“When one goes nursing, all things must be expected”

Mary Finney, Union Nurse, Beaufort, NC 1863

Nursing in North Carolina during the Civil War

At the outbreak of the Civil War, in the spring of 1861, there were no trained nurses, nursing schools or general hospitals in the state of North Carolina. Physicians were generally poorly trained and unregulated. Practices such as bloodletting, leeching and purging were still common. At the beginning of the Civil War, the Union Army employed only 98 physicians and the Confederate Army only 24.

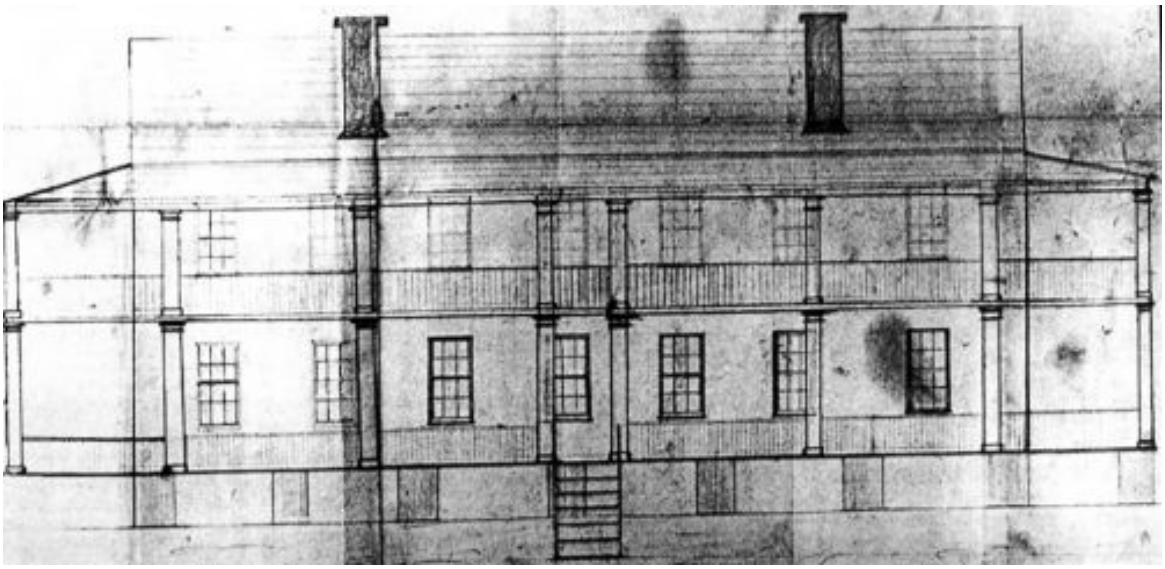
Before the Civil War, Medical practices of bloodletting and leeching were popular before the Civil War

One of the few examples of organized health care in NC before the Civil War was at the small Moravian Settlement we know today as “Old Salem”. Dr. Hans Kalberlahn and then Dr. Vierling served the communities physician, surgeon, dentist, pharmacist and veterinarian. By the 1770s male and female nurses were selected to provide care to their respective sexes when needed.

In addition, a few large plantations, like Summerset in Washington County, maintained "Slave Hospitals" to try to keep enslaved people well enough to continue to work.

Eastern view of the Insane Asylum at Raleigh.

Dorothea Dix, mental health reformer and soon to be Chief Nurse of the Union Army, was largely responsible for the establishment of Dix Hospital, a psychiatric facility in Raleigh in 1856.



The only other form of organized health care in North Carolina prior to the Civil War were 2 Marine Hospitals, one in Wilmington (which became Confederate Hospital #4 during the war) and one on Portsmith Island (a sketch shown here) built by the federal Government in the 1850s to care for ill and disabled seamen in the United States Merchant Marine, and the U.S. Coast Guard

Nursing in North Carolina during the Civil War

Types of Hospitals/Nursing care

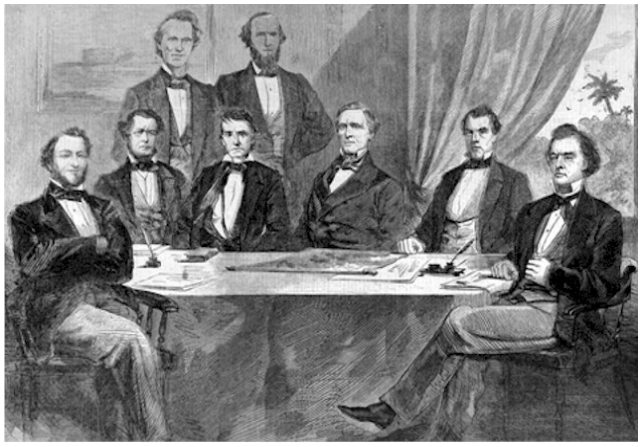
- On/near the battlefield
- Confederate Hospitals
- Wayside Hospitals (Confederate Women)
- Union Hospitals

Who nursed?

- White Confederate Soldiers (majority of nurses)
- Union Soldiers
- White Confederate volunteer women
- White Union Army nurses
- African American Free women
- White Catholic Nuns

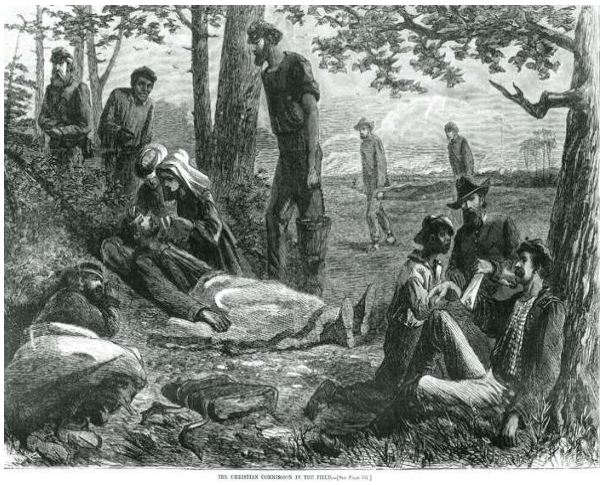
American nursing workforce was perhaps at its most diverse during the Civil War. War time nursing staffs were composed of males, females, whites, and African Americans, both enslaved and free. Faced with over 600,000 deaths and 10,000,000 cases of illness and injury in a four year period, anyone who could help, did help.

Confederate Government Officials



The leaders of the Confederacy were busy organizing a new government, establishing foreign relations and fighting the War. A common misconception was that the Civil War would be quickly and easily won. Because of this error in judgment, little provision was made for the care of wounded and sick soldiers. When the Civil War broke out both sides were woefully unprepared for the flood of wounded and dying from the battlefields. Overwhelmed, medical personnel made makeshift hospitals in homes and tents. Many of the wounded lay outside in the elements waiting for medical care. These unsanitary conditions took their toll; infection and disease claimed the lives of many of the injured and infirmed.

For every three soldiers killed in battle, five more died of disease

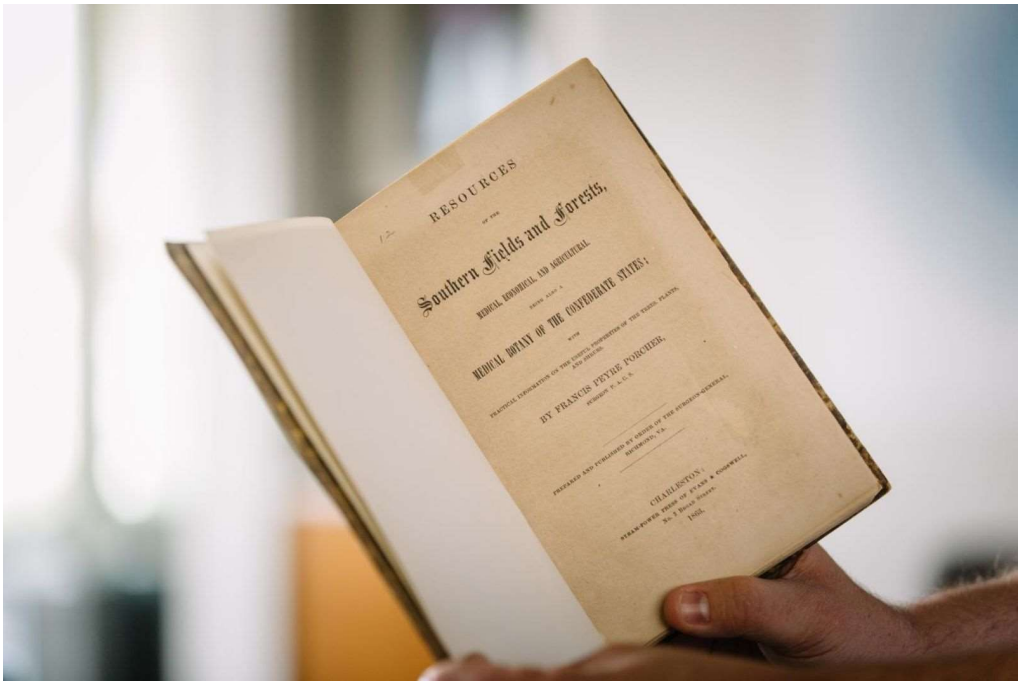


As the result, deadly epidemics of measles, malaria and assorted fevers swept through the soldier's camps killing and incapacitating thousands of men. IN the first year of the war, almost half of the Confederate Army was ill. Throughout the war, most **casualties** and **deaths** were the result of non-**combat**-related **disease**. For every three soldiers killed in **battle**, five more died of **disease.**

The seven most common diseases in army camps were typhoid fever, smallpox, measles, dysentery, pneumonia, malaria, and tuberculosis.

Name of Disease	Dysentery	Typhoid	Pneumonia	Measles	Tuberculosis	Malaria
Number of Union Soldiers Killed	45,000	35,000	20,000	11,000 for both	14,000 for both	30,000 for both
Number of Confederate Soldiers Killed	50,000	30,000	17,000	*See above*	*See above*	*See above*
Death Rate of those Contracting the Disease	Virtually all	1 of 3	1 of 6	1 in 20	Not as fatal, can be treated, but not cured	1 in 10
Cause and Effect of Disease	Bacteria, contaminated water, parasites - lead to inflammation of the intestines	Bacterial illness, starts from contaminated food and lack of hygiene- damages intestinal wall	Came from wounds and other sicknesses - lead to inflammation of lungs	Occurred mostly in crowded areas, caused by virus that spreads from person to person, very infectious- infects respiratory tract	Caused by bacteria - can affect any part of the body, but normally the lungs	Transmitted by mosquitoes - parasite attacks the red blood cells

Cases	Diseases	Deaths
75,368	Typhoid	27,050
2,504	Typhus	850
11,898	Continual Fever	147
49,871	Typho-malarial Fever	4,059
1,155,266	Acute Diarrhea	2,923
170,488	Chronic Diarrhea	27,558
233,812	Acute Dysentery	4,084
25,670	Chronic Dysentery	3,229
73,382	Syphilis	123
95,833	Gonorrhea	6
30,714	Scurvy	383
3,744	Delirium Tremens	450
2,410	Insanity	80
2,837	Paralysis	231



Along with Florence Nightingale's recently published book **Notes on Nursing,** soldiers and southern health care providers relied on **Resources of Southern Fields and Forests** a guide for treatments of disease written by Frances Porcher, a Confederate Sugeon.

BRIEF NOTICE OF EASILY PROCURABLE MEDICINAL PLANTS, TO BE COLLECTED BY SOLDIERS WHILE IN SERVICE IN ANY PART OF THE CONFEDERATE STATES.

Sassafras (Laurus).--Whilst engaged in active duties as Surgeon to the Holcombe Legion, whenever a soldier suffered from measles, pneumonia, bronchitis, or cold, his companion or nurse was directed to procure the roots and leaves of Sassafras, and a tea made with this …

Dogwood (Cornus Florida).--Since the war, the bark has been employed with great advantage in place of quinine in fevers---particularly in cases of low forms of fever, and in dysentery.

Wild Jalap (Podophyllum Peltatum).--If this can be found it can be used as a laxative in place of rhubarb or jalap, or wherever a purgative is required. Every planter in the Confederate States can produce the opium, mustard, and flax seed that is required, either for the army or for home use.

Here are a few of the remedies found in Porcher's book

1861 – 1862 Confederate women take it upon themselves to provide nursing care

Without government sanction, women in North Carolina and other Confederate states traveled to the battlefields to nurse sick and wounded men. They usually paid their own way and often paid for part or all of their supplies.

Soldier’s Aid Societies, organized by women in many towns of the South, sent food, clothing, and medical supplies to battlefield hospitals housing “their” boys.

Several North Carolina women, including Abby House of Franklin County (pictured here), Mrs. Kennedy of Wilmington, Miss M.L. Pettigrew of Raleigh, Catherine Gibbons of Charlotte, and Mrs. Beasley of Plymouth were some of the women who went to battlefields in Virginia as early as the summer of 1861 to care for NC troops.

Margaret Elizabeth Clewell of Salem, North Carolina left a rare, unpublished first person account of these early attempts at nursing the troops. Her memoir titled *A Volunteer Nurse* reads in part:

I remember that day September 19, 1861, when I left Salem with a party of volunteer nurses, to go to Fauquier County, Virginia where the 21st North Carolina Regiment was in camp… We were given the use of a fine old Virginia Home, Blantyre, which we soon made as comfortable as possible, and as many sick soldiers were brought in as the house could hold. We had carried many things with us, knowing we could get nothing in the way of supplies when we reached the camp. One thing I remember was a large box, containing a barrel of good whiskey packed in dry fruit. Both whiskey and fruit were of great benefit to us, the former, of course being used only when requested in the way of medicine…

Read slide

Mary Ann Buie of Wilmington

A unique story is that Mary Ann Buie of Wilmington. A friend of hers recalled: "It was her idea to travel from point to point on the trains, nursing and aiding the soldiers … and I have heard many soldiers tell how, when weary and footsore, they would be refreshed by Miss Buie's kindness in looking after their physical comfort. She was known as the "Soldiers' Friend, and traveled up and down on the trains free of charge, as all the conductors saw her good works and recognized her valuable services to the sick and wounded Confederates on their trains.

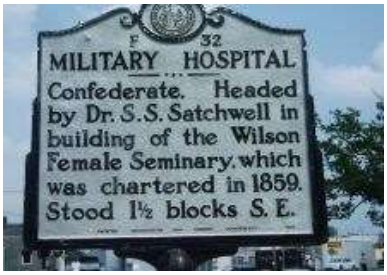
Most NC Civil War nurses remain unnamed

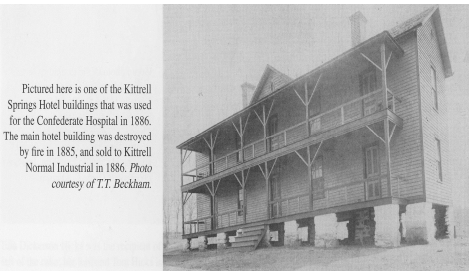
Emeline Pigott of Carteret County

Sallie Chapman Gordon Law of Wilkes County

From her home in Carteret County, Emeline Piggott spied on nearby Union troops in New Bern, and Morehead City. She also nursed Confederate soldiers in her home throughout the war. Sallie Chapman, born in Wilkes County but living in Memphis in 1861, opened the Southern Mothers Hospital, which cared for troops from both sides of the conflict.

Confederate Hospitals in North Carolina





#1 Kittrel Springs,
#2 Wilson,
#3 Goldsboro,
#4 and #5 Wilmington,
#6 Fayetteville,
#7 and #8 Raleigh,
#9 and #10 Salisbury,
#11 Charlotte,
#12 Greensboro
#13 Raleigh.

While several brave and determined women became volunteer nurses in many unique ways, most of the nursing during the Civil War occurred in hospitals in North Carolina. On May 16, 1861, North Carolina opened the first of what would be 13 Confederate hospitals by the close of the war. The first, Fairground Hospital opened in Raleigh. In official records this was General Hospital #7 (the numbering system was not instituted until the summer of 1862). General hospitals were usually large structures, sometimes occupying existing buildings, like Peace College in Raleigh, or at times, new structures were built, like the 500-bed facility at the fairgrounds in Charlotte.

Most nursing in Confederate Hospitals was done by recovering soldiers who were well enough to help care for their fellow patients but not well enough to return to the battlefield. This photograph shows Private William Henry of Co. B, 31st North Carolina Infantry Regiment who enlisted at age 53, and served as a nurse in hospitals at Washington, North Carolina, and Summerville, South Carolina. Pleasant Daniel Gold of Cleveland County was a chaplain and a nurse in the Confederate Army until a fever ended his military career. James A Johnston of Iredell County was another enlisted man who served as a nurse, his papers detailing his service as a Civil War nurses are available at the library at UNC Chapel Hill.

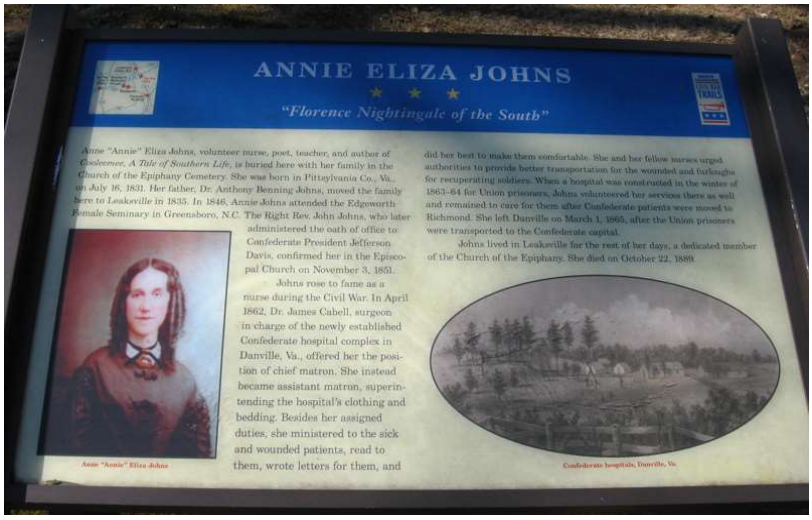
Difficulties with using soldiers as nurses …
From a report by Dr. Haywood of the Fairground Hospital to the CSA's Surgeon General Moore:

> . . . It will be impossible to keep a hospital in fine order and the patients well cared for with broken down disabled men. Nurses who are detailed on account of permanent disability know that they are not likely to be returned to the field, and therefore do not exert themselves to please. They are generally . . . discontented at being detailed . . . instead of being furloughed or discharged. . . . A nurse who is liable to be removed to duty in the field, for disobedience or neglect of duty, is much more easily managed and ten times as efficient. A disabled man cannot lift the sick, carry out the beds, scour the floor or sit up at night, or do many other things which are necessary in a well conducted hospital. I think it hard that the Medical Department should have to give up their skilled and faithful ward-masters and nurses. No other Department has given its employees. . . .[33]

Read slide

In September, 1862, the Confederate Congress passed legislation specifically designating positions for women in military hospitals. Each hospital was to have two matrons to oversee "the entire domestic economy" of the hospital, two assistant matrons, who were primarily responsible for laundering the bedding and clothing of the sick and two nurses to care for the individual soldiers. They were to feed, clean, dress and administer medications and treatments to each patient. In addition, they were to write letters home for the soldiers, talk and read to them and generally help them pass the lonely hours in the hospital. Often it was hard to fill these positions. It altered white women's domestics roles, took them away from their homes and families, put them into close contact to battlefields and contagious diseases, and it was seen as unladylike for middle and upper class southern white women to bath and care for men to whom they were unrelated.
The ratio of male soldier nurses to female nurses in Confederate Hospitals was 5 to 1.

Annie Eliza Johns of Rockingham County



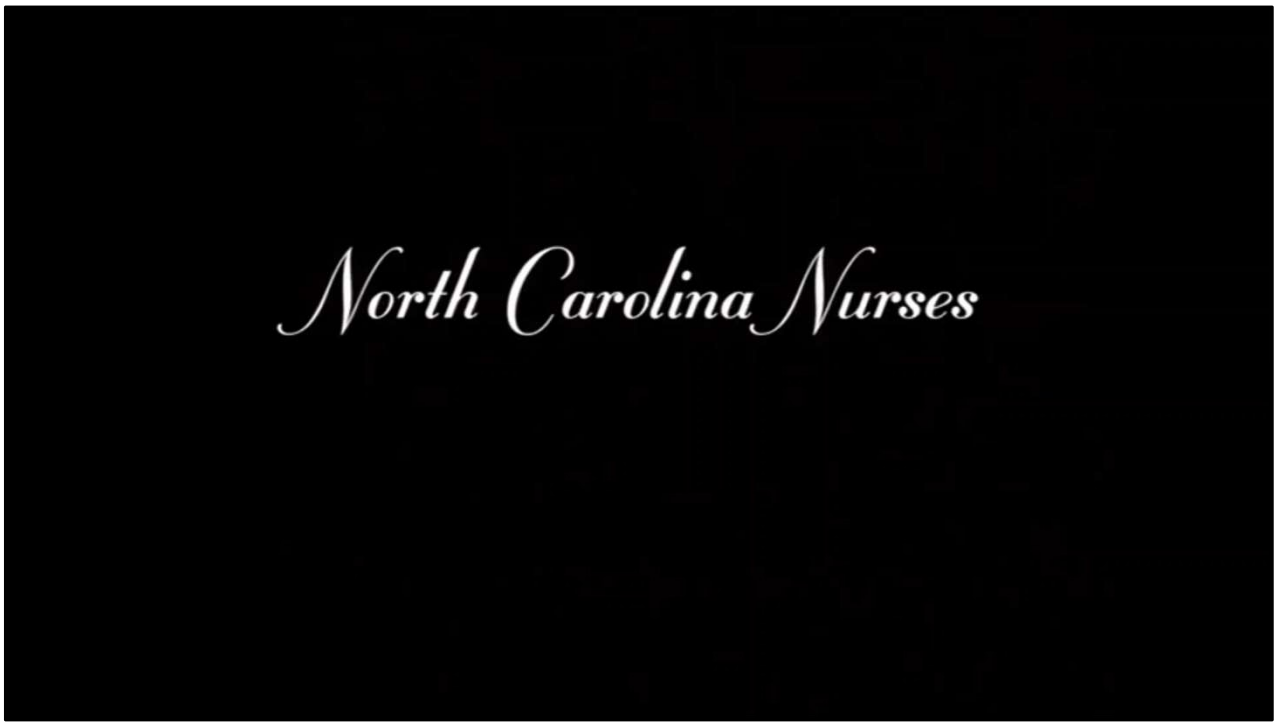
Annie Johns, of Rockingham County, was one North Carolina woman who defied these expectation of her social class. In April 1862, she began nursing and matron duties at a Confederate Hospital in nearby Danville, Virginia
When a hospital was constructed in the winter of 1863-64 for Union prisoners, Johns volunteered her services there. She left Danville on March 1, 1865, after the Union prisoners were transported to the Confederate capital. Johns lived in Leaksville for the rest of her days,

Confederate Hospital #2 Wilson, NC

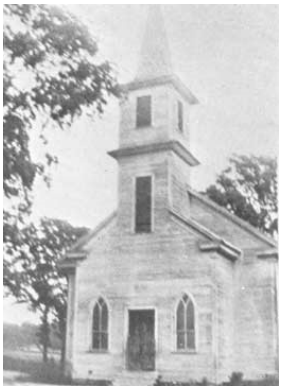
Wilson was home to Confederate General Hospital #2 from 1862-65. This hospital was housed in the Wilson Female Seminary and faced the Wilmington and Weldon Railroad tracts. Soldiers could be easily transported from Virginia battlefields to the front door of this hospital. Some of the white, female nurses who worked at the Wilson Hospital were Susan Clark, Zilpha Manning, Lydia Pritchard and Kate Rice. In September 1863, the staff at the hospital consisted of a surgeon, matron, 2 assistant matrons, 2 ward matrons, a ward master, a steward, a cook, and 23 nurses. Twenty of these nurses were enlisted men, three were white women.

Some of the white, female nurses who worked at the Wilson Hospital were Susan Clark, Zilpha Manning, Lydia Pritchard and Kate Rice. In September 1863, the staff at the hospital consisted of a surgeon, matron, 2 assistant matrons, 2 ward matrons, a ward master, a steward, a cook, and 23 nurses. Twenty of these nurses were enlisted men, three were white women.

Wayside Hospitals: Women meet extraordinary needs on their own


North Carolina Nurses

North Carolina Wayside Hospitals:
Weldon, Goldsboro, Greensboro, High Point, Tarboro, Salisbury, Wilmington, Fayetteville and Charlotte



As the War continued, casualties mounted. In March 1862 the women of Columbia, South Carolina initiated the first Wayside Hospital. Schools, churches, barns and other large buildings near train depots were quickly converted into facilities to care for ailing soldiers. When word was received in towns along the railroad lines that solders were coming through, women of the town would meet the trains with hot food, fresh water, clothing, shoes, bandages and medicines. Soldiers too ill to continue their journey would be cared for at a Wayside Hospital until they recovered sufficiently to either travel home or to a more suitable Confederate General Hospital, or they died.

The needs were so great and the concept so appealing that Wayside Hospitals sprang up all over the Confederacy. North Carolina women in the railroad towns of Weldon, Goldsboro, Greensboro, High Point, Tarboro, Salisbury, Wilmington, Fayetteville, and Charlotte opened Wayside Hospitals. Few documents exist describing these unique institutions.

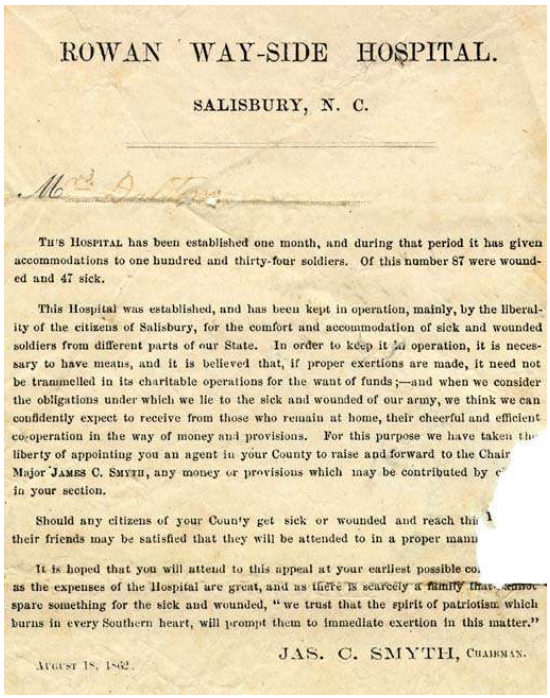
Jane Wilkes, leader at the Wayside Hospital in Charlotte, NC

Hundreds of women across the state met the challenges of aiding suffering troops. These women worked in makeshift buildings with inadequate equipment and homemade supplies. Relying on folk remedies, and Nightingale's *Notes on Nursing*, these women gave their time, talents, money, and occasionally their lives to their cause. By the end of the War, they had established new institutions, initiated new organizations and ultimately helped create professional nursing, a new career for women.

Nursing under primitive conditions

Mrs. Jacob H. Smith of Greensboro recalled her days working in her town's Wayside Hospital this way.

Weary, footsore and needy soldiers were daily passing through town (on the Greensboro to Danville, Virginia Railroad) who needed to be clothed, fed, and comforted and whenever the Danville train came in with Greycoats aboard, one set out all the milk, buttermilk, and sorghum one could lay hands on…sometimes dozens would file in, occasionally some with unhealed gunshot wounds…But it was on March 19,1865, the date of the Battle of Bentonville, that the war in stern and startling reality came to our very doors. On that memorable night without warning or preparation, the wounded were brought to Greensboro in such numbers as to fill the Courthouse and every available space in town. To that clarion call the women of Greensboro responded with one accord. All else was forgotten as with eager hands and tender hearts they sought to make the poor fellows comfortable…



ROWAN WAY-SIDE HOSPITAL.

SALISBURY, N. C.

Mrs. D. L. Tyer.

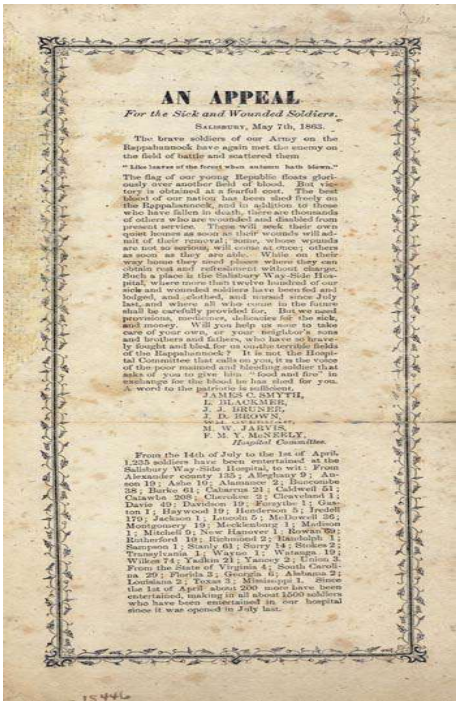
THIS HOSPITAL has been established one month, and during that period it has given accommodations to one hundred and thirty-four soldiers. Of this number 87 were wounded and 47 sick.

This Hospital was established, and has been kept in operation, mainly, by the liberality of the citizens of Salisbury, for the comfort and accommodation of sick and wounded soldiers from different parts of our State. In order to keep it in operation, it is necessary to have means, and it is believed that, if proper exertions are made, it need not be trammelled in its charitable operations for the want of funds;—and when we consider the obligations under which we lie to the sick and wounded of our army, we think we can confidently expect to receive from those who remain at home, their cheerful and efficient co-operation in the way of money and provisions. For this purpose we have taken the liberty of appointing you an agent in your County to raise and forward to the Chair Major JAMES C. SMYTH, any money or provisions which may be contributed by c in your section.

Should any citizens of your County get sick or wounded and reach thi their friends may be satisfied that they will be attended to in a proper manu

It is hoped that you will attend to this appeal at your earliest possible co as the expenses of the Hospital are great, and as there is scarcely a family that cannot spare something for the sick and wounded, "we trust that the spirit of patriotism which burns in every Southern heart, will prompt them to immediate exertion in this matter."

AUGUST 18, 1862. JAS. C. SMYTH, CHAIRMAN.



AN APPEAL

For the Sick and Wounded Soldiers.

SALISBURY, May 7th, 1863.

The brave soldiers of our Army on the Rappahannock have again met the enemy on the field of battle and scattered them

"Like leaves of the forest when autumn hath blown."

The flag of our young Republic floats gloriously over another field of blood. But victory is obtained at a fearful cost. The best blood of our nation has been shed freely on the Rappahannock, and in addition to those who have fallen in death, there are thousands of others who are wounded and disabled from present service. These will seek their own quiet homes as soon as their wounds will admit of their removal; some, whose wounds are not so serious, will come at once; others as soon as they are able. While on their way home they need places where they can obtain rest and refreshment without charge. Such a place is the Salisbury Way-Side Hospital, where more than twelve hundred of our sick and wounded soldiers have been fed and lodged, and clothed, and nursed since July last, and where all who come in the future shall be carefully provided for. But we need provisions, medicines, delicacies for the sick, and money. Will you help us now to take care of your own, or your neighbor's sons and brothers and fathers, who have so bravely fought and bled for us on the terrible fields of the Rappahannock? It is not the Hospital Committee that calls on you, it is the voice of the poor maimed and bleeding soldier that asks of you to give him "food and fire" in exchange for the blood he has shed for you. A word to the patriotic is sufficient.

JAMES C. SMYTH,
R. BLACKMER,
J. J. BRUNER,
J. D. BROWN,
M. W. JARVIS,
F. M. Y. McNEELY,
Hospital Committee.

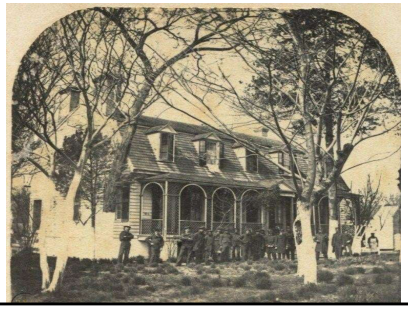
From the 14th of July to the 1st of April, 1,235 soldiers have been entertained at the Salisbury Way-Side Hospital, to wit: From Alexander county 135; Alleghany 9; Anson 19; Ashe 16; Alamance 2; Buncombe 38; Burke 61; Cabarrus 21; Caldwell 61; Catawba 208; Cherokee 2; Cleaveland 1; Davie 49; Davidson 19; Forsythe 1; Gaston 1; Haywood 19; Henderson 5; Iredell 179; Jackson 1; Lincoln 5; McDowell 36; Montgomery 19; Mecklenburg 1; Madison 1; Mitchell 9; New Hanover 1; Rowan 70; Rutherford 19; Richmond 2; Randolph 1; Sampson 1; Stanly 63; Surry 14; Stokes 2; Transylvania 1; Wayne 1; Watauga 19; Wilkes 74; Yadkin 21; Yancey 2; Union 3. From the State of Virginia 4; South Carolina 29; Florida 3; Georgia 6; Alabama 2; Louisiana 2; Texas 3; Mississippi 1. Since the 1st of April about 200 more have been entertained, making in all about 1500 soldiers who have been entertained in our hospital since it was opened in July last.

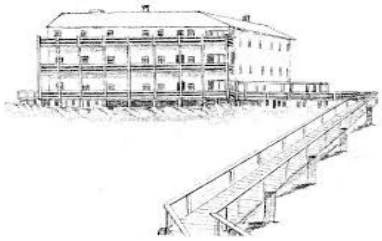
Supporters of Way-Side Hospitals were constantly seeking money, food, blankets and other supplies to keep their operations going, since they were not part of any official government plan. These documents are appeals for supplies and money for the Wayside Hospital in Salisbury, NC. They are representative of the types of urgent requests for assistance made by supporters of Wayside Hospitals.

Laura Wesson nurse who died at the High Point Small Pox Hospital (1845-1865)

Barbee Hotel in High Point was converted into a Wayside Hospital, from 1863-65. Although High Point in the 1860's was only a village, the townspeople cared for 5,795 soldiers, with only 50 deaths. The Barbee Wayside Hospital could not house all the casualties sent there. The High Point Female Academy as well as at the town's Methodist and Presbyterian churches were also turned into hospitals. Mrs. Welborn, daughter of the owners of the Barbee Hotel wrote about one particularly brave nurse, Laura Wesson. S "The good women of the village nursed the sick and wounded, and when that most dreaded of all diseases, smallpox, broke out among the sick, one noble girl, just 18, followed the small pox patients to what was then known as the "pest house," and remained with them until the last patient had died or was dismissed as cured and then she succumbed to the same disease."

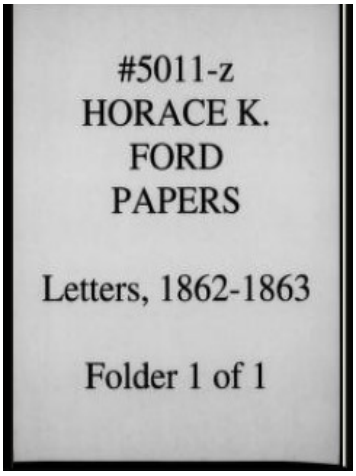
At least Six Union Hospitals in North Carolina





There were at least 6 Union Hospitals in NC. They were Hammond Hospital in Beaufort, Foster and Stanley Hospitals in New Bern, Mansfield Hospital in Morehead City, the U.S. Army General Hospital for Colored Troops in Wilmington and a small, perhaps unnamed hospital on Hatteras Island. These hospitals were staffed by a combination of white female nurses working for the US Army, Sisters of Mercy Catholic nuns and emancipated African Americans, sometimes called “Contraband”

Horace K. Ford, Union Soldier/Nurse in Morehead City 1862-1863



Like the Confederacy, the majority of nurses in the Union Army were recovering soldiers. Horace K. **Ford** was an enlisted Union soldier from New Hampshire, stationed in New Bern, **N**.**C**. IN June 1963 , **Ford** entered Hammond Hospital in Beaufort, **N.C**., as a patient and he later served there as a nurse.

Mary Phinney von Olnhausen, Union nurse

Unlike the Confederacy, over three thousand female **nurses** served the **Union** Army. One was Mary Phinney, Head Nurse of the Union Army hospitals in New Bern and Morehead City. She arrived in the fall of 1863 and stayed until the wars end. She wrote a book titled Adventures of an Army Nurse in two wars" which was based partially on her diary entries and letters to friends and family she wrote during the Civil War.

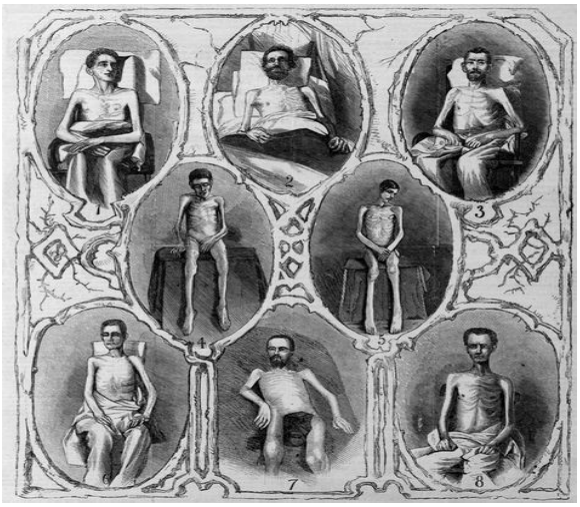
From a letter by Mary Von Olnhausen

- Morehead City, Thursday, January [? 19], 1865.
- Two hundred wounded and I the only wound-dresser in the ward. I shall have all I can do now … Send me a box of all you know I want for wounded men, especially rags and long bandages.
- One of my men has been wounded in six different battles; such a banged-up fellow you never saw. Now he has a bullet through the wrist and one through the side; he is very sick, but is so brave.
- Dr. Hand, medical director, sent me word by Dr. Palmer that his nine surgeons, after examining those wounds, said they had never seen wounds so well dressed and such bad wounds so soon getting well; and, for himself, that I was the best wound-dresser in the country. I feel uncommonly satisfied, as these men a year ago were all opposed to female nurses and “poohed ” at the idea of one being useful.

Diary entries of Mary VonOlnhausen October 2 and 16, 1864

- Typhoid and swamp fevers are prevalent, but to no alarming extent … Friday and yesterday each there were twenty-five burials, all of yellow fever. Whole families are found dead in their houses; four were found yesterday, the wife lying across the feet of her dead husband, and both children dead beside them … This is the first time I have sat down to-day, and with no sleep last night I feel drowsy and stupid enough ….

Prisoner exchange, 1865 Wilmington, NC



Soon after the Union troops captured Wilmington in the winter of 1865, a prisoner exchange occurred. Union prisoners of war, including those who spent time at the notorious Andersonville Camp in Georgia arrived in Wilmington in the spring of 1865 in terrible physical and mental shape.

Union nurses in Wilmington, Spring 1865, taking care of exchanged Union prisoners

Many famous and experienced Union nurses came to Wilmington to care for these men. They included Eliza George, one the first nurses to join the Union Army who spent much of the war in Tennessee. She contracted typhoid fever while caring for the released prisoners and died a month after the war ended in Wilmington. Another Union nurse who came to Wilmington was Mary "Mother" Bickerdyke who served with General Grant' troops for many years. The last nurse pictured here is Dorothea Dix, Superintendent of all Union Army nurses during the War.

Formerly enslaved people, known as "contraband" worked for the Union Army as nurses, cooks, laundresses, and laborers.

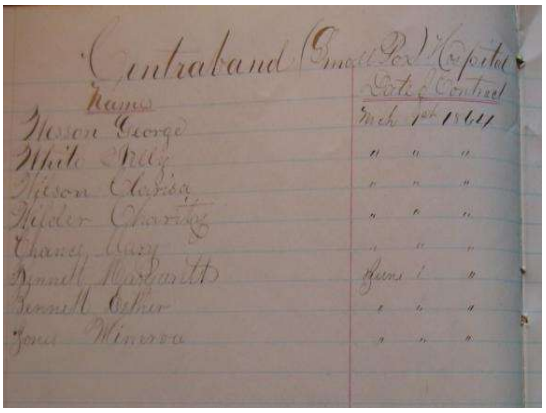
Newly emancipated people, known as "contraband" worked for the Union Army as nurses, cooks, laundresses, and laborers.

Contraband Small Pox Hospital, New Bern, NC

44 African Americans were hired as "Contract nurses" in the spring of 1864

Female "contract nurses"

Nelly White
Clarissa Wilson
Charity Wilder
Mary Chance
Margaret Bennett
Esther Bennett
Minerva Jones
Eliza Chapman
Sarah Donnell
Lora Faber
Susan Grimes
Dinah Carter
Dolly Howard
Jane Kinsley
Celia Lindsay
Sarah Mellinder
Lucy Overton
Martha Pool
Gracy Russell
Ellen Washington
Mary Thomas

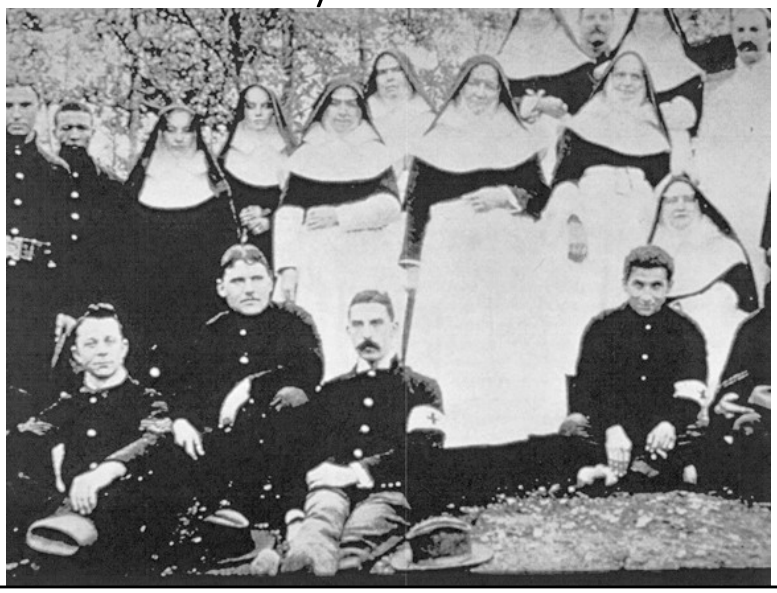


Male "contract nurses"

Phillip Biddle
James Brimayer
George Wesson
Juda Latham
Henry Moore
Zachary Johnson
Scott Jones
David Ralls
Edward Ruffind
Jospeh Simmons
Joseph Singleton
Levanter Swindle
Creasy Taylor
Thomas Turner
Simon Wilson
Joshua Lindsay
Frank Mabry
Isaac Mabry
Wright Cobb
Frank Lewis
Matthew Ircott
Samuel Harris
Alfred Pool

It is very rare to have the names of African American nurses who worked for the Union Army. The people named above were hired as 'contract nurses" to work in a Small Pox Hospital in New Bern until the epidemic was over.

Sisters of Mercy nurse in New Bern



As noted above, when the Civil War started, there were no trained nurses in NC. However, nuns in a few religious orders, including the Sisters of Mercy, were organized, experienced, and volunteered to provide nursing care during the Civil War. Of the 640 Catholic sisters that served during the Civil War, 100 were Sisters of Mercy and in July of 1862, nine of them arrived at the Hammond Hospital in Beaufort.

Sister Mary Augustine described the Beaufort Hospital when they arrived
Before the war Beaufort was a place of fashionable resort for sea bathing, and its principal hotel, though a frame building, contained five hundred rooms and was elaborately furnished; but having been sacked in the spring of 1862 everything of value was destroyed. Along the shore were wrecks of pianos, tables, chairs, etc. It was so near the shore that at high tide the waves rolled in and out under the timber props on which it was erected. It was in a sadly denuded condition when it was utilized as a hospital for two hundred disabled men … There was no modern means of washing clothes, it had to be done with a few small, old-fashioned tubs No artificial light of any kind, not even a candle, could be procured at that time in Beaufort, and there was no proper food or refreshing drink for the patients.

The Sisters sent an urgent requisition to the United States Sanitary Commission, and very soon the hospital was amply provided with all necessaries and many comforts

A passage from an 1897 book “Angels of the Battlefield” reports on some of the Sisters work:
A great number of Union Soldiers returning to New Bern after the Battle of Goldsboro “had either one or both feet in a terrible condition, the feet having been pierced with balls. There were broken legs, broken arms and one unhappy victim had both hands shot off, and the condition of these agonizing wounds was something terrible. The first task of the Sisters was to feed the wretched sufferers, who had had but little care bestowed upon them. After that the difficult and distressing duty of cleansing their wounds was undertaken and was left entirely to the Sisters. In short order, the sisters scrubbed the place clean of bloodstains and filth, and reorganized the kitchen to provide nutritious meals. They institute a regimen of bathing for the patients and regularly clean wounds and change dressings

Final words