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# Through Grace and Grit: Northern Women's Contributions to the American Civil War

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**Through Grace and Grit:  
Northern Women's Contributions  
To the American Civil War**

by

Amelia Luel Morgan  
May 12<sup>th</sup>, 2012

A thesis submitted to the Department of Education and Human Development of the  
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Fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
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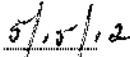
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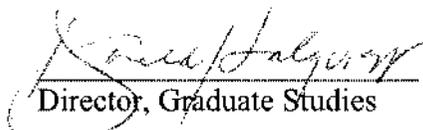
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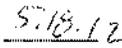
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Chapter One

**Northern Women's Roles in the Civil War:**

A Historiography



The New York state curriculum includes women's roles listed as a subcategory underneath the impact of the American Civil War on the home front category. Thus, although the learning standards mandate that teachers bring up the topic of women's roles during the war, it's brief and unimportant mentioning causes many teachers to barely discuss this topic. As a result, many teachers address women's roles only concerning their domestic aid to the troops. Thus, countless Americans remain oblivious to the fact that women offered a great deal more to the war than simply sewing socks. Although some women did contribute through sewing, they offered much more of their lives to this significant story.

Women comprised an integral part of the American Civil War. Thus to discuss the Civil War without them leaves the overall picture half missing. Without them, the war may not have occurred or progressed as well. Women maintained positions as nurses, physicians, spies, soldiers, influential literary figures, workers, soldier relief aid providers, administrators, teachers of freemen, abolitionists, color bearers, watch guards, laundresses, cooks, musicians, propagandists, landlords, political activists, and seamstresses. Women placed themselves on or near the battlefield, at home, in the city, or in Washington D.C. to dedicate their time to the war. Women searched for missing relatives, grieved over lost friends and family, fought for their right to obtain pensions, and struggled to survive financially. In addition to famous women, such as Clara Barton, Dorothea Dix, and Louisa May Alcott, countless other women dedicated their lives to helping the cause throughout the North. This paper gives testament to those famous and non-famous Yankee women who did so.

Numerous authors have addressed this topic since right after the Civil War. Many sources concerning the Confederate views and memoirs materialized in addition to hundreds combining the viewpoints of both the North and South as a comparison. Thus, countless other books exist

that this paper does not address. However, a limited number of authors have written specifically about the Yankee experience. For example, only one northern memoir, discussed later, has received publication. Despite this, some have addressed this topic in detail. When viewing those books written concerning the Northern perspective, this paper only includes the more accessible and popular ones. Therefore, numerous other noteworthy studies sit on shelves, waiting for someone to read them, and the scholarship of northern women does not end with those included here. Those discussed through this historiography provide insight into the current scholarship of our modern world.

### **Women as Nurses and Physicians**

As a nurse, women held one of the most influential occupations they could have during the Civil War. Over 20,000 women served as nurses for both the Union and Confederate armies.<sup>1</sup> Thus, as these women tended the wounded and ill either near the battlefield or farther away in war hospitals, gender conflicts arose. Many risked their lives to fight against disease, infection, a patient's death, and sometimes even the medical institution itself against any horrible practices. Some women, such as Dorothea Dix, even obtained some authority due to the aid of the American government. However, this only caused more tensions to arise, contributing to the gender conflict. Despite this, women proved themselves capable of hard work, influence, and compassion for their patients. In the later years some female physicians have also received discovery, demonstrating a more independent and intelligent role than some could have believed possible. These women attempted to make a difference in a male world. Although less successful than female nurses who as natural nurturers convinced far more men of their capabilities and

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<sup>1</sup> Jane E. Schultz, *Women at the Front: Hospital Workers in Civil War America*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004), p. 2.

rightful place in the nursing field, female doctors still contributed in gaining some approval for their work. Thus, this popular topic of study has received publication as early as the early 1900s. Over the past century, numerous scholars from the very beginning have discussed this vital position.

In 1928, Louise Oates wrote a short article about the foundations of women as nurses and their expectations. She argued that the Union Army had a better health care system than any that ever existed in the United States before. Thus, Oates included discussions on Women of New York City who founded Women's Central Association of NY (modern-day Red Cross) in order to train the 100 women as nurses. She also informs the reader that since Washington D.C. realized that their war efforts would require the aid of women, then the Secretary of War assigned the famous Dorothea Dix as the Superintendent of Female Nurses (a job without compensation). Dorothea Dix became responsible for defining the qualifications for the job which entailed that the prospective women must be over thirty and plain (they could only wear brown or black colors). They could not wear hoop skirts (a hard demand for women to give up), curls, or jewelry. Women received a pay of twelve dollars per month for their efforts. Often times a woman held the position as a ward nurse and oversaw everyone, even male nurses.<sup>2</sup> Overall Oates represents the typical discussion of her time; she discussed nursing through the famous women and organizations that influenced the Civil War. Thirty years later, this would change.

In 1959, Sylvia Dannett began a new tradition through including countless unknown women into her conclusions. Her thesis claims that hundreds of courageous women on every battlefield from Bull Run to Appomattox shaped the Civil War. Instead of using the biographies

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<sup>2</sup> Louise Oates, "Civil War Nurses," *The American Journal of Nursing* 28. 3 (Mar., 1928), 207-212, [www.jstor.org](http://www.jstor.org). (accessed May 3, 2011), pp. 207-209.

of famous women's lives, Dannett became the first author to investigate the letters and diary entries of any brave woman who participated in the Civil War. She compiles numerous primary sources in order to tell the story from a firsthand account with some commentary to help the reader follow the story that the thirty-nine Northern women reveal through the 103 included writings. Although her work encompasses many different roles for women during the Civil War, she does contain extensive examples of women's roles in the medical field. For example, she includes ten primary source documents by Eliza Woolsey Howland, Jane Stuart Woolsey, Sarah Emma Edmonds, Georgeanna M. Woolsey, Mary Phinney von Olnhausen, Sophronia E. Bucklin, Eliza Harris, and Belle Reynolds to describe the deplorable conditions for both the women and the patients, the lack of organization in the hospital system, makeshift hospitals, unskilled doctors due to the automatic demand for them upon the commencement of the war, the need for nurses to handle responsibilities such as setting a fracture that normally would not fall under their list of duties, and the constant gender conflict that the women encountered. She also demonstrates that some, like Sarah Emma Edmonds, served as a male nurse in order to truly serve the cause as an equal. This way, Edmonds did not deal with the ruthless bitterness many faced, such as Sophronia Bucklin, from their male superiors.<sup>3</sup> Dannett wrote countless books concerning the women not only during the Revolution but throughout the women's movement as well. As a lecturer and historian, her specialty or expertise rested on the era of the Civil War making her book well respected. Much like Simone de Beauvoir (a French philosopher and feminist), Dannett represents a unique individual to have studied women shortly before the women's movement of the 1960s even began. Not famous herself at the time, this probably influenced her decision to incorporate all women's lives into her story in order to grant everyone

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<sup>3</sup> Sylvia G. L. Dannett, *Noble Women of the North*, (New York: Sagamore Press, 1959), pp. 11, 63-65, 79-104, 159, 214, 291, 304, 306, 381, and 387-389 .

credibility to their voice and brave actions, not just the famous ones. For the next forty years, nursing would remain a popular topic to study.

Countless scholars continued to discuss both famous and unfamiliar nurses and their contributions. Some, like Dannett, choose to use primary sources to tell a story concerning women's lives and their endeavors. Others will continue to do the same. In 1980, editor, John R. Brumgardt presented the life of the remarkable Hannah Ropes fully for the first time, an unattainable task until her completed journal collection became available at the library of the University of California in 1974. Prior to this book, the only mention of Hannah Ropes occurred in Louisa May Alcott's book since Ropes had supervised Alcott as a young nurse. Brumgardt's principal conclusion claims that the war provided avenues for women to go from homemaker to intelligent activist that greatly influences the women's right movement. Ropes, a social reformer and abolitionist of New England, participated in politics in addition to her influential nursing career and believed that women should work outside their home to promote a better and more unified humanity. Her experience in Bleeding Kansas forever altered her life and made her character even stronger. As chief nurse at the Union Hospital in Georgetown, Washington D.C., she uses her womanly virtues (as a highly moral Christian) to comfort, treat, and fight for hundreds of wounded men from numerous battles, including the First Bull Run and Fredericksburg. She worked endlessly with limited supplies and food to better help her patients. Due to the horrible condition, she repeatedly demanded for more acceptable and edible food, better treatment, and improved sanitation. Thus, she always placed her patient's best interests at heart despite the costs. For example, when her steward and head surgeon wrongly imprisoned a patient in a cellar hole, she immediately spoke to the Secretary of War, Edwin M. Stanton, about his dishonesty and unjust punishments. As a result, the government reprimanded the steward and

head surgeon and granted some of the better conditions she craved.<sup>4</sup> Besides Brumgardt, other scholars will provide the lives of amazing women through a feminist viewpoint as well.

Editor Gerald Schwartz's book presents the newly discovered diary of a remarkable physician, Esther Hill Hawk. She lived life as a physician, teacher, administrator, abolitionist, and suffragist who joined her husband (a Union Army surgeon) in 1882 in South Carolina where he resided as a surgeon to help freedmen. Throughout the war she taught and tended freedmen and black Union troops. Her diary also detailed not only the lives of the African Americans she aided, but also the attitudes of the proud South throughout the war and shortly after. As a native of New Hampshire, this remarkable story demonstrates those avid social reformers who lived in the North and attempted to bring change to their nation and the choices an independent woman could have. It also portrays the hardships of African Americans experiences from slavery to freemen, the issues of black education, and the difficulty of facing gender roles. Even though she lived her adult years in a married state, she maintained a high level of autonomy and even split from her husband (living in Florida) to return to Massachusetts to practice medicine.<sup>5</sup> Schwartz discovery offers another unique tale that demonstrates that women offered more to their communities than that of a wife and mother. Instead of writing about one individual, others wrote about nursing in general.

Culpepper and Adams' article concludes that despite the general public's early skepticism of women containing jobs as nurses, these women demonstrated that they had the dedication, organizational skills, talent, and ability to positively affect their patients lives that would now make nursing a career opening for women for centuries to come. She uses all of the

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<sup>4</sup> Hannah Anderson Ropes, *Civil War Nurse: The Diaries and Letters of Hannah Ropes*, John R. Brumgardt, (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1980), pp. ix-xiii.

<sup>5</sup> Esther Hill Hawks, *A Woman Doctor's Civil War: Esther Hill Hawks' Diary*, Gerald Schwartz, (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1989), pp. 1-28 and 125.

previous book discoveries on influential women to bring about a discussion concerning nursing in general. She covers the development of this occupation as a career opportunity for women (prior to the Civil War only teaching remained a suitable occupation for women and thus women had to develop the profession from scratch), poor living conditions and medical practices, problems that these horrible conditions caused, and the numerous jobs women conducted for their patients. Nurses provided more than just health care, they wrote letters for soldiers, read books to patients, acted as physical therapists and psychiatrists, consoled dying men while willing others to live, and even provided entertainment as singers or with musical instruments.<sup>6</sup> This article helped to highlight all of the important parts in the studies conducted on women nurses during the American Civil War and demonstrate how the origins of women nurses impacted us today. The next decade would only bring more case studies to add to this growing field without focusing specifically on nursing. Books written throughout the later 1990s and 2000s would offer a deeper thesis analysis than simply presenting information.

Elizabeth D. Leonard, who specializes in Civil War women's history, wrote three books worth discussing (the first three books that she wrote out of four). The first one, written in 1995, argues that three Northern middle class women, Sophronia Bucklin, Annie Wittenmyer, and Mary Walker (M.D.) vitally impacted the Union effort and caused gender battles that challenged male assumptions and male dominated fields, specifically as nurses, soldier's aids, and physicians. This spectacular book causes one to think for the first time about how the Civil War impacted gender relations and women's roles. It also positively answers whether the Civil War serves as a milestone for women. Leonard uses memoirs, letters, pension records, and modern scholarship in order to take the individual experience and apply it to most of the Northern

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<sup>6</sup> Marilyn Mayer Culpepper and Pauline Gordon Adams, "Nursing in the Civil War," *The American Journal of Nursing* 88. 7 (July, 1988), 981-984, [www.jstor.com](http://www.jstor.com). (accessed May 8, 2011).

women population. Sophronia Bucklin lived as a single and independent seamstress in New York until the war broke out and she became a nurse that repeatedly faced opposition from her male coworkers and superiors, especially surgeons. The Iowan widow, Annie Wittenmyer, had a supportive family (they took care of her son while she volunteered) that caused her to provide aid to soldiers. She led the Keokuk Soldiers' Aid Society into the leading state relief system. Due to her progress, the US Sanitary Commission's Iowan Auxiliary offered innumerable challenges to take over the organization. The women of course rebelled, claiming their actions reflected natural women's work. Later she conducted some political work, such as founding asylums for any orphans of Union soldiers, befriending those in power to help organize and promote her own ideas (a "male" strategy), and establishing "Special Diet Kitchens" in military hospitals with managers she personally trained. The last remarkable woman, the divorcee Mary Walker (M.D.), continued to try and serve her country as a female physician. Nurtured with avid supporters of countless reform movements as a child, Walker attempted to convince Americans to change women's required attire to include trousers (which she always wore), tried to run her own practice, travelled around in order to participate in various war projects, and conducted work as a spy that got her nation recognition when the Confederate troops captured her. Leonard believes her powerful personality tried to bring too many changes too fast leading to her failure. Due to Walker's persistence and her remarkable war service efforts, she gained a Medal of Honor which she treasured even though she never officially gained the commission as a physician that she desired. All three women joined in the war efforts due to patriotism, a strong desire to gain awareness for women, and the hope of favorably shaping the outcome of the war.<sup>7</sup> This groundbreaking work comprised of Leonard's doctoral thesis. The first and last case studies

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<sup>7</sup> Elizabeth D. Leonard, *Yankee Women: Gender Battles in the Civil War*, (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1995), pp. xiii-xxv, 3, 48, 51-88, 106-112, and 123-131.

provide more examples of the harsh realities women faced as nurses and physicians and the incredible women who faced these challenges with vigor. Her argument does not include much of a feminist view and instead focuses more on the realistic (and thus less patriotic) manner of these women's lives. Garrison will not follow Leonard's suit.

In 1999, a new and unknown writer, Nancy Scripture Garrison, composed a book on Yankee women's contributions to the origins of the U.S. Sanitary Commission. Using letters and diaries, Garrison argues that due to their strength to prove themselves as women in jobs previously closed to them, Georgeanna Woolsey, Katharine Wormely, and Eliza Howland risked their lives to exposure of nauseating conditions. This elite group of evangelical Christian women helped to collect and distribute medical supplies after the founding of the Women's Central Association of Relief (which later turns into the U.S. Sanitary Commission) in New York by Dr. Elizabeth Blackwell. After joining into a national Sanitary Commission, the commission raised millions of dollars' worth of goods to distribute to the Union troops, such as clothes, blankets, bandages, medicines, wines and spirits to relieve pain, and fruits and vegetables. These sanitarians even served as floating nurses on transport ships in Virginia during the Peninsula Campaign of 1862, witnessing some of the worst medical conditions of the war. For example, men, both dead and wounded, came to their ship in need of care within the same boxes, often with maggots all over them. These notable accomplishments influence these women's later lives for reform. For example, Georgeanna Woolsey established a nurse's training school after the war. Although they did not contribute to the women's movement, the Civil War did cause them to become more active in different areas of reform in their later lives. They no longer limited

themselves to the domestic world.<sup>8</sup> Overall, Garrison rejoices on the U.S. Sanitary Commission's successes and provides a feminist perspective towards the women's actions.

Scholars have studied Civil War nursing since the late 1800s. This popular topic of study caused women such as Dorothea Dix, Clara Barton, and Mary Bickerdyke to become famous for nursing care and organization. Over the years, other scholars have published investigations into the hundreds of other women who worked under these great women and dedicated their lives just as much as the famous women. These women faced horrible living conditions and medicinal practices, grueling and extensive work hours, male resentment, and poorer pay than their male counterparts simply due to their gender. Despite this, women fought for their right to make a difference for various reasons. All of these authors discuss the point of view that these women fought to overcome oppression, a modern viewpoint America has due to the lasting implications of the women's rights movement and the Feminist movement of the 1970s. A few more authors have offered case studies to offer to the study of Civil War women nurses, but much of the new scholarship concerning Northern Civil War women will depict other ways that women could contribute, like Wittenmyer's account.

### **Women as Spies, Soldiers, and other Battlefield Positions**

Besides nursing, some women offered their services as spies, soldiers, with some even becoming officers or sergeants, or other war occupations. Under the modern impression that women only recently have received commissions in the military forces to fight in modern wars such as the Persian Gulf War, War on Terrorism, and Iraqi War, modern individuals unintentionally discredit the thousands of women who have fought in American wars for years,

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<sup>8</sup> Nancy Scripture Garrison, *With Courage and Delicacy: Civil War on the Peninsula: Women and the U.S. Sanitary Commission*, (Mason City, IA: Savas Publishing Company, 1999), pp. 3, 17, 62-93, and 119-140.

just not necessarily dressed as women. Many have disguised themselves as men in order to patriotically contribute to the cause. Although some women, such as Deborah Sampson and Nancy Hart, have received recognition for their heroic actions in the American Revolution, many have viewed these women as flukes or bizarre exceptions. However, the Civil War offers hundreds of accounts of women from both sides that daringly risked their lives for the War. Many authors have provided written works in order to commemorate and gain recognition for these Northern women.

Leonard's next works, released in 1999, present more leading scholarly work offered on this topic. The first one will present the life of yet another extraordinary and independent female. She provides the amazing story of Sarah Emma Edmonds, one of the few women who disguised herself as a man to serve the Union Army. Interestingly, Edmonds, like numerous other women who enlisted as a man, had a poorer upbringing. As one of several children born to a farmer in New Brunswick, Canada, she led a life in which her contributions equaled that of her brothers. This more equal upbringing most likely aided her decision to become Frank Thompson in order to move to America and become a bookseller. A couple years later, used to living on her own as a man, she enrolled as a soldier in Company F of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Michigan Infantry Regiment. Through various disguises, she received nursing duties as her first assignment, a common soldier as her second, and debatably a spy for her third. After serving the Army for two years, she abandoned army life due to an illness she feared would reveal her true gender. In 1864, she then wrote one of only two existing memoirs of women who served as soldiers and the only one for women of the North. Due to the circumstances of the time period, the memoir offers a camouflaged version of events that Edmonds witnessed, including participating in bloody battles from the first Bull

Run to the Kentucky Campaign.<sup>9</sup> Although significant and one of the most discussed by modern intellectuals, Edmonds offers only one example of women soldiers.

Leonard's other work addresses women serving as soldiers and spies on both sides of the war, a popular format to address this uncommon topic which caused the removal of a few books. Fortunately, this book contains enough Union examples to focus primarily on the discussion of them. Leonard discusses the influential work of famous women, such as Edmonds and Pauline Cushman (a Union Spy), while addressing other more unknown women such as Jennie Hodgers (served as a soldier under the name Albert Cashier), Kady Brownell (who followed her husband and served his regiment in one of the most dangerous jobs, a color bearer), Bridget Divers (also followed her husband to war and became a watch guard for wounded soldiers of the First Michigan Cavalry), and Sarah Rosetta Wakeman (disguised herself as a man to earn higher wages for her family, then joined the Union Army as Lyons Wakeman of the 153<sup>rd</sup> New York Regiment of Volunteers). She uses the 130 volumes of Official Records, the Veterans Administration Records, and other government sources, in addition to the usual selection of primary sources (newspaper articles, letters, and memoirs), in order to demonstrate the large number of women who fought as soldiers, participated in espionage, or became daughters of their regiment (like Brownell, Divers, and other women who served as laundresses or cooks). Lastly, Leonard discusses how women's motivation (although occasionally including patriotic reason and romantic notions) usually demonstrated the need for economic profit.<sup>10</sup> Although not as well-known as *Yankee Women*, this book offered the most comprehensive study of Civil War Army women of its time. Three years later, two other scholars who worked on a similar project

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<sup>9</sup> Sarah Emma Edmonds, *Memoirs of a Soldier, Nurse, and Spy: A Woman's Adventures in the Union Army*, Elizabeth D. Leonard, (DeKalb, Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press, 1999), pp. xiv-xxii, 3-13, 25-41, 67-75, 83, 95, 102- 116, 127-131, 164-170, and 193-199.

<sup>10</sup> Elizabeth D. Leonard, *All the Daring of the Soldier: Women of the Civil War Armies*, (New York: Penguin Books, 1999), pp. 16-19, 39, 57-65, 106-109, 114-125, 179-181, 185- 197, and 228-275.

during this book's publishing, propose even more female participants and other reasons for motivation.

Blanton and Cook's hardback, written in 2002, offers more examples. Even though their book discusses both women soldiers of the North and South, the argument and Northern examples offer substance to the discussion of this topic since seventy percent of the 250 discussed individuals fought for the Union side. The authors conclude that these women engaged in battle as men, without differing from them in their efforts, in order to gain economic benefits, social opportunities only offered to men, and to challenge gender norms. Due to hasty physical examinations and a need for volunteers, women served in every rank from musician to major and worked for about two years. Almost three-fourths of the women became discovered through injury, accident, or death. It seems popular opinion accepted women's romantic (following a loved one like Ellen Goodridge followed her boyfriend lieutenant James Hendrick in the Wisconsin regiment) or patriotic reasons for joining but not for the purpose of wanting the life of a soldier or economic prosperity. The remaining one-fourth escaped detection or served overtly as women, which they received much hassle for. This book comprised of both famous and non-famous women to synthesize ten years of research on military documents, diaries, letters, government records, memoirs, photographs, and the scarce previous scholarship to present as many cases as possible, many offered through a male perspective.<sup>11</sup> The last two books present the most thorough research to date.

Overall, as these credible authors illustrate, hundreds of women risked their lives and health for economic prosperity, social opportunities, love, or to challenge gender norms. They held jobs as both men and women as spies, soldiers, watch guard in order to retrieve the

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<sup>11</sup> DeAnne Blanton and Lauren M. Cook, *They Fought Like Demons: Women Soldiers in the American Civil War*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2002), pp. 2-7, 25-45, 62-65, 77-106, 150-162, and 106-210.

wounded, and a more dangerous job as color bearers (since this position became the enemy's favorite target by the war's end). These authors, just like all of the others that this paper has addressed so far, offer a feminist viewpoint. They discussed how northern women's war efforts begin the process to female liberation. One author will refute this well accepted notion in the next topic. Women contributed to the war effort without ever directly participating in war as soldiers, nurses, or other war occupations. Many other patriotic ways existed for women.

### **The Home Front**

In addition to containing war jobs, women supported the war effort from the home front, another side to the story of women's efforts in the Civil War. Women sewed, rolled bandages (and other household manufacture work for the military), participated in politics, joined the workforce in the men's absence, raised the children, wrote books to inspire the population, and organized important and influential soldier relief programs. Countless scholars have written about the lives of women and the difficulties they faced away from the war. They also address how women responded to this unique time of women's lives and how it impacted their future.

Frank McSherry, Jr., Charles G. Waugh, and Martin Harry Greenberg present an anthology that, although fictional, encompasses nine of the most influential stories of the Civil War. These narratives all represent the theme that having an active role in the war and making a difference causes women to participate in their nation's happenings in ways that would not exist during times of peace. Whether by simply nursing or sewing or something more adventurous, such as hiding mules in cellars or freeing prisoners, these heroines demonstrated the overall fever of women throughout the North to contribute in one way or another. Although this book also discusses the North and South, if one focuses on the literature offered to Northern women, one

discovers the same sentimentality found in previous books and those to come. For example, Louisa May Alcott's "The Brothers," discusses an abolitionist nurse and Rose Terry Cooke's "A Woman" addresses a sheltered girl who became a true heroine through offering her strength and becoming a leader to all those around her during hard times of war.<sup>12</sup> This patriotic literature begins a field that later study what actions women actually took, much like their heroines.

In 1990, using manuscripts, newspapers, and military records, Janet L. Coryell writes the first scholarly biography of single and independent Anna Ella Carroll (1815-1894). Coryell investigates and presents the myth of Carroll's military strategies and the reality of her political contributions. Throughout Carroll's life, she asserted that she mapped and created a strategy for the Tennessee campaign (split Confederacy in half) and Vicksburg campaign (using Champion Hill and Big Black Bridge to weaken Confederate forces and take a significant fort of the South), which she sent to President Lincoln. Coryell alleges that both victorious campaigns reflected moves that the Union used before and describes that anyone could come up with, including the General, the obvious plan to use the two rivers to their advantage in the Tennessee campaign. Many, including Carroll, continued to advocate for her recognition as an influential strategist even after her death, but she never acquired it. Coryell's thesis claims although Carroll's proposed military strategies seem unremarkable and do not deserve recognition, her political actions do. She advocated for the Know-Nothing party during the 1850s as a propagandist, blaming Catholics for various issues the nation contained through pamphlets and books. In the early years of war, she continued writing pamphlets, this time in favor of President Lincoln's actions against the popular array of criticism for his war strategies. Throughout the war, she also wrote her opinion in the *National Intelligencer*, a newspaper that she becomes editor for in 1864.

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<sup>12</sup> *Civil War Women*, Frank McSherry, Jr., Charles G. Waugh, and Martin Harry Greenberg, (Little Rock, Ark.: August House, 1988), pp. 7-11, 13-30, and 45-65.

Her father's political connections as a one-term governor of Maryland helped inspire and promote such a life for his daughter. Since she believed in anti-slavery, she freed all of her slaves, but encouraged the colonization of freemen to Africa. The author also demonstrates that she followed the typical role of a Victorian lady to some extent, apologizing for her interference in politics, but this would change once the war began. During the war, Carroll changed, becoming more radical as a woman who had no care for social standards, wearing low cut dresses and travelling without escorts, and actively promoting her beliefs. Overall, it seems Carroll, although sometimes charming, desperately wanted fame, power, self-promotion, and to earn a living. Although taking place during the Civil War, the author does not use her account to generalize about women during this time, claiming that Carroll is too unique a character. The last chapter addresses how suffragists used Carroll's cause as an example of a lack of women's recognition for their efforts.<sup>13</sup> Thus, her conclusions promote feminist thought in that women became participants of the women's rights movement due to a more active involvement in politics in the years before. Besides pamphleteering and lobbying as one way for a woman to become involved in politics, other ways existed shortly before, during, and after the war as well.

Much like the abolitionists Esther Hill Hawk and Louisa May Alcott, various other Civil War women actively participated as abolitionists. The start of the study on women and abolition movements began during the 1960s, with historians bringing fresh perspectives every decade, especially Venet. Wendy Hamand Venet argues that some white, middle class abolitionist women not only politically fought for the abolition of slavery, but also for women's rights. Prior to this argument, many believed that the American Civil War only had very little women's rights movement activity due to the distraction of the war. She uses various primary source documents,

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<sup>13</sup> Janet L. Coryell, *Neither Heroine nor Fool: Anna Ella Carroll of Maryland*, (Kent, Ohio: The Kent State University Press, 1990), pp. x, xiii-xv, 1, 7-29, 47-68, 71-76, 84, 88-90, 93, 95, 97, and 107-113.

such as pamphlets, newspapers, and manuscripts, to demonstrate the public careers of these women and how their methods of propaganda and campaigning methods (petitioning, public speaking, and distributing pamphlets) continued into the women's rights movement. For example, one of the biggest campaigns of the Civil War came from the legendary Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony's *The Woman's National Loyal League*. They aspired to gain one million anti-slavery petitions to present to Congress. Although unsuccessful since they only gained approximately 400,000 signatures for Congress, this method would pass on into the women's rights movement. Thus, women contained political roles long before ever achieving the right to vote, with Venet showing political work done as early as the 1820s.<sup>14</sup> This early work, although significant for its time period, offers a feminist viewpoint that focuses on the renowned women of the Civil War. Do their methods actually continue into the war or did those suffragettes who existed prior to the war adopt the same methods their peers used during the Civil War? The answer remains unknown and only further scholarship will provide the answers. Maybe Venet's thesis offers valid conclusions that simply need further verification in our modern world. Other authors will demonstrate other happenings of less noteworthy women on the home front.

In 1994, for the first time ever, Arlene Reynolds reconstructs and introduces Elizabeth (Libbie) Bacon Custer's "War book" to the public. Although the book never received completion, Reynolds composes her notes and rough drafts into chronological order (based on dates or battles mentioned) in a narrative style, much like Custer's other books, in order to produce a comprehensible book similar to those Custer wrote before. After the death of her husband, Lieutenant Colonel George Armstrong Custer, Libbie Custer moved to New York City

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<sup>14</sup> Wendy Hamand Venet, *Neither Ballots nor Bullets: Women Abolitionists and the Civil War*, (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1991), pp. x- xii, 22-36, 53-56, and 94-150.

in search of a job and began writing various books (which her husband had persuaded her to do before she became a widow). She wrote three widely-read books, but the Civil War memoir that she began writing in the 1890s, using her own letters, notes, and memories during the Civil War and memories from friends, did not ever get finished. This book provides a glimpse into the life of a General from a female perspective. Her home front included following her husband and his troops and staying at Washington where she even scheduled an interview with Lincoln.<sup>15</sup> This great discovery, offered by Reynolds, marked only the beginning of discovering new women to add to this growing field.

Another book concerning women's political actions came out in 1998. Jeanie Attie concludes that the soldier relief programs that women contributed to, especially the Woman's Central Relief Association (WCRA) of New York, exposed gender confictions between the women members and the male leading U.S. Sanitary Commission. During the Civil War, the U.S. Sanitary Commission, a masculinized vision, endeavored to create a national organization that extinguished female charity work that promoted individualism and localism. However, various women would not stand for a change that caused greedy men to benefit from their labor and distributed their goods to soldiers as they saw fit instead of their own local regiments. Many women remained fearful of rumors that these men profited from their free services and wanted nothing to do with this central organization. Instead, by the end of the war, women decided to trust the United States Christian Commission. Thus, women gained authority over their households, opportunities in the workplace, a right to participate in social welfare programs, and a voice in moral reform movements. After many years of debating a woman's place within society, the war provided an avenue, what Attie calls "civic republicanism," for women that they

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<sup>15</sup> Elizabeth Bacon Custer, *The Civil War Memories of Elizabeth Bacon Custer: Reconstructed From Her Diaries and Notes*, Arlene Reynolds, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994), pp. xi-xv, 1-3, 9, 35-43, 89, and 106.

fought for. This position developed out of the “republican mother” status of the American Revolution. According to Attie, by the end of the war between ten and twelve thousand female soldier relief aid programs produced goods worth about 50 million dollars for the Union Army.<sup>16</sup> Unlike Garrison, Attie portrays the U.S. Sanitary Commission in a negative manner, showing how it harmed local women organizations, although not state ones. She claims her work represents Linda Kerber’s republican mother concept, however I feel one could argue for Margaret Nash’s more republican woman in that these women contained more autonomy over their lives than that of a wife or mother. Thus, women seemed not to have as limited a role as earlier research has suggested. Attie does not represent the only scholar to write about women’s political work. The next modern historian will look at the political actions of women differently.

In 2000, through studying nine women’s published writings, including Lydia Maria Child, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Louisa May Alcott, Sara Willis Parton or Fanny Fern, Mary Abigail Dodge or Gail Hamilton, E. D. E. N Southworth, Rebecca Harding Davis, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, and Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, Lyde Cullen Sizer demonstrates that women writers used their literary works to engage in the national issues of the time. These reform activists discussed abolition, patriotism, and class and gender divisions. Her primary argument states that these political war writings confronted the concept that women’s roles contained only the domestic sphere and caused them to make contributions to the nation both domestically and politically. Writing chronologically, her book begins in the 1850s with practical daily problems, such as carbon monoxide poisoning from the new, less laborious stoves, or financial management, in addition to more radical discussions, such as anti-slavery sentiments. By the time the reader reaches the concluding chapters that address reconstruction, the women writers

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<sup>16</sup> Jeanie Attie, *Patriotic Toil: Northern Women and the American Civil War*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), pp. 3- 17, 22-23, 78-86, 90-123, 157-169, 176-197, 234-240, and 274-275.

have split politically, with 1863 and the Emancipation Proclamation marked as a turning point. Now, she claims that female abolitionists became more vigorous in their attempts to free all the slaves, others forcefully protested against the suffering the war caused for women, many objected the unfairness of the female workplace (especially concerning wages), and some advocated against class and gender conflicts. As an intellectual historian, Sizer's book offers a glimpse into the minds of the people through popular and notorious authors of the nineteenth century. She discovers that many women wanted a utopia filled with an interracial, interregional, and interclass band of sisters that they never obtained during the Civil War or Reconstruction era.<sup>17</sup> Her book seems to look directly at what women said and how this reflects on the ideals of women in general. As an alternative to promoting feminist concepts, she discusses what women hoped to accomplish, which did not include women's rights. Instead of focusing on influential women's contributions, the next editor proposes the war experiences of one female in a small, local town.

Nina Silber does not believe that Civil War northern women participated in war jobs in order to confront their oppressive lives, a popular belief since the early 1900s. Instead, she argues that the war supplied new public opportunities with the federal government, but they did so with a "new form of subordination" for American women's social norm. Thus, due to the promotion of the war, the Federal government involved women for the first time that subsequently resulted in a protective role. For example, women such as Catherine Speilman actually wrote to their government now, but did so due to the wartime circumstance causing her to become an economic dependent as a soldier's wife. The federal government became more paternalistic (both in a positive and negative manner) in trying to help those who became less

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<sup>17</sup> Lyde Cullen Sizer, *The Political Work of Northern Women Writers and the Civil War, 1850-1872*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), pp. 12-13, 22-23, 52-60, 66-70, 77-84, 99-107, 113-121, 133, 262, 280-281.

fortunate due to the demands of war. This sometimes had negative effects, such as an invasion of privacy (men investigated the sexual affairs of women demanding pensions). This governmental demand for obedience and conformity affected male and female Americans alike. She uses letters, diaries, and memoirs to address this entire process. Her book begins with how propaganda demanded women to encourage men to enlist in order to support the cause. This later led to an expansive array of soldier relief work, such as Wittenmyer's, conducted by various women organizations, nursing, and fulfilling those jobs left vacant from soldiers, even taking government clerical jobs for the first time. Some would even act on their own political beliefs, believing that women had morally superior viewpoints. As a result, instead of women demanding equal rights and pay (a popular promotion among historians), the thought that women should have civic involvement would spread, causing a feminist movement to later arise that demanded for the right to vote.<sup>18</sup> The next book to address the issue would focus even more on women's activities on the home front.

In 2009, Judith Giesberg demonstrates that the war provided opportunities for rural, working-class women, while addressing middle class opinions concerning this change in one chapter. She uses the records of unknown women, who periodically occur in the records from time to time, in order to tell the story of common Northern women's experiences throughout the Civil War. She also addresses the role of "infrapolitics" or the use of disguises to protect a woman's respectability as she intentionally participates in politics through a certain site. For example, Martha Yeager disguised herself as a seamstress in order to gain an interview to discuss unequal wages with President Lincoln. Since at least two million men served in the war efforts, with over 300,000 casualties, women needed to make a living for themselves (with no male

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<sup>18</sup> Nina Silber, *Daughters of the Union: Northern Women Fight the Civil War*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2005), pp. 11-13, 86, 103, 278, and 282-283.

escorts existing to protect them) and did not embody the popular Victorian ideals of the time period. This caused many to take advantage of the Republican ideology of free labor which then caused competition for jobs between the lower and upper classes. Many faced hardships from a poor wage from their enlisted husbands who did not make enough to provide for his wife and family, if the husband lived at all. Unfortunately, women frequently raised their families without their husbands and losing sons to the war effort. For example, Lydia Bixby claimed to have lost five sons to the Civil War (a fact debated by intellectuals for years, but she lost at least three), causing President Abraham Lincoln to write a personal letter to her with his condolences. However, Giesberg emphasizes the circumstances and feelings that Bixby felt in order to show the woman, instead of focusing on her patriotic sacrifice as other books have done. Due to the war's negative impacts, not everyone supported the war. Some women housed deserters, rioted against the draft, threatened to go on strike for higher wages, while others such as the Pennsylvanian women resented the war due to the loss of their husbands or sons. In addition, due to limited protection and financial means, some women were forced from their homes, while others who worked for the Army of Massachusetts or Pennsylvania risked their lives for their job.<sup>19</sup> Overall, Giesberg's discussion, for the first time, shows women in their true form, with both pro and anti-war feelings as they faced destitution and suffering from some of the avoidable negative side effects of war.

Over the past twenty-five years, the broad discussion of women's roles on the home front has progressed. Women's war experiences went beyond simple domestic work to include becoming more politically involved, aiding soldiers, advocating for their beliefs, writing to promote their own opinions, and joining the workforce. As to whether these new encounters for

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<sup>19</sup> Judith Giesberg, *Army at Home: Women and the Civil War on the Northern Home Front*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009), pp. 6-7, 13-16, 21-29, 40-44, 66-89, 122-135, and 143-176.

women led to the women's rights movement, modern scholars seem to think not. Silber represents this significant turning point in the modern discussion. Have the viewpoints of the last twenty years prior to Silber contain a reflection of modern day views? Since the minority of the women population during the late 1800s provided texts that may have supported these views, it seems that earlier scholars primarily used these literary works. One could conclude that earlier scholars choose texts that reflected the ideologies that flourished after the feminist movement. If valid, then reading the next ten years of interpretation should provide new, interesting views into the lives of the women of the Civil War. Also, since most of the literature contains patriotic elements, other more objective writings may exist with interesting and unknown things unsaid. Scholarly inquiry will have to find the answers to these questions.

## **Conclusions**

The scholarship of Northern women's involvement during the Civil War seems to reflect similar conclusions to the last thirty years of research on women's participation in the American Revolution. In 1976, Linda Kerber invented the republican mother phrase to represent all women's roles after the American Revolution. For the first time, she used a new, expanded definition of politics to demonstrate that women had a very limited political role. This remarkable event sparked the beginning of a new trend concerning women's political roles for the next twenty years. As a result, women now had a new role, the educated republican mother, to raise unselfish sons and daughters to self-sacrifice for the common good of the republic. For the next twenty years, scholars would present the women they studied as republican mothers, supporting Linda K. Kerber's conclusion. Since 1997, modern scholars, such as Margaret Nash, Rosemarie Zagari, and Susan Klepp, have immensely weakened Kerber's analysis to explain

women's roles during and after the American Revolution. As they have shown, women choose their own intellectual interests, including a political role. As a result, new theses support Nash's republican woman who empower their lives with knowledge, become better wives to their heart's love match, and promote spirituality. Therefore not only did women have a more political role than that of mothers but they also had more agency over their lives than Kerber's concept permits. This independent lifestyle far exceeds any role historians have granted women in the past and became apparent due to the life experiences of the newest researchers. Scholars have drawn such conclusions over topics concerning women and their roles in war.

The research conducted on northern women and the Civil War reflects much of the same concepts. Prior to 1970, researchers simply discussed those famous women who had any part in the Civil War. They also portrayed women in a patriotic light. The Civil Rights Movement caused intellectuals to discover even more famous women and sometimes uncommon women as well. From the 1970s until the 1990s, historians claimed that the Civil War provided women with a chance to become more active which lead to women using methods that directly transitioned into the women's rights movement. Since people often look to the past to understand the present, viewing the past with a feminist viewpoint seems reasonable. By the later 1990s, a few scholars began to investigate women's lives in a realistic manner and focus less on how their lives contributed to the women's movement. However, the question remains, did women's efforts during the Civil War actually change gender norms that caused the women's rights movement to flourish? Over the last five years, with Silber sparking this change, scholars have said no. Instead, Silber and Giesberg show a society where not everyone had patriotic views, how the war impacted women, and how the war resulted in a new paternal form of subordination for many women after the war. Other authors who demonstrate a similar argument include Jane E. Schultz'

*Women at the Front: Hospital Workers in Civil War America* (excluded due to its focus on the North and South equally) and Judith Ann Giesberg's *Civil War Sisterhood: The U.S. Sanitary Commission and Women's Politics in Transition* (excluded since Garrison and Attie have covered the information provided in her book). Thus, only the future will tell whether this trend will continue, while hopefully more case studies unravel before scholars can make more accurate conclusions concerning the mass population. Despite this, modern scholars have provided their readers with one undeniable fact that women led more autonomous lives than the general populace believes.

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Chapter Two

**The Will to Win:**

The Remarkable Story of Cora Beach Benton's Journey

From Dependence to Autonomy



Many historians have addressed the daily lives of countless Union soldiers who fought in the Civil War, but what about those women who stayed home? As men fought in the war, their wives and families continued living through often strenuous conditions back home. Countless collections of Southern letters exist transcribed by women, but not for the North. Thus Cora Beach Benton's letters serve as a unique opportunity in which to study the ordinary daily lives of Northern American citizens.

In 2003, Thomas R. Taber presents the life of a common woman as she experienced it in Albion, New York. Taber chronologically organizes over 160 letters between Cora Beach Benton and her husband, Charlie, most of which he purchased through an auction. Other letters trace, less in depth, the journeys of her four brothers (two older and two younger) that also served the Union Army. In this collection, some letters from other family members exist too, providing further insight into their family. Cora Benton begins this life expedition pregnant with her second child and frightened of what will happen in her future. By the end of the war, she has found confidence and independence through the experiences the war's sufferings has placed on her. By 1865, due to the financial difficulties she faced as a young woman, with the support of family and friends, she founded her own school in her home and became a landlord. Thus, when her husband returned, she informed him that two heads would determine what's best for the family from then on. In her last letter she even criticizes him for his previous depressing letter and urges him to man up, be brave, and learn from his experience. As a result, the letters show how gender norms changed during the war and for some after the war. Also, the letters portray common attitudes of the northern American population, such as the common belief that the war would end as early as 1862 or the belief that a woman's responsibility included ensuring that

men remained religious throughout the war.<sup>20</sup> Overall, this remarkable set of letters offers a view of how everyday life changed for women and gender norms.

Cora seems very honest and open in her letters. Many women would not initiate their letters with any news that may lead their husband to feel guilt, fearing that they would distract his mind during warfare. However, Cora did not have such fears. She openly discussed the troubles that she and her daughter have without his presence there. At one point she even claimed that their daughter Belle is a “fatherless girl,” due to the lack of his presence.<sup>21</sup> She also continuously asserted that she does not believe he will return home. Thus, one can easily analyze and utilize her letters to show the daily life of women during the Civil War. As Charlie’s sister Jennie stated about Cora, “her letters are worth a host of others.”<sup>22</sup>

## **Background**

On September 11<sup>th</sup>, 1838, Elias and Maria Vosburgh Beach had their daughter Cora. As far as anyone knows, by 1849, the couple will have had their tenth and last child. At this time, she had five brothers, Almeron (1821-1849), Elias (1824), Henry (1828), Howard or Hoddy (Charles Howard- 1846), and Vallie (Valentine- 1849), and four sisters, Maria (1823), Pamela (1826), Emma (1833), and Ella (Eleanor- 1843). Unfortunately the eldest son, Almeron, dies at sea in his search for gold in California in the same year of the birth of the youngest son.<sup>23</sup> At 16, Cora, her parents, and three younger siblings all moved into her eldest sister’s (Maria’s) house in Albion with her husband Nelson Graves and three children, Lena, Selden, and Maurice.

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<sup>20</sup> Cora Beach Benton, *Hard Breathing Days: The Civil War Letters of Cora Beach Benton*, Thomas R. Taber (Albion, NY: Almeron Press, 2003), pp. v-vi, 1-2, 23, 32-34, 79, 106, 145, 223, 305, 314, 344, 350, 400-406, 432, 441-444, 449, and 456-460.

<sup>21</sup> Benton, *Hard Breathing Days*, p. 12.

<sup>22</sup> Benton, *Hard Breathing Days*, p. 386.

<sup>23</sup> Benton, *Hard Breathing Days*, pp. v-vi.

Everyone still lives there during the commencement of her letters, except Cora who moved out after her marriage ceremony.

Cora married Charlie (Oliver Charles- 1836) Benton the day prior to her nineteenth birthday. Apparently she gave him quite a difficult time before deciding to marry him, but not near as bad as her little sister Ella does before marrying Cousin Jim as shown in her letters later on. They had their daughter Emma, forever called Belle, nearly a year later on August 19<sup>th</sup>, 1858. Cora continuously remarked on the greatness of this blissful time. She even goes as far as to state that they had “a perfect marriage.”<sup>24</sup> At some point during this heavenly stage, they purchased the house right next door to her sister Maria’s house. When Charlie leaves for war, they rented their house to a Mr. and Mrs. Frye and leased a different house on State Street.<sup>25</sup>

Cora’s letters changed over time. Cora and her husband usually send about two letters to each other per week initially. By the following year, she will only send one letter per week which she continued to do until her last letter on June 4<sup>th</sup>, 1865. Thus, her letters serve as a sort of journal and documentation of what a wife and mother would have to deal with as an average family without a husband during the 1860s. Cora’s husband left for training at Camp Church in Lockport, NY for a three year term on August 26<sup>th</sup>, 1862. He had enlisted into the 17<sup>th</sup> New York Independent Light Battery, leaving a pregnant wife and his four year old daughter at home. She wrote her first letter to him shortly after on September 10<sup>th</sup>. In this beginning stage, typical of many wives separated from their husbands for a long time, Cora got lonely and nostalgic. She continuously yearned for his presence in every matter of everyday life. She missed his absence of life’s greatest moments; her birthday, their daughter Belle’s cute sayings and discoveries, the birth of their son, family dinners, and holiday celebrations. At one point she admitted to faking

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<sup>24</sup> Benton, *Hard Breathing Days*, pp. 165 and 220.

<sup>25</sup> Benton, *Hard Breathing Days*, p. v.

happiness while in other people's company while grieving the moment she has time for herself. She did include her husband in some of her more monumental decisions, such as whether she should move to another house with the Phelps family. Although she never received an answer and made her decision based off the advice of her father and her own inclinations, she still attempted to include him in the big decision. She seemed to desperately want him to make these decisions for her, but knew when no response came that she had to make them herself. She decided to board with Mr. Phelps and his family. By January of 1863, she seemed more able to bear his absence than ever before.<sup>26</sup> This toleration would only continue to gradually increase over time. By 1865, instead of consulting her father and husband for every decision she must make, she started making them herself. In fact, by 1865, she often disregarded the advice of her husband and father in favor for her own reasoning. Over these nearly three years of struggling, Cora becomes an independent and self-reliable female.

### **Cora's Education**

The high level of education that Cora received greatly benefited her throughout the duration of the Civil War. Since Cora sent a letter from a former close classmate to her husband, we know that she received her education from Phipps Union Female Seminary in Albion, much like her sister Ella did.<sup>27</sup> Although public high schools had started to flourish in the 1850s and 1860s, many still preferred the education one could receive at an Academy or Seminary.<sup>28</sup> Since Boston had not offered a high school for females until 1855, Albion's remarkable institution for

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<sup>26</sup> Benton, *Hard Breathing Days*, pp. 3, 6, 18, 62, 211, and 460.

<sup>27</sup> Benton, *Hard Breathing Days*, p. 28.

<sup>28</sup> Nancy Beadie, "Female Students and Denominational Affiliation: Sources of Success and Variation among Nineteenth-Century Academies," *American Journal of Education*, 107, no. 2 (Feb., 1999): 75-115, [www.jstor.org](http://www.jstor.org) (accessed December 14, 2011), p. 75.

girls provided a great opportunity for those girls able to attend.<sup>29</sup> In fact, as the postcard demonstrates, Phipps Union Female Seminary became the first female academy in western NY in 1837. Most likely, similar to most women of this time, she received a great education in a common school, possibly in a co-educational setting, then she continued her education at the Seminary where she concentrated on cultivating her future role as a mother and domestic manager. Receiving a Seminary education would allow her to possibly teach at least her own children and possibly others if she chose to.<sup>30</sup> A less typical college experience, although they did exist, would have been unlikely for her. Most women did not receive such a high end education at this time. Thus, she had received a high school education which would help her throughout the duration of the war.



PHIPPS UNION FEMALE SEMINARY - 1837 - First Female Seminary in Western New York

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<sup>29</sup> Dorothy Denneen Volo, and James M. Volo, *Daily Life in Civil War America*, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1998), p. 279.

<sup>30</sup> Wayne J. Urban, and Jennings Wagoner, Jr. *American Education: A History*, (Boston: McGraw Hill, 2004), p. 113.

Since Cora contained a great education, she obviously could read and write fluently. In fact, she often corrected her husband in her letters with grammatical and spelling errors that he made. We would not have such a well-organized, grammatically correct, and clear collection of letters to her husband, relatives, and friends, if not for her great reading and writing skills. As such, countless other older female relatives, such as her mother and mother-in-law count on her to write to her husband, brothers (four of which end up participating in the war efforts), and friends due to her exceptional writing skills. Additionally, she later became an active member in the literary society and wrote poems, one of which she actually published. Also, since she actively read the newspapers in order to keep informed about the war and local events, she had intelligent conversations with her husband and male relatives about subjects such as politics. Due to having a baby to constantly tend to and thus could not take the bookkeeping class that she wanted to, she used her love for reading to learn some skills such as bookkeeping. For example, upon reading about cotton, she wanted to know the particulars of the cotton plant which Charlie disclosed through sending a sample. Also, in order to know when her husband gets paid, she intelligently read the newspapers to keep track of the general pay-master.<sup>31</sup> This passion and quest for knowledge would greatly aid her throughout tough times.

Cora's high quality education allowed her an easier transition into a self-sufficient woman, such as educating children. In addition to managing her family as many women did, she educated her daughter thoroughly. She taught her four year old daughter the basics of how to read, write, spell, and sew. She used writing a letter to her father as a motivational tool for Belle. In addition, she continuously provided Belle with other opportunities in her daily life in which to practice these developing skills, such as finding three letter words in the home or town. Thus, she thoroughly prepared her daughter for Sabbath school, which Belle attended starting in December

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<sup>31</sup> Benton, *Hard Breathing Days*, p. 141, 398, 412, and 420.

of 1863. Later, after starting a school in her back parlor, when Belle does not attend Sabbath school, Cora furthered her daughter's education with high elementary levels of arithmetic and geography. According to a proud Cora, Belle had a great mind when it came to school that she wanted to develop to its full potential.<sup>32</sup> Therefore, although countless mothers educated their daughters, especially during the Civil War when many could not afford to send their little girls to school, Cora had the intelligence to aid her daughter in a higher leveled elementary education. In addition to teaching her daughter various subjects, Cora would not have had her own school or received a job offer from Phipps Union Female Seminary if she had not had such a substantial education. Thus, her education caused her an avenue in which to independently make some much needed revenue and gain some agency. Besides these obvious ways in which Cora's education aided her life of solitude, other ways existed.

In addition to using her education to serve as landlord and manage household finances, she occasionally served as a nurse to local townspeople. She had compassion for those around her and tried to help out the best she can with her limited resources even when others would not. For example, when a neighboring family came down with Typhoid fever, Cora immediately came to their aid. Although many others refused to come near the family for fear of contracting the disease, as soon as Cora heard about it she rushed over and sat up with the most affected, Sarah Joslyn, night after night trying to help her overcome the odds.<sup>33</sup> As she claimed,

“I never saw a family in a more deplorable condition, and I am only too glad all I can do for them. My skill as a nurse is considered by the Dr. to be more than ordinary (Dr.

Noble), and Mrs. J felt last night as the fever was at its crisis that she could trust her to no

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<sup>32</sup> Benton, *Hard Breathing Days*, pp. 24, 27, 65, 265, 364, and 416.

<sup>33</sup> Benton, *Hard Breathing Days*, p. 362.

one but me. The consciousness of knowing I have been a comfort to them more than pays me for my sacrifice of ease and rest.”<sup>34</sup>

Thus, her intelligence and compassion allowed her to help others as she determined too. She apparently picked up medical skills well. Later, she also played the role of nurse to a tenant, the very ill Mrs. DeLaMatyr during the absence of Mr. DeLaMatyr.<sup>35</sup> Due to the constant presence of diseases, a common occurrence in New York during the 1860s, she of course tended her own children and other family members as well. Therefore, having a good education greatly helped Cora to serve as a communicating mediator, political discussor, charity leader, teacher, landlord, financial manager, and nurse. Such roles had not commonly existed for women prior to the Civil War.

### **Charlie and Cora’s Changing Relationship**

As the war progressed, Cora’s relationship went from pleading with her husband for changes and acting as a dependent to demanding them as an individual with strong opinions. For example, Cora demonstrated agency through pushing Charlie to become more religious. Fueled by her belief that Charlie’s lack of faith in God will cause him unfavorable conditions during the war, Cora feared for her husband’s death. Especially due to his non-Christian status, she seemed to think that her husband would probably not return to her alive. Thus, in the beginning, she begged him to reconsider his relationship with God. As proof of her influence over her husband, he did end up going to sermons while in the army in order to please her. However, in her beginning letters, she did not give orders, simply pleading for his soul. Later, after he has accepted God back into his life, she lectured him on his discussion of God. Charlie had claimed

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<sup>34</sup> Benton, *Hard Breathing Days*, p. 363.

<sup>35</sup> Benton, *Hard Breathing Days*, p. 441.

that he would conquer his little sins first. In her response, she blatantly informed him that he is “altogether wrong.” Apparently, according to Cora, little sins do not exist.<sup>36</sup> This example represents the shift in her mentality over the course of the war. The more time Cora spent away from her husband, the bolder she became in voicing her opinions to others, especially Charlie. Religion offers just one way in which to show Cora’s personal growth.

As previously mentioned, Cora depended on Charlie before he left for war. For the first year of her husband’s absence she continuously tried to have a strong and brave demeanor. But, as she claims in January of 1863, “I never cared to feel strong and independent of your help.” Thus, since she viewed herself as a dependent, she still asked the advice of Charlie or her father in any monumental life decision. In March of the same year she states, “I am so tired acting like a woman- I want to be folded in your arms again like a child.”<sup>37</sup> Cora obviously wanted her husband to coddle her from the demands of life as he had done previously. The reality of raising a four year old and a four month old as a single mother offered a daunting task that Cora would eventually overcome.

By June of the following year, Cora had embraced life’s challenges and prevailed. She no longer maintained an attitude of longing for someone to take charge for her. Now, she had a more independent attitude and used her voice especially to Charlie. For example, upon discovering that thirty-two other women got pregnant from either visiting their husbands during the summer or during their husband’s brief trip home, Cora gladly admitted that she had not gotten pregnant during his furlough (or trip home). Furthermore, she informed Charlie that she did not want any more children, a decision he supported. As she argued “I don’t believe there is a man living that would endure the birth of more than one, if it were possible for them to have one.

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<sup>36</sup> Benton, *Hard Breathing Days*, p. 4, 8, 107, and 309.

<sup>37</sup> Benton, *Hard Breathing Days*, p. 67, 69, and 121.

I have a perfect dread of it.”<sup>38</sup> Additionally, she informed him of her decision to not conduct lovemaking with him anymore, just to ensure that they do not create any more children. In 1862 or early 1863, Cora would have addressed this topic differently. She would have claimed that she did not think she wanted to have any more children, but she would have asked for his honest opinion in the matter first. Cora had always consulted the advice of her husband in every big decision before. Even Cora noticed this change within herself. Later in October of 1864, she discusses how over time, both her and Charlie no longer require their significant other in order to complete daily tasks. Although they still miss one another, they have become independent of one another and do not continuously long for the presence of the other.<sup>39</sup> A couple months later she really emphasized this point after Charlie made the mistake of claiming that she should get a cast for her sore foot. Cora vehemently states:

“Really now, that is putting on airs- no one asked for a cast of your foot, that you should be so independent about it. What right, I should like to know, have you to dictate about the disposal of my foot? When I get rich I shall surely do as I please about it, and he may have the marble. You forget you don’t take care of me much now, and I am not quite dependent as I used to be on you. There will be two heads after this- do you understand darling?”<sup>40</sup>

Cora used to constantly accommodate everything her husband asked for. Now, she obviously thinks for herself and did not fear using her own intellect to make her own decisions. Thus, she had gone from asking her father and husband advice concerning every little decision to not accepting orders from anyone. After Charlie received this letter, he greatly questions this comment. She responds with “I simply meant that I had been thrown so much upon my own

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<sup>38</sup> Benton, *Hard Breathing Days*, p. 337.

<sup>39</sup> Benton, *Hard Breathing Days*, pp. 330 and 394.

<sup>40</sup> Benton, *Hard Breathing Days*, p. 416.

strength since you went away, that hereafter I should have a mind of my own generally, and that you would feel you had a woman to walk with- not a child to lead. You will not love me less, but respect me more.”<sup>41</sup> Therefore, Cora expected to maintain an equal position with that of her husband when dealing with family matters. Nonetheless, Cora will no longer submit to anyone. She thinks for herself and will not accept a position inferior to anyone, including her husband. Fortunately, as the inclusion of a quote from his letter in one of her own, we see that he proudly accepted her newfound independence and autonomy.<sup>42</sup>

### **Daily Tasks**

Although strong-willed from the commencement of her letters, Cora still remained dependent on her husband and family. For example, she portrayed herself as weak in her letters while at the same time claiming that she can handle extra tasks without any help. She alleged that she did not have the strength to carry her son much longer, but yet insisted on stacking the wood or helping with her sick mother even when her father claimed she should not due to the kids she would have to drag along. Meanwhile, she not only helped her family whenever possible, but her husband as well. She frequently sent care packages to him throughout the years. While tending a newborn and rambunctious four year old, she provided him with anything he needed including stamps, socks, newspapers, homemade food, brandy, boots, tobacco, or money. Even at Christmastime, although her life kept her too busy to make any food, she did send a box with socks, a vest, and other such goods.<sup>43</sup> Her busy life caused her to only have time to write letters in the evening. Cora even faced the childbirth of their son all by herself. As a single mother she prevailed through the daily chores.

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<sup>41</sup> Benton, *Hard Breathing Days*, p. 422.

<sup>42</sup> Benton, *Hard Breathing Days*, p. 350.

<sup>43</sup> Benton, *Hard Breathing Days*, pp. 22, 45, 56, 101, 104, 183, 279, and 376.

Besides helping her family and attending to her husband's deprived state as a soldier, Cora had various responsibilities in the home. She tended her children when they had colds (a recurrent event during this time), stacked wood much to Charlie's dismay, sewed clothes, blankets, and dolls for Belle (sometimes travelling as far as Rochester to purchase the necessary cloth), attended church events, and did the housework which she hated (washing, ironing, baking, and cleaning). Although she had a little help from a maid in the very beginning during her one month confinement requirement after the birth of her son and then some help from Vallie before he went to war, as the war progressed she had less help with housework. The children often would get so sick that she feared for their lives, such as the time Belle became sick with scarlet fever.<sup>44</sup> Many other times, her baby boy became sick too. As she stated in the first year of his life, "Verde has been sick nearly ever since we've been here- I felt quit alarmed about him yesterday, but he is better today. Every time he is sick, I'm afraid he's going to die before you can see him. He is so good, I've been afraid we could not keep him long."<sup>45</sup> Due to the constant presence of death of many children who gain an illness and die shortly after, this fear seems realistic. Even Cora had no immunity to the frequent colds. She got dyspepsia a couple times in December of 1862 among others.<sup>46</sup> Her letters displayed a common theme of death from family members (lots of children as nieces and nephews die), neighbors, friends, and of course those in the army. She dealt with all of this death, fear of death, and disease while raising her children as a single mother.

Although she continuously portrayed a theme of yearning for Charlie's help in the raising of their kids, this theme did not last. As she claimed over a parenting conflict, "concerning helping me take care of baby, I'd rather get along alone than have you stern to a little six weeks

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<sup>44</sup> Benton, *Hard Breathing Days*, pp. 67, 87, 90, 106, 158, 171, 350, and 403.

<sup>45</sup> Benton, *Hard Breathing Days*, p. 285.

<sup>46</sup> Benton, *Hard Breathing Days*, p. 57.

old boy- quite too young dear, don't you think? You forget Belle was between six months and a year old when you commenced making her mind."<sup>47</sup> This agitation with his parenting methods versus hers did come up a few times in her letters. Unfortunately, since Cora's letters end in 1865, one cannot see who won this clash of opposing viewpoints when he came home. Due to Cora's strong will that became more so with the development of a more independent mind, Cora probably did. Thus, even in daily tasks Cora had stopped portraying herself as weak and accepted the strength of her character, taking control over her own life. This daily life sometimes included contributing to local charity affairs.

### **Charity Work**

In addition to helping out as a nurse to some local families, Cora did find the time to participate in other charity events. For example, when Albion hosted a strawberry festival on July 7<sup>th</sup>, 1863, Cora volunteered for the "ornaments and decorations" committee. This wonderful event gave all proceeds to Washington as a donation for those sick or wounded in the latest battles of Gettysburg and Vicksburg. Without providing any specifics, Cora provided other aid throughout the years to various local charitable programs, such as the one in Rochester that fundraised money for the sick soldiers through the Sanitary Commission.<sup>48</sup> One time, local efforts by the Presbyterian Church even included Cora as one of their recipients to receive local aid. As Cora explains in the following quote, she did not appreciate receiving any aid. Cora states:

"Friday, before dark, a man brought in hurriedly a turkey, chicken, paper of coffee and a pound of sugar, and was gone before I could recover my astonishment. On a slip of paper

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<sup>47</sup> Benton, *Hard Breathing Days*, p. 57.

<sup>48</sup> Benton, *Hard Breathing Days*, pp. 203, 264, and 340.

was ‘Mrs. Cora Benton. By the Presbyterian Church.’ It was the first public charity I had received, and God knows I hope it will be the last. I never was designed to live on charity, else I’d feel differently from what I do now. That was an extremely humiliating moment of my life, and when Mrs. Hayward came in and saw the things, I covered my face with my hands. They were sent to all the soldiers’ families in town. They have never before classed me among them, but have rather called on me for help.”<sup>49</sup>

Thus she liked to give charity to others but not to receive it. Her proud demeanor made her determined to succeed in life on her own. She barely tolerated all of the aid she received from her own parents. If not so desperate, she probably never would have. After discussing her feelings over this occurrence with Charlie, he wrote that he disagreed over her receiving charity as a soldier’s wife. She responded through informing him not to go on with such an opinion for then she would “think less of you.”<sup>50</sup> Typical of her growing ability to speak her mind, she refused to allow Charlie to disagree with her opinion in this matter. Thus, he complied and no longer offered such a contradicting opinion. Thus, typical of Cora’s nature, she helped others as much as she could while expecting nothing in return. In fact, it seems that she did not want to accept any charity at all due to her pride. She continued to increase in her ability to voice her opinions over time not only on issues of charity, but also concerning politics.

### **Cora and Politics**

From the very beginning, Cora openly discussed politics with other men. Early on, Cora exchanged views on the political situation of England with her husband. She described how England sent various ships to Quebec in order to prepare itself for a possible skirmish with

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<sup>49</sup> Benton, *Hard Breathing Days*, p. 415.

<sup>50</sup> Benton, *Hard Breathing Days*, p. 421.

America. Thus, she contradicted the popular belief that women did not discuss politics, or at least not with men, in the mid-1800s. In addition, due to reading the papers, she also knew when the battle of Fredericksburg took place and anxiously awaited news that her brothers and husband survived. She even often kept her husband informed of the battles (including the level of Union progress) and their casualty statistics going on around him in the Civil War. Later, Cora and her husband discussed the shortsightedness of the United States political leaders which caused the outbreak of war that they must suffer through. Other political activities included keeping track of any messages President Lincoln provided to his citizens, discussing any Generals' speeches (such as General Woolford's in which he wanted to remove his troops from the war due to the Emancipation Proclamation), talking about the various drafts Albion faced, comparing the rise of non-threatening copper-heads in relation to the Federals of 1812, summarizing a bill that would increase a soldier's pay, tracking local elections, and offering her opinion concerning the latest military strategy that the Union used. For example, due to the South's firm control of Fredericksburg, she believed that an attack there would not suffice. Lastly, she debated racism with her husband. When her husband demanded that all Albion townfolk should push all blacks out of town, Cora challenged it. She claimed that blacks offer no harm to anyone and asked him to question whether he would want a good friend of his, Riley White, to have to move too then.<sup>51</sup> Although Cora certainly became bolder in her opinions over time, she still does not take direct political action until the end of 1864.

At the end of 1864, Cora gave Charlie political advice and forewarned him not to vote. As a couple, they had opposing political beliefs. At one point, since their son sang "hurrah for Mac" (George B. McClellan) and their daughter waves a Lincoln Flag, Cora jokingly claimed that their children follow in each parent's footsteps. Therefore, Cora contained republican views

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<sup>51</sup> Benton, *Hard Breathing Days*, pp. 22, 58, 63, 88, 96, 150, 196, 182, 191, 251 and 308.

and supported Abraham Lincoln in the 1864 election while Charlie wanted the democratic nominee McClellan (a famous Union General) to win.<sup>52</sup> When it came close to the time to vote, a friend (Mr. Ough) of both Cora's and Charlie's sent a ticket to Charlie so that he could vote.

Since Cora knew who Charlie would vote for, she wrote in her next letter:

“Mr. Ough is going to send you a ticket he said- no I beg you do not vote it. It seems to me no soldier that loves his country could vote for McClellan, on the democratic platform. There is no danger of his getting elected, but I don't want your boy to know in the future that you voted such a ticket at such a time. There is but one way to settle this war honorably, and that is to fight it out.”<sup>53</sup>

Thus, Cora really pushed the issue of not wanting her husband to vote for the opposite party. She even used their son and the question of honor to validate her argument. As a result, she promoted her own political beliefs and really wanted him to support them. She continuously inquired as to whether or not Charlie's friends received a vote from her husband. Eventually, she discovered that Charlie respected her wishes and did not vote.<sup>54</sup> Thus, Cora stopped Charlie from voting even when numerous friends attempted to get him to vote through mailing a few tickets to him. This action demonstrates that Cora has agency over her own life. She now not only had her own political opinion but directly influenced her husband's. Since she wanted nothing more than to depend on her husband initially, the Cora of 1862 would never have done such a thing. She would have only discussed the election, not stopped him from voting. Consequently, Cora had gained more independence as the war progressed, a circumstance influenced by her continuous need for money.

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<sup>52</sup> Benton, *Hard Breathing Days*, p. 389.

<sup>53</sup> Benton, *Hard Breathing Days*, p. 390.

<sup>54</sup> Benton, *Hard Breathing Days*, p. 402.

## Poverty Stricken/ Managing Finances

Due to her husband's absence, Cora managed the finances from the moment he left. Initially, Mr. George Ough, a businessman in Albion and the previous boss of her husband prior to his leaving for war, gave twenty dollars to Cora's father who in return handed it to her for expenses. She seemed overwhelmed by her costs as the money easily dwindled away for rent, groceries, and other miscellaneous living expenses. Charlie often sent the money he received to various businessmen who ensured that his wife received it. She did the best she could to cover the price of food, clothing, and shelter with the money. In the beginning she also complained about the government not sending her husband his pay. It often takes the government months to issue the soldier's pay. For example, after serving six months, Charlie received his second pay check which comprised a total of two and a half months pay when he should have procured five. Thus, due to their meager situation, she sold items such as boots and the stove in order to gain more money.<sup>55</sup> With such limited funds, Cora continued to face difficulties throughout her first year.

From her very first winter, Cora experienced difficulty for her family's survival. For example, her mother offered her canned food in order to help her endure the winter. Her mother also watched the baby occasionally to help Cora conduct errands usually to provide her husband with another basket of goods. In order to help, her father located and purchased loads of wood for her to help keep warm through the winter while her little brother Vallie split it. So, although she struggles to manage her household's finances, her family helped her gain her feet. During this time she also spent a lot of time sewing in order to save what little money she could. With whatever funds her husband granted her, she saved some to send him local newspapers, canned tomatoes, and stamps in order to send her letters back. Additionally, she mailed food in order to

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<sup>55</sup> Benton, *Hard Breathing Days*, pp. 3, 14, 44, and 99.

aid with his horrible and simple diet. Since the government did not pay their soldiers on time, she often could not pay the mortgage and thus dealt with those men requesting the money and lost her servant, Maggie, early on adding more chores to her list of responsibilities. She continuously had issues with money since her husband does not receive his pay as he should. As a result, she borrowed money from her father for stamps to send letters to Charlie and her sister (who teachers in Michigan) and does not know where she will live once Spring arrives due to tight finances and limited options.<sup>56</sup> With all of these hardships occurring only over the first six months of Charlie's absence, Cora quickly realized the tough times she had in front of her.

In 1863, Cora continued to manage the best she could off of what pay her husband had received at that point. Practically right away, Cora dealt with rising and inconsistent prices. For example, the price of cloth went from thirteen cents to 30 or 40 cents per yard. Luckily, her family often provided her with milk, potatoes, wood, and extra meals in order to help them stay well-nourished and fairly warm. After deciding to move back into her home with a tenant, she later paid to get the roof fixed, which only cost \$15.11 including labor. In October, she had someone paint the dining room and front door in addition to putting a lock on the front door for the tenants. Luckily, since a friend did it, Henry Hayward only charged her for supplies. She initiated these home repairs with only a little help from her husband and father. By the end of 1864, she comments on how the winter will bring more high prices that will continue to hurt the poor and cause some to even steal.<sup>57</sup> Her husband had even denied some furloughs initially in order to save more money. However, despite the dire circumstances, she continues on with an attitude of "I prefer going without to running in debt- and I have and still go without a good

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<sup>56</sup> Benton, *Hard Breathing Days*, pp. 5-6, 50, 53, 73, 94, and 112.

<sup>57</sup> Benton, *Hard Breathing Days*, pp. 105, 171, 194, 244, and 257.

many things I need.”<sup>58</sup> Thus, over the last year, her circumstances forced her to take some agency over her poor situation. She managed house repairs and her household’s books. Although she had initiated life as a landlord, she still greatly depended on her husband and father. Sick of living in poverty the following year would bring about more change and even more agency.

In 1864 and 1865, Cora became more independent financially. Early on, she realized that she could not afford to go and visit her husband like other women could. She had aspired to initially, but soon recognized that she never would. The pay-master continued to greatly delay her husband’s paychecks as she faced horrible grocery prices, eating only bread and butter and potatoes that a nearby neighbor, Albert, would give to her for weeks at a time. As she claims, “I shall have to work my nails off to keep from starving.”<sup>59</sup> In addition, by writing her husband less often, she tried to save some money from purchasing as many stamps. Thus, she decided to change her circumstances through beginning her own common school. Although, the constant workload of housework, school, and volunteering made her weary and worn out, she both saved a lot of money and created it. Despite the new income, in early September, Cora went to temporarily live with her father since she no longer had any food in the house or money in which to purchase any. Luckily, Charlie finally received a paycheck and sent some money shortly thereafter. As the winter approached, a new all-time high for wood prices occurred. Therefore, over the last few winters Cora faced alone, she decided that she dreaded the coming of winter. However, she still did the best she could and continued managing the money. In order to pay a portion of the taxes of \$30.02, she did not get a new dress, figured out a way to get Belle some shoes, and persistently hunts for deals on wood. By 1865, she decided that she may have to sell her husband’s beloved watch which she treasured so much in order to obtain some much needed

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<sup>58</sup> Benton, *Hard Breathing Days*, p. 271.

<sup>59</sup> Benton, *Hard Breathing Days*, pp. 343 and 353.

funds. Unfortunately, she traded the watch with her brother Henry for his furniture and a little cash.<sup>60</sup> In fact she received a “sofa, four nice cane seated chairs, a large rocker, ten dining room chairs, a couch, a large mirror, a parlor-cooking stove, a table and spread, wood, potatoes, turnips, wheat flour and barrel, beans, carpeting, a nice centre table or stand, snow shovel, wash stand, oil can, and twenty-five dollars in money.” Thus he gave her a total of \$117.60 worth of items for Charlie’s watch.<sup>61</sup> She also became a landlord to a higher number of tenants. Despite her constant attempts to produce more revenue, poverty had taken a toll on her. As she claimed,

“I have never wished to be rich as much as I have the past three years- I have about concluded I am wicked about it, for I wish it every waking hour. It keeps you from me (our poverty) now- it kept me from you when you were sick at Camp Barry- it prevents my going anywhere, or having the clothes I need for myself and children- it has made me dependent to a distressing degree, and other things too numerous to mention. But ‘what can’t be cured must be endured’ I suppose.”<sup>62</sup>

Thus, despite everything, Cora prevailed! Although obviously exhausted from poverty, she had independently created revenue for herself despite the odds and managed to survive times of severe financial hardship for her family. Without the occurrence of the war, Cora would not have had such an opportunity in which to gain a financial independence and a mind for business from the school she founded and having tenants.

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<sup>60</sup> Benton, *Hard Breathing Days*, pp. 370, 413, 427-428, and 432.

<sup>61</sup> Benton, *Hard Breathing Days*, pp. 444 and 449.

<sup>62</sup> Benton, *Hard Breathing Days*, p. 438.

## Cora's Common School

In the 1860s, teaching provided a great opportunity to earn some extra cash, especially as a single woman. The average female teacher received a monthly salary of \$18.11 in 1861.<sup>63</sup> Since the feminization of teaching began in approximately 1840, especially among common schools, teaching provided an opportunity for women to earn a meager salary. Many believed this position benefitted everyone since employers saved money with women as cheap labor while women as natural nurturers helped young children to learn in an affectionate environment.<sup>64</sup> Despite the push for this mentality, especially by Horace Mann, prior to the war men still heavily outnumbered women in the teaching profession. However, since the war took many men away to become soldiers, the Civil War provided a great opportunity for women to embrace the teaching lifestyle in order to survive. Thus, during the Civil War the number of female teachers then greatly surpassed the males.<sup>65</sup> Cora Beach Benton would help contribute to this growing number.

On April 4<sup>th</sup>, 1864, Cora decided to school-teach over the summer in her house with hopes of creating revenue with about twenty students. She found ten students in time for her first day. She aspired to work five hours per day for twelve weeks in order to gain a shilling per week per pupil, or twelve and a half cents per week per student. While she taught her students and Cora, her father watched baby Verde (which remained his name until a month into her teaching career when his name became George). Except for the fact that she had to get up early in the morning, she looked to this new time in her life with excitement to make her own money.<sup>66</sup>

Before long, Cora had money regularly flowing in to help her with her poor financial circumstances. As she proudly claimed of her success, “no, dear Charlie, keep at least two

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<sup>63</sup> Volo, *Daily Life*, p. 273.

<sup>64</sup> Urban, *American Education*, pp. 106-107.

<sup>65</sup> William H. Jeynes, *American Educational History: School, Society, and the Common Good*, (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2007), p. 159.

<sup>66</sup> Benton, *Hard Breathing Days*, p. 314.

dollars with you- I shall collect the rest of my school-bill this week. You see, I am getting quite independent.”<sup>67</sup> She even hired Mary, a maid, for three shillings per week in order to complete the washing and ironing while teaching. Although she could not afford this for long, this accomplishment made her feel successful since she had always wanted to have enough money to pay someone to take care of various housework tasks. By the end of the first week, she had fourteen pupils with two more lined up to start the following week. By May 22<sup>nd</sup>, she had gone beyond her goal to have twenty six students that provided her with a decent sum of money. Since she taught two students for free, she made twenty-four shillings per week or five dollars (the modern day equivalent of just a little over \$100).<sup>68</sup> As a result of this financial success, Cora decided to teach for another term.

Due to some challenges she faced during her first term, Cora aspired to create some beneficial changes to her school. First, Cora really wanted to find a room to rent as her school room, not located in her own home. The constant flow of children running through her house caused a lot more housework to conduct in a very limited time schedule. Second, her close friend Jennie Flint and she hoped to start a partnership in which Cora instructed forty scholars the basics while Jennie taught the kids music and drawing for beginners. Jennie would need six music scholars of her own in order to prosper. Anytime not spent teaching music and drawing, Jennie would spend in the classroom aiding Cora. In order to provide the necessary room for such a project, Cora would occupy her entire house (with no tenants), leaving the wing open as her school. Since she would not have the time, Cora would hire a maid to help keep her home clean. Both she and Jennie would split all the bills in a partnership. Since she already had twenty-eight pupils lined up, getting twelve more would not offer much of a challenge.

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<sup>67</sup> Benton, *Hard Breathing Days*, p. 341.

<sup>68</sup> Benton, *Hard Breathing Days*, pp. 315, 317, 323, and 327.

Obtaining the music students offered the only concern Cora had in achieving this great business proposition.<sup>69</sup> Such thorough business plans represent Cora's intelligence and growing independence. Unfortunately, due to circumstances out of her control, she would not execute all of her plans.

Although Cora had great ambition and courage, her plans for improvement would fail. Due to the tough economic times, Cora could not obtain enough scholars for Jennie's music program. Without these six students, they could not create enough profit to create the partnership they desperately wanted. Thus, since she still wanted to rent a room for her scholars, she agreed to rent the whole basement of the Episcopal Church which provided desks and benches for her use. Even though Charlie had disagreed with this decision, Cora had listened to her father's advice not to use her west wing as a school so that she would not live in her home all alone.<sup>70</sup> She also thought her school would not compensate for the loss of rent from her tenants. However, when her husband informed her not to rent a room for her school, she openly claimed that she had made the best decision. Therefore, she now only listened to others advice when it supported her own. Otherwise, she disregarded their guidance. After all this time, she now makes decisions for not only herself, but for her business too. Her experiences, intellect, ambitions, and courage no longer allowed her to blindly follow her father and husband. Instead, she directly challenged her husband's opinion and defied it. However, this blissful environment that she chose would not last.

Her second term offered many challenges that drained Cora's determination to continue teaching. First, after three days of teaching, she could no longer teach in the basement due to the dark, damp environment. Consequently, she now educated children in her parlor again. Her

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<sup>69</sup> Benton, *Hard Breathing Days*, pp. 332, 338, and 339.

<sup>70</sup> Benton, *Hard Breathing Days*, pp. 339-341, and 365-366.

father had suggested that in order to make more money, she should rent her house leaving just one room for herself, a business decision that would result in about \$140 extra/ year. Despite this suggestion, she had decided to keep her house and teach in the parlor since she thought she could produce more wealth in this manner regardless of the extra effort it would demand. Therefore, not only did she disregard her husband's advice, but also her fathers.<sup>71</sup> Other challenges would soon follow this disappointment.

The students themselves offered her another challenge. Keeping the parlor the schoolroom like before, Cora decided that she aspired to have twenty four students this time in order to provide a little more room. Especially considering the space that the new benches she purchased took up, she did not want to overcrowd the room again. These great benches seated seven students each and provided a place for them to put their books. Besides Belle whom she proudly taught primary geography on the side, she had fourteen scholars by the end of the second week with the promise of four more. By November 6<sup>th</sup>, 1864, she had twenty two of the twenty four students that she had wanted. At this point, she complained about how having so many kids in one room required a great deal of management skills.<sup>72</sup> The kids simply exhausted her. As she claimed in regards to her job as a schoolteacher, "I wish I was going to do something that would pay me better, for I am working so hard for a sixpence."<sup>73</sup> Her frustrations with teaching seemed typical for any teacher of any time period. For example,

"Louie Ough is going to the Seminary and I think it much the best place for her. She needs to be in very strict hands. She gives me a great deal of trouble, and I've had to punish her several times. Lillie Emerson is equally troublesome, but she will only be here a few weeks longer, as she is going to be in Rochester this winter. The rest I can manage

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<sup>71</sup> Benton, *Hard Breathing Days*, p. 372.

<sup>72</sup> Benton, *Hard Breathing Days*, pp. 375, 376, and 397.

<sup>73</sup> Benton, *Hard Breathing Days*, p. 371.

without trouble. A teacher's life is none of the easiest at the best, though I have avoided telling you the almost daily trials I am subject to, thinking you have quite enough to worry about. There are many things about teaching I enjoy, and it is only once in a while I am so discouraged and heart-sick, I wish it were the last day. The next morning, however, I am ready to begin my work again."<sup>74</sup>

Therefore, she dealt with disruptive students and typical conflicting emotions. This wearied mind and her last challenge during this term would cause her to conclude that she would not teach for much longer.

Cora's encounter with disease comprised of her last straw before deciding to end her teaching career sooner than she had previously planned. She dealt with ten students and her daughter getting the chicken pox. After concluding her second term of teaching, she planned to teach two more terms through the summer before Charlie returns before ending her teaching career for good. If not for the money she probably would have stopped teaching at the close of her second term. In fact if not for her grave situation, she would never have founded a school to begin with. For her third and final term ending by March 5<sup>th</sup>, 1865, she gained about twenty scholars. Due to the small numbers and the high cost of wood during the winter season, this term did not offer her the profits of the previous terms.<sup>75</sup> Therefore, when offered a teaching job at the Academy that she received her education at, she thrillingly informed Charlie of the good news. Unfortunately due to the sudden appearance of the absent teacher that she would have replaced, she never did get the job. However, the offer demonstrates just how successful, albeit stressful, and noteworthy her reputation had become. She had independently founded and maintained a

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<sup>74</sup> Benton, *Hard Breathing Days*, p. 400.

<sup>75</sup> Benton, *Hard Breathing Days*, pp. 406, 410, 416, and 437.

school, in order to pay for necessities that would have continued to prosper had she not got burned out. Thus, she would focus her attentions completely on her job as a landlord.

### **Cora as a Landlord**

From the very beginning, her husband set her up to take over the role of landlord. However, initially she looked to the men in her life to help make any decisions regarding her tenants. She did not start to independently take over that role until she decided to rent out her home again in 1863 and searched for her next tenants for her home instead of moving in as planned. This business choice marks the start to Cora's growing independent mind.

When Charlie left for his life as a soldier, Mr. Frye rented their house while she boarded with the Phelps' family for the winter. Later, she aspired to rent their house out to help pay for finances while living in another portion of it so that she did not have to continue boarding somewhere else. In order for Mr. Frye to continue to rent as she had proposed, he stipulated certain conditions, such as fixing the roof and water pump, before agreeing to another year. Since Cora could not find anyone or the means to fix everything, this option would not do. She continued to show the house to countless couples in order to find someone to rent the house. In the meanwhile she worried over where she and the kids would live. Finally, a Mrs. Hayward agreed to rent a part of the house for a dollar a week, leaving Cora with a place to live in the best section of the house. This way Cora had a steady income of one dollar per week in which to live on, supplemented with some of Charlie's salary when he finally received his wages. Due to rising prices and the lack of pay from her husband, she would raise the rent to \$1.25 per week later that spring.<sup>76</sup> In this beginning process, although she began making some decisions, she consistently consulted her husband and father for help. The circumstances had forced her to

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<sup>76</sup> Benton, *Hard Breathing Days*, pp. 93, 110, 124, and 313.

reluctantly make some decisions. Eventually, she would happily take over her position as landlord.

As she became more burnout from her school teaching, Cora focused more attention on her job as a landlord. In late 1864, her friend May resided with her while attending the Seminary school.<sup>77</sup> Although only paying a small amount, the assistance May provided compensated for the meager funds. By early 1865, after May moved away Cora discussed the prospect of boarding Mr. and Mrs. DeLaMatyr during his possible stay in Albion. Although this would continue to take away some much needed room from her house, it offered a great opportunity for more income. As she claimed, “there is but one thing that tempts me to do it- that is, a chance to be a little more independent.”<sup>78</sup> Therefore, in order to gain more money and independence, she rented her house to the couple shortly after. Loving her new occupation, she had Henry Owen and his wife lined up to board in her house for \$8/week when the DeLaMatyr’s moved out. The Owens’ even furnished their own two rooms, provided wood, and resolved their lighting situation themselves. After the closing of her school, she decided to rent to more tenants. On April 30<sup>th</sup>, 1865, she proposed to rent out three rooms at three dollars per week in order to prosper. Unfortunately the Owens’ decided to move out west in early May. Therefore, this abrupt change to her financial plans caused her to temporarily borrow money from others. Upset with this fate and determined to change the situation, she immediately set out for new tenants. By May 17<sup>th</sup>, she had three groups of tenants lined up with one already living with her. So far, Captain Barnard and his wife had the front parlor and front chamber and Charlie Sickle would have one of the other rooms upstairs. During this letter, she also informed her husband that unless he wanted to share her room, he would have to sleep on the couch. Her next letter made it sound as if he preferred to

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<sup>77</sup> Benton, *Hard Breathing Days*, p. 414.

<sup>78</sup> Benton, *Hard Breathing Days*, p. 428.

share her bedroom upon his arrival home. Luckily in this letter she also discovered that he received approval from Washington to finally come home!<sup>79</sup> So, by the time Washington allowed Charlie to return home, Cora had developed an independent business mind as a landlord. Interestingly enough, she now did not even know if she wanted to share a room with her husband. She had become her own person and simply missed someone to share her life. As a result, their marital relationship had changed due to the hardships of the war. She now expected to make many of the financial and family choices on her own and wanted nothing less than a full partnership with her husband.

### **Self-reliant Women by the War's End**

The war provided Cora with the opportunity to speak her mind. Besides those reasons already mentioned, Cora berated her husband's superior once. For example, due to her husband's frail condition after he fell, Cora wrote a letter to her husband's superior, Captain Anthony, requesting that he allow her husband to temporarily come home to recuperate. Her last statement claims "Mrs. Anthony, if he shakes his head- you nod it for him, please."<sup>80</sup> The conclusion to this letter shows the spunk and boldness she had in writing it. Of course due to the marching orders received shortly after this letter, her husband did not get to go home as one would have hoped.<sup>81</sup> It also demonstrates the influence women had in the war. Continuous destitution caused many women to become more aggressive not just in the home, but also in the community. As shown through her letters, the war granted other women similar opportunities and hardships.

Cora disclosed the difficult journey of her friend Jane Eunice Lee (referred commonly as Jennie Lee Flint) during the war. According to Taber, Jennie Lee became Jennie Flint when she married Charles H. Flint (or Charlie) on November 29<sup>th</sup>, 1960. A graduate of Phipps Union

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<sup>79</sup> Benton, *Hard Breathing Days*, pp. 451, 452, and 454.

<sup>80</sup> Benton, *Hard Breathing Days*, p. 210.

<sup>81</sup> Benton, *Hard Breathing Days*, p. 223.

Seminary in 1858, Jennie remained Cora's friend throughout their early lives. Like Cora, Jennie Flint also faced numerous anguishing burdens during the Civil War. Cora first thoroughly mentioned Jennie Lee Flint as a visitor with her baby to Cora's apartment on November 4<sup>th</sup>, 1862. Later, when Cora discussed the possible partnership with Jennie to start a school in June of 1864, we begin to see the troubles Jennie confronted. Since they could not open a school together, Jennie Flint moved to Rochester in August where she obtained a job as a saleswoman in a hair factory. Although scared to take such a job, the desperate times required it. As a single mother due to the death of her husband by consumption on March 7<sup>th</sup>, 1864, she needed to provide a living for her daughter (Lizzie) and her. She also no longer would accept any more generosity from her friends. She did not want to continue to depend on them, especially since every family experienced difficult times. As far as her position in the ladies store, she got to keep her baby with her to tend to while boarding with her cousin off duty. These circumstances offered her the best opportunity she had without heavily depending on others. By October, Jennie Flint complained about the high demand of work she completed for such meager wages. At this point, she no longer boarded with her cousin since she claimed that six of the seven dollars she earned every week went towards paying for her board and washing. Thus, Jennie hoped to move to Providence to earn more money. Where Jennie wanted to move specifically remains unclear. The reader cannot tell whether Jennie referred to Providence, Rhode Island, or a place in or near Rochester. At this point Cora felt sorry for her, but at the same time felt glad that her friend became more independent. Cora definitely valued a woman's independence at this point, whereas she would not have prior to her husband's enlistment. However, Jennie did not get her dream home. Instead she moved in with her aunt until the aunt became severely ill. At this juncture in Jennie's life, she felt torn. On the one hand, she could certainly discover a

boarding-place for them, however, she no longer had anyone she could trust to watch Lizzie while she worked. Thus, she unfortunately and reluctantly gave up her job at the store in December of 1864. Thus, since she could not make it on her own as a single mother, Jennie married Henry Drake in February of 1865, soon after she had given up her job.<sup>82</sup> As both Cora and Jennie claimed, they missed depending on their spouses as they had before. They now realized that they had not had as much independence as they like to have thought they had formerly. This year of Jennie's life really provided her the opportunity to live her own life and make her own decisions. Therefore, the war caused many women to become truly self-reliant and independent, much like Cora and Jennie.

Cora's letters share glimpses of other grievances women faced during the Civil War. First, many women went from choosing their husbands as an important personally made decision to running businesses. Second, thousands became single mothers, some to newborn babies their fathers did not meet for months or years after their birth. In fact, Cora mentioned how two out of three women from Barre Centre who visited their husbands during the summer of 1863 became pregnant. Although she laughs at the circumstances and exclaims her gratitude for not affording to go, she finds herself in similar circumstances the following year.<sup>83</sup> In the spring of 1864, Charlie gains his first furlough or temporary leave from his services. Not only does he see his son for the first time and his wife and daughter whom he had not seen for nearly two years, but Cora also worried about the lateness of a menstrual cycle after he left. Although a false alarm, many women did not have such a lucky fate. Hopefully that mother would then not witness the child's death or discover her husband died in the war.

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<sup>82</sup> Benton, *Hard Breathing Days*, pp. 17, 363, 367, 368, 388, 413, 436, and 479.

<sup>83</sup> Benton, *Hard Breathing Days*, p. 259.

Third, countless single mothers lost children and husbands to the war. For example, when Typhoid affected Albion in the fall of 1863, of Cora's friends and acquaintances, the Paine's lost a baby, the Reynolds' lost their eight year old daughter, and an old soldier lost three children and possibly his wife. Countless of the impoverished widows would end up marrying to avoid starvation while others endured the hardship of giving up their own children due to the trying times. Since she lost her home due to limited funds and the death of her husband, the widow of Mr. Herrick gave her son away to a couple she had lived with prior to her marriage. To have to sacrifice through giving away your own child demonstrates the horrible life challenges women confronted during the Civil War. Not only did one possibly lose their husbands to war, but also the limited funds caused the families to remain very poor. Besides Jennie, due to the hard and difficult times, Cora commented that many widows married in order to survive.<sup>84</sup> At any time, women continuously encountered the prospect of death by a loved one.

Fourth, in addition to husbands and children dying, women worried over and faced the death or captivity of other relatives. For example, since they all fought in the war, even Cora continuously worried about her brothers Henry, Howard, and Vallie in addition to her own husband. Such constant worrying over so many men causes much grief within the family, especially the Beaches. Many other women dealt with similar and much worse grievances. As Cora claimed, "dear Charlie have you heard how many of the Albion boys have been killed? It seems as though nearly all have been killed or wounded."<sup>85</sup> Besides death of a loved one, women consistently dealt with poor economic conditions influenced by the war.

Women survived even more financial obstacles throughout the Civil War. Despite inadequate funds, many had to send money to their family members in the war due to the

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<sup>84</sup> Benton, *Hard Breathing Days*, p. 264, 280, and 389.

<sup>85</sup> Benton, *Hard Breathing Days*, p. 336.

difficult conditions in the camps. In fact, Cora sent money to both her husband and Howard a few times.<sup>86</sup> Also, much like Cora, numerous women confronted financial destitution since their husband's did not receive their pay very often. As Cora stated, "Not paying the soldiers is too wicked- it is causing untold suffering in thousands of homes, especially among those who have no friends. I don't wonder so many women sell their souls for bread, and I believe God will judge them harshly than man does."<sup>87</sup> In addition, when referencing Sarah, Henry's wife, about how Henry's doing, she said "she has not been sick yet- very low-spirited Mother says- thinks she shall never see Henry again. He has had no pay to send her as yet, and she has cultivated an acre of land while in the situation she has been in. If both she and the child live, it will be strange."<sup>88</sup> Therefore, the Civil War caused formidable living situations that women had to survive in. As demonstrated through Cora's letters, some prospered better than others. Either way, women acquired more agency in their lives than they had had prior to the war's commencement.

In conclusion, Cora Beach Benton transformed from a frightened young pregnant woman who heavily depended on her husband and father to a confident autonomous woman who decided her own fate over the course of the Civil War. As the war progressed, she became more self-reliant in facing the hardships of poverty as she tried to pay their bills, taxes, and provide food, shelter, and clothing. She not only survived these harsh living conditions, but thrived in them. She became a prosperous landlord and founded a school in her own home! She used her education to serve as mediator, nurse, politician, financial manager, mother, and charity leader. No one can describe her amazing journey better than herself. As Cora claimed to Charlie "during

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<sup>86</sup> Benton, *Hard Breathing Days*, p. 337.

<sup>87</sup> Benton, *Hard Breathing Days*, p. 353.

<sup>88</sup> Benton, *Hard Breathing Days*, p. 352.

the past three years, I've had some things to do and bear that would make many a stout heart tremble. I am not crushed, but sit here to-night stronger than when you left me.”<sup>89</sup> Therefore, the Civil War caused countless women to battle personal burdens that they would otherwise not have had to deal with. As a result, the Civil War created some autonomous women, such as Cora Beach Benton and challenged various gender norms within certain families.

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<sup>89</sup> Benton, *Hard Breathing Days*, p. 460.

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## Chapter 3

### **Northern Women of the Civil War:**

Information and Materials for Teachers (4<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup>)



**<http://www.wix.com/amelialuel2/northern-women-of>**

For the final section of my thesis, I created a website in order to help other teachers educate children on this crucial topic. The website includes various tools, materials, and lessons that I either created or discovered on the internet. The process seemed simple, to provide as many resources as possible. The result demonstrated that easy and fun process. However, linking those materials to the website proved an unexpected challenge as I struggled to generate a website for the cause. Although difficult, the outcome proved worth it.

Although free, I had a hard time creating my website through wix.com. A task as simple as extending the length of the page or adding another column took an extra hour of frustration to determine how to do so. Therefore, I do not think that I would recommend it. Apparently, I later learned that other free website publishers offer easier programs. Despite this, the contents of the website do achieve my goal. It contains great resources that teachers can use to help their instruction on women in the American Civil War.

Countless resources exist to aid teachers in their instruction concerning Northern women's roles during the Civil War on my website. On my website, one will find a four minute video clip and video guide, a RAFT activity, an introductory PowerPoint, two web quests, a complete lesson plan using Cora Beach Benton as a case study, activities for fourth, fifth, and sixth graders, and a journal activity. In addition, I compiled a list of Northern women that one could easily research along with a list of various websites that provide more information under the fourth tab. Of course, I offered countless pictures of these women through a slide show and on the introductory PowerPoint. Lastly, I created a section, under the fifth tab, with contact information and a Blog to continue providing more information and resources as time progresses.

In conclusion, a website provided the best avenue to publish my research and help utilize the information in a way that helps others. Now teachers can use the information to teach students about this vital topic whether through a short activity or as a distinct part of a unit plan. To teach about the Civil War and exclude the women's side of the story leaves the overall picture half missing. Teachers need to demonstrate that women offered more to the cause than through simply sewing socks. They also should demonstrate how the Civil War caused gender norms to change, generating a path for a future of change.

# Thesis Website Materials

## NYS Learning Standards

II. The Constitution Tested D. 2. b. Impact of war on home front (civil liberties during the Civil War, women's roles)

## Introductory PowerPoint to Northern Women's roles in Civil War

- For pictures: <http://americancivilwar.com/women/women.html>
- Four minute YouTube clip: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZMHIIY-LOE8&safety\\_mode=true&persist\\_safety\\_mode=1&safe=active](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZMHIIY-LOE8&safety_mode=true&persist_safety_mode=1&safe=active)
  - I created a video guide for this clip, conveniently provided at the end of this section.
- Pictures/ photos: <http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/lessons/women-cw/gallery.html>
- General information: <http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/nge/Article.jsp?id=h-2719>
- Website with some information on women in the Civil War- <http://www.essortment.com/women-civil-war-21016.html>

## Web quests

- Female Civil War Spies web quest- [http://www.lincolnparkboe.org/WebQuests/civilwar\\_spies.htm](http://www.lincolnparkboe.org/WebQuests/civilwar_spies.htm)
- Extensive web quest on all of the Civil War- [http://www.barrow.k12.ga.us/hes/classrooms/html/civil\\_war\\_webquest.html](http://www.barrow.k12.ga.us/hes/classrooms/html/civil_war_webquest.html)
- Activity 4 has many helpful websites, photos, ideas, and a reading- [http://www.pbs.org/civilwar/classroom/lesson\\_letters.html](http://www.pbs.org/civilwar/classroom/lesson_letters.html)
- Students make a PowerPoint with web research- [http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/historyonline/lesson\\_plans\\_display.cfm?lessonID=3](http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/historyonline/lesson_plans_display.cfm?lessonID=3)

## Activities

- RAFT activity- <http://ctah.binghamton.edu/greenman.html>
- 3 different activities for 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, and 6<sup>th</sup> graders- [http://www.nps.gov/stri/forteachers/upload/lesson\\_womeninwar.pdf](http://www.nps.gov/stri/forteachers/upload/lesson_womeninwar.pdf)
- Write a journal for both sides- <http://score.rims.k12.ca.us/activity/manswar/>

## Famous Northern Women

- Louisa May Alcott – author and army nurse
- Clara Barton – founder of the American Red Cross
- Mary Ann Bickerdyke – hospital administrator
- Kady Brownell – "daughter" of a regiment

- Lydia Maria Child – abolitionist and author
- Dorothea Dix –Union superintendent of nurses
- Rose O’Neal Greenhow - spy
- Sarah Edmonds – fought disguised as a man
- Charlotte Forten – taught in the Freedman’s schools
- Angelina Grimke – antislavery activist
- Susie Taylor King – escaped slave, teacher and nurse
- Mary Livermore – hospital administrator
- Harriet Beecher Stowe – author and anti-slavery activist
- Sojourner Truth – abolitionist
- Harriet Tubman – abolitionist
- Loreta Velazquez – recruited her own battalion as a man”<sup>90</sup>
- Dr. Mary Edwards Walker- Physician, Spy, and Prisoner of War. She’s described more on <http://www.northnet.org/stilawrenceaauw/walker.htm>
- Sarah Emma Edmonds- Soldier, Hospital Attendant, Mail Carrier, Possible Spy all disguised as Franklin Thompson. She was also a female nurse at the end of the Civil War. She’s described on <http://www.civilwar.org/education/history/biographies/sarah-emma-edmonds.html>
- Jennie Rodgers- enlisted as Albert Cashier in the 95<sup>th</sup> Illinois Infantry. Soldier as a Private. Possible Prisoner of War. For more information see: <http://www.civilwar.org/education/history/biographies/jennie-hodgers.html>
- Emily. Soldier of a Michigan Regiment in the Drum Corps.
- Susan (Susie) Baker King Taylor- Union laundress and teacher to her husband’s (Edward King’s) regiment. Nurse. More information can be located here: <http://www.blackpast.org/?q=aah/taylor-susan-susie-baker-king-1848-1912>
- Cathay Williams- nickname: Buffalo Soldier. Worker and Soldier (the only documented African American woman to serve) as William Cathay. More information: [http://www.aaregistry.org/historic\\_events/view/cathy-williams-buffalo-soldier-under-wraps](http://www.aaregistry.org/historic_events/view/cathy-williams-buffalo-soldier-under-wraps)
- Annie Etheridge- Nurse. The following website provides more details: [http://civilwarwiki.net/wiki/Annie\\_Etheridge\\_Hooks](http://civilwarwiki.net/wiki/Annie_Etheridge_Hooks)
- Sarah Rosetta Wakeman- Soldier as Private Lyons Wakeman in the 153<sup>rd</sup> regiment of New York State Volunteers

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<sup>90</sup> [http://www.pbs.org/civilwar/classroom/lesson\\_letters.html](http://www.pbs.org/civilwar/classroom/lesson_letters.html).

## Case Study: Cora Beach Benton Lesson

**Grades:** 9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup>

**Time:** 50- 60 minutes

### **NYS Core Curriculum addressed in this lesson:**

This lesson is listed under II. The Constitution Tested, letter D, number 2, section b. Impact of war on home front (civil liberties during the Civil War, women's roles).

### **NYS Learning Standards addressed in the lesson:**

- Standard One: History of the United States and New York
  - Students will learn about various influential women who made a vital impact to the Civil War's efforts both directly and indirectly.

### **NCSS Standards met in the lesson:**

- Culture and Cultural Diversity
- Time, Continuity, and Change
- People, Places, and Environments
- Individuals, Groups, and Institutions
- X. Civic Ideals and Practices

### **Lesson Objectives** (levels one, two, four, and five of Blooms):

- Students will list and describe at least two famous women who contributed to the Civil War effort.
- Students will interpret and analyze various documents depicting the life of Cora Beach Benton.
- Students will design a PowerPoint slide to summarize their analysis of Cora Beach Benton's life and what it can teach us about Northern women's lives during the Civil War.

### **Anticipatory Set [5-10 mins]**

This section has two parts. **First**, one needs to activate a student's prior knowledge on women that was last taught in your class. For example, most teachers last discussed women in the 1848 convention. Therefore, one needs to ask a question that will re-access what they learned so that the students can add the new material in a timeline with the old. **Then**, ask the students what women were doing during the Civil War? What roles did they have? Be sure to have the students answer the questions independently first and then go over their answers.

### **Purpose**

The students will learn about the importance of women's roles during the Civil War, how they changed from before, and some of the major figures involved in it.

**Body of Lesson** [45 mins or 55 mins if include optional video]

Input (what the teacher says, does, or models)	Output (students)
Optional: If time, the teacher could show the four minute video clip from youtube about northern women in the Civil War. [5 mins]	Students fill out the video guide and then report on something they learned from the video to reflect on what they just learned. [4 mins]
<b>First</b> (if skip the optional activity), the teacher will provide direct instruction using the powerpoint presentation to provide background information concerning women’s roles during the Civil War. The powerpoint briefly encompasses all the roles except the home front. [7 mins]	Students take notes.
<b>Next</b> , the students will complete a packet with a partner of excerpts from letters of Cora Beach Benton of Albion, NY. The teacher should provide the background of these letters. For the first time, in 2003 Thomas Talber organized over 300 letters between Cora Beach Benton and her husband, Charlie, most of which he purchased through an auction. Thus, he was able to present a common woman’s experiences and hardships that women faced at home during the Civil War. [4 mins]	Students complete the packet with a partner. Then, they create a PowerPoint slide that summarizes what Cora Beach Benton’s life teaches us. [25-35 mins]

Important Facts to Obtain from the letters: In conclusion, Cora Beach Benton transformed from a frightened young woman who heavily depended on her husband and father to a confident autonomous woman who decided her own fate over the course of the Civil War. She changes from a powerless wife that did her husband’s bidding to his equal who challenged him on any conflicting opinions between them. As the war progressed, she became more self-reliant in facing the hardships of poverty as she tried to pay their bills, taxes, and provide food, shelter, and clothing due to the government’s lack of reliability in providing pay to the soldiers. She not only survived these harsh living conditions, but thrived in them. She became a prosperous landlord and founded a school in her own home! She used her education to serve as nurse, financial manager, mother, and charity leader. Therefore, the Civil War caused countless women to battle personal burdens that they would otherwise not have had to deal with. As a result, the Civil War created some autonomous women, such as Cora Beach Benton.

**Guided Practice**

The questions in the packet help guide the students to summarize the main points that they have retrieved from the readings.

**Closure** [4-5 mins]

Have students do a quick write to list and describe two famous Northern women who contributed to the Civil War sharing as many details as they can?

**Assessment**

Formal- The teacher will collect their PowerPoint slides to see how the students summarized the information and presented it in this format. The teacher could also collect the quick writes if needed to ensure that everyone is on track.

Informal- The teacher will walk around the room while the students are working on their packet, prompting student groups as needed.

**Adaptations for the Inclusive Classroom**

PowerPoint provides both visual and auditory components for both types of learners.

The teacher could provide more time if needed.

The original PowerPoint presentation provides a model for the student's own slide later on.

Students work in pairs in order to get feedback from a peer and help one another learn to their full potential. This way no one is left behind.

**Technology Integration/ Necessary Equipment**

Need computers to show the PowerPoint to the students and to allow students to create their own PowerPoint slides too.

Need a projector to show the teacher's PowerPoint presentation.

Optional: May need internet access if showing the video clip.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Class: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Cora Beach Benton's letters**

**Part I-** Read the excerpts from Cora Beach Benton's letter below and answer the questions. You do **not** have to use complete sentences.

Albion. January 7<sup>th</sup>, 1863- "I am naturally so dependent, darling, that although I feel it keenly, these bitter lessons may teach me to be more self-reliant, and less childish. But I never cared to feel strong and independent of your help. It was so sweet to me to think, Charlie will aid me- or, I wonder what Charlie will think best for me to do in every little matter even, or which will Charlie like? Now I am thrown upon my own judgment, my own strength and likings. If I do not do wisely often, you must remember I am but a child in experience. About everything of importance though, I still go to you or father."<sup>91</sup>

- 1) At this point in the war, is Cora Beach Benton independent? Why or Why not?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 2) Prior to the war, what kind of relationship did Cora Benton and her husband have? What role did she provide for her family?

Tuesday night 2/10/63- "I got your dear letter this noon, and received the allotment all right. Thank you for it darling. But I do not understand how it is you only got 20 dollars for 2 months pay; it ought to have been 26. Mrs. Phelps was saying Mr [Reuben] Boyce wrote to his wife they were only paid for 1 month and 18 days- if that is so, it accounts for it. Be sure and keep some of it for yourself, for I can get along with less, seeing the whole amount is too small to pay up board and taxes. I do hope they will pay you up soon, for this is a disagreeable way of living. I know you had been in service nearly six months, and I thought at first three months pay was due still to the close of the year. I know they talk of being more punctual in settling the soldiers, and I think it is time."<sup>92</sup>

- 1) What conclusions can you conclude from this excerpt?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 2) After serving for six months, how many months pay **approximately** has Charlie received so far?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 3) Who is Cora referring to as "they" in the last sentence?

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<sup>91</sup> Cora Beach Benton, *Hard Breathing Days: The Civil War Letters of Cora Beach Benton*, Thomas R. Taber (Albion, NY: Almeron Press, 2003), p. 69.

<sup>92</sup> Benton, *Hard Breathing Days*, p. 99.

July 8<sup>th</sup>, 1863- “There was a large straw-berry festival in the new hall last night; largely attended too. The proceeds are to be sent to Washington for the benefit of the sick and wounded in the last battle.”<sup>93</sup>

- 1) What conclusions can you draw from this quote? Hint: What role does she provide here?

April 17<sup>th</sup>, 1864- “I made up my mind I’d try school-teaching- anything to take up my time. The next day and the next I was in the street half of the time, calling mostly on those families who were keeping their children from going in promiscuous society, and had therefore never sent them to any of the school in town. Twenty was the number I concluded to get if I could. Well, I have had my hands full, as I had to have my house cleaned and make all my arrangements during the past week. Our back-parlor is to be the scene of my operations- the carpet is up, and the benches and tables make it look quite like a school-room. Tomorrow morning at ten o’clock my school opens- so imagine me school-marm.”<sup>94</sup>

- 1) Why did she decide to open a school in her home?

- 2) How much of an education do you think she received?

August 21<sup>st</sup>, 1864- “I never saw a family in a more deplorable condition, and I am only too glad all I can do for them. My skill as a nurse is considered by the Dr. to be more than ordinary (Dr. Noble), and Mrs. J felt last night as the fever was at its crisis that she could trust her to no one but me. The consciousness of knowing I have been a comfort to them more than pays me for my sacrifice of ease and rest.”<sup>95</sup>

- 1) What conclusions can you make about this section?

December 25<sup>th</sup>, 1864- “What right, I should like to know, have you to dictate about the disposal of my foot? When I get rich I shall surely do as I please about it, and he may have the marble. You forget you don’t take care of me much now, and I am not quite dependent as I used to be on you. There will be two heads after this- do you understand darling?”<sup>96</sup>

- 1) What conclusions can you make concerning this excerpt?

- 2) How has her attitude changed?

- 3) What do you think “he may have the marble” means?

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<sup>93</sup>Benton, *Hard Breathing Days*, p. 203.

<sup>94</sup>Benton, *Hard Breathing Days*, p. 314.

<sup>95</sup>Benton, *Hard Breathing Days*, p. 363.

<sup>96</sup>Benton, *Hard Breathing Days*, p. 416.

March 5<sup>th</sup>, 1865- "I have never wished to be rich as much as I have the past three years- I have about concluded I am wicked about it, for I wish it every waking hour. It keeps you from me (our poverty) now- it kept me from you when you were sick at Camp Barry- it prevents my going anywhere, or having the clothes I need for myself and children- it has made me dependent to a distressing degree, and other things too numerous to mention. But 'what can't be cured must be endured' I suppose."<sup>97</sup>

1) What setbacks did their meager finances cause?

2) How has her opinion of their financial situation changed over time?

May 17<sup>th</sup>, 1865- "I had almost forgotten you did not know I have boarders again- three engaged, although but one is here yet. Captain [Henry] Barnard and wife have the front-parlor and the front chamber, and Charlie Sickles one of the other rooms up stairs. The Captain's wife has not come yet- may not be here till the first of next week, and Charlie S. comes Monday morning. So you see I can feed you, while you pay my bills. It is fortunate you are to sleep in my room, for all the rooms and beds are occupied; still if you prefer a separate room, I might fix you a bed on the sofa."<sup>98</sup>

1) Why is Cora renting out rooms in her house as a landlord?

2) How has Cora and Charlie's relationship changed since he went to war in August of 1862?

## Part II- What can she teach us?

Design a PowerPoint slide to add to our PowerPoint on Northern Women in the Civil War presenting the life of Cora Beach Benton. Underneath your slide, **use the notes section** to include the extra details of what you would say during the presentation of the text on your PowerPoint. Be sure to have **no more than 40 words** on your slide. Also add a title slide with your names and print both slides on one sheet of paper. You do **NOT** need to have a background. However, be sure to **include at least one** visual. If you want to add animation effects, they are optional.

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<sup>97</sup> Benton, *Hard Breathing Days*, p. 438.

<sup>98</sup> Benton, *Hard Breathing Days*, p. 454.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Class : \_\_\_\_\_

Teacher: \_\_\_\_\_

Danielle Wrag's- *The Role of Northern Women in the Civil War* Video Clip

During the Video: Answer the following questions. You **DO NOT** need complete sentences in your answer.

- 1) What is one role women had during the Civil War?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 2) What role did Clara Barton (the angel of the battlefield) have during the Civil War?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 3) Who was the founder of the American Red Cross?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 4) What role did Pauline Cushman have during the Civil War?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 5) President Abraham Lincoln gave Pauline Cushman an honorary commission as a \_\_\_\_\_?

After the video: Answer the following question, using complete sentences.

- 1) What is one new thing that you learned during this short video clip?

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