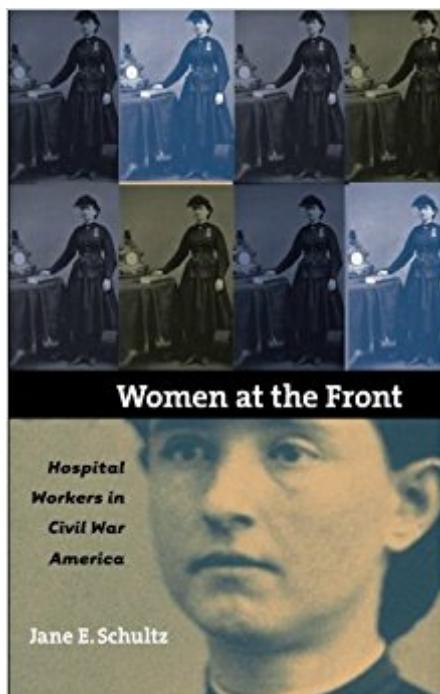


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# Women At The Front: Hospital Workers In Civil War America



## Synopsis

As many as 20,000 women worked in Union and Confederate hospitals during America's bloodiest war. Black and white, and from various social classes, these women served as nurses, administrators, matrons, seamstresses, cooks, laundresses, and custodial workers. Jane E. Schultz provides the first full history of these female relief workers, showing how the domestic and military arenas merged in Civil War America, blurring the line between homefront and battlefield. Schultz uses government records, private manuscripts, and published sources by and about women hospital workers, some of whom are familiar--such as Dorothea Dix, Clara Barton, Louisa May Alcott, and Sojourner Truth--but most of whom are not well-known. Examining the lives and legacies of these women, Schultz considers who they were, how they became involved in wartime hospital work, how they adjusted to it, and how they challenged it. She demonstrates that class, race, and gender roles linked female workers with soldiers, both black and white, but became sites of conflict between the women and doctors and even among themselves. Schultz also explores the women's postwar lives--their professional and domestic choices, their pursuit of pensions, and their memorials to the war in published narratives. Surprisingly few parlayed their war experience into postwar medical work, and their extremely varied postwar experiences, Schultz argues, defy any simple narrative of pre-professionalism, triumphalism, or conciliation.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Jane Schultz has written a well-researched book that tells a compelling story. First-person accounts interspersed throughout the book lend immediacy to the war that took place nearly 150 years ago. The author transports the reader through time so effectively that the sights and smells of Civil War hospitals become real. On the basis of this book's depiction of women's fight to serve patients despite the hostility of Civil War-era surgeons, it seems clear that the problems of contemporary nurses have a long history. Throughout history, female nurses have dealt with being invisible, discounted, and devalued. During the Civil War, when nursing was viewed as domestic work, nurses did not seem threatening, which eased their entrance into the "military medical arena." Paradoxically, this move hampered their autonomy and virtually eliminated any claim to authority they might have desired. Whether black or white, Southern or Northern, nurse or laundress, the women who toiled in hospitals -- there were 20,000 of them -- had to deal with the hubris and not-uncommon state of intoxication of surgeons, the contempt of generals, and the challenge of working with others from different backgrounds. This was on top of dealing with the filth, lack of supplies (including food), mosquitoes, bad weather, floods, driving accidents, and, for most, lack of any formal nursing education. Social norms during the Civil War era were not kind to women who exposed themselves to the horrors of war by working in hospitals. Southern women, especially, were criticized for jeopardizing their reputations. However, women did the challenging work for many reasons. Some were left with no means of support when their husbands went to war, so they worked for undependable wages. Women of higher social classes felt that it was demeaning to accept pay for their work, so many worked as volunteers. After the war, soldiers and the widows, fathers, and brothers of fallen soldiers were included in pension legislation. The Army Nurses Pension Act of 1892 broke with tradition in that it supported the independence of women by authorizing pensions to women who earned them. Even so, it was difficult for many nurses to prove their service during the war. Many did not have the means to hire a lawyer to plead their cases, whereas others were illiterate or ignorant of the law. Widows of dead soldiers had a much easier time collecting pensions than did nurses who served. Black women had the hardest time proving their service. White nurses often used their supervision of black workers to buttress their claims, but the white nurses were much less likely to assist black nurses in claiming their pensions. Much has been written about the Civil War, but this book is unique in that it scrutinizes the war through the "lens of gender." Schultz's treatment of the subject of women who worked in the hospitals of the Civil War is neither sentimental nor lacking in appreciation of their heroism. Loretta P. Higgins, R.N., Ed.D. Copyright © 2005 Massachusetts Medical Society. All rights reserved. The New England

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Breaks new ground. . . . Highly recommended."Choice""Women at the Front" is a significant achievement.Darlene Clark Hine, author of "Black Women in White: Racial Conflict and Cooperation in the Nursing Profession, 1890-1950"An example of the best aspects of modern Civil War scholarship."Civil War Times"Jane Schultz has written a well-researched book that tells a compelling story."New England Journal of Medicine"Schultz gives us the most complete picture that we have of the women who broke with convention to become military relief workers."Journal of Illinois History""[A] thorough, insightful, and carefully written history. . . . Engrossing and enlightening." -- "American Historical Review""[An] absorbing and meticulously researched history, and a useful introduction to Civil War histories written in the early postwar period." -- "Metascience""Schultz has enriched the historiography on women's war experiences in general and on the formative role of gender . . . in this particular war." -- "Military History of the West""[Schultz] alone has assiduously mined a treasure trove of . . . information. . . . [This] superlative book is invaluable and should be read and considered by everyone interested in the Civil War." -- "Historian""This absorbing book recovers a largely unknown history of the twenty thousand women who served Confederate and Union hospitals during the Civil War. . . . [A] compelling . . . account that is both empathic and unsentimental toward [the] subjects. The result is a nuanced and thoughtful interpretation of women at the front." -- "Journal of Southern History"

Recently, I've been working on family history and found that one of my ancestors was a nurse in the Civil War. This connection peaked my interest in this fascinating aspect of Civil War life. **WOMEN AT THE FRONT: HOSPITAL WORKER IN CIVIL WAR AMERICA** was effective in providing the background information I needed to bring my family history alive.This well-researched book provides background information about the roll of women. Then provides indepth biographies on selected women.

If one wishes a very good history regarding women during the Civil War and their service in the hospitals, as well as the story of women after the war, then this is a book to read. The information is not only informative but well presented. The story of women and their treatment is rending, yet at the same time admirable because of their determination during and after the war to show that women were ore than show pieces or slaves to the men, having babies and just taking care of the

home.

What a great book. Describes the trials of women working during the Civil War. Many of their hardships were just because they were women. Beside the medical difficulties they even had to worry about feeding their patients.

This is an indepth review of the nurses in general. I was looking more for a one person story. This a lot of information about what ladies battled in their quest to be useful in the war.

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great book

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