

The Daughters of Charity and the Civil War



“Angels of the Battlefield” prints are available for sale in the Shrine gift shop.

Maryland Civil War Trails

- Sponsored by the Tourism Council of Frederick County: www.civilwartraveler.com
- Three wayside interpretive panels (Gettysburg Campaign) located on the Daughters of Charity campus in Seton Shrine parking lot.
- Inquiries may be addressed to the Archivist and must be *in writing*. They may be sent by e-mail to: ASJPH@doc.org or to the archivist by regular mail.

Emmitsburg, Maryland Civil War Sites

- **Saint Joseph’s Provincial House and National Emergency Training Center (NETC)** grounds . . . 80,000 Union troops, June 27-30, 1863, followed by detached regiments of Confederates en route to Gettysburg . . . General Philippe Regis de Trobriand, Third Brigade of the First Division of Third Corps, stayed at Our Lady of the Field . . . General Daniel Edgar Sickles . . . made headquarters at “the Bridge” [over Toms Creek] . . . General John McAllister Schofield somewhere on campus . . . The former Daughters of Charity chapel (1839), now on NETC property, provided solace and spiritual consolation to many a soldier and sister during the Union encampment. The chapel was restored in 2006.
- **The White House** (former home of Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton) . . . occupied by General Carl Schurz and staff . . . site of war council.
- **Pigs Park** . . . “private soldiers flooded the land . . . the large and beautiful woods contiguous to our garden” [now the wooded grove beside Sacred Heart Cemetery east of Daughters of Charity Provincial House].
- **Saint Vincent’s House, Rectory of Saint Joseph’s Parish** (town of Emmitsburg)... occupied by General George G. Meade and General Oliver Otis Howard.
- **Our Lady of Victory Statue** . . . erected immediately after the Civil War by the sisters who had promised that, should violence be averted on our property, a statue of Our Lady of Victory would be erected. (The Feast of Our Lady of Victory dates to 1571 in thanksgiving for the victory of the Christian fleet over the Turkish fleet at the Battle of Lepanto.) *The statue has recently been removed for conservation.*

Gettysburg, Pennsylvania Sites Related to the Daughters of Charity

- **McClellan Hotel** (now The Gettysburg Hotel) . . . The proprietor gave the first floor to the Daughters of Charity for their use as headquarters during the weeks they nursed the wounded at Gettysburg.
- **Saint Francis Xavier Catholic Church**, High Street . . . The Daughters of Charity nursed in this church, which served as a surgical center, particularly for amputations (in the well-lit vestibule) with the sanctuary as the recovery room. Today the church has a plaque to the Daughters of Charity on its façade, and a unique stained glass window to the right of the sanctuary depicting Elizabeth Seton, Louise de Marillac, and Daughters of Charity in the cornette nursing wounded soldiers of both armies.
- **Pennsylvania College** (now Gettysburg College; founded 1832 At least four Daughters of Charity worked in Penn Hall treating Confederate prisoners of war.
- **Lutheran [Seminary] Hospital** . . . located near the site of the first day's battle.
- **Methodist Church Hospital** . . . on Middle Street near square; no longer standing.
- **Assorted Field Hospitals**
- **Research** . . . For the convenience of consultation by researchers, the Daughters of Charity have deposited first-hand accounts of the sisters' experiences as Civil War sister-nurses with the Park Library and Research Center of the Gettysburg National Military Park. The title of the document is: *Daughters of Charity in the Civil War* (BAMcNeil, ed.)
- **20th Century**. . . The Daughters of Charity staffed Saint Francis Xavier School from 1899 to 1920.

Frederick, Maryland sites related to the Daughters of Charity

- **Hessian Barracks**, site of the United States General Hospital during the Civil War where Daughters of Charity nursed sick and injured of both the Union and the Confederate armies.
- **Saint John's Catholic Church**—Sisters and some of their patients worshipped here during the Civil War.
- **Saint John's Asylum, St. John's Free School and Saint John's Academy** (now Visitation Academy) — begun in 1824 by the Sisters of Charity from Emmitsburg to care for and educate poor children and those from families who could pay tuition and care for orphans. The orphans were transferred to Emmitsburg in 1843. The site was partially destroyed by a suspicious night fire in 1845. The property was transferred to the sisters of the Visitation in 1846. Served as a Civil War hospital.

The Daughters of Charity as Civil War Nurses

At the outbreak of the Civil War in the United States, the only well established group which could transmit a heritage of knowledge, skills, and management ability within an organized system of nursing were communities of religious women.

Of approximately eight hundred Daughters of Charity, at least two hundred-seventy sisters served at more than sixty sites in fifteen states during the Civil War and rendered nursing care and spiritual assistance to victims from both the United States Army and the Confederate Army.

In addition, other religious women also nursed during the Civil War: the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth; Sisters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul of New York; Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati; the Sisters of Saint Dominic; the Sisters of the Poor of Saint Francis; Sisters of the Holy Cross; Sisters of Saint Joseph; the Sisters of Mercy; the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy; Sisters of Our Lady of Mount Carmel; Sisters of Providence, and the Sisters of Saint Ursula.

The Daughters of Charity in Emmitsburg played a prominent role as nurses, human service workers, and women of compassion in an otherwise violent and painful epoch. The sisters' ministry of charity brought solace and healing to victims from both armies, sometimes at the peril of the sisters themselves. The sisters faced the possibility of death and loss of property for three days when soldiers from both armies encamped successively at Saint Joseph's Central House immediately before the decisive encounter at Gettysburg.

The personal involvement of the sisters during the Civil War was rooted in Christian values, rather than politics. By 1861, the Daughters of Charity were already operating two hospitals in New Orleans and two in Virginia (Norfolk and Richmond). This positioned the community to quickly mobilize resources and reach out with an effective response using existing establishments as a hub of action.

During the war years, the Daughters of Charity cared for the sick and wounded in general and marine hospitals, prisons, floating medical transports, and improvised arrangements on battlefields, etc.

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, Visitatrix (superioress), had received telegrams from the Confederacy for sisters to nurse the sick and wounded at Richmond and Norfolk where the sisters already had hospitals. Mother Ann Simeon and her Council, in consultation with Rev. James Francis Burlando, C.M. (1814-1873), Director, stipulated five conditions for the sisters' service during the Civil War:

- 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.

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

The Sister administrator of Providence Hospital had access to the Executive Mansion, as this 1862 memorandum of President Lincoln indicates:

Today, Sister Mary Carroll calls and asks that Father Joseph O. Reagan, now chaplain to 4th Regiment of Excelsior Brigade, be made a hospital chaplain. She says that nearly all the Catholics of his regiment are now in hospital, and that the Catholic chaplains already appointed can not possibly attend all the Catholic soldiers in hospital.