Fall 10-1-2007

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The Daughters of Charity as Civil War Nurses, Caring without Boundaries

By

BETTY ANN McNEIL, D.C.

This article highlights the mission and role of the United States Province of the Daughters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul as sister-nurses during the American Civil War (1861-1865). The significant experiences of five sisters will be used to illustrate how 270 Daughters of Charity crossed boundaries of locale, politics, and religion during wartime for the sake of the Vincentian mission. Sister Matilda Coskery, Sister Juliana Chatard, Sister Gonzaga Grace, Sister Mary Felix McQuaid, and Sister Marie Louise Caulfield will describe some of their contributions in their own words.

Under the able leadership of Sister Ann Simeon Norris, D.C. (1816-1866, visitatrix [provincial] 1859-1866), and Rev. Francis Burlando, C.M. (1814-1873, provincial director 1853-1873), the Daughters of Charity accomplished their charitable mission at sixty sites in fifteen states and the District of Columbia. Their commitment required not only great personal courage and zeal but also corporate flexibility and mobility, which enabled them to cross lines boldly, caring for war victims from both the Confederate and Union armies.

Sister Rose Noyland (1834-1909), succinctly described the spirit of the Daughters of Charity:

A protestant minister who was a constant visitor at the hospital asked me if I was ever tired. I told him I was, very often. "You must get a large salary for what you do?" I told him no less than the Kingdom of Heaven.

1 A version of this article was originally presented at the Triennial Conference on the History of Women Religious, Atchison Heritage Conference Center, Atchison, Kansas, 28 June 2004.
2 The sister nurses represent 34% of community membership during the Civil War years.
3 Sources utilized are first-person accounts, diaries, original, unpublished, nineteenth-century holographs, and other archival documents of the Civil War Collection contained in the Archives of the Daughters of Charity (ASJPH), Emmitsburg, Maryland, USA.
4 Notes of the Sisters’ Services in Military Hospitals, 1861-1865, ASJPH 7–5–1–2, #7, 122. (Hereinafter cited as Notes.)
One Sunday the convalescent patients at Satterlee Hospital had official visitors, General W.A. Hammond and General Franz Sigel. The veterans eagerly crowded the halls, except for one young man too ill to leave his bed. When the Daughter of Charity on the ward empathized with him about being unable to participate in the event, with deep feeling the patient said simply:

I would any time rather see a Sister than a general, for it was a Sister who came to me when I was unable to help myself, in an old barn near Gettysburg, where I was. She dressed my wounds and gave me a drink and took care of me until I came here.  

During the war years, no Daughter of Charity was mortally wounded in battlefield nursing. Only Sister Consolata Conlon (1842-1862), age nineteen, died as a direct result of her military service after contracting typhoid fever on the hospital transports. Sister Consolata died at Point Lookout, Maryland.

**Crossing Boundaries**

The American Daughters of Charity valiantly overcame barriers created by the Civil War. At the beginning of the War, Sisters from Emmitsburg were serving in states associated with the southern cause (Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Virginia) and in those siding with the Union (New York, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, Michigan, Illinois, Delaware, and California). They were also serving in Maryland and Missouri, both neutral states. California, where the sisters also served, functioned outside of the conflict. In spite of the national crisis, the Daughters of Charity opened new establishments during the war years while also contributing both personnel and resources to assist those engaged in combat. In their roles as Civil War nurses, the Daughters of Charity served in different locales, crossing significant sociocultural and physical boundaries. In so doing the sisters had to deal with security issues, establishing emergency strategies involving new methods for communication and delegation of authority as a result of their missions being impacted by regional politics and army movement.

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Their attitude of respect toward all parties did much to erode religious intolerance and bigotry, particularly directed toward Roman Catholics. Lt. Col. Daniel Shipman Troy, 60th Alabama Regiment (Montgomery), was one of the many Civil War veterans who relinquished anti-Catholic sentiments because of the Sisters devoted and impartial care and ministry to victims from both the North and South. Troy, an Episcopalian and son of a Mason, encountered the Daughters of Charity at Washington in Lincoln Hospital after the battle of Petersburg. In a memoir he described his experiences.6

One of the first things that impressed me [at Lincoln Hospital, Washington, D.C.] was that the Sisters made no distinction whatever between the most polished gentlemen and the greatest rapscallion in the lot; the measure of their attention was solely the human suffering to be relieved; and a miserable wretch in pain was a person of more consequence to the Sisters than the best of us when comparatively comfortable.7

Locales. The Daughters of Charity Civil War nurses were among the entrants described in the preliminary findings of a current demographic profile of candidates to the Emmitsburg community from 1809 through 1909. Of the 4999 women who entered there, the majority (55%) were born in the United States, followed by the British Isles (26%), Europe (4%), and Australia (.1%). Among ethnic groups by geographic region, entrants born in the United States, Ireland, Germany and Mexico were the largest. Sixty-one percent (1658) of the 2722 entrants born in the United States came from eight states: New York (461), Maryland (411), Pennsylvania (398), Massachusetts (272), Louisiana (174), Missouri (136), Virginia (111), and Illinois (105). Fourteen percent (695) of all entrants, or 22% of the entrants who remained in community (3199), were women from the top five cities where the Sisters of Charity had opened their earliest missions.8

6 “How I Became a Catholic,” ASJPH 10–1–20. Troy and his wife converted to Roman Catholicism, 20 April 1868, at Saint Peter’s Church, Montgomery, Alabama.
7 Ibid., 16.
During the Civil War Daughters of Charity served in eastern and western theaters of the war both within Union boundaries and in the Confederacy. Sister nurses were also mobile, and individual sisters served in different places at various times according to need and circumstance, like Sister Matilda Coskery (1799-1870), who served successively at six sites in Virginia, Maryland, and Pennsylvania. Another example is Sister Felix McQuaid (1812-1897), who left her mission in Albany, New York, to serve on transports on the Virginia-New York route, then later nursed in Frederick, Maryland, and West Philadelphia. Sisters born and bred in the South cared equally for Union victims as for Confederates, as did those who sympathized with the Federals.

![A sketch of a Civil War hospital in Frederick, MD.](image)

*Collection of the National Museum of Civil War Medicine, Frederick, MD*

Sisters reared in urban settings were subject to ministry in rural areas. Those from mountainous areas worked in seaside communities. Crossing cultural and regional boundaries brought inherent challenges, as did unforeseen local climatic conditions which could be horrific at times.

After the Battle of Gettysburg, Union authorities began using Point Lookout, Maryland, by the confluence of the Chesapeake Bay and the Potomac River, for the incarceration of up to 20,000 Confederate prisoners. Since the rebel captives were held inside wooden walled prisoner pens on the bay shore, with only tents for shelter, many fell victim to exposure, disease, and starvation. One of the sisters on duty at the Hammond Hospital complex described how a raging tornado and water spout tore a terrible path of destruction, 6 August 1864:
Our poor little Chapel shook from roof to foundation, doors and windows were blown down, and part of the walls giving way. Men, sick and wounded, were blown out on the ground, and the wards and cottages carried several feet from their base... Lumber and iron bedsteads were carried over the tops of cottages. The wards had been nearly full of patients, and several of these wards were leveled to the ground. The men who were able to move about were running in all directions for safety... the dead house [morgue] was seen twirling through the air, and the bodies... were not discovered for some time after the storm... though death had seemed imminent, yet no one was seriously injured. 9

The year General Robert E. Lee gallantly surrendered to General Ulysses S. Grant at Appomattox also marked the highest number of entrants (97) to date since the founding of the community. During the war years, almost four hundred women entered the Daughters of Charity at an average rate of seventy-seven (77) per year, and the community opened nineteen (19) new missions including some located far from Emmitsburg, e.g., California, Massachusetts, Louisiana, and Ontario.10

Culture. The sisters had to adapt to regional cultures, social mores, customs, and food. As Sister Felix McQuaid recounted: "This morning we sat down as usual to tea or coffee without milk & dry bread & as a luxury pork & beans in one dish. Only Sister Bernard [Moore] ventured upon this Yankee dish."11 All sick and wounded were treated with respect and compassion regardless of personal religious persuasion. The sisters respected the religious desires and preferences of the patient and did not proselytize among the victims, but responded holistically to their spiritual needs.

The sisters served at the pleasure of governing authorities, predominantly male, most of whom lacked direct experience in human

9 *Annals of the Civil War*, ASJPH 7–5–1–2, #6, 1:24-25.
10 *Catalogue [A-Z]*, 1809-1890, ASJPH RB #82. See also, [Sister John Mary Crumlish, D.C.], 1809-1959, 99-00.
11 *Daughters of Charity in the Civil War*, ASJPH 7–5–1–2, #8, 149. Sister Bernard Moore (1803-1907), born in Baltimore, had recently been on mission in Albany, New York, and La Salle, Illinois.
service delivery and underestimated the levels of skill and commitment required to respond effectively to the degree of human suffering and misery caused by the War. The sisters compassionate vision of charity extended across the culturescape wherever they found persons who were suffering and in need of charitable assistance.

The Infirmary of St. Francis de Sales [Richmond] had been in operation by the Sisters for the Sick in general, when the War having commenced, this house was soon made use of for the sick soldiers, May 16, 1861, the first appeal was made to the Sisters by the [Confederate] Medical Authorities, to admit their men for treatment. But very soon this building was too crowded for their benefit. The Government then took a very large house, or houses, making this a hospital. They thought their male nurses would serve their purpose, but, in a few days the Surgeon and Officers in charge, came to the Sisters of the [Saint Francis de Sales] Infirmary and [Saint Joseph’s] Asylum, begging them to come to their assistance, as the poor men were much in need of them.

Despite the usual comfort of ante-bellum Virginia, Sister Juliana recorded the following recollection: “Our hospitals were often also extremely scarce of the necessities of life... For our own table, rough corn bread and strong fat bacon were luxuries, provided the dear sufferers were better served. As for beverage, we could not always tell what they gave us for coffee or tea; for, at one time it would be sage, or some other herb, roots, beans, etc., etc.” At Saint Ann’s Military Hospital in Richmond, Virginia, as elsewhere, unexpected incidents became the routine of each day. At least once, the sisters were expected to not only be nurses but also involve themselves in character formation as educators in life-skills training.

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12 Saint Francis de Sales Infirmary may also be known as the Catholic Charitable Hospital. Sister Rose Noyland, Sister Juliana Chatard, and Sister Ann Louise O’Connell contributed to this account.

13 Daughters of Charity in the Civil War, ASJPH 7-5-1-2, #8, 115.

14 Ibid.
Upon one occasion Lady prisoners were brought to us for safe keeping, who otherwise must have been consigned to a common jail. Another time a female soldier is brought to us that she might be taught to know her place and character in life. The apprenticeship of this poor girl had been novel reading.\textsuperscript{15}

Sister Matilda Coskery recorded what the sisters faced when they arrived at Winchester, Virginia, after fleeing with their sick from Harpers Ferry in 1861.

We now heard that the Ladies of Winchester had written to the Medical Director, "not to have the Sisters of Charity serve the sick, that they [the ladies] would wait on them." ...They [the physicians] said; "No, they cared nothing for the objections that had been made to them on that matter; that those Ladies could never do for the sick as the Sisters of Charity would do, and therefore, unless we insisted on returning home [to Emmitsburg], they held us to our undertaking."\textsuperscript{16}

In her account of Satterlee Hospital, the largest Union hospital, Sister Gonzaga Grace (1812-1897), recorded that "On the 25\textsuperscript{th} of May 1862 a requisition was made by Surgeon General Hammond through Dr. I. I. [Isaac Israel] Hayes (1832-1881), for 25 Sisters of Charity to nurse the sick and wounded soldiers in the West Philadelphia Hospital... of which Dr. Hayes was named Surgeon in charge." The hospital was still under construction as the sisters were on alert to report for duty within twenty-four hours. Twenty-two Daughters of Charity arrived on the scene 9 June at 10:00 A.M., but the facility was so large that they made quite a spectacle as they searched for the entrance on the huge campus.

The workmen looked at us in amazement, thinking perhaps that we belonged to the Flying Artillery [because of our large white cornettes]; after

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{16} Annals of the Civil War It, ASJP H 7-5-1, 52.
stepping over bricks, mortar, pipes &c we were ushered in to an immense ward while a good Irishman went in search of the Surgeon in charge; he [Dr. Hayes] and his staff welcomed us, showed us our quarters and desired us to order dinner to [be] sent ourselves; he then showed us through the Hospital, of which 8 wards only were finished, their number when completed was 33, each capable of accommodating comfortably 75 patients each having a table & chair.... The Hospital grounds covered a space of fifteen acres, giving our sick ample space to move about and recreate themselves.17

One can read between the lines of Sister Gonzaga’s memoir and feel their restraint at the dining protocol they were subjected to at their first meal at Satterlee. In her own words, the sisters “could not help smiling when we saw the tea served in thick pitchers and the meat & potatoes in the basins; but there was neither knife, fork nor spoon; upon asking the cook for some, he answered, he had only four for the Officers, but as they would not dine till later, he would lend them to us, so we used them by turns.”18

17 Notes, ASJPH 7–5–1–2, #7, 394.
18 Ibid.
In 1865 at Saint Louis, when the sisters were authorized to visit the Prison of the Confederate Soldiers in order to take them nourishment, a woman gave Sister Winifred Mallon a cooked turkey. Without Sister’s knowledge, the donor had secreted a note under the turkey’s wing for one of the prisoners. When the turkey was carved, the note was discovered and Sister Winifred was held responsible despite her innocence in the matter. The affair was widely publicized in the media, and Sister Winifred was severely censured and forbidden to resume her ministry at the prison since she adamantly refused to disclose the identity of the woman who had provided the fowl.19

Security Issues. The sisters carried out their duties in the wake of spies posing as Daughters of Charity and fraudulent “nuns.”20 In addition to being subject to martial law and military sentinels on their own property at Emmitsburg during the Union encampment in June of 1863, the sisters also dealt with security patrols in and around their buildings. In Richmond the sisters were told “that they had received orders from their generals to capture Sisters of Charity, if they could, as the hospitals were in such great need of them.” Fortunately, this did not happen. At other times the sisters crossed army lines, sometimes with passports, pass words, and counter signs, often at great personal danger. For example, when the Daughters of Charity were traveling to Harpers Ferry at the request of the Confederates, the sisters crossed the Potomac River on a bridge laden with kegs of dynamite prepared for the approach of the Union Army.21

Departing from Harpers Ferry in the middle of the night, Sister Matilda Coskery remembered the reaction of the sisters’ host family who:

19 Provincial Annals, ASJPH 7-8-3, 581. Sister Mary Winifred Mallon (1811-1874) was on mission at Saint Louis Hospital in 1865. See “Sister Mary Winifred Mallon,” Lives of Deceased Sisters (1869-1875), 25.
20 Archbishop Francis Patrick Kenrick, archbishop of Baltimore (1851-1863), wrote Father Burlando, 17 December 1861, because Sisters traveling from Saint Joseph’s had caused some alarm. Major General John Adams Dix, who was the Major General of Volunteers, had charged “that ladies dressed in the costume of the Sisters of Charity furnished by the convent in Emmitsburg, have passed the lines into Virginia, for the purpose of keeping up communication with the Confederate states.” The Daughters of Charity Council wrote a detailed response refuting the charges and assuring that the Sisters serve the “poor and suffering of every nation, independent of creed or politics.” Mother Euphemia Blenkinsop, 1816-1887, ASJPH 7-2-7, 36-39.
21 Annals of the Civil War II, ASJPH 7-5-1, 52.
Wept to see us pursuing hardships [in]... an open farm wagon with two Negro men to drive.... Our trunks formed seats for us; the heavy spray from both rivers was thick in the air; here and there a star appeared between broken clouds, giving barely light enough to see the Sentinel at his post, who in turn advanced, asking the countersign.... Our wagon running on a high terrace edge, on the Potomac river, made with the darkness, a gloomy prospect before us. On reaching the Depot, an officer met us, offered to find us a shelter until the car would arrive. He conducted us over two boards raised up, and by his lantern we could see water on one side of us, so that we must watch to pick our steps lest we might get off the boards. At last he opened a little hut, whose door was almost washed by the river; here we entered, sat down resting our foreheads on our umbrellas, until between 3:00 or 4:00 [in the morning], when taking the [train] cars we arrived in Winchester in five hours.²²

Sometimes the sisters had not only the role of nurse but of peacemaker, as in Winchester, Virginia, when the sisters heard loud threats and angry jargon in the kitchen and found two men, the cook and a nurse fighting. The sisters stepped between them and mildly but firmly requested that each man "calm himself."²³ Elsewhere, another time, "a patient tried to shoot the Sister on his ward; he was arrested but later released at the sister’s request."²⁴ Sanctuary also was sometimes provided by the Sisters to persons in need. In March, 1865 two alumnae arrived at Saint Joseph’s with their infant children and nothing but the clothing on their backs.²⁵ Melissa Bennett Northrup and Emily Northrup Ryan, of South Carolina, sought refuge with the sisters en route to Lancaster, Pennsylvania. They and their children

²² Notes, ASJPH 7-5-1-2, #7, 81.
²³ Daughters of Charity in the Civil War, ASJPH 7-5-1-2, #8, 136.
²⁴ Annals of the Civil War, 8 January 1863, ASJPH 7-5-1-2, 3:106.
were homeless, having lost all when their property was burned by the Union army. Sister Juliana Chatard (1833-1917), described her experiences in Richmond at Saint Ann’s Military Hospital, concluding a passage thus: “to lay the scene truly before you is beyond any human pen.”

All kinds of misery lay outstretched before us. A terrible engagement commencing near the City (Richmond), this hospital being more convenient was made the field hospital, where all the wounded were first brought, their wounds examined and dressed, then sent to other hospitals to make room for others. This Battle lasted 7 days, commencing about 2:00 A.M. and continuing to 10 P.M. each day. The bombs were bursting and reddening the heavens. While the Reserve Corps ranged about three hundred yards from our door. While these days lasted, our poor Sisters in the [Richmond] City Hospitals were shaken by the cannonading and the heavy rolling of the ambulances filling the streets bringing in the wounded and dying men. The entire city trembled as if from an earthquake during the whole week, with the exception of a few short hours between 10 and 2:00 o’clock. Memory is surfeited over these days; hearts overflowing with anguish at the bare remembrance of them.

When news of Lee’s surrender reached Richmond, Virginia, in April of 1865, Sister Juliana Chatard recorded that the “medical stores, commissary departments, and houses of merchandise were thrown open. Liquor flowed down the streets... Stores became public property. The city trembled from the blowing up of gunboats in the [James] river... The noise of breaking windows in our hospital and neighboring dwellings added... to the alarm... the Confederates had blown up their own supplies of powder.... After the surrender, a Federal officer rode up to the door, told us we were safe, that

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25 The Seven Days Battle, 25 June through 1 July 1862.
property would be respected, that he would send a guard to protect
the house."

Emergency Strategies. Sister Servants (local superiors) received
delegated authority to send sisters from their local communities on
emergency missions on behalf of wartime relief. At the same time,
they could recall the sisters for new needs. In the midst of their
responsiveness, care of the sick and wounded was the primary
concern, not making or maintaining records of their good deeds, or
even recording their experiences. That came after the war in response
to a request of Father Burlando, who asked that the sisters make
detailed written accounts of their wartime experiences. Hence their
remarkable stories are available for the present generation.

At the meeting of the Council of the Daughters of Charity, 2
November 1861, it was decided to appoint Sister Euphemia Blenkinsop
(1816-1887), Provincial Assistant, the official representative of Sister
Ann Simeon Norris, the Visitatrix, and her Council to the Daughters of
Charity missions in the South. In her role as acting Visitatrix, Sister
Euphemia not only nursed the wounded as needed (Winchester and
Frederick) but traveled within the Confederacy to support the sisters
during this time of crisis. Almost two years later on 27 June 1863, the
Council again sent Sister Euphemia to represent Mother Ann Simeon
since they feared increasing difficulty in communicating with the
Sisters in the Confederacy. At this time, the sisters also accompanied
some pupils at Saint Joseph's Academy back to their homes in the
South. A journalist writing for the Provincial Annals conveyed the
courage of the sisters who crossed boundaries during war time for the
sake of their mission:

[We] left the next day accompanied by eight Sisters
who "had to go part of the way by Flag of Truce
boat, and for two days, and nights we were on this
miserable thing. There was hardly sitting room...

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27 Notes, ASJPH 7-5-1-2, #7, 64-5.
28 In 1866, Rev. James Francis Burlando, C.M., director of the Daughters of Charity
province of the United States, requested Sisters who had served in the Civil War to
send detailed accounts in writing. The sisters outlined much about their recollections
of the nursing and spiritual services rendered including conversions, baptisms at death,
returns of careless Catholics; and the compassionate care of consoling the dying or
wounded soldiers, and encouraging them to pray.
29 ASJPH 3-3-5-1863:312.
30 Ibid.
we took the cars [train] at Petersburg for Richmond. When we were about half way, the boiler burst, and the engineer was killed, several other persons were very seriously injured. We were in a deep swamp.51 Sister Euphemia was like an angel, going first to one and then to another. The little party arrived in Richmond52... stayed about eight weeks, and then went south to New Orleans and Mobile, even to Pensacola... where our Sisters were engaged in a military hospital. Sister Euphemia spent Christmas at Saint Simeon’s School, New Orleans and then returned to Richmond. “Had she stayed longer [in the deep south], she [would] have found herself separated from her charge of the Southern missions.”53

Adaptability characterized all that the Daughters of Charity did during the war years. In their service on the hospital transports between New York and Virginia, Rev. Francis Burlando, C.M., director, accompanied the sisters part of the way on the initial journey, bringing the group to White House Landing in Virginia near the Pamunkey River. The initial group of sisters “went to the White House by permission of [Gen. George] McClellan through Col. Murphy.”54 While Burlando spent the night aboard, the sisters enjoyed the comforts of the confiscated home of Gen. William Henry Fitzhugh Lee, a son of General Robert E. Lee. In the general’s room “Sister [Mary] Austin [Mudd] and Sister Mary Felix [McQuaid] slept in the General’s bed (across) while five other young Sisters laid on mats on the floor.... Twelve beds on floor to be piled up next morning. Second story and attic same.”55 The next day Father Burlando celebrated the Liturgy of the Eucharist (Mass) in the former Lee home on a “sideboard with marble slab &c. carved top placed on white marble mantlepiece for altar. Statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary – (Sister Oswald [Spalding’s]) 2 candles in vases with narrow necks flowers in holy water vials... next morning when suddenly on Friday... all of us must hurry out

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51 Probably the Great Dismal Swamp located near Petersburg in southeastern Virginia and northeastern North Carolina.
52 Sister Clothilda McElhinney (1837-1922), remained in Richmond on mission.
53 Provincial Annals (1846-1871), ASJPH 7-8-3, 499-500.
54 Diary of Sister Felix McQuaid, ASJPH 7-5-1-3, Folder #3, 2.
55 Ibid.
of the White House as it might be surrounded in two hours &c. &c. &c.!!'"'

Sister Mary Thomas McSwiggan (1818-1877), the sister servant at Saint Mary's Asylum, Natchez, Mississippi, described their fears during the bombardment of Natchez (2 September 1863), when shells passed over their child care institution in the city. Some shells fell in the yard but providentially no one was hurt. Residents of the city sought shelter there with the sisters. William Henry Elder (1819-1904), bishop of Natchez and later archbishop of Cincinnati, came to help five Sisters take the children about five miles out of the city to a safer area, and gave general absolution to all because of the great danger. Weeks later the Union gunboat left the area.37

Historical Background

The Sisters of Charity of Saint Joseph's was the first native sisterhood established in the United States, founded in Maryland near Emmitsburg on 31 July 1809 by Elizabeth Ann Bayley Seton (1774-1821). The mission of the Sisters of Charity was, and is, to seek out and serve persons in need, especially individuals and families living in poverty, to teach children lacking educational opportunities, and to care for sick or dying persons lacking nursing care. As a result of historical developments after the French Revolution, their ecclesiastical superiors in Baltimore, who belonged to the Society of Saint Sulpice, arranged for the sisterhood to officially unite with the French Daughters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul in 1850. The headquarters for the new United States province of the Daughters of Charity remained at the Emmitsburg foundation.

By 1861 the Sisters from Emmitsburg had a record of over fifty years of serving needy persons of all faiths, and had opened foundations as far north as New York and Massachusetts and beyond the Mississippi as far west as California. The distinctive seventeenth-century peasant dress, with its large white cornette (winged headdress) and blue-grey dress, was a familiar symbol of charity.38

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36 Ibid., 13.
37 Annals of the Civil War, ASJPH 7-5-1-2, #6, 3:106-7.
38 By this time, the Daughters of Charity had establishments in Philadelphia, New York, Baltimore, Frederick, Washington, Harrisburg, Albany, Saint Louis, Cincinnati, Wilmington, New Orleans, Boston, Mobile, Detroit, Rochester, Milwaukee, Natchez, Buffalo, Syracuse, Santa Barbara, Norfolk, Richmond, and Chicago.
The Daughters of Charity were among the six hundred sister nurses from twelve separate religious communities which served during the Civil War. By 1861, the Daughters of Charity already had more than thirty years experience in American health care: having served in three public hospitals and twelve Catholic hospitals. The Sisters/Daughters of Charity were distinguished for their expertise in service delivery and had achieved many milestones in education, health care, and social services in the United States:

1810 The first free Catholic school in the United States, at Emmitsburg
1814 The first Catholic orphanage in the United States, at Philadelphia
1828 The first Catholic hospital West of the Mississippi, at Saint Louis, Missouri
1840 The first Catholic psychiatric hospital in the United States, at Baltimore

Military Service

During the Civil War years emergency local missions of the sisters were authorized to respond to new needs as they arose. For example, when a telegram arrived on 16 May 1861 from the Confederacy requesting sisters to nurse the sick and wounded in Virginia, particularly at Richmond and Norfolk, Sister Euphemia Blenkinsop informed superiors in Emmitsburg about the situation in 1862:

We were for two long days in the very midst of the sounds of war... our poor sisters, though the shells were flying around them, did not even interrupt their duties.... The soldiers asked one another: "How is it that the sisters do not tremble? As for us, we are used to the noises of cannon and shells, but they are very

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40 The first free Catholic school for girls staffed by religious women (sisters).
41 Sister Euphemia Blenkinsop (1816-1887), was assistant to Mother Ann Simeon Norris during the Civil War and succeeded her in office (1866-1887). Due to the difficulties Emmitsburg superiors were experiencing communicating with the sisters stationed in the southern states, the Council decided in November of 1861 to send Sister Euphemia as an authorized representative of superiors in the Confederacy.
different, and yet they go about as if nothing were the matter." Others asked the sisters what we should do if the enemy should reach us in triumph! "We should remain at our post!" 42

The Daughters of Charity had a history of battlefield nursing in Europe during the seventeenth century, while their founders were still living. At that time the sisters were told: 43

Men go to war to kill one another, and you, sisters, you go to repair the harm they have done. Men kill the body and very often the soul, and you go to restore life, or at least by your care to assist in preserving it. 44

During the nineteenth century they also served in the Crimean War (1854-1856). During the Civil War the larger hospitals where the Daughters of Charity nursed included: Satterlee Hospital, Philadelphia; Lincoln Hospital, Washington, D.C.; Military Hospital, Alton, IL; United States General Hospital, Frederick, MD; Military Hospital, St. Louis, MO; and St. Francis de Sales Infirmary, Richmond. In the United States their service was characterized by flexibility and mobility as a real mission of mercy in multiple settings, including marine hospitals, prisons, temporary hospitals, and care of veterans. 45

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42 Sister Euphemia Blenkinsop, D.C., to Mother Gilberte-Elise Montcellet, D.C., 11 August 1862, as quoted in Remarks on Deceased Sisters, 1863 (printed privately), 24-25. See also Sister Camilla O'Keefe, D.C., Notes on the Civil War, Gettysburg, ASJPH 7–5–1–2.8.
43 Châlons, Sainte-Menehould, Sedan, La Fère, Stena, and Calais in France (1654-1660), and Cracow, Poland (1655).
45 In their hospitals the sisters cared for veterans in Massachusetts, Michigan, New York, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin.
A barn, transformed into a battlefield hospital after the Battle of Antietam, Keedysville, MD.

Public Domain

- **Battlefield Hospitals** (Antietam and Boonsboro, MD; Corinth, Natchez and Vicksburg, MS; Winchester, Danville, Gordonsville, and Manassas, VA; and Harpers Ferry, WV).
- **Floating Medical Transports** (Mississippi River, Potomac River, and the Chesapeake Bay).
- **Ambulance Corps** (Corinth, MS; Manassas, VA; Harpers Ferry, WV, and night evacuation to Winchester, VA).
- **Improvised Hospitals** (New Orleans, LA; Pensacola, FL; Warrington, FL; Marietta, GA; Arlington, VA; St. Louis, MO; Corinth, MS; Gettysburg, PA; Richmond, VA; Lynchburg, VA).
- **Isolation Camps** (Washington, D.C.; Point Lookout, MD; West Philadelphia, PA; Camp Sigel, WI; The Pest House, Lynchburg, VA).

*The Confederacy.* Four Daughters of Charity from Charity Hospital, New Orleans, were among the first religious women to nurse sick Confederate soldiers in late March 1861. Two months later, Mother Ann Simeon Norris, received telegrams from the Confederacy requesting sisters to nurse the sick and wounded soldiers at Richmond and Norfolk where the Daughters of Charity were already involved in hospitals. Mother Ann Simeon and her Council, in consultation with Rev. Francis Burlando, C.M., stipulated five conditions for the sisters’
service during the Civil War. The Daughters of Charity served in the following states of the Confederacy: Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri and Virginia.

The Union. Emmitsburg superiors responded to a request from the federal government by offering President Abraham Lincoln the nursing services of approximately one-fourth of the community, without the usual salary for lay nurses of twelve dollars per month. The sisters soon served with the ambulances, on the battlefield, in military hospitals, and in towns. On 5 June 1861, the Washington National Intelligencer reported:

We learn that two hundred Sisters of Charity are ready to enlist in the cause of the sick and wounded of the army, at any moment the Government may

ASJPH 7-8-3-503. These stipulations included the following: That no ladies be associated with the sisters in their duties, such would be an encumbrance rather than a help; That the sisters have entire charge of the hospitals and ambulances where they serve; That the Government pay the traveling expenses of the sisters, furnish their board and other actual necessities during the war, clothing also, in case it should be protracted; That a Catholic chaplain be in attendance. No compensation would be required by the sisters for their services.
signify to them a desire to avail itself of their services, to take charge of hospitals, ambulances for conveying the sick or wounded, or any post far or near, where the cause of humanity can be served.  

In addition to the District of Columbia, the Daughters of Charity served as Civil War nurses in the following Union States: Maryland, Massachusetts, West Virginia, Illinois, Michigan, New York, and Pennsylvania.

*Human Resources.* The Sisters first involvement in battlefield nursing and military service in the United States was during the Civil War and its aftermath. When additional Sisters were required to care for the wounded throughout the country, despite limited personnel, Daughters of Charity superiors sent as many Sisters as possible, even to the point of closing educational institutions in order to make personnel available for the war effort. In her Gettysburg account, Sister Camilla O'Keefe commented on the scarcity of available sisters to meet emerging needs during the war years:

So many there engaged in the West Philadelphia Hospital, [several] in Washington, and at Point Lookout. Only very few remained at St. Joseph's, even the Procuratrix, Sister Baptista [Dowds (1814-1871)], was down at Point Lookout with nearly twenty Sisters and where the services of the Sisters were much needed and appreciated too by the Government. Think of 16 hundred [1600] wounded brought in one day, December 16th, after the Battle of Fredericksburg, Virginia, when the Federals were defeated to pieces. Only think of 1600 in one day. Oh, that was a scene of terror.  

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58 Later the Daughters of Charity also served in the Spanish American War and in World War I.  
59 Sister Matilda Coskery, “Frederick,” *Notes*, 140.  
50 The battle at Fredericksburg, Virginia, was 13 December 1862.
Voices of Experience

Sister Matilda Coskery. Anastasia Coskery of Frederick County, Maryland, entered the Sisters of Charity of Saint Joseph's, 15 August 1828, and became known as Sister Matilda. She served in nursing roles, primarily in Baltimore, Maryland, for over twenty years and was distinguished for her skills in psychiatric nursing, particularly at Mount Hope Retreat, which became the subject of a high profile court case in 1865-1866. Untiringly, William P. Preston successfully defended the Daughters of Charity in the case and referred to Sister Matilda in his eloquent presentations:

Strike down the Sisters of Charity! Cover with infamy and disgrace an order of women, who, in the midst of every privation, in the midst of every suffering, without limit to endurance, have invariably been found wherever human woe was deemed most bitter.... Within the sound of my voice, and within this court-room, is one who upon the bloody field of Gettysburg I saw bending over the dying and the dead – binding up with her own hands the prostrate soldier’s wounds, or commending, with her earnest prayers, his departing spirit to the mercy of his God.

51 Archives of the Daughters of Charity (ASJPH), Saint Joseph’s Provincial House, Emmitsburg, MD, USA. Biographical and Mission Records of individual sisters are taken from the following sources: Treasurer’s Notebook of Sister Margaret George, RB #69; Sisters/Daughters of Charity Catalogue [A–Z], 1809–1890, RB #82; Sisters/Daughters of Charity Notes, A–Z, 1809–1890, RB #375.
52 Sister Matilda Coskery (1799–1870), served on the following missions of the Sisters/Daughters of Charity: Mt. St. Mary’s, Emmitsburg, MD (1831–1833); Maryland Hospital, Baltimore, MD (1833–1840); Mount Saint Vincent’s [later Mount Hope] (1840–1860); St. Joseph’s School, Baltimore, MD (1860); Central House, Emmitsburg, MD (1860–1870). Sister Matilda died 12 June 1870, at Saint Joseph’s Central House, and is buried in the original community cemetery at Emmitsburg. See “Sister Matilda Coskery,” Lives of Our Deceased Sisters 1869–1875, 10.
When she first became involved in Civil War relief, Sister Matilda was sixty-two years of age and on mission at Saint Joseph’s Central House, Emmitsburg. She left extraordinary first-hand accounts of the sisters’ service at Harpers Ferry, Winchester, Frederick, Antietam, Boonsboro and Gettysburg. In addition, Sister Matilda also summarized the activities of the sisters at White House Landing, Virginia, and Alton, Illinois. Sister Matilda detailed how the sisters traveled bravely to Harpers Ferry as they crossed “over the Potomac Bridge, on which kegs of powder were already placed, so that in the moment of the Enemy’s approach, it might be destroyed.”

On the 9th we left by stage for Frederick City, with a good out-fit of prudence, caution etc. from our dear Mother Ann Simeon [Norris], lest we might meet trouble, as we had the Northern Army, and sentinels to pass – An escort had been sent for us, but the Telegram had left him far behind, and we met our intended Guide without knowing it, he passing on to St. Joseph’s for us....

An expected [military] engagement kept villagers and farmers quietly at home, and men cautiously whispered their fears, or opinions – and to see people

Notes, ASJPH 7-5-1-2, #7, 61.
bold enough to travel just then, was looked at with surprise. For this reason the Sisters tried to sit back in the stage, hoping to pass unobserved – but halting in a little Town for mail, the driver opening the stage door, and handing a Letter, said in a loud voice: “Sisters a gentleman in Emmitsburg desires you to put this Letter in the Southern post office, after you cross the line.” – All eyes of the astonished people were on us [in our navy-blue habit with large white cornette], and we too, were not even aware of the driver’s knowing of our destination – Nothing more, however, was said, and we passed on....

The heat was excessive – One of our horses gave out – ...As hostilities had stopped the [train] cars, we had to continue our journey in the stage – ...Almost sick with the heat, we journeyed on until another horse gave out – here again suspense. The rocks of the Maryland heights on our right, and the Potomac River on the left – here our carriage got fastened in the road, and we feared, we could have to walk our way....

Sister Juliana Chatard.56 Juliana Chatard, of Baltimore, entered the Sisters of Charity of Saint Joseph’s, 28 August 1857. During her sixty years as a Daughter of Charity, Sister Juliana served in educational and leadership roles in various locations from New York to Alabama. She was on mission in Richmond, Virginia, as a young sister of only twenty-eight years when she distinguished herself in

55 Ibid.
56 Sister Juliana Chatard (1833-1917), served on the following missions of the Sisters/Daughters of Charity: Saint Joseph’s Academy, Emmitsburg, MD (1858-1861); St. Joseph’s School, Richmond, VA (1861-1865); St. Joseph’s Central House, Emmitsburg, MD (1865-1882); St. Mary’s Asylum, Mobile, AL (1882-1885); St. Joseph’s Central House (1885); House of Guardian Angel, Philadelphia (1885-1894); St. Joseph’s Central House (1894-1895); Infant Home, Utica, NY (1895); St. Joseph’s Central House (1895-1900); Seton House, Troy, New York (1900-1902); St. Joseph’s Central House (1902-1917). For 16 years (1867-1882), Sister Juliana was responsible for the formation of new members of the Daughters of Charity as seminary directress (novice mistress). Sister Juliana died at Saint Joseph’s Central House, 26 April 1917, and is buried in the original community cemetery.
Civil War services in the capital of the Confederacy, and wrote a first-hand account of her experiences. The Sisters served in Richmond at Saint Francis de Sales Infirmary, The Richmond General Hospital #1 (the Alms House Hospital), and Saint Ann's Military Hospital.57

Sister Rose Noyland (1834-1909), a sister who worked there with Sister Juliana, recorded that "Mrs. President [Jefferson] Davis often came to the [Richmond General] Hospital to see the Union sick soldiers. She supplied [them] with tobacco, cigars, soap, razors, and anything they asked for. She requested the Sisters not to let patients know who she was. The Confederates, she said, she knew would want nothing. The soldiers were most grateful and respectful to the sisters."58

Sister Mary Gonzaga Grace.59 At age fifty Sister Mary Gonzaga Grace, who was then on mission at Saint Joseph's Orphan Asylum in Philadelphia, was asked to coordinate the nursing care by the Daughters of Charity at Satterlee Hospital in West Philadelphia. Sister Gonzaga wrote an account of the sisters experiences at Satterlee, the largest hospital in the Union, where they were also responsible for the kitchen and storeroom.60 Sister Gonzaga recorded the essentials of what soon transpired:

In a short time our number was increased to nearly nine hundred many were ill with Typhoid fever, swamp fever, chronic dysentery &c., &c. — On the 16th of Aug't [August], over 1500 sick

57 Daughters of Charity in the Civil War, ASJPH7-5-1-2, #8, 115.
58 Notes, ASJPH 7-5-1-2, #7, 122.
59 An orphan and convert, Anne (Agnes Mary) Grace (1812-1897), of Baltimore, entered the Sisters of Charity of Saint Joseph's in March 1827, and was known as Sister Mary Gonzaga when she went on her first mission to the Free School and Asylum, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania (1828-1830). Afterwards she served at St. John's Asylum, Philadelphia (1830); St. Joseph's Asylum, Philadelphia (1830-1844); the Sisters of Charity Novitiate (1844-1845); Charity Hospital, New Orleans (1845-1847); Select School, Baton Rouge, Louisiana (1847-1848); St. Mary's Asylum, Mobile (1848-1849); Charity Hospital, New Orleans (1849-1850); St. Vincent's House, Donaldsonville, Louisiana (1850-1851); St. Joseph's Asylum, Philadelphia (1851-1855); Paris (1855-1856); St. Joseph's Central House, Emmitsburg (1856-1857); Procuratrix (elected 1859); St. Joseph's Asylum, Philadelphia (1857-1887); St. Joseph's Central House, Emmitsburg (1887-1889); and St. Joseph's Asylum, Philadelphia (1889-1897) where she died. She is buried in Saint Mary's Cemetery in Philadelphia. Sister Gonzaga also served as procuratrix for the United States province of the Daughters of Charity (1859-1865). See also Eleanor C. Donnelly, Life of Sister Mary Gonzaga Grace (1900).
60 Notes, ASJPH 7-5-1-2, #7, 394.
& wounded soldiers were brought to the Hospital, most of them from the battle of Bull Run; many had died on the way from exhaustion; others were in a dying state, so that the Chaplain Father [Peter P.] McGrane was sent to administer the last sacraments: we took care to furnish them with some good beef essence.\textsuperscript{61}

When cases of smallpox occurred at Satterlee, the ill were segregated in a separate location (Small Pox Hospital) at a distance from the city. Sister Gonzaga recorded that the patients were "were more distressed on account of their being sent away from the Sisters, than they were for having the disease: it was heart rending when the ambulance came to hear the poor fellows beg to be left even if they were entirely alone provided the Sisters would be near them to have the sacraments administered in case of danger [of death]."\textsuperscript{62}

We offered our services several times to attend these poor sick, but were told the Government had ordered them away to prevent the contagion spreading. At last our Surgeon in charge obtained permission to keep the smallpox patients in the camp some distance from the Hospital, the Tents were made very comfortable with good large stoves to heat them and flies (double covers) over the tops; the next thing was to have a Sister in readiness in case their services should be required; every one was generous enough to offer her service, but I [Sister Gonzaga] thought it most prudent to accept one who had had the disease.\textsuperscript{63}

Once the soldiers heard a Sister had been assigned to the camp, "they said, well, if I get the smallpox now, I don't care because our Sister will take care of me."\textsuperscript{64}

During the period 9 June 1862 to 3 August 1865, a total of ninety-one Daughters of Charity were on duty at Satterlee. After the

\textsuperscript{61} \textit{Ibid.}, 395. At this time Father Peter P. McGrane, a former Redemptorist, was assigned to Saint Patrick's Church, 20\textsuperscript{th} and Locust Avenue in Philadelphia.

\textsuperscript{62} \textit{Ibid.}, 400.

\textsuperscript{63} \textit{Ibid.}, 401.

\textsuperscript{64} \textit{Ibid.}
war when the government no longer had need of the sisters' services and they withdrew:

[On] the eve of our departure the executive officer said to me: "Sister, allow me to ask you a question; has there ever been any misunderstanding or dissatisfaction between the Officers and Sisters since we came to this hospital?" I answered, "None at all"; he said, "well, I'll tell you why I asked; the other evening we were at a party, the conversation turned on the Sisters in the hospital. I said there never had been a falling-out between any of us at Satterlee [Hospital], that we were all on the same good terms as the first day we met; some of the City Hospital Doctors said, they did not believe that forty women could live together without disputing, much less be among such a number of men."65

*Sister Mary Felix McQuaid.* Elizabeth McQuaid, of Philadelphia, entered the Sisters of Charity of Saint Joseph's, 6 December 1829, and became known as Sister Mary Felix. She was active in various roles in orphanages and schools of the Daughters of Charity until she became involved in Civil War transport services from Virginia to New York in the summer of June 1862. At that time Sister Mary Felix was on mission at St. John's School, Albany, New York. At age fifty she became the sister servant (superior) of a group of sisters assigned to the *Commodore, Louisiana,* and the *Vanderbilt.* Sister

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66 *Sister Mary Felix McQuaid* (1812-1897) served on the following missions of the Sisters/Daughters of Charity: St. Joseph's School, Richmond, Virginia (1832-1841); St. Patrick's, New York (1842-1844); St. Joseph's School, New York, New York (1844-1846); St. Joseph's Asylum, Washington, D.C. (1846-1850); Orphan Asylum, Philadelphia (1850-1854); St. Joseph's Asylum, Richmond (1854-1858); St. Mary's, Philadelphia (1858); St. Joseph's Central House (1858-1859); St. Mary's, Philadelphia (1858-1860); Paris (1860); St. Mary's Hospital, Troy Hospital, Troy, New York (1861-1864); General Hospital, Frederick, Maryland (1864); West Philadelphia [Satterlee] (1864-1865); St. Vincent's Asylum, Syracuse, New York (1865-1866); St. Mary's School, Dedham, Massachusetts (1866-1867); St. Joseph's, Philadelphia (1867); St. Mary's, Rochester (1870-1873); St. John's, Albany (1873-1880); St. Joseph's House of Providence, Syracuse, New York (1880); St. Joseph's Central House, Emmitsburg (1880-1897). Sister Mary Felix died at St. Joseph's Central House, 10 March 1897, and is buried in the original community cemetery at Emmitsburg.
Felix recorded her experiences on the transports in a diary recently discovered and transcribed, in which she describes the sisters upon arriving in New York from Albany as “hungry, thirsty & fatigued.” This became the norm of their life on the transports. Traveling down the Chesapeake Bay and along Virginia waterways, Sister Felix recorded their observations en route.

Stopped at Fortress Monroe [Virginia] about 2 hours, took another boat for White House [Landing], which we reached in 7 hours from noon till 7 p.m. Saw Yorktown, the tall tree where torpedoes were buried, house where [Charles] Cornwallis [1738-1805], signed the surrender of Yorktown & c. Chimney where skirmish took place & c., large hospital here and camp.

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67 Diary of Sister Felix McQuaid, ASJPH 7-5-1-3, Folder #3, 1.
68 Known as “The White House,” the home of the middle son of Robert E. Lee, William Henry Fitzhugh Lee, which Federal troops had confiscated. It no longer stands. The site was chosen by General McClellan to serve as the primary supply base for his Army of the Potomac during its operations against Richmond in 1862. It served as such from the third week of May until 28-29 June 1862. Mary Custis Lee (Mrs. Robert E. Lee) had taken refuge here until May 1862, departing just before the Union troops assumed control. The place became an immense hospital as the campaign evolved. See Georgeanna Woolsey Bacon and Eliza Woolsey Howland, My Heart Toward Home: Letters of a Family During the Civil War (Roseville, MN: Edinborough Press, 2001), 252.
69 ASJPH 7-5-1-2, #7, 512. Colonel Lord Charles Cornwallis surrendered at Yorktown, Virginia, on 19 October 1781, thus bringing the American Revolution to a victorious conclusion for the colonists of the United States.
Sister Marie Louise Caulfield. Mary Louise Caulfield (1821-1905), born in Ireland but later from New Orleans, entered the Sisters of Charity of Saint Joseph's, 7 April 1838, and was known as Sister Marie Louise. She served in top-level secretarial roles which supported the mission of the sisters. At the age of forty-two when preparing to retire the night of Saturday, 27 June 1863, she heard unusual noises and realized that 80,000 Union troops were approaching the sisters' property. In addition to serving at Gettysburg, Sister Marie Louise recorded the hazards of the Union encampment at the sisters' motherhouse. For the next few days, the “Sisters were engaged all day slicing meat, buttering bread, filling canteens with coffee and milk for the ceaseless tide of famished soldiers, and when were soldiers known to be in any other condition!”

General Philippe Regis de Trobriand, a Frenchman in the Union army, went to the belfry of the 1841 Bruté Building of Saint Joseph's Academy. From its cupola and belvedere, designed for astronomical observation, de Trobriand surveyed the surrounding

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71 Provincial Annals (1863), ASJPH 7-8-3, 522.
land in light of battle strategy. There the General encountered curious Seminary Sisters [novices] who were also studying the spectacle of the Union encampment on the Central House campus, and he said:

Permit me to make one request of you. Ask Saint Joseph to keep the rebels [Confederates] away from here; for, if they come before I get away, I do not know what will become of your beautiful Convent.72

In her account Sister Mary Louise included the alarming experience of Sister Mary Jane Stokes (1834-1919), who at that time had charge of the farm and hands [workers] at St. Joseph's.

During the next few days the Army concentrated thickly in the neighborhood. There were encampments everywhere. A force was stationed in what we call "Pig Park," the large and beautiful woods contiguous to our garden.73 General Carl Schurz and staff occupied the Asylum (White House); Gen. [George] Meade made the Father's house in town his headquarters; Gen. [Daniel Edgar] Sickles was at the Bridge; Gen. De Trobiant [sic, de Trobriand] at the Lady of the Field, he it was who placed guards; he had his "vivandiere" [and] left us a beef. Private soldiers flooded the land, but were respectful and polite.

The soldiers made their appearance here, as well as I can remember about three in the afternoon. We were going down to the barn, Sister Camilla [O'Keefe], the Treasurer, and I, to see about them there, when we turned around, and here was a whole pack of them at the house behind us. The poor fellows looked

72 Provincial Annals (1942), ASJPH 7-8-28, 14. See also Regis de Trobriand, Four Years with the Army of the Potomac, George K. Duchy, trans. (Boston: Ticknor and Company, 1889), 486. None of the Sisters nor their property was harmed. In gratitude the Daughters of Charity erected a monument in honor of Our Lady of Victory, dating to 1571 a traditional French devotion in thanksgiving for the victory of the Christian fleet over the Turkish fleet at the Battle of Lepanto.

73 This area is now the wooded grove beside Sacred Heart Cemetery east of Saint Joseph's Provincial House, Emmitsburg, Maryland.
half-starved, lank as herrings, and barefoot. They were on their way to the Gettysburg battle. Well, the Sisters were cutting bread, and giving them to eat as fast as they came for it, all the evening, and I was afraid there would be no bread left for the Sister's supper. However, they had supper, and plenty. After supper, I belonged to the kitchen Sisters, I went to Mother Ann Simeon [Norris], and told her I didn't know what the Sisters would do for breakfast next morning, for they would have no bread. Then I went to see, and the baking of the day was there. I did not see it multiplied, but I saw it there.74

About dawn “a sudden order was given to strike tents and march for Gettysburg. In fifteen minutes it was done, and St. Joseph’s Valley [and Emmitsburg] relapsed into quiet.”75 Within a brief time, “The country [Emmitsburg area] now changed hands for a little time, and the Southern Grey swept round St. Joseph’s, not in large force, but detachments of cavalry, picket men etc.”76 Seeing the Daughters of Charity property as he marched by, Private Butt, a young man from a Virginia Company, asked to be remembered to his sister, Virginia (Ginny) Butt of Norfolk, Virginia, who was then a pupil at Saint Joseph’s Academy.77

Immediately after the encampment, the roar of the battle at Gettysburg echoed through Saint Joseph’s Valley, where life was anything but routine. Every eligible Sister that could possibly be mobilized had been sent on military missions among the sick and wounded of both armies. Amidst the crises unforeseen events also developed. One day during the battle of Gettysburg, Sister Appolonia Tiernan (1840-1915), decided to get a head start on cooking the noon meal at Saint Joseph’s, and had the idea of going to the ice house to get the meat for dinner before her breakfast. Unfortunately the ladder gave way under her and she fell onto the ice where she was stranded for hours, hearing the cannons of Gettysburg, until a poor workman heard her screams and rescued her. This incident resulted in severe health problems for Sister Appolonia for the next sixteen years, until

74 Provincial Annals (1863), ASJPH 7-8-3, 521.
75 Ibid., 524.
76 Ibid., 514.
77 Ibid., 515.
she was the subject of an unexplained cure in 1879 enabling her to continue in active ministry for thirty-six years.78

Sister Camilla O'Keefe.79 Serving at Saint Joseph's at the time, Sister Camilla O'Keefe (1815-1887), left a moving account of the devastation the Daughters of Charity encountered at Gettysburg after the great battle.

About noon on the first of July we [in Emmitsburg] heard very distinctly, the cannonading, Boom, Boom, so terrific. This kept on until the afternoon of the 4th.... Father Burlando got the carriage, taking two Sisters

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78 Provincial Annals (1879), ASIPH 7–8–5, 5–8. After exhausting all available medical treatments she returned to Emmitsburg and was thought to be dying of a large abdominal tumor. The sisters began a novena of prayer and she was miraculously cured, 2 February 1879, after receiving Holy Communion. Sister Appolonia resumed ministry at Saint Joseph's for thirty-six more years until her death, 11 September 1915. She is buried in the original cemetery of the Daughters of Charity.

79 Joanna O'Keefe (1815-1887), born in Ireland, entered the Sisters of Charity of Saint Joseph's, 8 September 1836. Sister Camilla served on the following missions: St. Vincent's School, Martinsburg, West Virginia (1838-1841); St. Mary's Asylum, Mobile, Alabama (1841-1850); St. Vincent's School, St. Louis (1851-1853); Charity Hospital, New Orleans (1853-1856); Sisters Hospital, Buffalo (1856-1863); Saint Joseph's Central House, Emmitsburg (1863-1867); St. Rose's Asylum, Milwaukee (1867-1884); and Saint Joseph's Central House, Emmitsburg (1884-1887). She died at Emmitsburg, 7 May 1887, and is buried in the original cemetery of the Sisters of Charity. See “Sister Camilla O'Keefe,” Lives of Our Deceased Sisters 1880–1890, 92.
with him, fourteen were in the omnibus and off they started... on reaching the battlefield, awful! To see the men lying dead on the road — some by the side of their horses. O, it was beyond description! Hundreds of both armies lying dead almost on the track [so] that the driver had to be careful not to pass over the bodies. O! this picture of human beings slaughtered down by their fellow men in a cruel civil war was perfectly awful.80

The sisters were fortunate that a Mr. McClellan, an inn keeper, welcomed their delegation and permitted them to use the parlors of his hotel as their headquarters.81 Initially Father Burlando and some of the officers accompanied the sisters to the various places where victims had been taken. In addition to ministry on the battlefield and in temporary field hospitals, the Daughters of Charity also nursed in the following sites at Gettysburg: Saint Francis Xavier Church Hospital; Methodist Church Hospital; and the Pennsylvania College Hospital. Sister Camilla graphically described what the sisters encountered:

Impossible to describe the condition of those poor wounded men, the weather was warm and very damp for some days after the battle. Generally the case where there is so much powder used, [that] they were covered with vermin [and] actually that we could hardly bear this part of the filth. We didn’t see a woman in the whole place that evening. They either escaped away in the country or hid in the cellars. The following day they appeared in their homes frightened and looking like ghosts — so very terrified the poor women were during the fearful battle, no wonder! The Sisters lay on the floor that [first] night, [and] did not sleep much, on the following day Mother Ann Simeon Norris sent us beds and covering — also

80 Notes of Sister Camilla O’Keefe, ASJPH 7–5–1–4, #10, 5.
81 McClellan’s Hotel was known as McClellan’s House during the Civil War. Today it is the Gettysburg Hotel, located at the town square. The hotel has had several names since its foundation: Scott’s Tavern (1797–1809); Indian Queen (1810–1816); Gettysburg Hotel (1816–1826); Franklin House (1827–1851); McClellan House (1852–1889); and Hotel Gettysburg (1890–1964).
cooked hams, coffee, tea and whatever she thought the Sisters actually needed... For three miles outside of the town was converted into an Hospital by tents and the farm houses. Ambulances were provided for the sisters to take clothing, etc. out to the wounded many, hundreds, of whom lay on the ground on their blankets.

The corps of the Daughters of Charity were assigned by twos to each hospital as far as numbers permitted, while two sisters returned to Emmitsburg for additional supplies and relief personnel. The surgeon introduced the sisters to the other volunteers at the first hospital by saying: "Ladies and male nurses also, here are the Sisters of Charity who have come to serve our wounded, they will give all the directions here; you are only required to observe them. They bowed their assent."82 "Every large building in the Town, was now being filled, as fast as the wounded could be brought in. In, and around the Town, one hundred and thirteen Hospitals were in operation besides those in private homes."83

Connections and Separations

The Klimkiewicz Sisters. Sister Mary Veronica Klimkiewicz (1837-1930), was on duty at Gettysburg when her brother, Thaddeus, was discovered and brought to her post for care. When the Baltimore News published her obituary, the article noted that Sister Mary Veronica was "believed one of the few women not in the service of their country ever accorded military honors at burial."84 Their sister, Sister Serena Klimkiewicz (1839-1909), had also served at Gettysburg.

Going over a field encampment we found the brother of one of our Sisters, who was in a hospital in the town. He had been wounded in the chest and in the ankle. The kind officer allowed him to be removed to

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82 Sister Matilda Coskery, Memoir of the Civil War, Gettysburg, ASJPH 7-5-1-2:54.
83 Ibid., 53.
84 The Baltimore News, 27 March 1930, 19.
the hospital where his Sister was stationed. They had not seen each other for nine years.85

Sister Hildgardis Hewitt. Catherine Mary (Kate) Hewitt was born 1 April 1836, in Oswego, New York, to Richard Hewitt, a soldier, and Jamina Maloney Hewitt. In 1860 Kate entered the Academy of the Sacred Heart at Torresdale, Pennsylvania, as a boarder, along with a younger adopted sister, Catherine Dunn, for whom she seems to have served as a governess. Shortly before her twenty-fifth birthday Catherine was baptized as a Roman Catholic, 18 March 1861.

In 1863, Catherine Mary (Kate) Hewitt (b. 1836) was engaged to Union Major General John F. Reynolds, whom she had met three years earlier (probably on a sailing vessel when both were traveling from San Francisco to New York). The couple had exchanged rings, she receiving his West Point class ring, and he a delicate gold ring with the inscription “Dear Kate” to wear on his little finger. Their relationship and intent to marry were only revealed after his untimely death at Gettysburg within the first hours of the battle on the 1st of July. The couple had planned to announce their engagement at a family party on 8 July. Kate had promised Reynolds that she would enter religious life in the event he was killed.

Three years later after having lived with the sisters at Mount Hope Retreat, Baltimore, Maryland, as a postulant (candidate), Miss Hewitt entered the Daughters of Charity on 17 March 1864. She completed her initial formation as a Daughter of Charity at Saint Joseph’s Central House and was sent on mission as Sister Hildgardis to Saint Joseph’s School, Albany, New York. She withdrew from the Daughters of Charity, 3 September 1868, prior to making vows for the first time.86 The Reynolds–Hewitt love story remains a romantic theme of Gettysburg lore, but the rest of Kate Hewitt’s life seems to have eluded the historical records.

Sister Mary Ulrica O’Reilly.87 William and Henry Seton, sons of William Seton II (1796-1868) and Emily Prime Seton (1804-1854) of

86 Catalogue [A-Z], 1809-1890, n.p., ASJPH RB #82; Council Minutes (31 August 1868), ASJPH 3-3-5, 433. Additional information about Catherine Mary Hewitt was published by Kalina K. Anderson, “The Girl He Left Behind,” America’s Civil War (July 1999).
87 Mary O’Reilly (1815-1888), entered the Sisters of Charity at Emmitsburg in 1839, but in 1846 transferred to the Sisters of Charity of New York.
Cragdon (New York City), and grandsons of Elizabeth Bayley Seton, were both Union Army officers during the Civil War. Captain William Seton from the 4th New York regiment was wounded badly in the legs twice 17 September 1862. As a result he returned to New York for medical treatment at Saint Joseph Military Hospital, where the Sisters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul of New York cared for critical patients who were known only by an identification number. Sister Mary Ulrica nursed Captain Seton back to life from near death. As he recovered and began to converse with his care-giver he revealed his earlier ties to Emmitsburg, where he had attended Mount Saint Mary’s College. The patient identified himself as William Seton III (1835-1905), and explained his relationship to Mother Seton. When the American Civil War erupted, Major Henry Seton (1838-1904), returned to the United States from Austria and enlisted, accepting a commission as captain in the 64th NY Infantry Volunteers. He served on the staff of several general officers.

**Conclusion**

Preserving the Daughters of Charity legacy of charity and communicating the dedication of these women, sometimes called “Angels of the Battlefield,” invites creative strategies. Some venues for telling their stories of heroism and compassion includes public awareness and educational programs utilizing various formats and media, including lectures, media presentations, storytelling, publications and exhibits.

The Daughters of Charity are among the twelve communities honored on a monument dedicated to the memory of Catholic Sister nurses, who served in hospitals, floating transports, and on battlefields during the Civil War. The monument, authorized by an Act of Congress approved 29 March 1918, is located in Washington, D.C., across from Saint Matthew’s Cathedral.
The National Museum of Civil War Medicine in Frederick, Maryland, highlights a life-size mannequin of a Daughter of Charity, and panels about other sister nurses from various communities, in a display on Civil War nursing. Furthermore, the reference collection in the research library of this facility includes an annotated typescript of first-person accounts, *The Daughters of Charity in the Civil War* (2002).

*Maryland Civil War Trails* collaborated with the Daughters of Charity in erecting three panels on the property of St. Joseph’s Provincial House at Emmitsburg. These panels recognize the 1863 union encampment there, the role of the sister nurses during the war years, and the unique connection with General John Reynolds through his fiancée, Kate Hewitt, who entered the Daughters of Charity after his death.

The reference collection in the library of the Chimborazo Museum in the National Battlefield Park (NBP), Richmond, Virginia, includes an annotated typescript of first-person accounts, *The Daughters of Charity in the Civil War* (2002), for the convenience of researchers. NBP staff have worked in collaboration to display a portrait of Sister Juliana Chatard, who directed the sisters services in Richmond. A National Park Ranger at Gettysburg studied the persona and documents of Sister Juliana Chatard in order to make authentic living history presentations on her experiences.

Preserving and passing on the Daughters of Charity tradition of care and compassion tells a unique story of faith and service.
impelled by the love of Christ. Their example still gives inspiring witness of the daring and dedication of women who risked all for the sake of their mission by valiantly crossing boundaries of locale, politics, and religion during wartime.