

Graduate Nurses in the Spanish – American War

As a result of their work in the Civil War, religious sisters were recognized for providing skilled nursing services. In view of the urgent need for medical assistance in the summer of 1898, it was no surprise when the government called for every nursing sister who could be spared. Official government records indicated that the various orders furnished around 250 sister nurses, with the Daughters of Charity (originally referred to in the United States as Sisters of Charity), providing the majority of nurses. Although members of other orders were represented, their numbers were considerably less.¹

As in the past, army physicians, while accepting of assistance from religious nursing sisters, were initially reluctant to involve female nurses . Surgeon General Sternberg, echoing past military physicians, believed women were ‘out of place’ in the military. Initially, the army tried to use untrained infantrymen as medical corpsmen. This was a dismal failure as there were few men who volunteered for this duty as it brought few rewards and there was danger from infectious diseases such as typhoid and yellow fever.²



¹ <https://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/2002/fall/band-of-angels-1.html>

² Goldenberg, Gary. 1992. *Nurses of a Different Stripe: A History of the Columbia University School of Nursing 1892 – 1992*. Columbia University School of Nursing, . p 49

During the month of August an epidemic of typhoid broke out in the camps which had been established as places of instruction for the volunteer troops, It also became evident at that time that these camp hospitals had lost their original character and become practically stationary, and consequently the objection to the employment of women nurses in them had disappeared.

Contract Nurses

In order “to supply the approaching necessities of the army, the United State Congress, in April, 1898, at the request of Surgeon General Sternberg., authorized him to employ nurses under contract and made an “appropriation for their payment.”



DR. ANITA NEWCOMB MCGEE, ACTING ASSISTANT SURGEON GENERAL IN CHARGE OF ARMY NURSE DIVISION IN THE SPANISH-AMERICAN WAR (1898-1899)

³When the war began, the Nurses Alumni Association of the United States and Canada, petitioned the government allow trained nurses to join the military in order to care for the soldiers. Surgeon General Sternberg then appointed doctor Anita Newcomb McGee , the vice-President of the Daughters of the American Revolution, to select nurses for ‘contract’ service in the Army. For their service each received \$30 per month plus board and transportation.⁴ The Army Nurse Corps was one of the important outcomes of the Spanish American War.⁵

The standard adopted for appointment to Army service was that of graduation from a training school, combined with suitable endorsements., the chief reliance being placed on a recommendation of the superintendent of nurses under whom the applicant had graduated. Women physicians were also considered ⁶⁷The first nurses were appointed on the 10th of

³ Roberts, Mary, 1957. The Army Nurse Corps, Yesterday and Today. Publisher The Army Nurse Corps, Washington, D.C., p.4

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Ibid

⁶ ⁶ <http://what-when-how.com/women-and-war/spanish-american-war-women-and-the/>

May, and ordered to the General Hospital at Key West, and -before the 15th of July, 47 had been asked for 'by surgeons at different General Hospitals and had been selected by the "Daughters" for appointment by the Surgeon General. About this time the Yellow fever appeared among the Santiago troops, and nurses were urgently needed there.”



CONTRACT NURSES SERVING IN THE SPANISH-AMERICAN WAR, 1898.

Photo :Second Nebraska Volunteers, Camp George M. Thomas, 1898.

First nurses at Sternberg Hospital, Chickamauga Park, Georgia, August 1898.

Back row, left to right, Major Griffin, Commanding, Maud Cromelien (representative of Auxiliary No. 3), Frances A. Stone, and Anna C. Maxwell.

The Spanish-American war [1898] resulted in the first large all-graduate nursing service to staff military hospitals.⁸ Anna Maxwell, Superintendent of Nurses at the Presbyterian Hospital of New York,⁹ operating out of her hospital office, motivated some 200 graduate nurses to enlist. And took charge of the nurses sent to care for the soldiers at Camp Thomas in Chickamauga Park, Georgia. There they found that “ Fifty thousand men lived in deplorable

⁷ <http://www.spanamwar.com/Nurses.htm>. Spanish American War Centennial Website Nurses serving aboard the hospital ship RELIEF

⁸, Kalish and kalish 2004, *American Nursing: A History..* Chapter 7 Nurses and the War With Spain Lippincott/Williams and Wilkins..p.144

⁹ Goldenberg, Gary. 1992. *Nurses of a Different Stripe: A History of the Columbia University School of Nursing 1892 – 1992*. Columbia University School of Nursing, . p 45

conditions, teeming with the triple scourge of typhoid, malaria, and measles. Maxwell's 160 nurses cared for a thousand sick men with only 67 deaths. This was at a time when more soldiers died of disease than combat. No wonder Florence Nightingale come to mind."¹⁰

"The military change of heart was best expressed by Camp Thomas' chief field surgeon, Colonel John Van Rensseler Hoff. To Anna Maxwell he said: 'When you first arrived we did not know what to do with a contingent of women in the camp, now we are wondering what we should have done without you.'¹¹.

Spanish American War, 1898

The New York Nurses, Sternberg General Hospital, Camp Thomas, Chickamauga, Georgia



¹⁰ Source: <http://www.workingnurse.com/articles/Anna-Maxwell-the-American-Florence-Nightingale>

¹¹ Goldenberg, Gary. 1992. *Nurses of a Different Stripe: A History of the Columbia University School of Nursing 1892 – 1992*. Columbia University School of Nursing, . p 49

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U.S. Army. Sternberg
General Hospital, Camp Thomas,
Chickamauga, GA. "Dormitory C",
furnished by the Red Cross

¹², Kalish and kalish 2004, *American Nursing: A History..* Chapter 7 Nurses and the War With Spain Lippincott/Williams and Wilkins..p.144

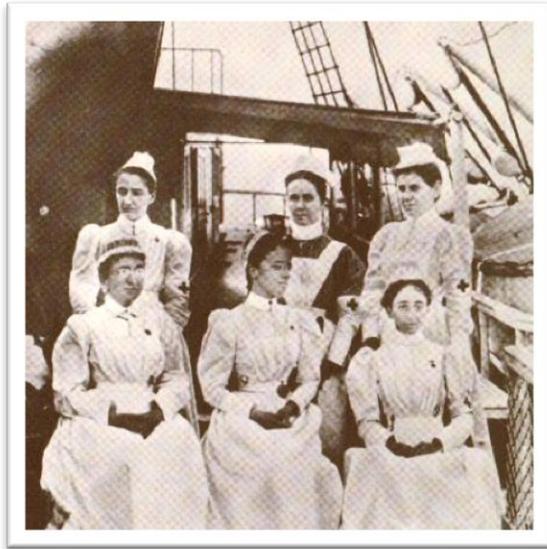
¹³ Goldenberg, Gary. 1992. *Nurses of a Different Stripe: A History of the Columbia University School of Nursing 1892 – 1992.* Columbia University School of Nursing, . p 45

¹⁴ Source: <http://www.workingnurse.com/articles/Anna-Maxwell-the-American-Florence-Nightingale>

Nurses aboard an Army hospital ship doing medical work in Cuba during Spanish-American War.

From 1898 to 1901 more than 1500 women served in the states, overseas, and on a U.S. Hospital ship.¹⁵

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Rose M. Heavren, a nurse in the Spanish American War speaking of her experiences at a reunion of Spanish-American War Nurses (SAWN) on March 28, 1950 said

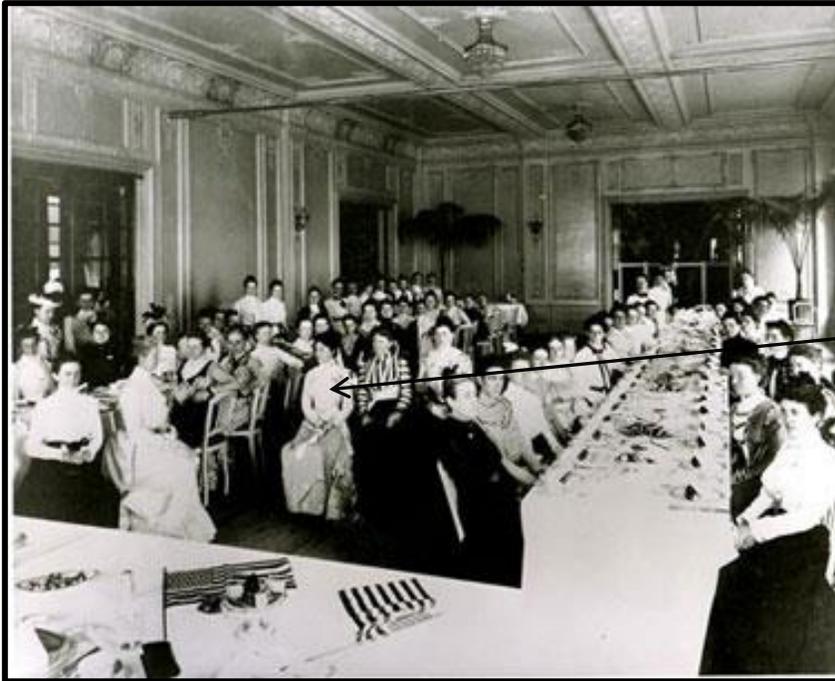
"[After being assigned to the army hospital at Montauk Point, Long Island, New York] we had to hustle to . . . get into uniform then we returned to the Colonel's tent and were ordered to line up outside and a group of doctors were told to choose the nurse each wanted. It was positively funny and yet humiliating to stand there and wonder who would choose you. I don't know how they sized us up. . . . We worked from 5 o'clock until about 8 o'clock without food of any kind, and when we went to breakfast we would get black coffee and some kind of mush, Indian meal or oat meal, then back to work [until 8 P.M.]. I remember one dinner I went to where there was nothing but boiled cabbage and black coffee."¹⁷

The role of skilled graduate nurses in the care of the wounded and military was solidified, “We cannot do without them.”

¹⁵Women Were There; The Wars of 1812 and 1846 and the Spanish American War ; <http://userpages.aug.com/captbarb/femvets3.html>

¹⁶ Goldenberg, Gary. 1992. *Nurses of a Different Stripe: A History of the Columbia University School of Nursing 1892 – 1992*. Columbia University School of Nursing, . p 49

¹⁷ Op cit what-when-how



Spanish American War Nurses - First meeting, Sept. 1900 - Luncheon at Sherry's, New York - Anita Newcomb McGee sitting in center (white waist and embroidered gray skirt)

Spanish American War Nurses Memorial Arlington Cemetery

