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# “WHAT THE WOMEN OF MAINE HAVE DONE”: WOMEN’S WARTIME WORK AND POSTWAR ACTIVISM, 1860-1875

BY LISA MARIE RUDE

*Maine women had been active in reform movements during the antebellum era. They joined mother’s associations, temperance groups, abolitionist societies, and woman suffrage organizations. Although the Civil War did not create activists, it did strengthen them, while opening the door for other women to become activists. The war provided an unprecedented opportunity for the women of Maine to be actors in the public sphere. Postwar women’s movements in Maine were therefore fueled by their agency on the home front during the war. The author is currently a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Maine, working under the supervision of Dr. Mary Hough. In 2007, she received her master’s degree in women’s history from Sarah Lawrence College, where her research centered on how Betty Ford refocused the American perspective on the First Ladyship. Her current work at the University of Maine examines the sources of influence on the First Lady, and the nature of power and politics.*

WARS OFTEN have unintended consequences. Begun in April 1861 as a war to preserve the political union between the northern and southern states, the Civil War ultimately transformed American society in a number of ways. The relationship of the states to the federal government, the place of African Americans in American society, and the labor system in the South were all changed by the war. Women’s rights activists also called for change. Just as African American men helped their own cause for civil rights by fighting in the war, many northern women hoped their wartime efforts on behalf of the Union would lead to citizenship rights. As the *Portland Daily Advertiser* noted in a July 1862 article entitled, “What the Women of Maine Have Done,” Maine women

have yielded up loved ones sufficient to meet the calls of the government, and will continue to do so. They have worked for the sick and dying; they have given from their often scanty resources, to add comforts to the camp and the hospital; they have prayed and wept for their country; they have sent their hearts along to the battle-field with their heroes, there to keep them, while a northern soldier sweats and bleeds beneath a southern sun.<sup>1</sup>

As the article's title made clear, the women of Maine had done quite a lot to preserve the Union. Many Maine women hoped their efforts would reap rewards after the war.

Women's historians have debated the extent to which wartime work fostered the growth of women's activism after the war.<sup>2</sup> Certainly one of the leading suffragists of the nineteenth century thought that was the case. According to Elizabeth Cady Stanton, the Civil War had "created a revolution in woman herself, as important in its results as the changed conditions of former slaves."<sup>3</sup> In Maine, the Civil War provided an unprecedented opportunity for women to be actors in the public sphere through activism, volunteerism, and wage labor. Women supported the Union war effort in a number of ways, both public and private. During the war, many Maine women worked outside of the home by forming soldiers' aid societies, by caring for wounded soldiers as nurses, or by filling in for male relatives at factories or stores. Women also expanded their domestic roles while their husbands, brothers, and fathers were away at war. Wartime work gave women in Maine a view of life beyond their traditional sphere. Whether or not they had been engaged in benevolence and social activism work before the war, women's work during the war strengthened their resolve to engage in such forms of activism after the war. Postwar women's movements in Maine were therefore fueled by their work on the home front during the war.

### **Women's Roles and the Cult of True Womanhood in Antebellum Maine**

In the early nineteenth century, American society was transitioning out of the Revolutionary period and into a new, changing, and often-contentious era. In this new era, ideas about women and their role in the new country shifted. Women were now held up on a pedestal, and characterized as passive, submissive, and the moral guardians of society. This characterization was known as "true womanhood."<sup>4</sup> The notion of true womanhood proposed that a woman's place was in the home; as such her political role was limited to raising virtuous and patriotic sons. According to historian Mary Beth Norton, "Women's domestic and mater-

nal role came to be seen as so important that it was believed women sacrificed their femininity if they attempted to be more (or other) than wives and mothers.”<sup>5</sup> As a Hallowell newspaper noted in 1843, a woman’s “highest ambition was to secure, as her husband, some industrious young farmer, and . . . make him a good wife.” In reality, though, women were not all the “precious porcelains of human clay” that society thought them to be.<sup>6</sup>

Despite this ideal of domesticity, many antebellum women were engaged in public life, through either benevolence work or wage labor. Regarding the latter, many middle- and working-class Maine women found work in the new textile factories in New England.<sup>7</sup> Regardless of contemporary norms, increased production in textile mills across New England opened spaces for women to join the work force, either out of need for wages or to escape farm work. Young female workers were often sought by New England factory owners in the early years of industrialization. Women and girls could be paid less than their male counterparts – often a fourth or third of what men made in similar occupations.<sup>8</sup> Thus, women provided factories with a steady supply of cheap labor. In addition, these young women were likely to marry and leave the factory for their husband’s home after a few years, thereby (in theory) avoiding the creation of a permanent proletariat class as had emerged in industrial centers in Europe.<sup>9</sup> In the 1830s, women and girls represented a majority of workers in the emerging textile industry in New England, and as late as 1850, were about a quarter of the manufacturing labor force in the United States.<sup>10</sup> Maine factories, including those in Saco, Portland, and Lewiston, advertised for women workers in the antebellum years. “Wanted, six or eight good coat makers and several girls to learn the trade,” went one 1848 notice in the *Maine Cultivator & Hallowell Gazette*.<sup>11</sup>

Regardless of their social class, women shared in the same experiences of being confined, by virtue of their gender, to social and cultural strictures of the early nineteenth century. Yet, there were real differences between the lives of working-class and middle-class women. As historian Sara M. Evans has noted, “Most working-class women paid little heed to the canon of domesticity. It fit too little of their reality to prompt any desire for emulation or conformity to its tenets.”<sup>12</sup> A growing middle-class of women could afford not to work wage labor jobs, nor did many particularly want to do so. While working-class women often labored outside of the home, most middle-class women did not. Even if they wanted professional careers, well-educated middle-class women found them-

selves excluded as a result of new professional licensing practices.<sup>13</sup> Above all, society told them they were supposed to be the ones who, as historians Edward O. Schriver and Stanley R. Howe put it, “looked after the needs of the family and provided moral training for the children. As guardians of society’s more refined virtues, they were supposed to exhibit piety, purity, submission, and domesticity.” This construction of “woman” prevented women from seeking careers or entering politics.<sup>14</sup> Yet, some middle-class women took on other public roles.

Although many women accepted their roles in the domestic realm, the narrowing of “proper spheres” caused discontent among a growing number of educated middle-class women. Many of these women took their business skills into the field of benevolence work. Early benevolence workers began as economic, social, and educational problem solvers in their own communities.<sup>15</sup> Class and social background greatly determined what type of benevolent work a woman supported. Although antebellum women engaged in benevolent work, it was viewed as sentimental rather than invigorating. Unpaid home labor was seen as a leisurely activity; thus women “naturally” engaged in private home work. By contrast, wage labor was typically seen as an expression of manliness, intellect, and social bonding.<sup>16</sup>

According to historian Jacqueline Jones, some Maine women sought to carve out a “wider sphere of usefulness for themselves – a public, political sphere based on the assumption that a new, expanded and socially-conscious definition of ‘true womanhood’ demanded it.”<sup>17</sup> Some women argued that, because of the cult of true womanhood, they were compelled to speak out on certain issues that affected society. As such many activist women joined the antebellum temperance and anti-slavery movements. In addition, a small group of suffragists called for voting rights so that women could extend their maternal responsibilities to society as a whole.<sup>18</sup> Thus, middle-class women with the time and resources (connections, money, and marital status) engaged in many different benevolent activities in an effort to improve society. Women of the emerging middle-class were more likely to have the time and money to engage in benevolent activities.<sup>19</sup>

### **Maine Women and the Union War Effort**

War comes with a high price tag, both human and economic. Across the country, as men volunteered for duty on the frontlines, women were signing up for duty on the home front. The Maine state government contributed men, resources, and money to the Union, but more was

needed. When the state or federal governments failed to supply Maine troops, the women of Maine often succeeded. State officials needed financial and material support from the citizens of Maine, and the state's women proved themselves worthy of the task. Women from around Maine sewed clothing, knitted socks, canned preserves, and donated time and money to support the boys in blue. Women pulled together in urban areas to care for wounded soldiers, fill needed jobs in mills, and play hostesses at numerous fundraising events. Through war work, women found ways to chip away at the separation of the public and private roles they had been expected to follow during the prewar years. Acting out of a sense of patriotic duty, the women of Maine found ways to exercise their ever-expanding civic role.

Once the war began, Maine women began producing goods to send to the front. Women often organized into groups to make production and distribution of items meant for soldiers easier. In order to meet the ever-increasing demands of men in the army, aid societies sprang up in every town across the state. The women of Saco, for example, formed a local soldiers' aid society. This group held meetings and even a concert in order to collect funds for their efforts.<sup>20</sup> Typically groups from several towns gathered materials together because of the high cost of shipping. Most packages were intended for an entire regiment, not an individual soldier. Maine women sent a variety of clothing items to their boys marching through the South. In June 1861, a Washington newspaper reported that "the women of Portland have furnished to the Maine volunteers 3,400 flannel shirts, 1,600 pairs of drawers, 4,200 towels, 1,800 needle books, 1,200 neck ties, 1,600 handkerchiefs, 700 bed socks, 900 sun hoods, 800 linen havelocks, 840 rubber blankets."<sup>21</sup> That same month, according to a Massachusetts newspaper, "334 shirts and 254 pairs of drawers were made by the ladies of Saco and Gorham."<sup>22</sup> Likewise, as a Biddeford newspaper reported, "The ladies of Alfred have been busily engaged of late in sewing and knitting for the soldiers."<sup>23</sup>

Gloves and mittens were in particularly high demand among Union army troops, as the federal government could not provide them for all soldiers. As the *Portland Daily Advertiser* noted in November 1861:

Our soldiers on the Potomac ask for mittens. Our reliable correspondent of the Maine 10th says that the days are mild, but the nights are very cold, and the boys put stockings on their hands to keep them warm. This is only to be made known to the women of Maine, and the click of knitting needles will be heard at many a hearth-stone, and our sons and brothers will soon be supplied with an article so important to their comforts, and effective service.<sup>24</sup>

This article in the *Advertiser* made a direct appeal to the women of Maine – and appealed directly to their patriotism: “Will not the men in our country towns give yarn for the women to knit? Many a woman who supports herself and family by sewing would be glad to knit one or two pairs of mittens if the yarn could be supplied.”<sup>25</sup> The article even instructed readers how to make mittens for soldiers. Such requests reinforced the need for women to form organizations to supply goods to soldiers on the front.

Maine women also sent perishable items to their soldiers in camp. Sometimes these goods were easier asked for than delivered. The cost of raw materials had inflated to the point that it was difficult for the average family to purchase the necessary material. Soldiers found that prices of foodstuffs depleted their minimal resources. Charles Mattocks of the Seventeenth Maine noted in a letter to his sister: “It is fortunate for me that we have money to buy these (toast and eggs) little things.”<sup>26</sup> Many soldiers did not. At home, the high cost and scarcity of resources hurt families as well as soldiers. The outcry for women to send “comforts from home” led many women to send perishable items to the frontlines wrapped in blankets. Unfortunately, receiving rotten food was just as bad as receiving nothing at all and this sometimes led to discouragement among soldiers.<sup>27</sup> Nonetheless, some food items found their way to the front. As a Baltimore newspaper reported in June 1861, “The ladies of Augusta, Me., some time ago distributed over fifty bushels of doughnuts to the Third Volunteer Regiment of Maine.”<sup>28</sup>

Although high prices for food and other commodities were typical on the battlefield, inflation also hit the home front. In a November 1862 letter to his sweetheart, Abial Edwards of the Tenth Maine commented that, “the prices you quoted are indeed monstrous I neve[r] thought that Cotton Cloth would be that price in Maine.”<sup>29</sup> With the increased demand for supplies and clothing from the home front came the need for more workers in factories that supplied war materials. Depending on their age, marital status, and geographic location, many women had to either run the family farm or work in a factory while their male relatives were away at war. Women on farms greatly contributed to the war effort. Rural farm women in Maine suddenly were responsible for both traditional female tasks *and* male tasks. All of these tasks operated on a calendar rotation whereby a particular task would need to be completed every week, month, quarter, harvest, or year. The *Daily Eastern Argus* took note of this wartime trend: “a great many Maine women are working in the fields, planting, sowing, ec. It is not that the menial labor belonging to

the other sex is put upon them, but because sons and husbands are in the army.”<sup>30</sup>

Various war-related jobs were also filled by women. According to historians Dorothy and James Volo, women “served as clerks in the clothing branch of the Quartermaster’s Department” and filled “ammunition cartridges and artillery shells with powder at the armories, laboring at this dangerous and exacting task for low wages.”<sup>31</sup> Women also replaced men as store clerks. Sales work, while not as inherently dangerous as factory work, nevertheless demanded women work long hours, often in excess of one hundred hours per week. It was also a poorly paid position (as little as \$5 a week).<sup>32</sup> Still rural daughters were drawn to urban centers for the chance to contribute to the family income while getting away from their family farms. In doing so they engaged with like-minded individuals and built support networks that would persist after the war.

Without a steady income derived from the labor of their male relatives, some young women found factory or mill work necessary. In addition, with prices on so many commodities inflated, household funds were often scarce. The women of Biddeford, for example, were in greater demand during the war in the Pepperell Mills because so many men were away serving in the Union army. In 1863, the mill reported a sales jump from \$670,000 in 1862 to \$2,447,544.<sup>33</sup> The Pepperell Mill began making duck cloth (canvas) for tents, wagon covers, jeans, and heavy drills in 1862. As production increased for the war effort, the mill was forced to hire more workers. Since half of the able bodied men in town were at war there were positions open for women. However, they were compensated at less than \$1.00 a week.<sup>34</sup>

These young women worked long hours in the factories. Factory work was often done by poor rural women looking to supplement their family’s income. Despite the hardships he faced in the army, Private Abial Edwards sympathized with his sweetheart Anna Conant, who worked in a textile mill in Lewiston: “14 hours a day in the mill that must indeed be hard and I hope you will not long have to continue to do so.”<sup>35</sup> After her father died, Anna considered the work necessary to support her family, while at the same time moving away and distancing herself from them. Unlike Anna, middle-class women had other options open to them in order to assist their families and the war effort.

Middle-class Maine women often assisted the war effort in ways that continued their benevolence work from the prewar years. As noted above, many middle-class women formed aid societies to produce and distribute goods to Maine soldiers in camp. But some middle-class



women wanted to do more – and even be part of the action. Denied the ability to serve in the army (although some women did serve covertly), women could serve at the front as nurses. Considered part of a woman's sphere, nursing had been a Maine tradition long before the war. It is not surprising, therefore, that many Maine women traveled to the field hospitals to serve as nurses.<sup>36</sup> Women chose to practice nursing for a variety of reasons. Writer Mary Livermore believed “the patriotic speech and song which fired the blood of men, and led them to enter the lists as soldiers, nourished the self-sacrifice of women, and stimulated them to the collection of hospital supplies, and to brave the horrors and hardships of hospital life.”<sup>37</sup> Although many women saw nursing as a romantic way to be a part of battle, others saw tending to the wounded as an extension of their motherhood responsibility. Some women even followed a son into battle and served as a nurse to his regiment.

Examples of Maine women who served their country during the war abound. Isabella Fogg of Calais, for example, volunteered as a nurse when her son Hugh joined the army. According to an 1867 history of women during the war, Fogg agreed “to serve the State without compensation as its agent for distributing supplies to the sick and wounded soldiers of Maine.”<sup>38</sup> During the war, Hampden native Dorothea Dix, who was active in antebellum reform, became superintendent of nurses.<sup>39</sup> Portlander Harriet Eaton served as a nurse in Virginia, where she was an agent for the Maine Camp Hospital Association.<sup>40</sup>

Soldiers liberated from Confederate prisons were initially taken to Annapolis, Maryland, where they received medical attention and care. According to the state's adjutant general, Maine was represented “by some of our excellent women” at Annapolis.<sup>41</sup> It was comforting for sick or wounded soldiers to encounter someone from home, regardless of where they were. If a wounded soldier was stable enough to travel on his own, he was sent home. Maine men often found themselves left at the state's southern border, penniless and miles from help and home. The local soldiers' aid societies often tried to make the journey as easy as possible on returning wounded soldiers.<sup>42</sup>

The needs of so many returning warriors created a space for women to care for soldiers without traveling outside of Maine. Various state homes opened in response to a need by soldiers for a place to convalesce. These homes allowed wounded men to recover, and receive medical attention before discharging them home or back to their unit. There were several soldiers' homes in Portland, because of the city's military hospital and its proximity to water transportation. The Portland Soldiers' Home, for example, was established by local churches and run by two

sisters, Hannah and Mary Ann Kilbourn. More than 3,500 soldiers passed through the home during the summer of 1863. As the year progressed, 10,000 young Mainers were sheltered and cared for between its walls. These men had been released from battlefield hospitals in Washington, Baltimore, New York, and Philadelphia without money or food.<sup>43</sup>

Other cities in Maine opened similar facilities. The Bangor Soldiers' Rest Home, located on the banks of the Penobscot River, was established in May 1864 to accommodate a large number of sick and disabled soldiers who were returned to Bangor. According to the state adjutant general's office, "the liberal citizens [of Bangor] established a 'Rest' for their accommodation, supporting it at first entirely by voluntary contributions."<sup>44</sup> Soon the state took over Bangor's rest home. Members of local women's aid societies worked as nurses in the Bangor home throughout its existence in the Queen City. These Bangor women cared for about 28,000 soldiers during the home's nearly two-year existence.<sup>45</sup>

Likewise, at Cony General Hospital in Augusta there was such an influx of sick and wounded soldiers in 1864 that around fifty contract nurses were employed at any given time. They were compensated for their time and effort at twenty-four dollars per month. Additionally, "thirty-three Matrons and Female Cooks were connected with the hospital at different dates. Their pay was from eight to eighteen dollars per month," the state adjutant general reported.<sup>46</sup> The Cony General Hospital opened on June 1, 1864, and closed on November 30, 1865. In total it received 3,764 patients.<sup>47</sup> The work of Maine's women was noticed by male leaders in Maine and in Washington. In an 1864 report, for example, the Maine State Agency in Portland noted that "especial credit is due the noble women who have labored so assiduously for the welfare of the soldier."<sup>48</sup>

Some Maine women worked directly under the aegis of the federal government, in particular for the United States Sanitary Commission. Created in June 1861, the Sanitary Commission was a civilian relief agency that reported to the War Department. Neither the military nor the local aid societies were capable of handling all the problems associated with quickly mustering 75,000 troops into Union army camps in the spring and summer of 1861. The camps were not sanitary and thus disease ran rampant. The Sanitary Commission did what it could to clean up the camps and improve the health and well-being of U.S. troops.<sup>49</sup> Its operations extended across the North; it raised its own funds, and enlisted thousands of volunteers, mostly women. Thus, it had



Dorothea Dix, a native of Hampden, was a strong advocate for reforming the state asylums and prisons during the antebellum era. During the Civil War, she served as the superintendant of nurses for the Union states. *Maine Historical Society Collections*.

the unintended advantage of mobilizing women from around the country into a national relief organization.

As writer Mary Livermore explained after the war, “the object of the Sanitary Commission was to do what the government could not. The government undertook, of course, to provide all that was necessary for the soldier, whether sick or in health; whether in the army or hospital.”<sup>50</sup> This was not always possible. Through the Sanitary Commission, people could be assured, with reasonable certainty, that their donation reached soldiers who were in need. Most women who worked for the Sanitary Commission were committed to preserving the vitality and autonomy of women’s local relief work. However, they also understood that the unprecedented circumstances of the Civil War could take their gender beyond its traditional constraints.<sup>51</sup>

The commission was not well received at first. Early in the war it was made up of hastily thrown together women’s groups. The result was a slow response to soldiers’ needs. But as support for the Sanitary Com-

mission grew, so too did the need for funding to maintain supplies and supply lines. Fundraising was an integral part of keeping the commission afloat. Regarding a Sanitary Commission fundraiser in New York, a woman wrote, "The amount [\$1 million] realized will no doubt do much toward relieving the poor wounded and suffering soldiers than all the surgeons do. No one can know how much good is done by the Sanitary Commission who is not in the Army."<sup>52</sup>

In Maine, the commission raised money and also obtained food for soldiers.<sup>53</sup> In October 1863, for example, three Bangor women who worked for the commission sent a box of supplies to Louisiana, where some Maine regiments were stationed. "The Ladies of the Sanitary have taken the liberty of sending a box directed to your care," they wrote to General George F. Shepley, a Maine native, "with clothing and a few delicacies for the sick, thinking you would place it in the hands of some reliable person to be distributed as occasion might require. While we would not limit the use of our slight offering, we would be pleased to have the Maine Regts know they are remembered, toiled for, prayed for, by their true country women at home."<sup>54</sup> Overall, the women of Maine managed to raise a total of fifteen million dollars in donations throughout the war years.<sup>55</sup>

Although the Sanitary Commission struggled at the beginning of the war, as it improved its operations, opinions about the relief organization soon changed. In early 1862, Maine soldier Charles Mattocks asked his mother to *not* send supplies through the Sanitary Commission, as it "is too slow."<sup>56</sup> Although derisive of the commission's ability to deliver supplies to soldiers at the war's beginning, Mattocks later changed his tune. In a letter to his mother in August 1863, Mattocks wrote:

Some little clothing from the Sanitary Commission has arrived but has not yet been distributed. If there is any one thing of this war more noble and praiseworthy than another, it is the Sanitary Commission. Wherever our officers or soldiers are in distress – even in Southern prisons – without aid from friends – the Commission is sure to send them something to render their stay more endurable.<sup>57</sup>

For many Maine soldiers at the front the Sanitary Commission came to be seen as a life-saver.

The Sanitary Commission was not simply an organization through which women could contribute to the war effort. Women's work for the commission, in particular, set the foundation for the sweeping reform efforts and the emergence of mass women's politics that characterized


the rest of the nineteenth century.<sup>58</sup> The women who worked for the commission learned techniques and developed connections with other young women of a like mind. Historian Judith Giesberg points out that while working for the commission, a group of women leaders labored to transform local women's benevolence into a national force. These women drew on familiar traditions of women's place and conserved the sex-segregated autonomy of women's local grassroots activism.<sup>59</sup> Critical to building a support system was encouraging those with far-sited views to engage in such work. Young women who had an eye on the future for women in Maine after the war were encouraged to stretch their political wings by becoming leaders in various local groups during the war. They viewed their work as part of a wider women's community, one that transcended local interests into the nation as a whole and that spoke with a political voice.<sup>60</sup>

It remains difficult to know the exact quantity of supplies sent to the front by women in Maine. Many sent their assistance directly to their sons or husbands, while others committed their efforts to hospitals and nursing organizations. Still others were content to provide for the Maine State Agency – which oversaw state relief work. Some even worked or gave to more than one organization, particularly if they had more than one family member on the frontlines. Some women worked on their own, while others joined a committee or organization, whether local or national. The roles played by Maine women during the war were as varied as those by men fighting to hold the nation together. Mary Livermore, for one, praised her sisters-in-arms. "Women," she wrote, "planned money-making enterprises, whose vastness of conceptions, and good business management, yielded millions of dollars to be expended in the interest of sick and wounded soldiers."<sup>61</sup>

### **Postwar Activism**

Before the war, middle-class women had organized through benevolence societies or as social activists. The techniques for organization, fundraising, and developing of support networks they created in the prewar year were strengthened during the war. In many cases, women activists then built upon their prewar and wartime experiences in the postwar decades. As the war drew to a close many believed that life on the home front would return to normal, and that prewar social structures would be reestablished. Many women who had been activists before the war, however, disagreed. The war had opened a space for women to demonstrate to themselves, and the nation, that not all women were

**LADIES' SANITARY FAIR,**  
**NOROMBEGA HALL, BANGOR, MAINE.**



**Opening Day, December 20th, 1864.**

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The LADIES' SANITARY FAIR will embrace so many departments that nothing can possibly be sent aside, and every article donated will have a place waiting to receive it.

We therefore beg to make to you personally, and through you to your friends, and all you can influence, our respectful but urgent appeal to forward in their for our Kith and Kin, all that a generous, patriotic heart may suggest, and willing hands prepare.

The Fair is for the purpose of raising money for the benefit of our sick and suffering soldiers, by furnishing them with comforts and necessities which cannot well be provided by the Government.

Mrs. SAMUEL HARRIS,  
 Mrs. DOLLIS BOWMAN,  
 Mrs. G. E. JEWETT,  
 Mrs. DR. SARRIS,  
 Mrs. S. P. STROKLAND,  
 Mrs. B. W. GIBSWOLD,  
 G. E. JEWETT,  
 DAVID HUGREE,  
 J. G. OLASE,  
 S. D. THURSTON,  
 SAM'L F. HORSEY,

*Executive Committee*

Note.—All goods and packages, of whatever kind, should be distinctly marked with the name of the donor, and placed from whence sent, and directed to "G. E. JEWETT, City Hall, Bangor, Me. (for L. S. Fair)."

Donations of Money are specially solicited, and should also be sent to "G. E. JEWETT, Treasurer of Ladies' Sanitary Fair."

P.O. Orders by Adams or Eastern Express will come Free.

An event sign for the Ladies' Sanitary Fair at Norombega Hall in Bangor, December 1864. Maine women organized many events to raise money so that they could send food and supplies to soldiers at the front. Maine Historical Society Collections.

weak and incapable of working in the public sphere, which was usually reserved for men. Women's rights advocates used the skills they had developed before, and refined during, the war to recruit new members. Following the war, these women activists reconnected with their former causes and branched out into new ones.

Maine women were not simply bystanders or spectators of the war. The skills they honed in organizing fundraisers, communicating with government officials, and managing volunteers across various state agencies provided them with the skills, contacts, and support necessary to build statewide organizations for women's causes.<sup>62</sup> After the war, women around the North, including Maine, joined political parties and reform movements as a way of becoming involved in the formal political process.<sup>63</sup> Although not united under one common banner as they had been during the war, Maine women took their war experiences and used them to build a future for their daughters and granddaughters in which they would not have to be actors in the theater of war in order to be recognized as citizens of Maine.

When the war began, women's rights activists believed they had to switch from advocating for women's suffrage to supporting the Union cause.<sup>64</sup> After the war, however, women's rights advocates were reinvigorated, especially to support their two main causes, temperance and suffrage. For many women their wartime work cemented the prewar claims that women were capable of wider political and social participation. From the standpoint that mothers held families together, many women argued, they too would hold society together.<sup>65</sup>

Many Maine women, like activists around the North, increasingly advocated for women's political power after the war. Two national women's suffrage organizations were formed in 1869 in response to the passage of a voting rights bill in Congress, which gave the franchise to black men. Four years later, in 1873, the Maine Woman Suffrage Association (MWSA) was formed in Augusta by pro-suffrage men and women. In the early years, the organization had male leaders, but that changed within two decades.<sup>66</sup> As historian Shannon Risk has noted, "The 1870s marked the beginnings of a concentrated effort in Maine for woman suffrage." In the decade following the Civil War, Maine's women's suffragists began a campaign to petition the state legislature for the right to vote. Although MWSA was initially run by men, Risk found that women usually led the petition drives.<sup>67</sup>

In addition, their work contributed to the formation of the Maine branch of the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) in the

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**THANKSGIVING  
FESTIVAL!**

FOR THE BENEFIT OF THE  
**United States Sanitary Commission,**  
**At Wawenock Hall,**  
WISCASSET, THURSDAY EVENING, Nov. 26th.

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**Programme :**  
A SELECTION OF QUARTETTES,  
SONGS AND CHORUS,  
BY AMATEUR PERFORMERS,  
AND SACRED MELODIES,  
By a full Choir, with Instrumental Accompaniment:  
TO CLOSE WITH  
**GRAND NATIONAL HYMN,**  
SUBJECT BY HEWETT.

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Ample refreshment will follow the regular exercises of the evening, and it is earnestly desired, that the good people of this town and vicinity will turn out en masse and contribute, out of their abundance, freely to the suffering soldiers.

**Admittance Fifteen Cents,**  
NO HALF PRICE.  
DOORS OPEN AT SEVEN O'CLOCK.  
Per Order Sanitary Committee, Wiscasset.

Wiscasset, Nov. 24th, 1863, Times Press, Bath.

Poster for a Thanksgiving-night festival held in Wiscasset in 1863. The proceeds from the event went to the U.S. Sanitary Commission. Maine Historical Society Collections.



mid-1870s. Women were at a distinct disadvantage in the antebellum years of the temperance movement. For the antebellum temperance crusade, women had to rely on male leaders and political officials to achieve their goals. In post-Civil-War temperance work, however, women became leaders of the movement. The war had increased their access to public life. It was their base for engaging in reformist causes. They found, through their war efforts, a sophisticated avenue for political action, as a support for demanding the ballot, and as a vehicle for supporting a wide range of charitable activities. By the 1880s, the WCTU was the largest organization of women in U.S. history.<sup>68</sup> Temperance reform in Maine was successful because of its relationship with the national WCTU and its dynamic local and, eventually, national leader, Lillian Stevens.

There are numerous examples of Maine women who moved from wartime relief work to postwar reform movements. Many of these women became leaders of reform organizations after the war. Mary C. Crossman, for example, became the WCTU Bangor chapter's first president in the 1870s. She had worked for the Sanitary Commission and Bangor Soldiers' Rest Home during the war.<sup>69</sup> Caroline Rogers Mason likewise had worked for the Sanitary Commission during the war. Before the war, she had focused on her wifely and maternal duties for the most part. However, during the war, she was, as one writer put it, "a most energetic and efficient participant in the work of the Sanitary Commission." After the war, Mason became active in charitable work. In January 1873, she was named a vice president of the Home for Aged Women in Bangor—the highest position of any woman in that organization. That same year she also was named president of the Unitarian Benevolent Society in Bangor, an institution with which she had some connection since 1846.<sup>70</sup> Sarah J. Prentiss of Paris, Maine, served as a nurse during the war. Following the war, in 1872, she led a petition drive in Paris for women's suffrage.<sup>71</sup> These women, and others like them, worked for the Union war effort during the Civil War. They acted in the public sphere—sometimes directly for the state. After the war, women like Crossman, Mason, and Prentiss were not content to stay in the home. They remained active in the public sphere and pushed for societal reform.

## Conclusion

In July 1862, a brief war of words occurred in a Portland newspaper regarding the role that Maine women had played in the then-year-old conflict. On July 17, 1862, a notice entitled "An Appeal to the Women"



Ruth Mayhew was one of the many volunteer nurses during the Civil War. Mayhew was responsible for caring for sick and wounded soldiers. She also headed the Maine State Agency, where she was responsible for distributing supplies to Maine soldiers. Maine Historical Society Collections.

appeared in the *Portland Daily Advertiser*. Addressed to the “Wives, Mothers, Sisters, Daughters of Maine,” the opinion piece glorified the role the women of Maine played in the Revolutionary War. “But now, at this time of trial, what have we, personally, done or borne?” the writer asked. The author pointed to the seeming unwillingness of Maine women to provide soldiers for the war effort. Women were “staying the hand” of their men by convincing them to not leave home. That, of course, hampered the Union war effort. By contrast, the women of the South gave freely of their time and energy. Maine women, the author argued, should “go earnestly to work, and personally interest ourselves in filling up the ranks of the army.” “Men and money should,” the author continued, “be freely offered,” because it would be honorable for them to

go, fight, and, perhaps, die. The only thing stopping patriotic men from volunteering was the “weak tears” of their women. All “faithful” mothers who have taught their sons patriotism should now stand by those teachings and send off their men, the author concluded.<sup>72</sup>

That biting editorial produced an immediate response. On July 22, the *Advertiser* published “What the Women of Maine Have Done,” which refuted the claims of “An Appeal to the Women.” The author of the July 22 editorial believed that Maine women had responded to every call to aid the war effort. More importantly, Maine women “have, in numerous instances, sacrificed much of happiness and personal interest, without a ‘murmur.’”<sup>73</sup> The contribution of Maine women for this war was just as important and praiseworthy as that of their Revolutionary foremothers. “Yet, judging from the spirit already manifested, we doubt not, that when the history we are now ‘weaving’ shall be read in the future, our children will be proud of the gleaming threads of gold that shall proclaim the heroism and courage of the mothers of Maine,” the author continued.<sup>74</sup> The women of Maine were lauded as being supportive of their soldiers, and for sacrificing their own comfort for the sake of the national trauma. This newspaper scuffle pointed to a key idea that perhaps both authors missed: many believed that women could and should play an important role in the war effort. The authors did not debate *whether* women should play a role in the war effort; they debated whether or not Maine women had supported the war effort *enough*.

When the war drew to a close many of these women did not want to relinquish the freedoms gained during the war. They continued to work in the public sphere, and with a new radicalized purpose. In doing so they managed to knowingly and unknowingly change the political and cultural future for women in Maine. Their collective action would spark women to form groups and organizations designed to better society and eventually allow women to seek the ultimate goal of citizenship. Collective action on the part of women across the state during the war was nothing new. Their mothers and grandmothers had banded together in times of war, since the nation’s inception. The difference for women in the post-Civil-War era was that some women were no longer content to return to their homes when the conflict ended. These women utilized the skills they learned while working for their local relief agencies or the Sanitary Commission to advocate for different social and political causes in the postwar years.

During the antebellum years the middle-class ideal of domesticity was undergoing a significant change. During the early years of the new



The U.S. Hospital in Washington cared for many sick and injured soldiers. During the Civil War, government funding was stretched thin, and many hospitals did not receive the funding they needed. To remedy this, President Lincoln nationalized the Sanitary Commission in the summer of 1861. The Sanitary Commission helped to collect donations from families to buy supplies for soldiers. Maine Historical Society Collections.

republic, women of means were viewed by society as keepers of the home, the moral guardians of the nation, and educators to their children. Accordingly, some did benevolent work for the sick and aged. As the nineteenth century progressed, some middle-class women also began organizing for causes outside these traditional fields and supported the suffrage, temperance, and abolitionist movements. War punctured large holes in the traditional notions of women's sphere, thereby allowing women who had already been activists the opportunity to expand their work across the state and to gather new members looking to expand their reach beyond their home. These women organized themselves into groups and collectively acted as they saw fit, not along a preformed plan or using government guidelines.

Women leaders emerged from Civil War relief organizations ready and able to assume leadership roles in future political and social causes. Occupation outside the home was already acceptable to many in the nineteenth century, but the war opened opportunities for women to act,

and have their action accepted, in the public sphere. As the *Daily Eastern Argus* of Portland proclaimed in 1863, “The ladies are patriotic, and one is no less a ‘lady’ because she occupies herself in the practical way.”<sup>75</sup> In placing themselves at the center of a patriotic cause, women formed a connection between themselves, their causes, and the nation’s best interest.

## Notes

1. “What the Women of Maine Have Done,” *Portland Daily Advertiser*, July 22, 1862.
2. Many historians agree that wartime work by women led to greater leadership roles in reform movements after the war. See, for example, Lori Ginzberg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics, and Class in the 19th-Century United States* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990); Elizabeth D. Leonard, *Yankee Women: Gender Battles in the Civil War* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1994); Judith Ann Giesberg, *Civil War Sisterhood: U.S. Sanitary Commission and Women’s Politics in Transition* (Boston, MA : Northeastern University Press, 2000). For examples of historians who argue the opposite, see Nina Silber, *Daughters of the Union: Northern Women Fight the Civil War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005); Jeanie Attie, *Patriotic Toil: Northern Women and the American Civil War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998).
3. Stanton quoted in Judith Giesberg, *Army at Home: Women and the Civil War on the Northern Home Front* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), p. 10.
4. Patricia L. Richard, “‘Listen Ladies One and All’: Union Soldiers Yearn For Their ‘Fair Cousins of the North,’” in Paul A. Cimbala and Randall M. Miller, eds., *Union Soldiers and the Northern Home Front: Wartime Experiences, Postwar Adjustments* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), p. 144.
5. Mary Beth Norton, *Liberty’s Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750-1800* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980), p. 298.
6. An Old Observer, “Single Ladies,” *Maine Cultivator and Hallowell Gazette*, August 26, 1843.
7. Gerda Lerner, *The Woman in American History* (Menlo Park, CA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1971), p. 29.
8. Lerner, *Woman in American History*, p. 52.
9. Catherine Clinton, *The Other Civil War* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1985), p. 22; Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 132-135.

10. Clinton, *Other Civil War*, p. 23.
11. *Maine Cultivator and Hallowell Gazette*, September 23, 1848.
12. Sara M. Evans, *Born for Liberty: A History of Women in America* (New York: The Free Press, 1989), p. 86.
13. Lerner, *Woman in American History*, p. 29.
14. Edward O. Schriver and Stanley R. Howe, "The Republican Ascendancy: Politics & Reform," in Richard W. Judd, Edwin A. Churchill, and Joel W. Eastman, eds., *Maine: The Pine Tree State from Prehistory to the Present* (Orono: University of Maine Press, 1986), p. 386.
15. Helen Coffin Beedy, *Mothers of Maine* (New York: Longmans, Green; Hastings: Barry, 1895), p. 268.
16. Jeanie Attie, "War Work and the Crisis of Domesticity in the North," in Catherine Clinton and Nina Silber, eds., *Divided Houses: Gender and the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 249.
17. Jacqueline Jones, "Men and Women in Northern New England during the Era of the Civil War," *Maine Historical Society Quarterly* 33, no. 2 (Fall 1993): 79.
18. See, for example, Richard R. Westcott and Edward O. Schriver. "Reform Movements & Party Reformation, 1820-1861," in Richard W. Judd, Edwin A. Churchill, and Joel W. Eastman, eds., *Maine: The Pine Tree State from Prehistory to the Present* (Orono: University of Maine Press, 1986), pp. 200-206; Alice Taylor, "From Petitions to Partyism: Antislavery and the Domestication of Maine Politics in the 1840s and 1850s," *New England Quarterly* 77, no. 1 (March 2004): 70-88.
19. Ginzberg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence*, p. 6.
20. *Biddeford Union and Journal*. March 27, 1863, as quoted in Lynda Sudlow, *A Vast Army of Women: Maine's Uncounted Forces in the American Civil War* (Gettysburg, PA: Thomas Publications, 2000), p. 12.
21. "Portland; Maine," *Daily National Intelligencer* (Washington D.C.), June 26, 1861.
22. "Portland; Maine; Saco; Gorham," *Lowell (MA) Daily Citizen and News*, June 20, 1861.
23. *Biddeford Union and Journal* as quoted in Sudlow, *Vast Army of Women*, p. 11.
24. "Potomac; Maine," *Portland Daily Advertiser*, November 30, 1861.
25. "Potomac; Maine," *Portland Daily Advertiser*, November 30, 1861.
26. Philip N. Racine, ed., *"Unspoiled Heart": The Journal of Charles Mattocks of the 17th Maine* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1994), p. 181.
27. Mary A. Livermore, *My Story of the War: A Woman's Narrative of Four Years Personal Experience* (Hartford, CT: A.D. Worthington and Company, 1890), pp. 121-122. Mary Ashton Livermore was a New England journalist and war ac-

tivist. She wrote prolifically on her work as a nurse and Sanitary Commission official during the war.

28. "The Feast of the Doughnuts," *Baltimore American*, June 29, 1861.

29. Quoted in Beverly Hayes Kallgren and James L. Crouthamel, eds., "*Dear Friend Anna*": *The Civil War Letters of a Common Soldier From Maine* (Orono: University of Maine Press, 1992), p. 37.

30. "Maine, Menial; Husbands." *Daily Eastern Argus* (Portland), May 27, 1863.

31. Dorothy Denneen Volo and James M. Volo, *Daily Life in Civil War America* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1998), p. 170.

32. Clinton, *Other Civil War*, p. 92.

33. Sudlow, *Vast Army of Women*, p. 22.

34. Sudlow, *Vast Army of Women*, p. 22.

35. Kallgren and Crouthamel, eds., "*Dear Friend Anna*," p. 54.

36. On nurses see Jane E. Schultz, *Women at the Front: Hospital Workers in Civil War America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

37. Livermore, *My Story of the War*, p. 109.

38. Linus P. Brockett and Mary C. Vaughan, *Woman's Work in the Civil War: A Record of Heroism, Patriotism and Patience* (Philadelphia: Zeigler, McCurdy; Boston, Mass., R.H. Curran, 1867), p. 506.

39. Jerry Desmond, "Maine in the Civil War," in Richard W. Judd, Edwin A. Churchill, and Joel W. Eastman, eds., *Maine: The Pine Tree State from Prehistory to the Present* (Orono: University of Maine Press, 1986), p. 363.

40. On Eaton see Jane E. Schultz, *This Birth Place of Souls: The Civil War Nursing Diary of Harriet Eaton* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

41. *Report of the Adjutant General of the State of Maine for the Years 1864-1865* (Augusta, ME: Stevens & Sayward, Printers to the State, 1866), p. 70.

42. See, for example, Fred N. Knapp to Bethel Soldiers' Aid Society, May 20, 1865, Box 2/2, Collection 1533, Maine Agency Sanitary Commission Collection, Maine Historical Society, Portland.

43. Sudlow, *Vast Army of Women*, p. 20.

44. *Report of the Adjutant General...1864-1865* (hereinafter cited as *Adjutant General*), p. 133.

45. Trudy Irene Scee, *City on the Penobscot: A Comprehensive History of Bangor, Maine* (Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2010), p. 185.

46. *Adjutant General*, p. 136.

47. *Adjutant General*, p. 134.

48. *Adjutant General*, p. 69. The Maine State Agency was a body created by the state to oversee wartime relief activity.

49. Stephen B. Oates, *A Woman of Valor: Clara Barton and the Civil War* (New York: The Free Press, 1994), p. 17.
50. Livermore, *My Story of the War*, p. 129.
51. Ginzberg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence*, p. 12.
52. Jack K. Bauer, ed., *Soldiering: The Civil War Diary of Rice C. Bull* (New York: Presidio, 1977), pp. 58-63.
53. Sudlow, *Vast Army of Women*, p. 17.
54. Mrs. Dr. Barker, Mrs. Franklin Muzzy, and Mrs. M.B. Ricker to George F. Shepley, October 9, 1863, Box 3/7, Collection 117, George F. Shepley Papers, Maine Historical Society, Portland.
55. Attie, "War Work and the Crisis of Domesticity in the North," p. 257.
56. Racine, ed., "*Unspoiled Heart*," pp. 105-106.
57. Racine, ed., "*Unspoiled Heart*," pp. 181-182.
58. Giesberg, *Civil War Sisterhood*, p. 12.
59. Giesberg, *Civil War Sisterhood*, p. 12.
60. Ginzberg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence*, p. 7.
61. Livermore, *My Story of the War*, pp. 109-110.
62. Ginzberg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence*, p. 5.
63. Women were allowed to participate in political party meetings, silently or as volunteers, but were participants nonetheless. See Melanie Gustafson, "Partisan and Nonpartisan: The Political Career of Judith Ellen Foster, 1881-1910," and Rebecca Edwards, "Gender, Class, and the Transformation of Electoral Campaigns in the Gilded Age" both in Melanie S. Gustafson, Kristie Miller, Elisabeth Israels Perry, eds., *We Have Come to Stay: American Women and Political Parties: 1880-1960* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1999).
64. Shannon M. Risk, "In Order to Establish Justice: The Nineteenth-Century Woman Suffrage Movements of Maine and New Brunswick" (Ph.D. diss, University of Maine, 2009), p. 62.
65. Risk, "In Order to Establish Justice," p. 75.
66. Schriver and Howe, "The Republican Ascendancy," p. 386.
67. Risk, "In Order To Establish Justice," pp. 83-88. Quotation is from p. 83.
68. Ruth Bordin, *Women and Temperance: The Quest for Power, 1873-1900* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1981), p. xvi.
69. Risk, "In Order to Establish Justice," p. 65.
70. Beedy, *Mothers of Maine*, pp. 367-369. Quotation is from p. 368.
71. Risk, "In Order to Establish Justice," pp. 88, 225.
72. "An Appeal to the Women," *Portland Daily Advertiser*, July 17, 1862.



73. "What the Women of Maine Have Done," *Portland Daily Advertiser*, July 22, 1862.
74. "What the Women of Maine Have Done," *Portland Daily Advertiser*, July 22, 1862.
75. "Maine, Menial; Husbands," *Daily Eastern Argus* (Portland), May 27, 1863.