

WOMEN SOLDIERS OF THE CIVIL WAR

I) Some Accepted Roles for Women During the Civil War

1. Self-Sacrificing Nurses:

- a. Dorothea Dix**
- b. Louisa May Alcott**
- c. Clara Barton**

2. Romantic Spies:

- a. Maria Isabella Boyd a. k. a. Bell Boyd – Confederate**
- b. Rose O'Neal Greenhow – Confederate**
- c. Elizabeth Van Lew – Union**
- d. Harriet Tubman – Union**

3. Women Who Ran the Businesses and Factories

4. Women Who Were Left Behind to Maintain the Home Front

II) Four Hundred or More Women Disguised as Men and Secretly Fought for Both the Union and the Confederacy. The Exact Number is Unknown Due to a Few Reasons.

- 1. They Disguised Themselves as Males. They Cut Their Hair, Bound Their Chests, Wore Men's Clothing and Adopted Masculine Traits such as Spitting, Card Playing, Smoking, Drinking, Cursing, and Swaggering.**
- 2. There is a Large Absence of Written Material Attributed to Female Soldiers, i.e. Letters, Diaries, Memoirs, etc. One Known Exception are the Letters of Sarah Rosetta Wakeman a. k. a. Lyons Wakeman. They Can be Found in the Book An Uncommon Soldier by Lauren Cook Burgess.**

This Lack of Correspondence May Be Due to Two Reasons:

- a. The Majority of Women Came From Farming Communities, Working Class or Immigrant Backgrounds. Possible Low Literacy Rate Due to a Lack of Education or Not Knowing the English Language.**
- b. Letters and Diaries Would Have Been Risky. Writers had to be Careful About What They Revealed. Many Letters Were Read by Fellow Soldiers, NCOs, and Officers Due to a Low Literacy Rate. Many Female Soldiers Severed Contact with Family and Friends to be Safe.**

III) It Has Been the Accepted Convention That the Civil War Was a Man's Fight. This is Not Entirely True. Women:

- 1. Lived in Germ Infested Army Camps**

2. Suffered in Prison Camps
3. Died Horribly Yet Honorably For Their Respective Causes
4. Participated in Just About Every Major Battle
5. Held Rank Above Private, i.e. Corporal, Sergeant, Captain, etc.
6. Enlisted in the Infantry, Artillery, Cavalry, and Navy
7. Fought While Pregnant

IV) Some Women Served as Vivandieres or Daughters of the Regiment. Usually Young Girls, Possibly an Officer's Relative, Who Wanted to Be Part of the Excitement of War. They Would Act as:

1. Nurses
2. Camp Cooks
3. Laundresses
4. Flag Bearers
5. Seamstresses
6. Refresh the Soldiers with Wine, Water or Whiskey
7. Aid in Removing the Wounded or Covering the Faces of the Dead
8. Bring Much Needed Ammo to the Soldiers in Battle

Some of the Famous Vivandieres or Daughters of the Regiment are:

1. Kady Brownell – 1st and 5th Rhode Island Vol. Inf.
2. Anna Etheridge – 2nd, 3rd, and 5th Michigan Vol. Inf.
3. Marie Tepe – 27th and 114th Penn. Vol. Inf.

V) 1837 – 1901 “The Victorian Era”. Women were Restricted Socially, Legally, and Economically. By Adopting a Male Identity, They Secured For Themselves Male Power and Independence. Rules Women Had to Live By Are:

1. Stay Home, Give Birth, Raise Children, Sew, Cook, Clean, Do Laundry, Take Care of Their Husbands
2. Obey Their Husbands
3. Could Not Vote
4. Could Not Serve on a Jury
5. Could Not Hold Political Office
6. Could Not Own Property
7. Had No Rights in a Separation or Divorce
8. Any Money Earned as a Laundress, Seamstress, etc. Had to Be Turned Over to Their Husbands
9. A College Education for Women was Not a Priority

Women Who Stepped Outside These Restrictions or Who Dressed In Men's Clothes were Labeled "Not Respectable" or Possibly "Insane".

VI) Reasons Why Women Chose to Disguise as Males and Enlist in the Army:

- 1. Patriotism/Love of One's Country**
 - a. Northern Women Fought to Abolish Slavery and/or to Keep the Union Together**
 - b. Southern Women Fought For States Rights and Included in that, the Right to Own Slaves**
- 2. To Be With Husbands or Loved Ones**
- 3. Adventure and Romance of War**
- 4. Flee Unbearable Home Life Situations**
- 5. Bounties and Pay**
 - a. Bounties: Cash Bonuses Paid by Towns, Counties, States, and Federal Gov. to Entice Enlistees**
 - b. Pay: A Private in Confederate Army Could Earn \$11.00 per Month. A Private in Union Army Could Earn \$13.00 per Month.**
- 6. Peer Pressure in the Cases Where Women Lived Their Entire Life as a Man.**
- 7. Moral and Political Views**
- 8. To Avenge the Death of a Loved One**
- 9. Escape Prostitution**

VII) How Were Women Able to Join a Regiment Without Their True Identity Being Discovered?

- 1. They Disguised as Men and Adopted Masculine Traits.**
- 2. Gender Identification in the Victorian Era was Closely Linked to Attire. Nobody Thought of Finding a Woman in Soldier's Dress.**
- 3. Many Were Accustomed to Hard Work and Manual Labor. They Were Able to Carry a Soldier's Load of Approximately 30 Pounds.**
- 4. Many Were Adept at Using Firearms and Working with Horses.**
- 5. They were Used to Poor Living Conditions.**
- 6. Army Physicals were Often cursory. Soldiers Had to Have Reasonable Height, Opposing Teeth to Tear Cartridges, and a Trigger Finger.**
- 7. Some Skipped Enlistment, Attained a Uniform, and Fell In Beside a Regiment With No Questions Asked.**

- 8. Uniforms Often Multilayered and Loose Fitting.
It was Easy to Hide Their Female Attributes.**
- 9. Soldiers on the March Wore the Same Uniforms and Underclothes for Weeks. They Slept Fully Clothed. They Seldom Took Baths.**
- 10. Modesty was Common Among Soldiers. It Was Not Unusual for Soldiers to Go to the Woods to Relieve Themselves Rather Than Use the More Public Latrines.**
- 11. Soiled Rags Used During Menstruation Were Easily Explained as Having Been Used to Dress Wounds. It is Possible Due to Weight Loss, Poor Nutrition, Extreme Exercise, and Skimpy Diet, Many Women May Have Stopped Menstruating Altogether, a Condition Known as Amenorrhea.**
- 12. Under Aged Boys Were Common in the Military. They Would Either Sneak In or Join as Musicians. All of Those Young, Slender, Beardless, and High Pitched Voices Aided the Women in Their Deception.**
- 13. Women Who Enlisted to be With Their Husbands Had a Partner to Help Protect and Shield Them.**
- 14. Many Women were Loners and Kept to Themselves.**
- 15. Female Soldiers Would Volunteer for Extra Duties Which Kept Them Up Late or Out of Camp Much of the Time. This Lessened the Chance of Discovery.**

VIII) What Types of Occurrences Led to the Discovery of These Female Soldiers?

- 1. Seeking Medical Attention for a Serious Wound or Illness**
- 2. Being Recognized By Someone**
- 3. Childbirth**
- 4. Exhibiting Stereotypical Feminine Behavior or Appearance**
 - a. "Peculiar Wring of the Dish Cloth"**
 - b. Ability to Sew as Well as a Professional Seamstress**
 - c. Use of an Imaginary Apron to Catch Apples**
- 5. Being Taken Prisoner**
- 6. On Occasion a Woman Would Make Her True Identity Known.**
 - a. She May Have Found the Rigors of Army Life Too Difficult.**
 - b. Her Husband May Have Passed Away.**
- 7. Some Women Soldiers Carried Their Secret to the Grave.**
- 8. Some Women Served Out Their Enlistment Terms Only to be Discovered**

When They Were Out of the Army.

IX) What Were The Repercussions Upon Discovery?

- 1. If They Were Wounded or Sick, They Were Quite Often Treated, Discharged, and Sent Home.**
- 2. Upon Discharge, Some Would Go Elsewhere and Re-enlist in Another Regiment.**
- 3. Some Were Allowed to Stay with the Regiment and Act as Battlefield Nurses, Surgeon's Assistants, Cooks, Laundresses, and Seamstresses.**
- 4. If They Were in Prison at the Time of Discovery, They May Have Been Released or Perhaps Provided with Improved Living Conditions. They May Even Have Chosen to Remain Imprisoned with Their Fellow Comrades.**
- 5. Some May Have Been Imprisoned for Impersonating a Man as it was Illegal at That Time to do so.**

X) Some Famous Women Soldiers:

- 1. Sarah Emma Edmonds a. k. a. Frank Thompson – (Union Soldier)
2nd Michigan Vol. Inf. Co. 'F'**
- 2. Jennie Hodgers a. k. a. Albert D. J. Cashier – (Union Soldier)
95th Illinois Vol. Inf. Co. 'G'**
- 3. Sarah Rosetta Wakeman a. k. a. Lyons Wakeman – (Union Soldier)
153rd New York Vol. Inf.**
- 4. Frances Louisa Clailin Clayton a. k. a. Jack Williams – (Union Soldier)
4th Missouri Heavy Artillery Co. 'I' and the 13th Missouri Cavalry
Co. 'A'**
- 5. Loreta Janeta Velazquez a. k. a. Lieutenant Harry T. Buford – (Confederate
Soldier) She Raised a 236 Man Infantry Unit Known as the Arkansas
Grays**