

## Catholic Nuns in the Civil War

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In an era where women were denied any real careers in life except marriage and motherhood, "A prime attraction of convents was a way of life which gave women, who would otherwise have had no such possibilities, access to effect change, a prominent and active role—in short, a vocation in the world. Sisterhood was seen as a great undertaking in the service of an active and enthusiastic faith."<sup>1</sup> These Catholic sisterhoods gave American girls an "alternative to marriage and motherhood, an opportunity for lifelong meaningful work, and a way to live out their spiritual ideals with an all female community that shared similar goals and values."<sup>2</sup> Through their travels, their administrative skills, their nursing skills, and their adaptability to any situation, they might have been "sheltered from the world," but these women were definitely in the public sphere.<sup>3</sup>

Twelve years after taking her final vows to become a nun, Sister Stephana Warde had been transferred from the Mother House of the Sisters of Mercy in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, to the Mercy Convent in Baltimore, Maryland. From there, she and five other nuns were sent to Vicksburg, Mississippi, to establish a school for young ladies from the finer families in the city. Shortly thereafter, the Civil War broke out and she and her fellow sisters traveled all over the state of Mississippi, tending to Confederate soldiers. When the sisters and soldiers were captured by Union troops, Sister Stephana was taken away as a prisoner of war. In 1865, she made her way back to the Mother House in Pittsburgh, her habit in ruins, and without a veil. After receiving a few weeks rest and good food, she was given a new habit and made her way to Washington, D.C., where Sister Stephana spent the rest of the war working at one of the many military hospitals

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<sup>1</sup> John J. Fialka, *Sisters: Catholic Nuns and the Making of America*, (New York: St. Martin's Press), 61.

<sup>2</sup> Carole Coburn and Martha Smith, *Spirited Lives: How Nuns Shaped Catholic Culture and American Life 1836-1920*, (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 66.

<sup>3</sup> Fialka, *Sisters*, 220.

in the capital. According to the annals of the convent in Pittsburgh, no actual quotes from her were recorded; just the story of her imprisonment and reinstatement into the community. Sister simply disappears and we hear no more about her. Thus it was with many of the stories of the nuns who worked as nurses in the Civil War.

For a long time after the war, there was very little written about the nuns in service on either side of the Civil War. Then in 1912, the Ladies of the Ancient Order of Hibernians decided to take it upon themselves to lobby for a monument called Nuns of the Battlefield to be erected in Washington, D.C. This became a reality in 1924. From this came the book, *Nuns of the Battlefield* by Ellen Ryan Jolly. For many years this book and one other by George Barton, *Angels of the Battlefield*, published in 1898, were the only sources available about the services of these brave women.

There were over six hundred Sister-nurses from twelve orders and twenty-two communities across this country that took some part in that terrible conflict. These extraordinary women did so much for soldiers on both sides and yet very little has been written about them. They kept very few records. Some of the orders kept a diary that they called annals. These diaries contained the writings of several nuns. This was not done on any regular basis, but seemed to be filled as the time became available. Unlike an ordinary diary, these contained very little of a personal nature, but much that had to do with the patients, the grace of our Lord, kindnesses from good Christian lay people, and conversions to the Church. The entries were dated by the Saint's day it happened to be. In his book, *Angels of the Battlefield*, George Barton tells us, "The Sisters do not have reunions or camp-fires to keep alive the memories of the bloodiest event in our history, but their war stories are as heroic as any and far more edifying than many veterans tell."<sup>4</sup> As I progressed with my research, I discovered why the nuns kept such sparse historical records. These women were not just doing this service for the country because of their excellent nursing and administrative skills and their sense of

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4 George Barton, *Angels of the Battlefield*, (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: The Catholic Art Publishing Company, 1898).

patriotism. Instead, this experience gave them a chance to put into actual practice what their sacred vows demanded of them, and to practice the real reason they had become nuns in the first place. These women who responded to this "call from God entered into a female world of ritual, commitment, and service."<sup>5</sup> They were asked to "become dead to the world" when they took their final vows and to become brides of Christ, living a life of chastity, poverty, and obedience.<sup>6</sup> First and foremost they had a duty to their fellow man and especially their fellow Catholics. In order to practice the seven Corporal Works of Mercy, and live up to their vows, they deemed it a privilege to sacrifice their lives for the sick and suffering.

It is hard for twenty-first century Americans to realize that the United States was considered, by Rome, to be a foreign mission field until the year 1908. These nuns were originally sent to the United States to be a religious refuge for the poor and destitute immigrants from their own countries. Only secondary were their hospitals, schools and social programs, or their work in the war. Regardless of their original mission, Catholic nuns had a significant impact on medical care during the Civil War.

**Nursing in America During the Civil War.** In the nineteenth century, nursing was not yet looked upon as a worthy profession, and there was no thought given to preparing and training people. There were no professional nursing schools in the United States at that time. This did not happen until 1871, under the auspices of the Catholic hospital system. The sick were usually cared for within the family home by mothers, sisters, and wives. However, when there were epidemics like cholera, measles, or smallpox, the only people who were actually doing any kind of nursing for these diseases in established hospitals were the nuns in Catholic hospitals. Full time service in hospitals was not considered respectable work for a woman. At that time there was "nowhere in the United States that had a strong background, tradition or experience in caring for patients

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<sup>5</sup> Coburn and Smith, *Spirited Lives*, 66.

<sup>6</sup> Sister Mary Denis Maher, *To Bind Up The Wounds: Catholic Sisters During the Civil War*, (New York and London: Greenwood Press, 1989), 9.

among women.”<sup>7</sup> This was especially true in the South. The type of “person who usually cared for the ailing and diseased in lay institutions ranged from ones with little or no experience in the best of them to the meanest sort of character that could be secured in the lowest caliber of hospital.”<sup>8</sup> Even though “Catholic hospitals were equipped with what modern surgery and medicine would call primitive methods, it is a glorious fact that they were blessed with conscientious nurses and ever maintained standards of sanitation and cleanliness.”<sup>9</sup> From 1823 to 1861, there were twenty-eight Catholic hospitals in the United States, all run by nursing sisters.

For over thirty-five years, the Catholic Sisterhood had “volunteered their services...the fear of contagion never phased or deterred them...The terrors of the battlefield were to be no exception.”<sup>10</sup> These holy women saw in the sick, the wounded and the dying, whether “Blue or Gray, regardless of race or color, an opportunity of assisting one of the least of Christ’s brethren...alleviation of the conditions of the suffering victims of war gave the charitable Sisters an opportunity of again conforming their lives to the ideals uppermost in the minds of their founders; the care of the suffering poor and neglected sick.”<sup>11</sup>

Medical historian, Robin O’Conner, in his book, *American Hospitals: The First 200 Years*, tells us “that in contrast to lay nurses, the Catholic sisterhoods trained their own members well, creating educated and disciplined nurses.”<sup>12</sup> What this “prevailing opinion overlooked though, was that the sisters brought something to the battlefields that were rare: more nursing experience than the armies

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7 Reverend William J. Cavanah, “The Hospital Activities of the Sister Nurses During the Civil War and Their Influence on the Catholic Hospitalization Movement up to 1875,” a dissertation submitted to the faculty of Philosophy of the Catholic University of America in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Arts, 1931, 2.

8 Ibid.

9 Cavanah, “The Hospital Activities of the Sister Nurses During the Civil War,” 4.

10 Ibid., 8.

11 Maher, *To Bind Up The Wounds*, 9.

12 Fialka, *Sisters*, 61.

had.”<sup>13</sup> When Florence Nightingale “went to the Crimean Peninsula in 1853, twenty-four of her thirty-eight nurses were from Anglican and Roman Catholic religious orders.”<sup>14</sup> British doctors were “loud and emphatic” in their praise for the Catholic Sister-nurses.<sup>15</sup> Unlike their British cousins, the United States had no “real background, tradition, or experience in caring for patients among women.”<sup>16</sup> Most of the nursing sisters had had valuable hands-on training in Europe in the nineteenth century; Europe was always at war with some country and these battles gave the sisters valuable hands-on training in battlefield medicine. On the other hand, regardless of their nationalities, nuns came from a long tradition “in which care of the sick was done from a religious motivation.”<sup>17</sup> Their vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience enabled the sisters to be able to respond quickly to requests from their bishops, and the governments of both sides. They were able to move to a variety of locations and insure top rated nursing wherever they went. The vow “of obedience meant being willing to mobilize oneself in the community to respond to the needs of others as articulated through the requests of legitimate religious authority.”<sup>18</sup> The vow of poverty “was expressed by a simple life style, the sharing of goods in common hardships, and the vow of chastity implied an attitude of inclusiveness of all people in the sisters’ love and service.”<sup>19</sup> The Sisters of Mercy went further. Their founder, Catherine McAuley, insisted on adding another vow. It was called The Mercy Rule and was “one of the first ever approved by the Church to give the Sisters the freedom to be wherever the poor, the sick, and the uneducated needed help.”<sup>20</sup> The Orders that had European origins, like the Sisters of Mercy from Ireland and the Sisters of Charity from France, “already had rules in the constitutions that contained sections that served as practical guides to nursing care...their constitutions

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13 Maher, *To Bind Up The Wounds*, 9.

14 *Ibid.*

15 *Ibid.*

16 *Ibid.*, 10.

17 *Ibid.*, 11.

18 *Ibid.*

19 Sister Mary Paulinus, *A Primary Source, Angels of Mercy: An Eyewitness Account of Civil War and Yellow Fever by a Sister of Mercy*, (Baltimore, Maryland: Cathedral Foundation Press, 1969), 1.

20 Maher, *To Bind Up The Wounds*, 12.

clearly spelled out how the sick were to be regarded and treated, and above all how the dying should be prepared for death."<sup>21</sup> Seeing to it that patients were well fed, kept clean and linens changed regularly were just little things that were second nature to the Sisters. These simple acts were extremely important for the health and recovery of the patients. Considering the condition of American nursing in the nineteenth century and the availability of decent nursing facilities for lay nurses, it was no wonder that the doctors of that era wanted the nuns' help. And it was a cold hard fact that at the outbreak of the Civil War, the sisters offered both sides the only source of trained nurses. The "sisters were uniquely positioned by their traditions, their experiences, and their community constitutions to provide nursing care when the Civil War broke out."<sup>22</sup>

The Sisters worked very closely with the United States Sanitary Commission, which was in charge of all the military hospitals for the Union. Mary Livermore, a sanitary worker and later woman's rights activist says in her autobiography,

"...I can never forget my experiences during the War of the Rebellion. Never did I meet these Catholic sisters in hospitals, on transports, or hospital steamers, without observing their devotion, faithfulness, and unobtrusiveness. They gave themselves no airs of superiority or holiness, shirked no duty, sought no easy place and bred no mischief. Sick and wounded men watched for their entrance into the wards at morning and looked a regretful farewell when they departed at night. They broke down in exhaustion from overwork; they succumbed to the fatal prison-fever, which our exchanged prisoners' brought from the fearful pens of the South. The world has known no nobler and no more heroic women than those found in the ranks of the Catholic Sisterhoods."<sup>23</sup>

It is interesting to note that after her experiences with the Sisters, Livermore attempted to start a nursing order, in collaboration with Dorothea Dix, made up of Protestant women who would devote themselves to the same kind of nursing. They both felt that if the

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21 Ibid., 13.

22 Ibid.

23 Maher, *To Bind Up The Wounds*, 13.

Catholics could offer such nurses surely the Protestant women could. The project never got off the ground.

At the outbreak of the Civil War, the Union Army had only one military hospital and that was in Leavenworth, Kansas. Their nurses were male recruits with no medical experience at all. The “Catholic sisters ran more than twenty, many of them started in converted barns, hotels, and warehouses—exactly what the Army was confronting in 1862, when it was saddled with more than two hundred hospitals and few trained nurses.”<sup>24</sup> The nursing situation in the South was much worse. They were really starting from scratch with a lot less money and supplies. And, they were stymied by their nineteenth century belief in the idea of separate spheres.

**Nuns and the Cult of Domesticity, Separate Spheres, and the Cult of True Womanhood.** In the South, even more so than in the North, this ideal of womanhood presented a whole host of problems for the nursing of their sick and wounded. The belief in those days was “that women could not mentally conceive of the brutality of war, let alone the stark reality of the bloody battlefield.”<sup>25</sup> In actuality, many of their women were seeing the carnage first hand, but still had to carry the additional “burden of the slander that they were ladies of easy virtue.”<sup>26</sup> Many of the lay nurses from both sides could not continue, but the “nuns of both sided stuck it out for the duration. The distinctive habits they wore and their nursing and organizational skill protected them from the slander of easy virtue.”<sup>27</sup> The Union paid their nurses forty cents a day, and the South nothing. It could certainly never be said that loyal Union or Confederate women were in it for the money.

In an article written for *United States Catholic Historian*, entitled, “Maternity of the Spirit: Nuns and Domesticity in Antebellum America,” author Joseph Mannard concluded that “if nuns helped pioneer new variations on traditional roles and greater participation

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24 Fialka, *Sisters*, 63.

25 Fialka, *Sisters*, 63.

26 *Ibid.*, 64

27 Maher, *To Bind Up The Wounds*, 14.

for women beyond the immediate family circle, the effect was only to broaden the meaning of the female sphere without questioning the validity of that concept. Nuns by practicing "maternity of the spirit," fulfilled the functions of domesticity and conformed to its assumptions about female nature."<sup>28</sup> Plus these women "possessed the qualities of piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity and were dedicated to a life of service to others. These were qualities that were seen as a feminine ideal by male and female alike."<sup>29</sup> The communities the sisters lived in, and the Orders they belonged to had their own cult of true womanhood. In both Catholic and Protestant households a woman's sphere centered on her position as "perpetuator of the race and nucleus of the family."<sup>30</sup> To Catholics these women were the exception to the socially expected and approved state of marriage and motherhood. They were "brides of Christ."

Their children were the children they taught in their schools. For over forty years, "parochial schools were identified with the sisters who lived in the local convent, taught in the classrooms furnished by the parish...to many of the local citizens, the schools in the Catholic parishes were referred to as the sister's schools."<sup>31</sup> To nineteenth century American Catholics, their outlook on the cult of true womanhood was only a little different from their Protestant neighbor. Their tradition "held that such a pattern was designed by God, exemplified, and revealed by a Pauline (Papal) interpretation of Scripture and natural law."<sup>32</sup> In Catholic homes, it was an honor to have a child that had a vocation; whether it was a priest or a nun. However, the real value of these women was the special opportunities they had which were unavailable to other nineteenth century women.

**The Sisters of Mercy and Their Duties in and Around Washington, D.C.** Seven Sisters of Mercy came to the United States from Ireland on the feast day of St. Thomas the Apostle on

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28 Ibid., 15.

29 Ibid.

30 Maher, *To Bind Up The Wounds*, 16.

31 Coburn and Smith, *Spirited Lives*, 128.

32 Fialka, *Sisters*, 129.

December 21, 1843 and established the first Convent of Mercy in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Their first Mother Superior was Mother Xavier Ward, aunt to the notable Sister Stephana. They had been requested by the first Bishop of Pittsburgh, the Right Reverend Michael O'Conner D.D. to come and establish schools, social programs, and hospitals for the Irish immigrants in his city. By 1847, just three years after their arrival, they established Mercy Hospital in Pittsburgh. All this was done by just seven sisters from Ireland. Included in this small number were two postulants. Miss Margaret O'Brian, a postulant from the original seven, became the Reverend Mother Mary Agatha O'Brian founder of the Chicago Community, who during the Civil War contributed her own sisters to the cause.

Secretary of War, Edwin Stanton requested the Bishop of Pittsburgh, to send some Sisters of Mercy to Washington, D.C. to set up and run a new Army Hospital. So on November 26, 1862, a contingent of Mercies set off for Washington. In addition to a priest, whose salary would be paid for by the government, the Sisters of Mercy laid down some ground rules. These ground rules were the same for all the Orders that ended up nursing in Washington.

•In the first place, no lady volunteers were to be associated with the Sisters in their duties as such an association would be rather an encumbrance than a help.

•That the Sisters should have the entire charge of the hospitals and ambulances.

•That the government pay the traveling expenses of the Sisters and furnish them board and other necessities during the war. Clothing also, in case the war should be protracted.

•Everything necessary for the lodging and nursing of the wounded and sick will be supplied to them without putting them to expense; they will give their services gratuitously.

•So far as circumstances well allow, they shall have every facility for attending to their religious devotional services.

•Provisions, medicines, and utensils supplied for the use of the Sisters and the patients.<sup>33</sup>

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33 Paulinus, *A Primary Source*, 1.

On December 8, 1862, the Sisters opened the doors of the Stanton Military Hospital to one hundred and thirty patients. Soon after, Washington became one vast hospital. President and Mrs. Lincoln made it a habit to visit the military hospitals regularly, but the Stanton was one of their favorites. The President would often come late at night, and just walk the wards, talking and comforting any soldiers that still might be awake. Mrs. Lincoln sent over fresh flowers from the White House gardens and treats from the White House kitchens. In a book entitled *Recollections of Abraham Lincoln*, the President says,

Of all the forms of charity and benevolence seen in the crowded wards of the hospitals, those of some Catholic Sisters were among the most efficient. I never knew whence they came or what the name of their order was...As they went from cot to cot, the medicines prescribed, administering the cooling, refreshing, strengthening draught as directed, they were veritable Angels of Mercy...their words suited ever sufferer...How often have I seen the hot forehead of the soldier grown cool as one of these Sisters bathed it...<sup>34</sup>

The Stanton Military Hospital was also the first of its kind to take care of the soldiers that were suffering from battle fatigue and other mental illnesses caused by the war. The Sisters of Mercy isolated these war-worn soldiers in a separate building and tenderly and bravely cared for them. Soon they were caring for soldiers from all the other military hospitals as well.

In Pittsburgh, the Union established the West Pennsylvania Military Hospital completely staffed and nursed by the Sisters of Mercy of Pittsburgh. This hospital was originally used by the government for the soldiers from Pennsylvania, but soon it became the hospital for "sick and disabled soldiers as were sufficiently recovered to bear the fatigue of transportation from Washington or other places, to make room for cases direct from the fields of battle."<sup>35</sup>

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34 Ellen Ryan Jolly, LL.D., *Angels of the Battlefield*, (Providence, Rhode Island: The Providence Visitors Press, 1927), 12.

35 *Ibid.*, 18.

This freed up the Stanton and the other hospitals in Washington for the more severe cases that involved surgery. The West Penn, as it was called, soon became more than just a hospital for recovering patients. Sometimes, there would be hundreds of emergency surgical cases in one frightful day, with the sisters' duties going on into the wee hours of the morning and then starting all over again the next day.

In the summer of 1912, it was the privilege of a few representatives of the Ladies Auxilliary of the Ancient Order of Hibernians to meet in the "Land of Mary" at Mount Saint Agnes Convent, Mount Washington, which was a suburb of Baltimore."At that time (1912) there were four older nuns still alive who served in the Civil War. By the time of the monument's unveiling, all but one of the Mercies was dead. Jolly faithfully recorded their memories. It was during this interview that the sisters showed the visitors some boxes and files that contained several pieces of memorabilia. One of these was a letter from Abraham Lincoln. In another of the military hospitals in Washington, the Douglas, the sister in charge of feeding the soldiers, encountered a problem with one of the guards of the hospital larder. Provisions were short and he refused to let the Sister and her companion in to get food and supplies for the patients. She replied that in that case she would see the President herself. Within an hour, Sister returned with a letter from President Lincoln that said,

To Whom It May Concern,

On application of the Sisters of Mercy in charge of the Military Hospitals in Washington, furnish such provisions as they desire to purchase, and charge same to the War Department.

Abraham Lincoln<sup>36</sup>

As the ladies were shown the contents of the boxes and files, they were carefully writing and "accumulating reliable statistics necessary to prove to the War Department at Washington the justice

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<sup>36</sup> Jolly, *Angels of the Battlefield*, 18.

of the Hibernian appeal to the United States Government for official recognition, however belated, to the Sister's hospital service in the Civil War."<sup>37</sup> Among the files were military discharge papers and pension papers. These papers went a long way in helping to authenticate the sisters' military service. None of the sisters from any of the communities or Orders ever applied for a pension, but the point was that they could have because they were veterans. Almost as an afterthought, one more piece of memorabilia was shown: a bronze medal resting in an exquisitely carved box of Irish Oak that also contained the veteran's tiny faded American flag pin. This medal had been presented to Sister Mary Anastasia Quinn who died June 30, 1910. Here in Jolly's book, she quotes from a newspaper article in the Baltimore Catholic Sun from May 21, 1910, that was also in the box with the medal.

"...in presenting this medal, General King said, 'Sister Anastasia, you were one of those noble women sent of God as ministering angels to alleviate the sufferings of the Union soldier and nurse him back to health, to soothe the dying hero and make smooth his pathway to the grace, we are here as representatives of the Grand Army of the Republic to present to you this small token of our gratitude for services you rendered...services rendered under most trying circumstances, when these noble women abandoned all thought of self and labored to aid the sick and wounded, to sooth the last hours of many a dying comrade. We feel that you were one of us; that your sacrifices were as great as ours."<sup>38</sup>

Exactly ten days later, Sister Anastasia died and the veterans of the Grand Army of the Republic of the Potomac "paid their visit of reverence to Sister's coffin, where they placed a wreath."<sup>39</sup> I was never able to find out if there were any other nuns who were given this medal, although there are records of lay nurses that received them. This medal went a long way to help the cause for the monument. It is interesting to note that of the twenty Sisters of Mercy who served in and around Washington, D.C. during the war,

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Jolly, *Angels*, 20.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 22.

seventeen of them were from Ireland, including Sister Mary Anastasia Quinn.

In 1924, Ellen Ryan Jolly interviewed the only remaining Sister of Mercy in Pittsburgh who had survived the war, Sister Mary Madeline O'Donnell. As dutifully recorded by Ellen Ryan Jolly, in Sister Madeline's own words,

"...Obedience kept me at that time among a large group of my Sisters who nursed the soldiers in the West Penn Hospital in Pittsburgh, in which every available spot, including the corridors, was occupied by soldiers. In 1863, a second large corps of Sister-nurses was engaged in making extraordinary efforts for the sad homecoming of many of Pittsburgh's own, among them whom, there was a large percentage of the Sisters' boys; former pupils in the parochial schools. During this particular period the scourge of the Civil War was cutting deeper wounds into the hearts of all the people. The horrors of combat were constantly increasing and plans were made, which almost overnight, the hillsides of Pittsburgh were dotted with hundreds of tents, serving as emergency stations. There, canvas hospitals dotted the hills as sheep dot the knolls while they graze. My second appointment was to this city of tents which sheltered many thousands of out countrymen who had been brought to Pittsburgh from battlefields, encampments and prisons."<sup>40</sup>

**The Sisters of Mercy in Vicksburg, Mississippi.** In late December of 1860, seven Sisters of Mercy went to Vicksburg, Mississippi, from Baltimore, Maryland to open a girls school. Less than five months later they and the entire population of Vicksburg were under Union bombardment. The Naval bombardment lasted from May 19, 1862, until July 24, 1862. Federal gunboats regularly shelled the city during the period of February second until May 1863. The Maryland annals tell us, "The hardships that this group of Sisters endured cannot be estimated this side of eternity."<sup>41</sup> Sick and wounded soldiers were lying scattered around town without shelter and or help. The sisters gave up their convent and school for use as a hospital. As it was, the convent and school had already come under

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40 Jolly, *Angels*, 23.

41 Paulinus, *A Primary Source*, 48.

fire. Soon it became evident that the number of wounded and sick was just too much for the convent and school to handle. Because of the fear that the city would be taken by the Union, the hospital was moved all over the state. Sisters rode in boxcars with the wounded or in wagons with them. First they moved the hospital to Mississippi Springs, thirty miles from Vicksburg. This involved moving staff and soldiers in boxcars and by wagon. By the time they had settled in Mississippi Springs, they had 400 soldiers. Once again they had to move on because the Union was getting closer. This time they made it to Oxford, which was the home of the University of Mississippi, and closed to the rail lines. They nursed about a thousand sick and wounded from the battles of Shiloh and Corinth. Food was in short supply and the annals talk about eating "our cornbread without salt, and drank our sage tea, or sweet potato coffee."<sup>42</sup> After about six months, they were on the move again. This time "we were warned to prepare in haste for flight, as the Federals were momentarily expected."<sup>43</sup> All in all they evacuated 940 patients. The same day as they left, the Federals overtook Oxford. They arrived at Canton, Mississippi the next night. From there they went to Jackson, took over a hotel that had originally been used by the rich for country vacations. It had been so looted that there was little furniture left. But, once again, the sisters took charge and made the best of the bad situation they were handed. Jackson fell to Grant and that seems to be where Sister Stephana Wards was captured. Finally, after three years absence, the sisters made their way back to Vicksburg, to take up their teaching duties where they had left off.

**Conclusion.** It is important to remember that there were 600 Sister-nurses who participated in the Civil War. They did not just do their nursing in Washington, or safely behind the front lines. They were in the thick of the action sometimes working alone without benefit of doctors. They "nursed soldiers in camps, barns, and abandoned rail way stations, and from the decks of hospital boats. They worked without medicine, supplies, food and even shoes."<sup>44</sup>

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42 Paulinus, Angels of Mercy, 49.

43 Ibid.

44 Ibid.

Father Leray, chaplain for the Sisters at Vicksburg, once made them shoes out of rabbit fur.

A Union Army delegation arrived at the door of the Sisters of Mercy Convent in Columbus, Georgia with a stack of documents. They were oaths of allegiance to the Union that every nun was supposed to sign. "And thus," one of the nuns later said in the annals of the convent, "we, who had never been rebels, were reconstructed."<sup>45</sup>

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45 Fialka, *Sisters*, 69.