

The Society for Women and the Civil War Contributions by Women During the American Civil War

While military women serving in the Civil War notably played roles such as soldiers, physicians, nurses and *vivandieres*, individual civilian women at home knitted, sewed, prayed for, and worked to maintain the morale of soldiers from their families and communities. They kept homes, farms and businesses running: they were engaged in the business of survival for themselves, their families and their nations. The Civil War offered women remarkable opportunities to undertake “firsts” which had not previously been available to them. They rose to the demands provided by the war to expand their service to their communities. This gave them the knowledge, skills and experience to become vital contributors to the war efforts of their nations, and to later serve their reunited country in post-war healing and recovery. Their achievements provided the foundation for those of the American citizens of today – women and men.



Civilian women served in the field and in general hospitals as paid and volunteer surgeons, nurses, matrons, cooks, laundresses and chaplains. They also opened their homes to serve as hospitals during and after battles and for longer-term care of the wounded. Women made hospital supplies, wrote letters for soldier patients, provided refreshments, and provided support for hospitalized soldiers and their families. Southern women herbalists produced pharmaceuticals for hospitals.



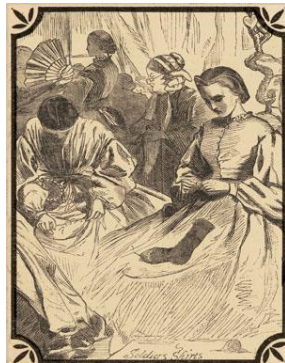
Civilian women engaged in information operations support to war efforts by writing books, newspaper articles, pamphlets and public and private letters. They composed patriotic songs and presented hand-made flags to units. They engaged in open resistance to occupying forces and in more subtle displays of defiance, such as the wearing of patriotic cockades, aprons, petticoats and stockings.



Civilian women worked in factories producing munitions, military equipment, uniforms and foodstuffs for the armies. Women farmers provided fresh produce, grain and livestock to the armies. They were business owners, scientists, teachers, engineers, lawyers, clergypersons, nuns, philanthropists and artists. Women also worked as civil servants in the governments of the two countries.



Civilian women served the armies as spies, detectives, guides, smugglers, cooks and laundresses. Those captured were usually imprisoned.



Civilian women in aid societies operated canteens and rest areas for soldiers. Aid societies provided comfort supplies, equipment, clothing and foodstuffs to soldiers and supported hospitals. They operated vast logistics networks to purchase and transport supplies to soldiers. They raised funds to support their efforts and to provide relief for wounded soldiers and to families of soldiers. After the war, aid societies raised funds to assist veterans and the families of veterans and deceased soldiers, to support disabled veterans' homes, and to support hospitals. The societies also worked to recover remains and provide proper burial sites for deceased soldiers, and to assist in community and national recovery from wartime devastation.