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TUBS AND SUDS:

CIVIL WAR LAUNDRESSES IN THE FIELD, CAMP AND HOSPITAL

Virginia Mescher © 2013

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INTRODUCTION

Throughout the years of civil war reenacting, there have been numerous debates on the appropriateness of a laundress impression at reenactments or living history events. There is a great deal of primary documentation indicating that laundresses were widely used by the military in garrisons, camps, and hospitals, and there are instances where women were present in the field and involved in battles but they were usually nurses. There is some documentation that supports the presence of laundresses at military events but with the caveat that the findings of this article should not be used as a vehicle to justify that every woman at an event should portray a laundress nor that an abundance of women can justify their presence in the military camp — especially a campaign camp — by claiming to be laundresses. In optimum conditions, there were four laundresses allowed per company of one hundred or fewer men, so there would be a limited number of laundresses present at any one time. Depending upon circumstances, as the war progressed, the recorded number of laundresses seemed to have decreased. Like any other

impression, either military or civilian, portraying a laundress requires considerable research and should not be an impression of convenience. Above all, the presence of a laundress should be reasonable for the event scenario.

The Civil War was the largest military exercise of the United States from the Revolution until World War I. The Civil War period also contributed the largest military employment of women as laundresses that ever occurred in the history of the army. The women worked, for whatever reason, in an arduous occupation that they were familiar with from their normal lives. They were paid either directly by the soldiers or, for laundresses in hospitals, by their respective governments. They were close to the soldiers at all times and, in some cases, accompanied them on campaigns. Like the soldiers, whose days were mainly a series of sameness with monotonous regularity, theirs were filled with the same repeated labors, sometimes eased by favorable design by the army and other times not. And at the end of the war, like the soldiers, most of the laundresses went back to their domestic lives. A few of the women married to soldiers continued as laundresses with the army in the western forts until the latter part of the nineteenth century, when the military determined that female laundresses were no longer needed.¹

Laundry during the nineteenth century was — and some still consider it — a necessary evil. During the nineteenth century laundry was probably the most dreaded household chore a woman had to do, and yet it was one that had to be done constantly. Even in wartime, laundry was considered a necessity; especially in military camps where “spit and polish” neatness was valued and in hospitals where cleanliness was particularly important. Laundresses were employed by the Army and they were also included as hospital personnel with the duty being performed by both men and women; white and black. Some of the women were widows, enlisted men’s or non-commissioned officers’ wives, or mothers of soldiers; others were women employed as nurses whose duties also included laundry and some were slaves or female contrabands. The male “laundresses” were convalescent soldiers, male slaves or contrabands, or soldiers who wished to earn some extra income by doing their comrades’ laundry. There are also records of slaves being hired as laundresses or laundrymen and their salaries were paid directly to their owner. Even though local women may have been hired by individual soldiers to do their laundry, as far as the author is able to ascertain there is no primary documentation that this was normally the practice.

Some elements of the laundry process were the same whether it was done at home or on a

large scale for a military camp or hospital. Laundry was a labor intensive and backbreaking job: items to be laundered must first be sorted into those that could be washed and boiled, those to be just washed, and those to be cleaned, i.e., spot removal or brushing. The washable clothing was then soaked, washed, boiled, rinsed, dried, and, if circumstances permitted, starched and ironed. A company laundress probably had the additional chores of marking the laundry items with the owner's name or initials, and mending and altering garments. Since officers paid more to have their laundry done, more care was probably given to their clothes, with bluing and starching their shirts, as well as brushing and pressing their uniforms.

LAUNDRESSES IN THE ARMY

The Army had long recognized that laundresses were a necessary part of military operations. On March 16, 1802, the Army authorized laundry service by allowing one woman to be hired for every 13 ½ men. Each woman was permitted to draw rations and was provided with quarters. By 1813, there was one laundress assigned to every seventeen men and she was also allowed a ration of bedding straw. Mentions of laundresses in military records and in subsequent revisions of army regulations indicate that they were present with the army throughout the years from 1802 until being effectively ended in 1883 (rations were no longer issued), a time span that included the Mexican War and Civil War. The 1841 revisions of Army regulations stated: "The price of washing soldiers' clothing, by the month, or by the piece, will be determined by the Council of Administration Debts due the Laundress by soldiers, for washing, will be paid or collected in the same way as is prescribed for those due the Sutler, the Laundress having preference." Additional regulations noted that laundresses were organized in groups of four and were allowed one common tent, one hatchet, one camp kettle, and 2 mess pans but the regulations do not mention that they were provided with any additional equipment for doing the laundry. Laundresses were also granted the services of the post or camp doctor.ⁱⁱ

Army regulations during the civil war contained numerous mentions relating to laundresses. As examples, in 1861, the general regulations of the United States Army and regulations of the Army of the Confederate States stated such items as the following:

"Four women will be allowed to each company [100 men] as washer-women, and will receive one ration per day each." [Children were issued half rations. Campaign rations differed

slightly from garrison rations.^{iii]}

“The price of washing soldier’s clothing, by the month, or by the piece, will be determined by the Council Administration.”

“Debts due the laundress by soldiers, for washing, will be paid, or collected at the pay-table, under the direction of the captain.”

“Laundresses permitted to follow the army will be furnished with certificates [of good character] signed [by the officer who employed them, verified by regimental officers, by the signature of the Colonel, or by the chief of their corps] . . . and no woman of bad character will be allowed to follow the army.”^{iv}

The Military Handbook and Soldier’s Manual, written in 1861, stated under the heading “washer-women,” that, “To each company are allowed four women, who each receive the regular ration of a soldier, but are not otherwise paid [by the military]. Their duties are those of washer-women to the men. The price of the washing is prescribed, and is paid out of the soldiers’ regular monthly pay. The women are liable to be discharged or ‘drummed out of camp’ in event of any gross misconduct, drunkenness or breach of camp etiquette. Each woman is required to have a certificate of good character from head-quarters before she can assume duty within the lines.”^v

Revised Army regulations, written in 1861 and published in 1863, contained the following information on laundresses: “Four women, as laundresses, are allowed to a company, and one ration per day to each when *present* with the company. In order that an authorized woman



received their rations.^{vii)}

(laundress) of a company may draw rations while temporarily separated from it, the officer commanding the company must designate her by name and in writing to the commanding officer of the post or station where she may be living, as attached to his company, and entitled to rations. The rations of company women are not to be commuted, and they can only be drawn at a military post or station where subsistence is on hand for issue.”^{vi} (Official ration

Harper’s Weekly
September 26, 1862

forms sometimes listed laundresses along with the soldiers when they

General Kautz stated, in his *Customs of Service*, that “Four laundresses are allowed to each company, and soldiers’ wives may be, and generally are, mustered in that capacity. They are then entitled to the same quarters, fuel, and rations as a soldier, and the established pay for the washing they may do for soldiers and officers.”^{viii}



Vanity Fair, November 2, 1861

FREE WOMEN AS LAUNDRESSES

There is a great deal of primary documentation that laundresses were wives of enlisted men. Henry Howe wrote, “The washing for the men is done by laundresses, of which there are a few to each regiment. These are generally soldiers’ wives”^{ix} George Ballentine wrote: “In time of peace, three married men of each company are allowed (their wives being laundresses, and washing for the soldiers,) to bring their families along with them when moving [from fort to fort]. Each of these married men is allowed separate quarters for himself and family when in garrison, also rations for his wife, who is paid a stated sum by each soldier for whom they wash. When one of these married men is discharged, if more applicants than one should apply for the vacant situation, the Captain gives it to the one he considers the best deserving.”^x At the beginning of the Civil War, women were requesting a position as a laundress so that they could be near their husbands, to earn an income, to assist the war effort, or any combination of reasons. In a December 3, 1861, notice to army officers about recruiting regulations, there is even a statement that the enlistment of married men depended upon the need for company laundresses. This notice from L. Thomas, the adjutant-general to General McClellan, states: “It will be observed the regulations, at this time, contain no direct prohibition to enlist married men. In the regimental

service this must be governed by the want of laundresses for companies^{xii} After the Civil War the number of approved enlisted marriages equaled the number of laundresses authorized for the regiment.^{xiii}



Three images of the same family and was probably done as a series of patriotic images.

Top Left: Make note of iron under the stool.

Top right: Notice the iron in the middle foreground.

Bottom Left: Notice the tub and washboard on the far bottom right of the picture. This is one half of a stereoview image.

Photograph of 31st Pennsylvania Regiment, winter quarters at Queen's Farm or Camp Pendleton in Virginia.

Far right: Women using mess kettles for laundry. Notice the woman at the far left with the basket.



A laundress was considered as an official position by the military. According to research from numerous western military forts and reading memoirs, wives of officers were counted as camp followers and were not given an official position and did not have the privileges granted laundresses. Even though officer's wives were considered to be of a higher social status than the laundresses, a laundress had more rights than other women on a military installation. An officer's wife was not allotted a ration, fuel, or quarters and, if her husband was killed, she was expected to immediately vacate their quarters. As an example, after notification of Custer's death, Libby Custer was given twenty-four hours to leave the post. In contrast, a laundress was given sixty days to either leave the post or remarry a man from the ranks of enlisted men or non-commissioned officers. Some women were married to several different men in succession during their service as laundresses.

Even though a certificate of good character was a requirement in order for a woman to be hired as a military laundress, there do not seem to be extant examples of this certificate. In extensive research, the author has not been able to locate an official form that was used as a certificate of good character or a hand-written recommendation that could have been used in lieu of an official form. Thus, it may be surmised that the designated certificate may have been just a hand-written letter of recommendation from a person of good standing who knew the applicant and was signed by the chief surgeon of a particular hospital or the commander of the unit to which she was assigned. After the war, there would have been no reason to retain the form. It is possible that some of these certificates are in the pension records but there is no systematic way to search for these certificates.

Although laundresses were expected to be of good character, there were differences of opinions as to the moral character of laundresses. The laundresses should not all be classed as prostitutes but neither were they all of sterling character. Some men described laundresses as common women and others considered them ladies. Henry Howe indicated that even though the laundresses were wives of soldiers, they, "usually possess rather questionable characters. Many a young pure girl, having become enamored of a good-looking soldier, has left home and friends to share his fortunes as a wife. For awhile she would continue a strictly chaste and lovely woman; but life in a camp is polluting — temptations would come, and in a few short years she would be

changed into a bloated, sottishly disgusting creature, too degraded for companionship with even the lowest of men.”^{xiii} Other men indicated that the laundresses were treated with respect. Private Mulford, a trooper with the 7th Calvary stated that they were “ladies in every sense of the word.”^{xiv} Apparently, not all laundresses were of “good character.” Bernt Olmanson, a private in the 2nd Minnesota Infantry, wrote, “We have about forty women in the regiment, some of them makes lots of money natures’ way. One of them had a bill today against a soldier for forty dollars.”^{xv} This one observation of a soldier does not mean that all laundresses were prostitutes or even that there was an appreciable number.

CONTRABANDS AS LAUNDRESSES

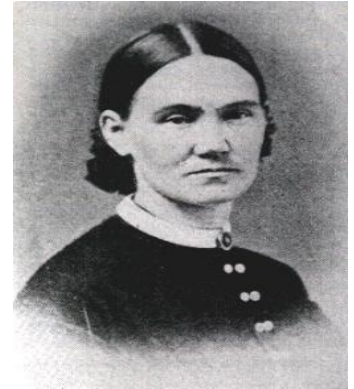
Both Union and Confederate hospitals used “Negroes” (either free blacks, slaves, or contrabands, depending upon the circumstances) to assist in the laundry, kitchen and as nurses’ aides. One order of General Rosecrans in July, 1863, specified, “That all officers commanding troops in the field will conscript and employ such able-bodied negroes as are allowed by law for . . . cooks, laundresses, . . . taking the servants of loyal people only in cases of necessity, and always leaving such as may be absolutely requisite for the care of the families.”^{xvi} In 1864, orders were issued by the medical director of the City Point hospitals which indicated that, “negro women who should be brought within the lines of the army should be sent to the depot hospital to act as laundresses.”^{xvii} In 1865, orders were given that the “wives and families of colored soldiers will be protected and supported . . . They will be required to find employment for themselves in some moral manner. In case they cannot find employment themselves places will be provided for them as nurses, laundresses, or in private service.”^{xviii}

Mary Ann Bickerdyke, a hospital matron, employed a fairly large number of contrabands to do laundry and used convalescent soldiers to supervise them. She needed quite a large force of laundry personnel because of the tremendous amount of laundry done for a hospital. Mary Livermore wrote, “This work once begun [establishing hospital laundries], Mother Bickerdyke never intermitted. Her washing-machines, her portable kettles, her posse of contrabands, an ambulance or two, and one or two handy detailed soldiers, were in her retinue after this, wherever she went. How much she saved to the government, and to the Sanitary Commission, may be

inferred from the fact that it was no unusual thing for three or four thousand pieces to pass through her extemporized laundry in a day.”^{xix}



Mary Ann (“Mother”) Bickerdyke (Left) Amanda Farnham (Right)



Left: Close-up of the photo on the right.
Right: Photo of contrabands doing laundry.

A number of other women wrote of the employment of contrabands. Among these, Amanda Farnham wrote, “At this time there were many colored women — contrabands — coming into White House Landing who had to be provided with food and quarters by the Quarter Master — and no means had as yet to be found to make them other than a burden and hindrance besides they were exposed to the evil influences of camp followers and other who crowded about the Army Supply depots and hospital grounds.”

“To accomplish the double purpose of finding employment for these unprotected women

— and to save and wash the soiled bedding and clothing of the wounded — I had the women detailed by proper authority — and put under my charge — and then I obtained a supply of empty barrels from the depot Quarter Master from which wash tubs were made — and soon had made a beginning of what later on proved to be an important part of the field hospital service.”

“ . . . 6th Corps Hospital where I remained until the 6th Army Corps left City Point for the Shenandoah Valley under General Sheridan in July [1864] — when I was ordered to report to Dr. McDonald of the 9th Corps Hospital at City Point — and here I organized and carried into effect the same laundry system as had been adopted by the 6th Corps previously.^{xx}

Jane Stuart Woolsey, a nurse from Connecticut, wrote in her memoirs about the employment of contrabands as laundresses, “After the Second Bull Run battle large numbers of blacks gathered about the Hospital and were kindly treated, the men being employed in policing and the women as laundresses, all receiving Government rations.”^{xxi}

Sarah Palmer, a union nurse who worked at the hospitals at City Point, VA, in 1864 - 65 also wrote of contrabands performing laundry duty. “We had a laundry established by the river-side, where the colored people did the washing for the hospital and for us. Spencer, from the Twentieth Michigan Regiment, had charge of the clothing, as it was distributed weekly amongst the different wards.”^{xxii}

Left: Sarah Palmer “Aunt Becky”
Right: Sarah Jane Woolsey



Adelaide Smith, a nurse with the union Ninth Corps who was working with the Maine State Agency in Virginia, wrote, “. . . While there [Maine State Agency] I was asked later, in the absence of Miss Gibson, of Lynn, Massachusetts, to take charge of the Corps d’Afric, but I soon found that the work was chiefly to look after refugee negroes, and to give them employment in laundry work, etc.”^{xxiii}



Contrabands doing laundry. Right photo: Notice the clothing hung on bushes at the left.

Louisa May Alcott, the author of *Little Women* who served as a nurse for about a year in Washington, DC, also described working with contrabands. Her opinion of the Negroes was not always favorable, but she did commend them for their cheerfulness. She wrote, “I like their cheerfulness, for the dreariest old bag, who scrubbed all day in that pestilential steam, gossiped [sic] and grinned all the way out, when night set her free from drudgery.”

Louisa May Alcott



Occasionally, men would comment on the employment of contrabands as laundresses. Homer Sprague wrote, “When the Thirteenth Connecticut had established itself in the Custom House [in New Orleans], most of the companies employed, as laundresses, colored women, who had run away or been driven off to the Yankees.”^{xxiv} General Butler, for about three weeks, had tried to pacify the inhabitants of New Orleans by ordering fugitive slaves back to their owners. Apparently, a laundress named Caroline was ordered to return to her master. Sprague wrote concerning General Butler’s order to return the slaves, “Now, General, we very much need the services of these laundresses. Many of our soldiers are debilitated by this climate, and it is a most welcome relief to have this work transferred to more skillful hands; besides contributing greatly to increased cleanliness, comfort and health. If one is to be taken from us [Caroline], why not another, and another, and all.

“The objection which you made to their . . . retention, on the ground of the difficulty of preventing improper intercourse between our soldiers and these women, is entirely obviated by the working of the wise plan you yourself suggested and directed us to adopt . . . by which these women are almost completely isolated from the world. Their seclusion is unbroken by any male person, except momentarily for the transmission of laundry articles or rations. Whatever may have been their habits at home . . . they are necessarily virtuous in their conduct *here*, and are likely to continue so while in this service.”^{xxv} Sprague also wrote about the expected treatment of the contraband laundresses. On January 29, 1864, an order was issued with regard to a laundress: “General Orders, No. 1. Lucinda, colored, is hereby appointed Laundress of Company A, 13th Conn. Vols. She will be obeyed and respected accordingly. J. C. Kinney. Lieut. Com’d’g Co. A. 13th C. V.”^{xxvi}

OTHER BLACK LAUNDRESSES

Among the hundreds of women of color who were hired by both armies as laundresses, there were three whose names stood out because they have been mentioned by name.

Possibly the best known was Harriet Tubman, who was employed by the Federal army as a cook, laundress, nurse and also as spy behind the Confederate lines. She was granted an army pension for her combined services.



Harriet Tubman
 Illustrations indicate some of the roles
 Harriet played in the Civil War.
 Upper left: Nurse
 Lower left: Saving slaves
 Upper right: Conductor on Underground
 Railroad
 Lower right: Laundress and cook

Another written record that stood out because it was self-written was that of Susie King Taylor, born a slave, who was able to read and write. In her memoirs, she wrote, “I was enrolled as company laundress, but I did very little of it, because I was always busy doing other things through camp, and was employed all the time doing something for the officers and comrades.”^{xxvii} She nursed, taught contraband soldiers and women, and worked as a general laborer, but did not recount any of her duties or salary as a laundress.



Susie King Taylor

Susie King Taylor.

A third woman of color who recounted her experiences as a laundress, Cathay Williams, became the first female buffalo soldier [1866-1868] told the *St. Louis Daily Times* on January 2, 1876. In a description of her experiences, after relating her experiences as a contraband, she

related, “Finally I was sent to Washington City [Washington, D. C.] and at the time General Sheridan made his raids in the Shenandoah Valley I was cook and washerwoman for his staff.”^{xxviii}



Cathey Williams, the first female
“Buffalo Soldier.”

MEN DOING LAUNDRY

Despite the fact that there were women employed as company laundresses, they were not universally distributed, some soldiers could not afford to use them, or some soldiers simply chose not to avail themselves of the laundress’ services. As an alternative, the soldiers might do laundry themselves, leading to a variety of previously unknown experiences for the soldiers. In 1865, George C. Lawson, of the Union Army, wrote, “I spent the afternoon in washing, mending and baking. I was very tired at night and wondered how women get through with as much work as they do. Washing, etc. is the hardest work I have to do.”^{xxix} John Billings discussed how the men spent their time in camp and the type of laundry apparatus used by the men. “How was the washing done? Well, if the troops were camping near a brook, that simplified the matter somewhat; but even then the clothes *must be boiled* [he had earlier stated that boiling clothes was done in order to kill lice], and for this purpose there was but one resource — *the mess kettles*.”

“ It would have indeed have been a most admirable arrangement in may respects could each man have been provided with an excellent Magee Range [a specific brand of cookstove] with copper-boiler annex, and set tubs near by; but the line had to be drawn somewhere, and so everything in the line of *impedimenta* was done away with, unless it was absolutely essential to the service. For this reason we could not take along a well equipped laundry, but must make some articles do double or triple service.”

“It may be asked what kind of a figure the men cut as washerwomen. Well, some of them

were awkward and imperfect enough at it; but necessity is a capital teacher, and, in this as in many other directions, men did perforce what they would not have attempted at home. It was not necessary, however, for every man to do his own washing, for in most companies there was at least one man who, for a reasonable recompense, was ready to do such work, and he usually found all he could attend to in the time he had off duty."^{xxx}



CLEANING UP.

Illustrations from *Hardtack and Coffee* by John Billings.



BOILING THEM.

As another example of paying to have laundry washed, Henry W. Prince of Suffolk County, New York, included in his account books prices he paid for individual pieces of laundry to be done. There was no indication that it was done by a laundress or a fellow soldier but, in other entries, he noted when amounts were subtracted from his pay for sutlers or uniform purchases so we can guess that at least some of these were paid to other soldiers. In July, 1863, he listed the cost of having a shirt (five cents) and drawers (ten cents) washed and in May, 1865, he listed the cost of having his clothes washed (two entries of twenty and thirty cents respectively but no listings of the garments cleaned).^{xxx}

Examples of men doing their laundry in camp. Notice the wooden tubs and tin basins. Both photos show scrub boards being used.



PAYMENT

There is little primary documentation as to the rate paid laundresses during the Civil War but there is a great deal of information stating the pay rates of laundresses present in garrisons and western forts prior to and after the war. Since the rates were established by the individual post Council Administrations (made up of three officers who met once a month or every two months), there was no standard rate of laundresses' pay for all military installations. In the 1830s and 1840s, at two forts the rate paid laundresses for their services was fifty cents per month for enlisted men; two dollars per month for single officers; and four dollars per month for married officers, with children and servants extra.^{xxxii} At Fort Crawford, Wisconsin, in 1851, "the monthly rate for washing two shirts, two pairs of drawers, and two pair of socks each week was fifty cents. Overcoats and blankets were washed for twelve and one-half cents each, later increased to twenty-five cents. The Fort Ridgley, Minnesota, [no date was indicated but it was before 1860] Post Council established charges of seventy-five cents per month for enlisted men's washing and

three dollars for officers.”^{xxxiii} At Fort Washita, Oklahoma, in 1854, the established rate for laundresses was seventy-five cents per month for each enlisted man. In 1866 at Fort Boise, Idaho, laundresses were paid five dollars per month for each officer and two dollars per month for each enlisted man. Additional sums were charged for added services such as sewing on of buttons, mending, and altering the men’s clothing. The following rates were recorded: “buttons, small - one cent per button and large - 3 cents per button; mending, drawers - nine cents, shirts - ten cents, coats - twenty-five cents, vests - twelve cents, pantaloons - nineteen cents, and great coat - thirty-seven and one half cents; altering, vests - thirty-seven cents, pantaloons - thirty-seven and one half cents, coats - forty cents, shortening vest - twelve and one half cents, lengthening vest - twenty cents, and one yard muslin thread - twenty cents.”^{xxxiv} The author found no piecework rates for individual items that were laundered even though piecework rates were mentioned in the regulation. Although the above rates are not from 1861-1865, they do reflect an established amount which would provide a laundress with a comfortable salary including benefits of housing, fuel, food, and medical care.

In addition to regulating the charges for laundry, the military also determined a method to ensure that laundresses were paid for their work. Consequently, the military regulations covered payment to sutlers and laundresses under ordinary circumstances and also in the event of a soldier’s transfer, death or court martial. Laundresses and sutlers were paid in the same manner as stated in the 1841 regulations, “Every facility will be afforded to the Sutler in the collection of the just debts contracted with him. The Sutler [or laundress] will take his place at the pay-table, with his books and accounts. If the amount charged against a soldier be disputed, the Sutler shall be required to produce written acknowledgment of the soldier, which shall be sufficient for the then settlement.”^{xxxv} “Before recruits are sent from recruiting depots to regiments or companies the amounts due by them to the laundress and sutler, having been verified and audited, will be entered on a roll made for the purpose, and will be paid by the paymaster on his next visit at the post, the receipts of the laundress and sutler to the amounts paid being the voucher; provided the recruits have a clear amount of pay due them, over and above their dues to the Government, equal to the claims of the laundress and sutler. The same amounts will be entered on the muster and descriptive roll of the recruits as ‘amount paid laundrers [sic], or sutler’ (naming them), to be deducted from the pay of the soldiers at their first subsequent payment.”^{xxxvi} In the event of a

soldier's court martial, sentence provisions were made for payment of the laundress: "In all cases where the sentence of a court-martial directs a forfeiture of pay, the just dues of the laundress are to be understood as always excepted from such forfeiture. This exception will embrace sums which have accrued as well as those which become due during the term of the sentence."^{xxxvii} In the *Revised Regulations* of 1861, Form 4 of the Pay Department indicated that a soldier's discharge would not be approved until he had paid the laundry fees he had incurred.

NUMBERS OF LAUNDRESSES

There is no way to accurately determine the number of laundresses attached to the military during any specific period of time. There are a number of sources that may be used in documenting laundresses, but no one source will offer a complete number at any one time during the civil war. Paymaster records are of little use in determining the exact number of laundresses employed at any one time. Both laundresses (with the exception of hospital laundresses) and sutlers were contract employees of the army and were not paid a stated salary, thus were not included in the paymasters' receipts. They provided the paymaster with chits, receipts or journal entries for the services rendered and the amount owed them was subtracted from the salaries of the men and were paid directly to the laundresses and sutlers at the pay table. Discharge forms have a blank for the laundress' name and the amount owed, but few of those filled out forms exist because the discharge papers became the property of the soldier and duplicates were not retained by the War Department until World War I. Another method to determine the number of laundresses would be to study surviving lists of ration issues, since laundresses were entitled to rations and quarters but there is no searchable database of this information that could be used for finding laundresses. Some hospital records also listed laundresses that were employed and noted their payments but beyond that, only sporadic mentions in other narratives pay heed to the presence of laundresses. Some unit rosters contained mentions and/or names of laundresses, but it did not seem to be a standard practice throughout the war.

There are numerous mentions of laundresses being a common presence in forts or garrison quarters and hospitals, as well as sometimes being present during campaigns. In researching the Official Records, there are some concrete numbers of laundresses included in some of the reports. At San Antonio, TX, on February 26, 1862, there were 136 laundress listed for at 2,445 men,^{xxxviii}

which calculated to be 18 men per laundress. The field return of Johnson's brigade, near Drewry's Bluff on May 15, 1864 indicated that there were 23 laundresses listed for 1,165 men,^{xxxix} which were fifty-one men per laundress. Occasionally, mentions of laundresses would occur in soldiers' letters or diaries. From Kentucky, in November, 1861, Bernt Olmanson of the 2nd Minnesota Infantry, Company E wrote to his family about the number of women in the regiment, "We have about forty women in the regiment,"^{xl} If we can assume further, since his letter did not state how many men were in the regiment, since it was still early in the war, it was probably still relatively large. If 800 soldiers are assumed, then there would be about 20 men per laundress.

Since laundresses were also employed by hospitals their names or numbers may be present in hospital reports but they usually were either not mentioned by name or were combined with the number of cooks. William Carrington, inspector of confederate hospitals wrote that, in Richmond on November 2, 1862, there were 327 laundresses employed by the hospitals in that city out of 1998 hospital workers.^{xli}

It is difficult to determine to what extent and under what conditions laundresses were with the army. Before and after the civil war, there were numerous mentions of laundresses and children in garrisons and also those that accompanied the soldiers on marches, such as the Mormon Brigade, and on campaigns during the Mexican War. Similar mentions during the civil war are relatively scarce. Among the documentation of laundresses during the civil war were the following examples:

The instructions regarding the evacuation of women and children from Fort Sumter to New York contained the direction to "give rations to such as are properly laundresses of companies."^{xlii}

When the Army was evacuating Texas in February, 1861, following secession, the colonel commanding the department mentioned, "I have estimated for the full allowance of officers' servants and laundresses, not knowing the exact number there are. I have no doubt there will be the full number of laundresses."^{xliii}

Laundresses were also transferred to other locations to remove them from harm's way, to prevent an overload on the facilities, or for other various reasons. On April 18, 1862, G. Loomis sent the following message from Fort Columbus to the Adjutant-General in Washington, DC, "I request authority to send some extra laundresses to Fort Hamilton. They take up room on this island [prison of Castle William] that is now needed for other purposes. Some of the laundresses

were of the Eighth Infantry and some of the regiments and companies from California. Some of their husbands are in the field I believe on the Potomac.^{xliv}

Laundresses were some of the few women that were sometimes allowed to travel with the army on campaigns. However, whether they accompanied the Army on any particular movement differed according to circumstances and the wishes of the commanding officers. Some officers allowed the women to follow the camps, but others restricted their movements. General Grant issued Special Field Order No. 18 on December 9, 1862, stating, “Women and children are hereafter to be excluded from the army in the field This is not intended to exclude authorized laundresses, hospital nurses, or officers’ servants, of which wing and division commanders are empowered to judge of the expediency of retaining.”^{xlv} Other commanders had similar orders which excluded extraneous civilian personnel, except laundresses. General Quincy Adams Gillmore issued the following order February 4, 1864, regarding laundresses accompanying the troops on an expedition to Florida from Hilton Head, South Carolina. “. . . You will see that no females accompany your command [Brigadier General Seymour], and will give strict orders that none shall follow except regularly appointed laundresses, who will be allowed to accompany the baggage of their respective commands.”^{xlvi} In contrast, General William T. Sherman gave the following order from Memphis, Tennessee, in December 18, 1862: “The expedition now filling out is purely of a military character No citizen, male or female, will be allowed to accompany it, unless employed as part of a crew, or as a servant to the transports; female chambermaids to boats and nurses to sick alone will be allowed, unless the wives of captains or pilots actually belonging to the boats. No laundress, officers’ or soldiers’ wives must pass below Helena.”^{xlvii}

LAUNDRESSES IN COMBAT

Despite the concerns of the commanding officers, laundresses were sometimes caught in the midst of the fighting. David L. Thompson, Co. G. in the 9th New York Volunteers, related his account of a skirmish that occurred a few days before the battle of Antietam. He wrote, “We came up at the close of the fight at Frederick [Maryland], and forming line of battle, went at double-quick through cornfields, potato patches, gardens, and backyards — the German washer women of the 103rd New York regiment going in with us on the run.”^{xlviii}

Another instance is found in the *Official Records* where it seems laundresses were present during a skirmish in Annandale, VA, during August, 1864, and were apparently refused shelter by one of the local inhabitants during the engagement. The account appears in the report of J. Schneider, a captain in the 16th New York Cavalry, who wrote:

“. . . . We also learned that their force was over 400 men when they passed the Court-House. Mrs. Tennison, who lives east of the camp, refused the laundresses to come in her house, and told them ‘get away from here into your camp’”^{xlix}

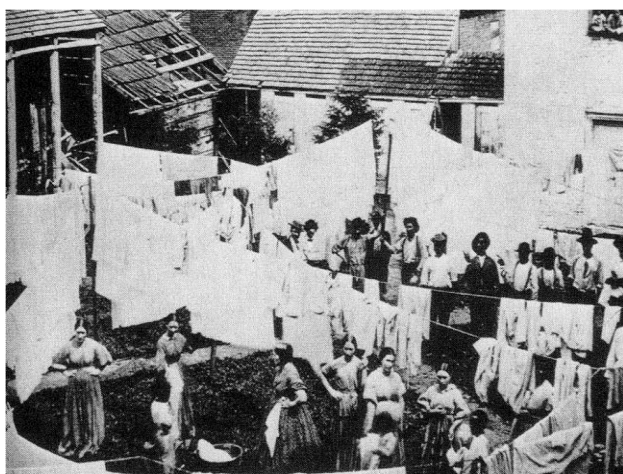
EQUIPMENT

There is little indication concerning the quantity, if any, of laundry equipment the Army supplied for the laundresses. It is possible that the Army supplied some basic equipment, laundresses could have supplied some or all of their own equipment from home, or, as was the case with Mother Bickerdyke (a widow, Mary Ann Bickerdyke, who accompanied the western armies), they obtained it from elsewhere, such as the Sanitary Commission. Mary Livermore of the western Sanitary Commission wrote of Mother Bickerdyke, “In the meantime she organized anew her huge laundries, in which was performed all the washing of the Memphis hospitals, even when there were eight and ten thousand patients in them. Washing-machines, wringers, caldrons, mangles, and any other needed laundry machinery, were sent her by the Sanitary Commission. Her old apparatus had been destroyed at Holly Springs, Miss., when that point was captured by the enemy”^l Sanitary Commission records also provide evidence that they supplied some laundry equipment, but the recipients were not listed. The following is from one such Commission report: “Wash tubs, 10; wash boards, 12, washing machines, 9.”^{li} Other items such as stoves, starch, soap, kettles, and buckets, all of which could serve as laundry supplies or equipment, were also listed in numerous Sanitary Commission reports.

By viewing some of the few period images of camp laundries and reading numerous descriptions of them, the equipment usually consisted of large camp kettles, wooden tubs, washboards, wringers, baskets and, occasionally, washing machines. There does not seem to any standardization of laundry equipment for either the camp or hospital laundry. The equipment was transported as the camps moved, and invariably there was grumbling from the officers and the men about transporting the immense amount of laundry paraphernalia.

Scant documentation exists on the procedures used for drying clothes in camp or hospitals. Civilian instruction manuals listed both clotheslines and clothes pins in laundry equipment suggestions, but there is no documentation concerning what was used in different situations. Both clotheslines and clothes pins were sold in general stores as well as other laundry equipment. In a *Harper's Weekly* illustration, clothes are pictured hanging from a tree and, if one looks closely in the center of the picture, clothes pins are shown holding the trousers or drawers to the tree branch. Other civil war laundry images show clothes drying on bushes, clothes hung from clotheslines, and clothes spread over porch railings. In more permanent laundry situations, such as a hospital, there may have been drying yards equipped with clotheslines or, as noted by Kate Cummings, "tents in which to put the clothes in case of rain."^{liii} In a National Archives' image of Hospital Number Eleven in Nashville, Tennessee, a drying yard was pictured but the clothes were just draped over the lines and no clothes pins were in evidence. In another Archives' image, showing the staff of Hospital Number Three in Nashville, clothes were hung on clotheslines strung

Scenes of laundresses in Nashville, TN hospitals.



across a porch and also spread out on the porch railing. In viewing the various laundry images, it seems that any method that was convenient and affordable was used to dry clothes.

Ironing had always been a long, hot chore so freshly ironed garments were probably something a soldier had to pay extra if he wanted his clothes ironed. Officers may have had ironing included with their laundry since they paid more, but without documentation it is difficult to declare that ironing was a certainty. An iron appears in an image of a woman and her children in camp so apparently some ironing was done. (The photograph was attributed to the 31st Pennsylvania Regiment at Camp Pendleton or Queen's Farm in Virginia.) In *Hardtack and Coffee*, Billings stated that ironing was not done or expected by the common soldier "for 'boiled shirts,' as white-bosomed shirts were called, were almost an unknown garment in the army except in hospitals."^{liii}

Another method used, besides ironing, to press or smooth large items, was the mangle. It was a machine that employed the use of pressure to smooth wrinkles from the fabric, and did so without heat. The linens were run between an adjustable platform and a large roller that was hand cranked; the pressure smoothed the linens and removed wrinkles. Using a mangle was quicker and much easier than ironing large pieces by hand. Smooth linens would be desired in a hospital, since rough-dried sheets would possibly irritate the patient's skin and cause bed sores. The large number of bed linens that were laundered in a hospital made a mangle much more practical to use than irons. Mother Bickerdyke requested and received mangles from the Sanitary Commission. In an account of Mrs. Bickerdyke's laundries she stated, "The clothes were washed, dried, folded (there was no ironing), boxed, and sent to the next point of destination."^{liv}

LAUNDRY FACILITIES

Laundries were set up in "Suds Row," often some distance from the soldiers. As an example, Captain Charles S. Lovell wrote from San Francisco, CA, in September, 1861, ". . . I should like the authority from the commanding general to put the laundresses' quarters in some other place more convenient to water, rather than on the opposite side of the square from the company quarters."^{lv}

Laundry facilities varied in placement, according to the fort, garrison, camp, hospital or prison layout. There were areas set aside for laundresses' quarters and laundry facilities and there are a few descriptions of laundress' quarters in forts. From personal accounts, descriptions of

the quarters ranged from a collection of huts, old tents, dugouts, and make-shift shelters of canvas and boards to permanent frame and clapboard buildings and structures of cement and stone with shingled roofs. Portable housing issued to officer's servants and laundresses' following the army were "small common tent, [of the] old pattern"^{lvi} as specified in regulations. Descriptions and plans of prisons and hospitals usually included laundries and quarters for the laundresses either in a separate area from the barracks and may have been near the officers' quarters. A number of reconstructed laundry buildings and quarters or their ruins exist in national historic sites of forts throughout the west.

Sometimes specific orders were issued concerning where the laundresses were allowed or prohibited. On June 3, 1861, General Butler issued an order that read, "The laundresses of companies are not permitted to come into the quarters of the men. They must be kept in their own quarters, and the clothing sent to them and sent for. Any officer, who permits a woman, black or white, not his wife, in his quarters, or the quarters of his company, will be dismissed [from] the service."^{lvii} The *Louisville Daily Journal* reported on Butler's order by writing, "General Butler has issued an order at New Orleans forbidding the admission of laundresses to the quarters of the men. It is probably thought a great hardship that the poor soldiers can't have a chance to court their washer-women."^{lviii}

HOSPITAL LAUNDRIES

Besides the obvious health benefits of clean bedding and clothing, the washing of bedding and clothing in hospitals saved the army money and this frugal measure was recognized by a number of women who worked in those hospitals. Mary Livermore wrote of Mary Ann Bickerdyke, "Up to this time [after the battle of Fort Donelson in February, 1862], no attempt had been made to save the clothing and bedding used by the wounded men on the transports and in the temporary hospitals. Saturated with blood, and the discharges of healing wounds, and sometimes swarming with vermin, it had been collected, and burned or buried. But this involved much waste; and as these articles were in constant need, Mother Bickerdyke conceived the idea of saving them. She sent to the Commission at Chicago [Chicago Sanitary Commission] for washing-machines, portable kettles, and mangles [used to press or smooth items by pressure], and caused all this offensive clothing to be collected. She then obtained from the authorities a full

detail of contrabands, and superintended the laundering of all these hideously foul garments. Packed in boxes, it all came again into use at the next battle.”^{lix} Cornelia Hancock, a Quaker nurse, wrote after the Battle of Gettysburg: “I have succeeded in getting a washerwoman today which is a great institution here indeed.”^{lx} Amanda Farnham, a nurse from Vermont who served with the Army of the Potomac, spoke of laundering the clothes of the wounded, so they could be saved for reuse. She wrote after Cold Harbor, May 31-June 12, 1864, “It was at the latter place [exact location unknown] that I first put into practice a plan by which the changes of clothing of the wounded . . . could be washed and saved for use again, and not burned or destroyed as had been done at some former places, and some way by which the clothing and bedding of the wounded should be saved had become a necessity for supplies of this kind were nearly exhausted.”^{lxi}

A tremendous amount of laundry was processed in each hospital. Several sources mentioned that between two to four thousand pieces of laundry to be done in one day was not unusual. For example, one account of Mary Bickerdyke’s laundry service listed one day’s laundry as containing 1532 sheets, 600 towels, 32 blankets, 80 quilts, 478 pillowcases, 22 feather pillows (emptied and washed), 5 blouses, 200 shirts, 175 pairs drawers, 400 handkerchiefs and napkins, 70 bedsacks, 130 pairs socks, and six pairs of pants.^{lxii} According to the author, all this was done by Bickerdyke’s troop of launders with family-sized tubs and washboards, kettles for boiling clothes (which doubled for making soup), a large stove sent by the Chicago Sanitary Commission, and barrels of soft soap and washing soda.



Kate Cummings

The design for hospital laundries were not all the same: some were meant to be moved and others were semi-permanent. Kate Cummings wrote of several laundry situations and the doctors in charge and their management of the facilities. Speaking of a Doctor Avent, whom she called *Pharaoh*, she requested that a wash-house be constructed for the health of the laundry attendants, and he refused the request, stating that “his grandmother and mother never had any but the canopy of heaven for theirs [laundry], and he did not intend having any other in the hospital.”^{lxiii} For a number of reasons,

she requested and received a transfer to a different hospital. Writing about the new hospital, she stated, “As this has been a watering-place, there are quite a number of small wooden houses on it, which are set apart for various purposes. . . . One is a linen and ironing-room, of which a man has charge; besides, there is a woman who does the mending and part of the ironing.

“The patients and attendants have their washing and ironing done in the hospital . . .

“We visited the wash-house; as yet it has nothing but the ‘canopy of heaven’ for a covering, if I except some very fine shade-trees, and tents in which to put the clothes in case of rain. Water is supplied from a ‘branch.’ Mr. Love, a soldier, and his wife have charge, and are responsible to the man in the linen-room for the clothes.”^{lxiv} Another time she wrote, “A very nice lady has charge of the linen room. In this hospital the patients have their clothes washed as soon as they come in. The wash-house is a little ways from the rest of the hospital; in it are large boilers, built on brick, and an ironing-room, and a shed for drying the clothes in wet weather.”^{lxv}

Little is known about specific laundry designs but, in one situation, dimensions were included for the laundry and matron’s quarters. Lieutenant Colonel George B. Drake sent the following, “First, the work allotted to the quartermaster’s department has progressed well thus far . . . [sizes given for other buildings] laundry, matron’s and attendants’ room, 18 by 40 . . .”^{lxvi}

Another problem existed for laundries whether in camp or for a hospital; that of a convenient and constant water supply. Some laundresses set up near a creek or river but, due to the vast amount of water needed for a hospital and laundry, sometimes other arrangements had to be made. This is evidenced in the following report concerning City Point:

“Shortly after the establishment of the hospital at this point, works were constructed by the quartermaster for supplying the encampment with water. Two steam-engines of four horse-power each were placed at the foot of the bluff at the edge of the river, whence they force water into a tank capable of containing 6,000 gallons, which is raised thirty feet above the level of the bluff and supported upon a strong wooden trestle-work . . . An abundance of river water was thus supplied for laundry, bathing, and other coarser purposes. Wells were dug in various parts of

the hospital, and these, with numerous springs in the vicinity, afforded a plentiful supply for drinking and cooking.”^{lxvii}

HOSPITAL LAUNDRESSES

The duties of a hospital laundress differed from that of a camp laundress. Hospital laundresses not only saw to the washing of clothing and bedding, but also were expected to assist in nursing duties. Other than personal cleanliness and military order, it was extremely important to keep the environment of a military hospital as clean as possible. Even though the germ theory was not recognized at the time of the Civil War, there was an observed correlation between filth and disease and the importance of cleanliness.

As the war continued, hospitals found it increasingly difficult to hire and keep laundresses. Kate Cummings, who worked in Confederate hospitals in several states, wrote in her diary of the difficulty in procuring servants to help in the hospital. She stated, “We have men as *laundresses*, as well as in other capacities.”^{lxviii} Later in the year she wrote, “We also received a dispatch from there [Mobile] requesting transportation for some laundresses, who are coming on. We are much in need of them.”^{lxix} The Union also experienced difficulty in hiring laundress and obtaining funds for supplies and personnel. Medical Inspector General and Acting Surgeon General, Joseph K. Barnes wrote, “The great difficulty that has been experienced at large general hospitals in procuring a sufficient number of matrons has rendered the use of washing-machines or employment of contractors in many cases a matter of necessity. Additional legislation is required to enable this department to meet the expenses thus incurred. The appropriation for laundry purposes of a sum of money equivalent to pay and allowances of the authorized number of matrons or laundresses in hospitals where washing is done by contract or machinery would obviate the present embarrassments.”^{lxx}

Since the Army did not pay for camp laundresses, no appropriations were granted for their services, but, as it was not feasible to charge hospital patients for laundry, both armies established a pay schedule for hospital laundresses. The Confederacy did not appropriate any funds in 1861 (they did authorize employment of hospital laundresses) for hospital laundresses, but, in 1862, \$10,000 was appropriated; in 1863, \$125,000; in 1864, \$300,000; and in 1865, \$150,000. In the Union correspondence, there was the following commentary on regulations:

“At present the washing of clothes in general hospitals is provided for as follows: One matron is allowed for every twenty patients, who receives a compensation of \$6 per month and one ration. Great difficulty is experienced in large general hospitals in procuring a sufficient number of matrons to perform this duty, and I have the honor to propose that instead of this now unreliable plan, a sum of money equivalent to the pay and allowance of a matron, say \$12 for every twenty patients, be monthly allowed to every general hospital, to be appropriated for laundry purposes at the discretion of the surgeon in charge, whether to the payment of matrons or to the payment of bills for washing by steam or otherwise.”^{lxxi} One of the duties of the surgeon in charge of the hospital was to hire the number of laundresses needed and sign their required certificates.

There were several laundress’ salary quotes from Southern sources. On March 21, 1863, Dr. B. M. Wible, a surgeon in a Georgia hospital wrote to Dr. Samuel Hollingsworth Stout, medical director of hospitals, “It is impossible to procure laundresses at 12 dollars per month, and I am obliged to require nurses to perform laundry duty — that is negro women who aid in cleaning the wards are also required to wash.”^{lxxii} On May 16, 1863, the General Order No. 62 stated that, “Hospital laundresses will be paid \$25 per month and allowed rations and quarters.”^{lxxiii} Also, in the legislation that provided directions for the establishment of medical services, there was the following direction concerning laundresses:

“Two matrons, to be known and designated as assistant matrons, whose general duties shall be to superintend the laundry, to take charge of the clothing of the sick, the bedding of the hospital, to see that they are kept clean and neat, and perform such other duties as may be necessary, at a salary not to exceed thirty-five dollars per month each.”^{lxxiv}

LAUNDRESSES IN PRISONS

Laundresses were also hired to work in prisons camps, washing for the prison personnel and prisoners. Even though prison funds were allocated for the services of laundresses, there is little indication that the prisoners benefitted from the service. Occasionally facilities, such as caldrons, were made available for the prisoners to do laundry themselves. Most often the prisoners were responsible for their own laundry and, in some cases; they would do other prisoners’ laundry to make extra money. In a sketchbook done by John J. Omenhausser, a prisoner at Point Lookout, Maryland, there were two drawings of two prisoners doing laundry.

One man was using a wooden tub and washboard and the other man was using a bench as a battling board by hitting the laundry that was laid out with a flat board [this action loosened the dirt]. In the background there was a kettle boiling on the fire, a painted bucket and blocks of soap. The caption that accompanied the drawing said, “Bob! why don’t you holler out and let the fellers [sic] know we take in washing, for two and a half cents a piece. [The man beating the laundry] If there are any more greybacks [lice] left in this shirt — I’ll be doged [sic] if I don’t make them suffer.”^{lxxv} The second pictures one man scrubbing with a washboard and the other man was beating the laundry with a board.



Illustrations done at the prison
at Point Lookout, MD

HAZARDS

Laundry was not only hard, back-breaking labor, but it could be dangerous to one’s health and life. In addition to being out in all weathers, doing laundry or being subject to the physical strain of spending long periods of time in a hot, steaming wash-house, the workers were exposed to all types of infections. Kate Cummings, a confederate nurse who worked in several locations during the war, wrote of one instance (exact location unknown, either Chattanooga or Mobile): “The erysipelas [a disease called, *St. Anthony’s Fire*, which was an eruption of a fiery red and particularly painful rash found chiefly on the face], which is infectious, is spreading. Two of the

girls in the washhouse [sic] had their ears bored [pierced], and have it very badly, taken from washing the clothes, though they are never touched by them until they are put into a large boiler and well boiled. One of the girls is a perfect sight; her face is so swollen that her eyes are closed, and part of her hair has had to be cut off.”^{lxxvi} There are also accounts of laundresses being killed in battle. Frank Moore included, in one of his books, a first person account of Shiloh, “Two women laundresses in the 16th Wisconsin, running to the rear when the attack was commenced, were killed.”^{lxxvii}

EXPERIENCES OF SPECIFIC LAUNDRESSES

A large portion of the women employed as laundresses had little or no education. Consequently, most laundresses themselves wrote little about their experiences. But others have written about them and, if the published accounts are representative, many also became involved in nursing, sometimes to the exclusion of their laundry tasks.

Bridget Deaver (spelling by Mary Elizabeth Massey, also spelled as Divers by Frank Moore and L. B. Brockett or Devens by Mary Livermore) was purported to have been with the 1st Michigan Calvary as a *vivandiere* or daughter of the regiment, but neither her name nor her husband’s name were on the roster. She was known as “Irish Biddy” or “Michigan Bridget” by the men, and was referred to in several letters from nurses or hospital matrons. Cornelia Hancock wrote from City Point, “December 30, 1864 Bridgett washes my clothes. She quarrels with the men too much to be in the winter kitchen. I see that she is made comfortable and has everything she needs.”^{lxxviii} Bridgett not only served as a laundress, but also nursed, and sometimes fought beside the soldiers.

Cornelia Hancock



Mary Livermore wrote, “. . . known as ‘Michigan Bridgett,’ went to the field with the First Michigan Calvary, in which her husband was a private, and served through the war. Sometimes when a soldier fell she took his place, fighting in his stead with unquailing [sic] courage . . . Her love of army life continued after the war ended, and with her husband she joined a regiment of the regular army [as a laundress], stationed on the Plains.”^{lxxix}

Kady Brownell, wife of Robert Brownell, was officially registered as a laundress with the 1st and 5th Rhode Island, even though she didn’t stay a laundress very long and is more well-known for her other deeds. She was present at First Bull Run and at the Battle of New Berne, North Carolina and was often known as “Daughter of the Regiment.” Her experiences were recorded by Frank Moore in his book, *Women of the War*.



Kady Brownell

Jane Hinsdale enlisted with her husband after the fall of Fort Sumter in Company D, 2nd Michigan Infantry Regiment. She was hired as a laundress (her husband was a private) but her functions soon changed from merely doing washing. They were involved in First Bull Run but, after she was separated from her unit during the battle, she continued to care for the wounded. Jane was captured by the Black Horse Calvary and placed in a barn with other Federal prisoners but she escaped and returned to Washington on foot. Finding her unit and husband in Arlington,

Virginia, she stayed with them as a nurse. She was sent to General Heintzleman's headquarters organization, where she set up a hospital and nursed there until the end of the war. In 1891, she was granted a pension of twelve dollars per month for her services to the Union.^{lxxx}

Mrs. Margaret Leonard, of Boston, Massachusetts, wrote of her experiences that started with her service as a laundress but soon changed. She wrote, "My husband, Newton Leonard, volunteered in January last, in the Second Massachusetts heavy artillery. When his company was ordered to the seat of war I received permission to go with his company as laundress." She was captured with the regiment and nursed their wounded for four weeks before being sent to Andersonville, Georgia. After only ten days (she does not mention whether she did any laundry or nursing there), she was sent to Richmond (Castle Thunder) for about two months. Like at Andersonville, she does not mention specifically whether she did laundry for the prisoners. However, since she did mention there was a period of five weeks without soap among other privations, it is assumed that doing laundry or other tasks was not possible. She finally was sent to Little Rock, Arkansas, where her account was published.^{lxxxi}

Rose Quinn Rooney, from Louisiana, joined Company K, Fifteenth Louisiana Regiment, as a company laundress, in June, 1861, and served throughout the entire war through the surrender at Appomattox. Fannie A. Beers wrote, in *Memories*, of Rooney's time in the Confederate army and according to Beers, she not only served as a laundress, but nursed the wounded, and obtained special foods for the soldiers. An article in the *Daily Picayune* in 1893 related how Mrs. Rooney washed and mended soldiers' clothing and generally cared for the men.

THE END OF OFFICIAL MILITARY LAUNDRESSES

Despite the intense labor involved in doing laundry, the health risks, and the added danger of being near or at the front, women continued to seek employment as military laundresses. It was a way to earn money for either self-support or to assist in the support of a family. After the end of the Civil War, the practice of employing women as laundresses for the Army continued until 1878, when the regulations stated, "That hereafter women shall not be allowed to accompany troops as laundresses..."^{lxxxii} Apparently, women, who were currently married to soldiers and were already employed as laundresses could remain until their husband's enlistment ended and later some women continued to work as laundresses in a few western outposts, they were not specifically

mentioned in any Army Regulations. In 1883, the authority to issue rations to laundresses expired. By 1901, individual military posts started operating laundries, and in 1909, the Quartermaster Corps established post laundries in all forts, thus eliminating the need for women to perform the task and closing forever one facet of women's involvement with the military.

For more detailed information on how to set up a laundry impression or display, please refer to my publication, *The Laundry Handbook* which is available through our website, <http://www.raggedsoldier.com>.

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