

## Early History of Nursing in the U. S. Military

In the summer of 1775, Maj. Gen. Horatio Gates of the Continental Army reported to Commander-in-Chief George Washington that, “the sick suffered much for want of good female Nurses.” Gen. Washington asked for help from Congress, which approved one nurse for every ten patients in Continental hospitals.<sup>1</sup> According to Roberts,<sup>2</sup> ‘The history of military nursing goes back to the war for independence when General Washington asked for funds to employ nurses in a ratio of one nurse to every ten patients. Feminine members of the families of soldiers were employed to care for the sick, to prepare their food, and to perform housekeeping duties. These, the first women employed by the military, received \$2 a month with room and board.’<sup>3</sup>



Nursing during the Revolutionary War was one of the many duties asked of women, many of whom had no medical training or education. The brave men and women that provided medical care lived under the extreme conditions that come with war, but

considered it a privilege and duty. While medical expertise and technology were minimal, advances in care and sanitation made leaps and bounds during this time.<sup>4</sup>

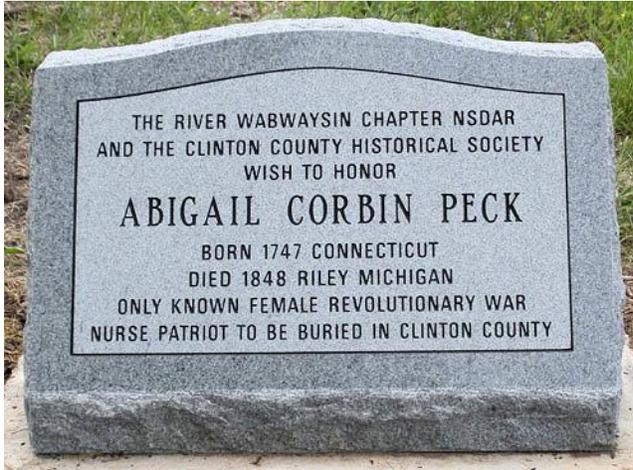
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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/cate-lineberry/history-military-nurses\\_b\\_3225854.html](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/cate-lineberry/history-military-nurses_b_3225854.html)

<sup>2</sup> Roberts, Mary, 1957. *The Army Nurse Corps, Yesterday and Today*. Publisher The Army Nurse Corps, Washington, D.C.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.womenhistoryblog.com/2014/07/first-women-nurses.html>

<sup>4</sup> <https://ceufast.com/blog/nurses-in-the-american-revolutionary-war>

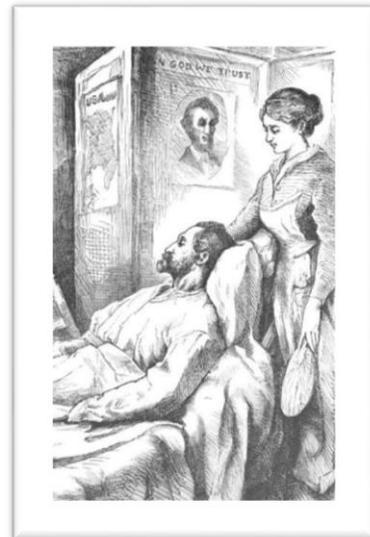


Patriot Nurse<sup>5</sup>

Born in Connecticut in 1747, Abigail Corbin married Phineas Peck in 1776. With her husband away at war, her home was destroyed by the British. Putting aside her personal tragedy, Abigail nursed the wounded in the immediate area. For this compassionate service, the National Society Daughters of the American Revolution recognized her as a Revolutionary War

## <sup>6</sup>American Civil War<sup>7</sup>

“Civil war nurses were often called ‘Angels of the Battlefield. Approximately two thousand women, North and South, served as volunteer nurses in military hospitals during the American Civil War. In the antebellum north and south women had “a duty to care” and were expected to nurse ill members of their families and neighbors .”



‘The American edition of Florence Nightingale’s book *Notes On Nursing* was published in 1860 and *Godey’s Lady’s Book (2)* wrote of her experiences in the Crimean War. When war was declared and their men went off to war, women on both sides of the conflict went to their respective army hospitals to offer their services some as volunteers, some as paid nurses. Revenby credits the Civil War for bringing the attention of the American public, as the fighting in the Crimea had for the British, the dangers of a disorganized hospital and sanitary services. ‘<sup>8</sup>

For further information on civil war nursing see:

<https://www.nursingeducationhistory.org/civil-war-.html>

<sup>5</sup> <http://miserybay.usanethosting.com/wordpress/2011/06/history/>

<sup>6</sup> Illustration from Louisa May Allcott, fictionalized account of her experiences in the Civil War, *Hospital Sketches*

<sup>7</sup> For further information see <https://www.nursingeducationhistory.org/civil-war-.html>

<sup>8</sup> Ibid

## **Establishment of formal Nurse Training programs**

During the Crimean war the actions of Florence Nightingale and her fellow nurses proved the worth of female nurses in caring for the sick and wounded. In the American Civil War, although the volunteer nurses lacked formal training, their actions demonstrated the value of women in caring for the wounded. Still, many military physicians found it difficult to accept female nurses, believing that women were ‘out of place’ in caring for the wounded. Interestingly, females in religious orders who generally had formal training in the care of the sick and wounded were excluded from this point of view. Just as in England at the end of the Crimean war, the Civil War became the impetus for the establishment of nurse training schools in America.

In 1872 Linda Richards entered the New England Hospital for Women and Children, located at that time in Roxbury Mass; while the program was not based on the Nightingale method, when Linda Richards graduated in September 1873, she was considered America’s first trained nurse. Eighteen seventy three was also the year that three hospitals established the first ‘Nightingale’ nurse training schools in America. These were:

- New York Training School at Bellevue Hospital
- Connecticut Training School at New Haven State Hospital
- Training School at Massachusetts General Hospital

The demand for trained nurses to assist physicians and care for their patients, as well as the “haphazard and disorganized”<sup>9</sup> nursing service in most hospitals, resulted in the establishment in America of nurse training schools based on Nightingale training schools. The establishment, and success of the first three hospital nurse training schools led to a steady increase in the number of hospital training schools in America.

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<sup>9</sup> Kalish, Phillip and Beatrice Kalish , 2004 Chapter 3 The Founding of Early Schools of Nursing In America. In American Nursing: A History Lippincott Williams and Wilkins. p60



### Nightingale Model Training Schools

First U.S. training schools form in 1873

Connecticut Training School, New Haven, CT  
Boston Training School in Boston, MA

Bellevue Hospital Training School in New York, NY



Bellevue Hospital Nursery (l) and School Pin (r)  
Both images from *Bellevue: A Short History of Bellevue Hospital and of the Training Schools*, by Mrs. William Preston Griffin and Mrs. William Henry Odette, 1916.  
Available on the Internet Archive: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/iarch00001>



**The Connecticut Training School for Nurses.**

"CLARITY BEGINS AT HOME." To provide for our families in delicate and imperative duty. In health we think our means to obtain every comfort for those whom we love. What preparation do we make for sickness? The time and thoughtful care, who are we prepared to be our caregivers though our eyesight is never present one for much of this we are responsible, though they may not realize it. It is too late to remedy the evil when sickness strikes our loved ones; our friends are related with health, living words, but the lack of knowledge their aid is ineffective, and leads to serious results.

NURSES ARE BORN OF IT. LAST ENDS, always difficult—sometimes impossible—in fact when needed, often inefficient for want of proper training in more—more useful and substantial, or even worse. Lack of knowledge to use their hands, for there has been no opportunity for instruction. Kindness and good intentions cannot take the place of trained skill.

THE OBJECT OF THIS SCHOOL is to provide, by a thorough course of instruction and experience, all the bedside of the sick, a corps of disciplined and efficient Nurses, to meet the wants of families of all classes of society and the public institutions of the State. During one year they will be necessarily occupied in seeing for the sick, this experience being supplemented by instruction by a trained head nurse, and a staff of physicians, dentists, lecturers and teachers.

The enlarged Connecticut State Hospital will be the home of its pupils and the base of its training work. The large number of patients in the Hospital will afford the best facilities for acquiring familiarity with different diseases.

THE OUTLINE AND DIRECTION has been selected by a committee of leading physicians and citizens, whose character is a guarantee of successful and economical management, and whose services are gratuitous.

IT IS A NECESSITY. Our families, in times of serious illness, or serious accidents, are greatly benefited by the presence of nurses. Trained practical nurses, with knowledge of disease, administration of medicines and observation, are very rare in this State. To this lack of intelligent aid may be attributed much unnecessary suffering and the sacrifice of many valuable lives. There are other urgent needs in disease when a minute is fatal. Sudden changes in symptoms must be promptly met. The physician if not he cannot be found and we have no help. To have help to meet the emergency, is invaluable then.

EFFICIENT may at any time that no other would then care for our sick and for the helpless poor.

PREVENTION OF DISEASE by observing its duration—by eliminating its causes—and by the removal of aggravating influences—these may be secured.