrance. Coskery described that when word of the sisters' exclusion got to the guards, "they became indignant and stepping forward, said these are not ladies or women but Sisters of Charity. Thus were we permitted to go on without further trouble."⁸⁰ This quote is interesting in that it offers praise to the sister nurses while simultaneously setting them on a level higher than other women. In this case, the officer in charge feared inappropriate contact between women and the coarse men and also subversive behavior from nurses not familiar with the military's chain of command. This is a recognizable example of how the sister nurses' required vows—especially chastity and obedience—affected their perception as perfect women.

⁷⁸ "Indianapolis Hospital," *Indianapolis Daily Journal*, August 16, 1861. Box 1, Folder 1, Civil War Collection, The Sisters of Providence Archives, Terre Haute, IN.

⁷⁹ Sister Mary Cecilia, unpublished journal entry, 15 May 1861. Box 1, Folder 3, Civil War Collection, The Sisters of Providence Archives, Terre Haute, IN.

⁸⁰ The Daughters of Charity, *The Civil War Annals*, 1866, 185. Box 1 (7-5-1), Folder 14, Civil War Annals Collection. Provincial Archives of the Daughters of Charity, Emmitsburg, Maryland.

In another recollection, Sister Coskery detailed an exclamation from a Northern surgeon shortly after the Battle of Antietam. After reprimanding a nurse for treating wounded Confederate soldiers better than their Union equivalents, the surgeon entreated his attendants to nurse both sides equally and embody the zeal of a sister nurse known for her impartiality: “I [could] never fear for any human misery they had charge of...—This young Lady, [said] he, is what all you Ladies [should] be.”⁸¹ Though directly referring to impartiality in nursing, the surgeon’s statement had larger implications. By declaring the sister as the model for the other nurses to aspire to, he effectively communicated the gendered hierarchy existing in war hospitals.

Another area where the gendered hierarchy in Civil War hospitals is visible is in references to sister nurses as mothers or maternal figures. When Lew Wallace declared that Sister Beatrice stood in place of the mothers who could not travel to care for their sons, he effectively highlighted her domestic traits that contribute to the hierarchy at hand. In *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War*, author Drew Gilpin Faust describes the significance of family members’ presence at the deathbed of nineteenth-century citizens. While offering support and saying last goodbyes were part of the deathbed tradition, the real reason for their presence lay in the importance of a “good death.” If family members were present at the last minutes of a loved one’s life, they could discern the condition of the passing soul and know the spiritual outcome for that particular family member. During the Civil War, hundreds of miles often separated soldiers on their deathbeds from their families. In order to uphold the *ars moriendi* tradition, Civil War men created surrogates to fill the role often held by

⁸¹ The Daughters of Charity, *The Civil War Annals*, 1866, 197. Box 1 (7-5-1), Folder 14, Civil War Annals Collection. Provincial Archives of the Daughters of Charity, Emmitsburg, Maryland.

their own mothers or wives.⁸² For sister nurses, this created another level of interaction with soldiers. As women religious, soldiers sought out sisters nurses to help them die righteously and receive the afterlife. Sister nurses' religiosity and capability of insuring "good deaths" for their patients elevated their status in war hospitals. We can see this occurrence by looking at the willingness of soldiers to perceive sister nurses like their own mothers.

In a written history of the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth, Sister Anna Blanche recalled a gloomy scene directly related to the ideas of motherhood and good death:

One day to a Louisville hospital were borne three boys, fair haired, blue-eyed, but alas, in the final stages of pneumonia. Side by side on their cots for several days lingered the poor little comrades-in-arms. The mothering of these wounded lambs became the Sisters' chief heart-breaking task. One the boys exclaimed what all felt: "O you are just like my mother to me!" Still another lad of twelve or thirteen in his last moments sobbed: "O Sister, put your head right down by me and don't leave me!" With his arms clasped around the Sister's neck, the little one passed in to the arms of the Good Shepherd.⁸³

As soldiers sought comfort and vindication in their final hours, they "would flock to [sister nurses] like children around a Mother."⁸⁴ For the sisters, "It was cheering enough...to know that the absence of mother and friends from the bedside of the dying was in some degree atoned for by [their] presence."⁸⁵

The final and most telling theme surrounding the gendered war hospital hierarchy concerns direct comparisons between sister nurses and their Protestant counterparts. Here, we most straightforwardly see hospital men and Civil War citizens placing one group of nursing women over another. Again, we find evidence in Union General Lew Wallace's "Sister Beatrice"

⁸² Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death in the American Civil War* (New York: Knopf, 2008).

⁸³ Anna Blanche McGill, *The Sisters of Charity of Nazareth, Kentucky* (New York: The Encyclopedia Press Inc., 1917), 155.

⁸⁴ The Daughters of Charity, *The Civil War Annals*, 1866, 178. Box 1 (7-5-1), Folder 14, Civil War Annals Collection. Provincial Archives of the Daughters of Charity, Emmitsburg, Maryland.

⁸⁵ Untitled newspaper clipping in scrapbook, No date, Box 1, Folder 6, Peter Paul Cooney Papers, University of Notre Dame Archives, South Bend, Indiana.

letter. Considering the “flock of white doves” that had come from St. Mary’s Academy, Wallace declared: “Nothing in our churches equals the devotion of nurse women. When Protestant sisters get tired they go home, but the Sisters of the Holy Cross live among the patients without thought of deserting infected places or avoiding contagion by flight.”⁸⁶ Other, simpler comparisons about nurses’ skill sets were made as well. In a letter to Mother Moncellet of the French Motherhouse, Sister Ryan of the Daughters of Charity described a nurse hierarchy in the Washington D.C. Lincoln Hospital: “The patients have unlimited confidence in the Sisters’ knowledge of care for the sick. The physicians themselves frequently tell the nurses – go ask Sister how such-and-such should be done. This gives our Sisters much influence...”⁸⁷ After years of working in their own hospitals, many Catholic sisters brought abundant medical knowledge and nursing skills to the war’s victims. As Mary Denis Maher points out in *To Bind Up the Wounds*, “only knowledge and expert skill could bring relief, even though it was universally assumed that being a woman was the only qualification needed for taking care of the sick.”⁸⁸ The ability to bring relief to soldiers added to sister nurses’ perception as perfect women. Caregiving constituted a central element of nineteenth-century domesticity and womanhood.

Like Wallace, others also remarked on Protestant nurses’ unwillingness to conform to all the necessities of hospital life. One Daughter of Charity commented that some ladies refused to remove their hoops while nursing. Unfortunately for the wounded soldiers, “their hoops [would] catch the foot of a poor broken limbed man lying on the floor, so that they feared to see [the

⁸⁶ Union Brigadier General Lew Wallace to Zerelda Gray Sanders Wallace, 18 December 1861, Box J3.1, Folder 3, The Civil War I, The Sisters of the Holy Cross Archives and Records, South Bend.

⁸⁷ Sister Ryan to Mother Moncellet, October 1864, Box 2, Folder 10, Civil War Collection. Provincial Archives of the Daughters of Charity, Emmitsburg, Maryland.

⁸⁸ Mary Denis Maher, *To Bind Up the Wounds: Catholic Sister Nurses in the U.S. Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), 29.

Protestant women] come too near.”⁸⁹ In another case, a man formerly opposed to the Catholic religion pulled a sister aside and confessed to her:

When you came in late last night, with the doctor to see the patient who lay dangerously ill, I noticed that you did not come alone but in company with a Sister; and when you did all that was necessary for the patient you retired. It was then my feelings became changed toward you, as I saw clearly how differently you acted, from the female nurses, who remain at night and at all times alone with the men.⁹⁰

As Protestant nurses navigated war hospitals they carried societal expectations specifying how a proper woman was to behave around exposed, strange men. As vowed members of a religious order known for charitable public service before the war, sister nurses did not face the same scrutiny as their Protestant counterparts.

One area of scrutiny that might have prevented sister nurses from occupying the apex of the gendered war hospital hierarchy was the stigma attached to Catholicism. As mentioned in the previous chapter, nativism and the Know Nothing Movement stirred up anti-Catholic sentiment for a large part of the nineteenth century. However, as war hospital occupants constructed a gendered hospital hierarchy, many sought to mindfully remove sisters nurses from the realm of Catholicism to better perceive the nursing nuns as perfect women. One such example is the southern soldier earlier mentioned who considered the sisters “pure Gold,” but thought “the Catholics ought to be burned alive for their badness.”⁹¹

Another telling example occurred in the wards of Satterlee Hospital, where multiple Daughters of Charity nursed for the extent of the war. A Protestant chaplain had made it his mission to defame the sisters in the hospital by preaching against Catholicism. Additionally, a

⁸⁹ Daughters of Charity, *The Civil War Annals*, 1866, 209. Box 1, Folder 14, Civil War Annals Collection. Provincial Archives of the Daughters of Charity, Emmitsburg, Maryland.

⁹⁰ Daughters of Charity, *The Civil War Annals*, 1866, 130. Box 1, Folder 14, Civil War Annals Collection. Provincial Archives of the Daughters of Charity, Emmitsburg, Maryland.

⁹¹ The Daughters of Charity, *The Civil War Annals*, 1866, 220. Box 1 (7-5-1), Folder 14, Civil War Annals Collection. Provincial Archives of the Daughters of Charity, Emmitsburg, Maryland.

group of local ladies began distributing anti-Catholic literature and bible tracts to the wounded men. However dissuaded from Catholicism the men became, they still turned to the sisters for spiritual support. One man even declared “for the future there [is] no religion...but the ‘Sisters’ religion.”⁹² By calling Catholicism the “Sisters’ Religion,” hospital men effectively disassociated sister nurses from an element that would prohibit embodiment of the nineteenth-century definition of true womanhood.

Lew Wallace’s encounter with Sister Beatrice of the Holy Cross exhibits many telling elements in the creation of a gendered Civil War hospital hierarchy. It is an example of a larger expression fashioned by soldiers and citizens as they sought to understand and categorize nursing women. In this instance, Sister Beatrice and all others found themselves ranking above Protestant women due to their purity, religiosity, obedience, and motherly nature. Considering their previous experience and social expectation to participate in public, charitable endeavors, we can see how sister nurses were perceived to be perfect women in the Civil War hospital.

⁹² The Daughters of Charity, *The Civil War Annals*, 1866, 140. Box 1 (7-5-1), Folder 14, Civil War Annals Collection. Provincial Archives of the Daughters of Charity, Emmitsburg, Maryland.

Chapter Four

“It should not be lost to posterity”: Sister Nurses and Civil War Memory

At the end of the American Civil War, Roman Catholic sister nurses returned to their convents and continued to nurse, teach, and serve their communities. Except for a stint of service during the Spanish American War, sister nurses—in their typical self-effacing style—stayed out of the broader public’s view. Meanwhile, a common narrative of Protestant women’s war work became widely known. Protestant nurses were favorably remembered as self-sacrificing, “loving, tender, [and] Christian ‘angels of mercy,’” while sister nurses received hardly any regard outside a narrow Catholic community in the first fifty years after the war.⁹³ In the hierarchy outlined in the previous three chapters, this seems illogical. If sister nurses were seen as more perfect women in their Civil War hospitals, how were they forgotten while their Protestant counterparts received high praise?

This lapse in remembering nursing nuns can be attributed to the cardinal attributes that made the sisters so successful in war hospitals. Sister nurses’ obedience, meekness, and self-sacrificing nature dissuaded them from constructing their own memory. While white, middle to upper class Protestant nurses wrote war hospital memoirs, published wartime diaries, and attended memorial dedications in their honor, Catholic sister nurses did not actively construct a public narrative of their service. Nearly sixty years after the war, outside forces worked to remember the sister nurses in a national monument. By this time, however, there was little room to venture outside the widely circulated understanding of a Civil War nurse. Even with a national

⁹³ Mary A. Gardner Holland, *Our Army Nurses: Interesting Sketches, Addresses, and Photographs of Nearly One Hundred of the Noble Women Who Served in Hospitals and on Battlefields During Our Civil War* (Boston: B. Wilkin & Co., 1895), 13.

monument, sister nurses failed to capture a proportional share of the “remembering” done for Civil War nurses.⁹⁴

Examples of Protestant women nurses constructing their own memory abound. During the Civil War, Kate Cumming travelled with and nursed for the Confederate Army of Tennessee. She kept a diary of her Civil War experience. Immediately after the war, Cumming published her writings, titled *A Journal of Hospital Life in the Confederate Army of Tennessee: From the Battle of Shiloh to the End of the War: With Sketches of Life and Character, and Brief Notices of Current Events During that Period*. In her conclusion, she recalled the “Christian and refined women of the South.”

[They] nursed the wounded and sick, preparing little delicacies, which no man has ever been able to do, for the poor bed-ridden soldier, who had lost all but honor for his country; and, when his hours were numbered, stood by his bedside when no wife, mother, or sister was there, to soothe his last moments and lift his thoughts to the Cross whereon his Redeemer had died, and to that heaven where he was waiting with open arms to receive the departing spirit.⁹⁵

This closing section calls attention to the characteristics of a Protestant female nurse. She was competent—capable of preparing nourishment beyond the capacity of male doctors and nurses. She embodied femininity in her ability to become a wife, mother, or sister to a soldier. Finally, she was pious enough to help a dying man reach salvation. As evidenced in the gendered hospital hierarchy previously discussed, these attributes personified nineteenth-century womanhood for middle to upper class white women. By positioning her war experience around these attributes Cumming constructed how she wished to be remembered as a Civil War nurse.

⁹⁴ The female nursing narrative constructed after the war “forgot” many nursing women alongside the sister nurses. Contraband women, enslaved women, and lower class white women often nursed or served as laundresses, cooks, or nurses’ assistants in war hospitals. See Jane Schultz, *Women at the Front*, 2005.

⁹⁵ Kate Cumming, *A Journal of Hospital Life in the Confederate Army of Tennessee: From the Battle of Shiloh to the End of the War: With Sketches of Life and Character, and Brief Notices of Current Events During that Period* (Louisville: John P. Morton & Co., 1866), 188.

Another Protestant nurse memoir published directly after the war belonged to Sarah Emma Edmonds. After complaining about incompetent women nurses from the “lower classes” Edmonds commented on the true nature of white, middle and upper class Protestant women nurses: “[T]he patriotic, whole-souled, educated woman twists up her hair...rolls up the sleeves of her plain cotton dress, and goes to work washing dirty faces, hands, and feet, as if she knew just what to do and how to do it.”⁹⁶ According to Edmonds, women like herself were doing “work which [would] engrave their names upon the hearts of soldiers.”⁹⁷ Their labor was hard and required self-sacrifice, but would be remembered and memorialized. In publishing her memoir, Edmonds was complicit in that memorialization.

These examples do not serve to make separate nursing women’s actual experience and their written accounts. Of course, the Protestant women who left their homes and families to nurse, bathe, feed, and console ill and wounded soldiers did back-breaking and necessary work. They sacrificed and suffered alongside Catholic nursing nuns and other hospital workers. However, these cases do illustrate the ways Protestant women nurses worked to clearly define a Civil War nursing experience. In *Remembering the Civil War: Reunion and the Limits of Reconciliation*, historian Caroline Janney outlines the stakes of this endeavor. In the South, memorializing female nursing work reaffirmed women’s centrality and necessity to the Confederate cause. For northern women, constructing a female nurse narrative pushed back against the male-centric war memorialization prevalent in the years following Appomattox.⁹⁸ Instead of simply providing the flowers for Federal Memorial Days, they worked to be remembered as important players in a nation-changing event like the Civil War.

⁹⁶ S. Emma Edmonds, *Nurse and Spy in the Union Army: the Adventures and Experiences of a Woman in Hospitals, Camps, and Battle-Fields* (Hartford: W.S. Williams, 1865), 371.

⁹⁷ Edmonds, *Nurse and Spy in the Union Army*, 370.

⁹⁸ Caroline Janney, *Remembering the Civil War: Reunion and the Limits of Reconciliation* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 236-37.

In October 1864, Sister Ryan of the Daughters of Charity wrote to Mother Moncellet at the Daughters of Charity motherhouse in France:

Sometimes, Most Honored Mother, I am tempted to collect some interesting details about the circumstances we are experiencing to transmit them to you, but I am stopped by the thought that perhaps I may seem too bold, and am seeking to call attention to myself. I know that this is a proud thought Mother...⁹⁹

As a sister nurse at Lincoln Hospital in Washington, D.C., the circumstances Sister Ryan was experiencing were no doubt related to her war hospital experience. Writing about her singular experience, however, would be considered “proud”—an attribute not encouraged in nineteenth-century Catholic sisterhoods. Though Sister Ryan had the same motivation to record her wartime experience as Cumming or Edmonds, her position as a Catholic woman religious prevented an opportunity for memory construction.

This humble attitude followed sisters after the war. Many sister nurses never wrote a single surviving word about their wartime experience. Those who did were often following the orders of a Church official. In 1866, Father Francis Burlando, director of the Emmitsburg Daughters of Charity, requested that the sisters under his charge compile a record of the war hospitals they served in; the number of sisters they served with; the dates of their service; and “the number of conversions, baptisms, and Holy Communions, and incidents connected with them.”¹⁰⁰ Burlando compiled the responses he received as an unpublished manuscript titled *The Civil War Annals* and sent the work to Paris, France per the motherhouse’s request. This manuscript is the closest comparison to Protestant nursing women’s memoirs. However, *The Civil War Annals* never reached publication or a large audience, therefore serving a very different purpose than writings like those of Cumming or Edmonds.

⁹⁹ Sister Ryan to Mother Moncellet, October 1864, Box 2, Folder 10, Civil War Collection, Daughters of Charity Provincial Archives, Emmitsburg, Maryland.

¹⁰⁰ Father Francis Burlando to The Daughters of Charity, 30 October 1866, Box 1, Folder 13, *The Civil War Annals* Collection, Daughters of Charity Provincial Archives, Emmitsburg, Maryland.

A large-scale effort to memorialize the Civil War sister nurses was not coordinated until the early twentieth century. Even then, the driving force behind this effort came from outside any sisterhood or convent. In 1912, Ellen Ryan Jolly of Providence, Rhode Island was elected National President of the Ladies' Auxiliary of the Ancient Order of Hibernians (AOH). As the new leader of the nation's largest and oldest Catholic organization, Jolly laid out her plan. She wished the AOH to construct a national monument in honor of Roman Catholic nuns who served as nurses in the American Civil War.¹⁰¹ It would take Jolly and the Ancient Order of Hibernians over ten years to complete this task. The Nuns of the Battlefield monument was finally dedicated on September 20, 1924.¹⁰²

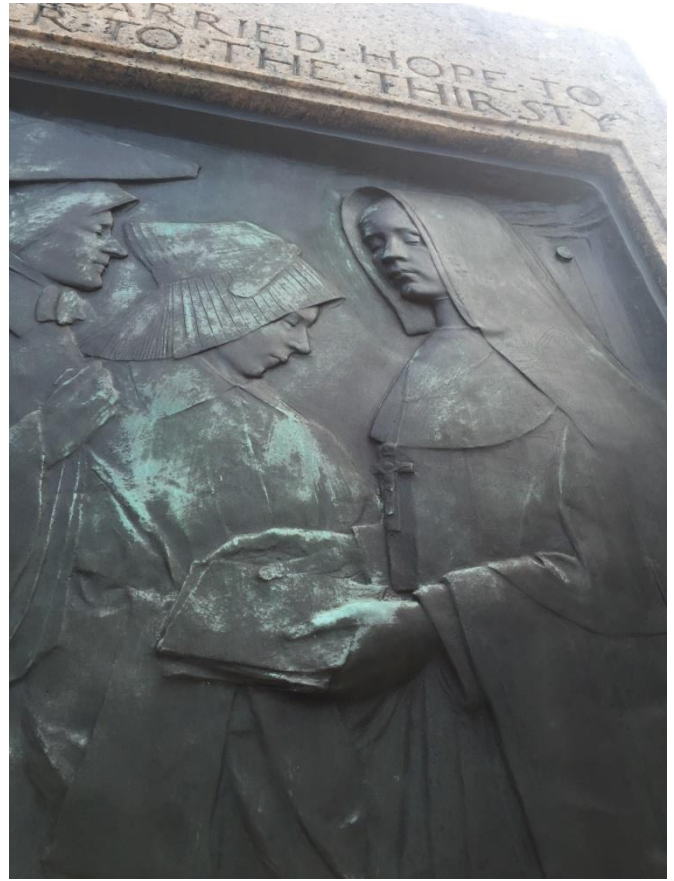
It featured a bronze-relief panel showcasing twelve orders of sister nurses. At the time of the dedication ceremony, only sixteen Civil War sister nurses were still alive. They were honored with "sprigs of green" from the ivy planted around the monument's base.¹⁰³ On October 10, 1924, Ellen Ryan Jolly wrote to Mother Superior Cleophas of the Sisters of Providence: "The story of the noble work done by our heroic Sisters during the trying days of the Civil War is an unwritten chapter of the history of the Catholic Church in America. It should not be lost to posterity. It belongs among the records that inspire love, admiration, [and] imitation."¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ Kathleen Szpila, "Lest We Forget: Ellen Ryan Jolly and the Nuns of the Battlefield Monument" *American Catholic Studies* 123 (Winter 2012): 23-43.

¹⁰² Smithsonian Art Museum Art Inventory Catalog, "Nuns of the Battlefield Sculpture" <http://siris-artinventories.si.edu/ipac20/ipac.jsp?&profile=all&source=~!siartinventories&uri=full=3100001~!16187~!0#focus> (accessed March 2016).

¹⁰³ Ellen Ryan Jolly to Mother Superior Cleophas, 1926, Box 2, Folder 4, Women in Military Service for America Memorial Foundation Collection, The Archives of the Sisters of Providence, Terre Haute, Indiana.

¹⁰⁴ Ellen Ryan Jolly to Mother Superior Cleophas, 10 October 1924, Box 2, Folder 4, Women in Military Service for America Memorial Foundation Collection, The Archives of the Sisters of Providence, Terre Haute, Indiana.



Nuns of the Battlefield Monument, Washington D.C.
Personal photographs by author. 1 August 2016.

Conclusion

In 1866, Sister Ann Louise O'Connell remembered the last days of the war. During her rounds nursing wounded and ill men at the "Sisters of Charity" hospital in Virginia, she learned that in a few days there was to be a "Flag of Truce." Soon after, O'Connell and her fellow sisters boarded a steamer set for Baltimore. When the officer in command of the boat learned Daughters of Charity were present, he quickly dismissed any idea of checking their credentials or belongings: "I should like to see the man who would dare touch papers belonging to a Sister of Charity. I would make that fellow feel he did something very wrong to show so little respect for Ladies who had rendered such great service to Government."¹⁰⁵ Even in their travels home, sister nurses found themselves praised and venerated for their wartime service.

Nursing nuns faced a very different country as they returned to their convents in 1865. The United States as a nation underwent profound changes in those five years. Of course, the war upended families, decimated industries, set free thousands previously bound, and remolded government authority. It also, however, created a space where women previously deemed undesirable by their religious affiliation rose to the pinnacle of a gendered, war hospital hierarchy. Before the war, most citizens could not have imagined such an arrangement. As hospital men and Protestant women returned home, however, it may have not seemed so ridiculous.

Though my work is centered around Civil War nursing nuns, it has deep roots in the effects of cultural and gender expectations on the history of women's labor. As Jane E. Schultz

¹⁰⁵ The Daughters of Charity, *The Civil War Annals*, 1866, 178. Box 1 (7-5-1), Folder 14, Civil War Annals Collection. Provincial Archives of the Daughters of Charity, Emmitsburg, Maryland.

points out in *Women at the Front*, white, middle-class women's nursing experience in the Civil War did not translate to widespread female public nursing after the war.¹⁰⁶ Though some scholars argue that women's wartime hospital work created "greater confidence in women's capabilities and an expanded vision of female citizenship," there was no profound revolution in the labor deemed appropriate for white, middle-class women immediately after the Civil War.¹⁰⁷ Understanding sister nurses' position as "perfect women" in the Civil War hospital can help better explain the cultural and gendered barriers women faced in their wartime service.

Through an even broader lens, the hierarchy between nursing nuns and Protestant women during the Civil War illustrates a workplace dynamic that can occur when one historical group better embodies cultural or gendered expectations than an alternate group. Though Catholic sister nurses could be seen as minority religious outsiders in war hospitals, their super-adherence to nineteenth-century gender roles greatly impacted the experience of the majority. These ideas could be better fleshed out in a larger, more diversified historical study of labor in the nineteenth-century, but the nursing dynamic experience detailed in this scholarship is an initial example.

Another direction for future research would be to focus on sister nurses and Protestant nurses' reactions to and perceptions of each other. While this study focuses on hospital men hierarchizing women, much could be added to its findings from a more well-rounded approach. It would be interesting to analyze what Protestant women nurses thought of the differential treatment sister nurses received from Army doctors and surgeons. Kate Cumming referenced this in her diary when she announced "it seems strange that [the sisters] can do with honor what is

¹⁰⁶ Jane Schultz, *Women at the Front: Hospital Workers in Civil War America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 147.

¹⁰⁷ Libra R. Hilde, *Worth a Dozen Men: Women and Nursing in the Civil War South* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2012), 221.

wrong for other Christian women to do.”¹⁰⁸ Alternately, investigating sister nurses’ understanding of their prominent position in war hospitals could also lead to a fruitful study.

Finally, it would befit future historians to pay more heed to nursing women’s Civil War memory. In most circles, a single archetype of a Civil War nurse exists. She is white, middle-class, and well-dressed. Most often she is pictured at the bedside of some dying lad, offering him a sip of water or writing his final letter home. This understanding or “memory” of Civil War nursing forgets the multiple types of women and women’s labor that constituted war hospital reality. Though scholars like Caroline Janney and Jane Schultz are at the forefront in correcting this erroneous assumption, I have yet to find a full-length study that addresses Civil War nursing memory’s construction.

On August 1, 2015, I visited the Nuns of the Battlefield monument in Washington, D.C. It sits next to St. Matthew’s Cathedral near Dupont Circle. The bronze relief panel is now weathered, but the sisters’ profiles remain striking; their habits and robes still tell their respective orders. Tucked away from the busy sidewalk in a city of monuments, few passerby seem to pay notice to the stately nuns gazing out on M Street. Their presence is demure, but the bronze sisters give a quiet air of strength and capability. I think their flesh and blood counterparts would have approved.

¹⁰⁸ Cumming, *A Journal of Hospital Life*, 115.

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