“Good wives! Good Women!”:
Wisconsin Women’s Labor on the Homefront During the American Civil War

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Abstract
When the Civil War began, Emily Quiner was a middle-class schoolteacher in Madison, Wisconsin. When news about the attack on Fort Sumter was announced, Emily immediately volunteered for the Union cause. She sewed flags and socks, raised monies for troops, and later volunteered to become a nurse to demonstrate her patriotism and support for the North. Drawing upon the diaries and oral histories of Wisconsin women, this paper argues that rural and urban women stepped up to perform agricultural, domestic, business, patriotic, and emotional labor in the absence of husbands and sons beyond peacetime norms. Historians of women’s work during the Civil War era have considered women’s movement into health and hygiene, including nursing and their work with the United States Sanitary Commission, their movement into industrial labor and government work, and the expansion of women’s public economic roles during the market revolution, but what remains to be fully explored is how the war impacted women’s labor in Wisconsin, a state that was not significantly populated at the time. Regardless of social class, Wisconsin women’s labor during the Civil War and Reconstruction changed in the absence of their partners. This paper uses brief case studies of five Wisconsin women, both rural and urban, across various social classes to explore how women navigated changes to their labor practices during the Civil War. While some wealthier urban women like Quiner, who did not need income, could perform labor that directly served wartime needs, rural women whose husbands went to war had to balance domestic, agricultural, and paid labor to support their children. Regardless, however, all Wisconsin women found themselves performing substantial emotional labor as they corresponded with male kin and husbands and hoped for their safe return.
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Introduction

“At first it displeased me, and I turned away in aversion.”¹ Visiting Wisconsin and Iowa in 1863, Mrs. Mary A. Livermore recalls an “unusual sight” on her journey in southern Wisconsin. Livermore was unused to seeing women in the field toiling away, even so, she concluded that the women’s work with grain was done carefully and with more beauty than the same task done by men. Further determining to herself that these women’s husbands must be too poor to hire farm laborers and as helpful companions, “…they have girt themselves to this work—and they are doing it superbly. Good wives! Good women!”² Later during the same visit, this native of Boston, as part of the US Sanitary Commission, was traveling across the countryside; her carriage broke down near a field of grain that six women and two men were harvesting. While waiting for repairs, she went to talk to them. When she asked one of the women about their work, the woman responded, “…the men have all gone to the war, so that my man can’t hire help at any price, and I told my girls we must turn to and give him a lift with the harvest in.”³ Livermore was again surprised to find that this woman was not a recent German immigrant, but a woman who had moved from New York state and a mother of three sons who had all enlisted in the army, the youngest of whom had died, and they were unable to recover his body.⁴ As Livermore continued to talk to these women, they told her “…that as long as the country can’t get along without grain, nor the army fight

¹ Mary A. Livermore, My Story of the War: A Woman’s Narrative of Four Years of Personal Experience (Hartford, CT: A.D. Worthington and Company, 1890), 146.

² Livermore, My Story of the War, 146.

³ Livermore, My Story of the War, 147.

⁴ Livermore, My Story of the War, 147, 148.
without food, we’re serving the country just as much here in the harvest field as our boys are on the battlefield—and that sort o’ takes the edge off from this business of doing men’s work, you know.”\(^5\) Besides the fieldwork they were now taking on, the women of this family also participated in domestic and political labor by manufacturing hospital supplies and clothing and making several varieties of preserved foods to send to soldiers in hospitals. Livermore decided that “each hard-handed, brown, toiling woman was a heroine.”\(^6\)

Women’s roles in societies have always been flexible and changed with necessity. Since the beginning of the modern era, events, especially wars, have often led to social change and reform movements. By the early twenty-first century, people equated this phenomenon with World War II, Rosie the Riveter, and women’s connection with their entrance into work via conscription and volunteerism. That same concept of women and labor on the Homefront corresponds directly to women in Wisconsin during the Civil War. The roles that gender, social norms, and economic changes had shaped for women of Wisconsin—analyzing women in Wisconsin before, during, and after the Civil War creates a picture of new independence, expansion of domestic roles, and labor in which they were obliged to participate. The Civil War, fused with their contemporary ideologies on race, class, and gender, impacted Wisconsin women’s labor practices and the roles women filled voluntarily and by choice.

Regardless of social class, women’s labor during the Civil War changed in the absence of their husbands. This is reflected in the lives of five women: Cecilia

\(^5\) Livermore, My Story of the War, 147.

\(^6\) Livermore, My Story of the War, 149.
(Odigomokwe Hollowfoot) Connor, Adelaide (Addie) Tripp, Margaret Vedder Holdrege, Emily Quiner, and Mary Schaal Johns illustrate continuity and change in women’s work, including the added emotional, patriotic, and physical labor demanded of women in the absence of their male kin. The case studies of these women provide the foundation on which the labor of women is clarified and connected to the war. Most of the women were directly impacted by added labors and worries during the war, and all of them were indirectly impacted by manifestations of the war in common society.

Historiography
The Civil War was, and continues to be written about exhaustively, starting immediately after the surrender of Robert E. Lee in April 1865. After the war, historians and writers collected vast data and personal histories of the soldiers involved. The early scholarship focused on what led to the war, consistently painting it as an inevitable outcome. A few standouts pertain to women, including *Woman’s Work in the Civil War: A Record of Heroism, Patriotism, and Patience*. Authors L.P. Brockett and Mrs. Mary C Vaughan cataloged various women’s stories generally focused on nursing, organizing,

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7 Emily Quiner’s name is spelled differently in various sources; you can find it Emilie or Emily, but her grave marker has it as Emily, which is how it will appear throughout the rest of this paper. The research presented on Cecilia (Odigomokwe Hollowfoot) Connor was from a book published by the Burnett Historical Society, which they produced from a collection of writings done by Cecilia’s grandson Lafayette Connor. As oral histories are a large part of Indigenous culture, I believe this to be a trusted source. Many events can be connected to recorded historical documents and are cited in the endnotes of each chapter.

8 The women in the case studies were from various areas of Wisconsin, some rural and frontier and some in more populated cities or towns. Two of them are cataloged oral histories, and three of the women are written about based on their journal entries. All journal entries are quoted with spelling and grammatical errors left as the women wrote them.

9 Brandon M. Eldridge, ”The Ever-Evolving Historiography of the American Civil War,” *Graduate Review*: Vol.1, Iss. 1, Article 7 (2021): 55-61, https://openspaces.unk.edu/grad-review/vol1/iss1/
and other distinguished services. Brockett also authored at least five books on the Civil War, including a general history and *The Life of Abraham Lincoln*. His collection on women started while the war was still ongoing in 1863 with a book called *The Philanthropic Results of the War*, which was intended to be circulated overseas. This inspired him to continue accumulating the stories, touring, and interviewing women he thought of as heroic. At the same time, the historians discuss one woman from Wisconsin, Cordelia Harvey, and The Wisconsin Soldiers' Aid Society. As is typical for this era, historians were not talking about ordinary women. They only emphasized the women who had made a name for themselves through auxiliary activities and volunteerism, ignoring the important labors of all women in the Civil War era.

According to Brandon Eldridge, in the twentieth century, historians began to look at the economic implications that led to the varied political decisions dividing the industrial north and the agricultural South. Published texts eventually moved to viewing the war as a less inevitable happenstance to more pro-south or pro-north arguments defending the decisions of either side depending on where their school of thought fell. Eldridge discussed how the historiography then changed again after the civil rights movement, which refreshed the equity perception and inspired historians to examine abolitionists' actions. This also led to historians looking at the war through the lens of Reconstruction, scrutinizing events that happened post-Civil War concerning politics.

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and the legal systems that were implemented. Looking at the war from the bottom-up historical lens revealed how the war impacted various communities, such as children, veterans, and women on the home front.

Historians of women began writing about women in the Civil War more frequently after the feminist movement in the 1970s and published more frequently starting in the 1990s. These authors showed what women did during the war from a feminist historical perspective. Stephanie McCurry is one example of a female Civil War historian who focuses on bottom-up history telling. McCurry has published three books and many articles on the Civil War. Her first book, *Masters of Small Worlds*, published in 1995, was focused on Yeoman, poor white farmers, and households in the South during the antebellum period leading up to the war. In her most recent book, *Women's War: Fighting and Surviving the American Civil War* (2020), McCurry concentrated on the orchestration of patriarchy and power by implementing white Christian values to lessen the care required by the government for "freed" enslaved persons. McCurry has a reputation for focusing on poor white women and farming families along with enslaved women to tell history through that lens, adding a compelling perspective to the connection between women and politics and the war's outcome.

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Thavolia Glymph, an educator, speaker, and author, is another female Civil War historian who writes about the war through the lens of women and gender history. Glymph has authored several articles discussing the antebellum South and has published three books on the Civil War and slavery. Her most recent book, *The Women's Fight: The Civil War's Battles for Home, Freedom, and Nation*, is a look at women's roles in several categories, including domesticity, politics, gender, and class in both the North and South. Glymph does not explicitly look at the Midwest though she does look at the differences in Northern women and Southern women through the lens of class disparity and the treatment of women in addition to credit received for their labor contributions to the war. Glymph furthers the discourse of the archival and historical silences of the work of women of color, which was evident in my research of Wisconsin women.

Judith Giesberg has published four books on the Civil War focused on northern women and their contributions to the war. Giesberg has written two books on the Sanitary Commission. *Civil War Sisterhood: The U.S. Sanitary Commission and Women's Politics Transition* (2000) and *Army at Home: Women and the Civil War on the Northern Home Front* (2009) which analyzed how women were organizing and helping the war effort in the ways they were allowed. Giesberg attempts to unravel the spaces in which women influenced change from rural spaces to government

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involvement and examines the ways in which women claimed the new spaces available to them.\textsuperscript{18}

Richard H Hall was a standout male historian who wrote \textit{Women of the Civil War Battlefront} (2006), though he does almost exclusively write about women as spies and secret soldiers.\textsuperscript{19} Additionally, many male historians focus on women’s roles in the Civil War, either dealing with feminine qualities like nursing or caretaking and often gravitating towards cases in which women masculinized themselves by dressing up and playing a man's part. While these things happened, and women historians author these stories as well, other historical lenses such as political, economic, or class should be applied to create a complete and just picture of their reality.

A book on women who dressed as men to fight is \textit{They Fought Like Demons} by De Anne Blanton and Lauren M. Cook.\textsuperscript{20} A feminist concept of what it was to be a Civil War soldier with scant access to records and little proof of their existence, these two authors work hard to show the strength of these women. They wrote in their conclusion, “Women soldiers of the Civil War merit recognition because they were there and because they were not supposed to be. They deserve remembrance because their actions made them uncommon and revolutionary, possessed of a valor at odds with


\textsuperscript{19} Richard H. Hall, \textit{Women on the Civil War Battlefront}, (Lawrence, Kansas: The University of Kansas, 2006).

Victorian, and in some respects, even modern views of women’s proper role.” This book expands the narrative on what was expected of women during the war and how working-class women and rural women used this as a way to escape the socially acceptable alternatives.

Predominantly, texts on women’s history during the Civil War focus on nursing and their roles as caretakers and those ideals associated with femininity. Women like Clara Barton, Dorothea Dix, Mary A. Livermore, Cordelia Harvey, and Mary Ann Bickerdyke made names for themselves through nursing, administration, and institution building. Accounts of all these women discuss the steadfastness of their pursuit of caring for wounded soldiers. Much of the work on Wisconsin women focused on Cordelia Harvey, often called the Wisconsin Angel. A widow of Governor Harvey of Wisconsin, who died accidentally early in the war, she tirelessly called attention to the needs of Union Hospitals in Wisconsin. She was instrumental in getting Abraham Lincoln’s attention to promote improvements.

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21 De Anne Blanton and Lauren M. Cook. They Fought Like Demons, 206.


The same evolution of historical writing that happened to Civil War writing is also evident in Wisconsin historians’ writings about the war. Robert Nesbit, a professor emeritus of American history at the University of Wisconsin Madison, wrote three volumes of *History of Wisconsin*, first published in 1973. While writing about the Civil War, he mainly concentrated on the war’s economic impact on the young, growing state. Nesbit wrote a great deal about the militia in the state and the various nationalities and how poorly trained soldiers with disciplinary problems were a widespread problem.\(^{24}\) Again, the focus was on the soldiers, politicians, military training spaces, and the economic impacts of the war. In his twenty-page chapter about the Civil War and its effects on Wisconsin, he devoted five paragraphs to women, including the story on Mrs. Livermore, information on Cordelia Harvey, and the U.S. Sanitary Commission.\(^{25}\) This type of historical writing left out a large part of the population and thus cannot represent history completely. Focusing on “great man” history at most shows what men did and typically focuses on white men in power.

Some writing helps to solidify feminine labor ideas, including *Calling This Place Home: Women on the Wisconsin Frontier 1850-1925*, by Joan M. Jenson.\(^{26}\) Jenson studies frontier women of Wisconsin in extraordinary depth. This book captures the hardships of life in rural Wisconsin before and after the Civil War. Though she does not invest a lot of writing on the Civil War specifically, she acknowledges the war through


the women and older men who supported the war at home, Native American participation, women’s participation in relief committees, and the connection of Catholic nuns and nursing. When she drafted the story of German immigrant Anna who lived near Dorchester, Wisconsin she displayed the resilience and strength needed on the frontier. “Anna hoed, raked hay, cut, and shocked rye. Anna later told her daughter-in-law that while working in the fields she always wore an apron to wrap up the baby in case she gave birth… She also helped neighbor women birth their children and was often paid in kind.”

Jenson’s book revealed what life was like for the women of Wisconsin from woodlands to farmlands in health and migration.

Wisconsin women’s labor shifted in the absence of their husbands, made more interesting by the frontier nature of most of the state. Further research should be conducted on the day-to-day life impacts of women and labor in Wisconsin; its unique placement on the Mississippi River and its frontier-like population add to the story. Wisconsin was removed from battles but connected to the war through soldiers, volunteers, and supply routes. The disconnection between the war and northern and rural Wisconsin further complicated their lives. The societal impacts can be explored by going through journals, diaries, and letters allowing historians to see the emotional toll caused by the extra labor, loneliness, and worry of women.

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27 Jensen, Calling This Place Home, 34.
Power, Pride, and Perseverance

At the commencement of the American Civil War, Wisconsin was a newly formed state with vastly varied communities and settlements from the populous counties like Milwaukee (68,512) to the sparsity of Dallas County (13).\textsuperscript{28} The majority of the women discussed were part of families settling or already settled in places without access to transportation, supplies, and familial or community support. New territories and exciting opportunities with sizable lots of land enticed immigrants and others to try their hand at homesteading. Contrasting ideologies plagued the women in these frontier areas. Expectations to conform to female gender norms were in opposition to the labor performed on the frontier. They were blurred by necessity, with women performing agricultural work beyond their prescribed gender sphere.

Wisconsin was young and not well established; in 1850, two-thirds of the state was populated by people from the eastern United States, while one-third were foreign-born immigrants. Of those 100,000 immigrants, only 48,000 spoke English as their native language.\textsuperscript{29} The influx of new immigrants to the United States and Wisconsin was vast; from 1850 to 1860, the population increased 154.1\% to 775,881 people, with 90.6\% of those people being ‘rural.’\textsuperscript{30} During the Civil War, Wisconsin sent 91,000 men


supplying 56 regiments to fight in the South, with 12,000 men never returning. The women of Wisconsin were expected to be the emotional, medical, spiritual, and economic support to their male family members, and they gave their best effort.

A revised concept of white womanhood emerged between the Revolution and the Civil War. During the Market Revolution, the United States of America experienced a period of economic growth with erratic and rapid peaks and valleys. The development of the Industrial North pushed the expansion of slavery in the South. The Market Revolution created great wealth, drove changes in class status, and amplified the disparity and differences between race, class, and gender. People started to work outside the home and moved away from the cottage industry. Farmers grew crops for money rather than personal subsistence, and cities formed along with the establishment of immense factories and manufacturing centers. Gender roles were altered then because of the further division of the classes, women that belonged to wealthier and middle-class women were able to gain respectable employment through formal education. However, poor families’ children were economic assets, thus they did not receive an education because they had to work to bring income into the family.

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33 Locke and Wright, American Yawp, chap 8, sec 2.

34 Locke and Wright, American Yawp, chap 8, sec 1.

35 Locke and Wright, American Yawp, chap 8, sec 5.
When it came to enslaved people, their labor remained intensely physical and brutally monitored; enslaved women were deemed less fragile than white women. As such, there was an expectation to perform demanding physical and agricultural labor despite their gender because of the strict racial hierarchy in the South.\textsuperscript{36} The North and Wisconsin, in particular, were considered anti-slavery and abolitionist. The lens of 21st-century activism fragments analysis of the treatment of people of color, including women, because abolitionist ideals were anti-slavery but not pro-equality.

Indigenous populations were subjected to colonization by white settlers and herded around the country, separated from their homes and families.\textsuperscript{37} In Wisconsin, the intermixing of Anglo settlers and Native Americans created hybrid societies whose women often tried to continue their roles within their traditions and work with and peacefully reject the white societal norms. Which often led to the women of these family systems becoming mediators between Indigenous and white communities, garnering both respect for their knowledge and disdain for their familial practices.\textsuperscript{38}

Middle- and upper-class American women participated in the Civil War and took on roles outside their prescribed domestic sphere to survive. The Civil War had impacts that need to be discussed on a social level to show the unintended impacts on women, social structures, economics, and national ideologies. As was the case in Wisconsin,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{36} Locke and Wright, \textit{American Yawp}, chap. 8, sec. 5.
\item \textsuperscript{38} Lucy Eldersveld Murphy, "Public Mothers: Native American and Metis Women," 146.
\end{itemize}
agricultural and physical labor was impacted by class, race status, and geographical location. Urban women of a higher-class status had far less physically demanding labor and continued to work within their prescribed domestic roles. Working-class women often had all the household duties of womanhood and sought paid work outside the home.

Adelaide (Addie) Tripp

Some women, like Adelaide Tripp, were seemingly unaffected by the events of the war. Adelaide (Addie) Tripp lived in the La Crosse Area with her parents and three younger siblings; during 1864, she kept a journal. Addie's journal entries stated that her father was in the trading business on the Mississippi River, and her family ran a boarding house. The implication is that Addie's family had enough income, and their father's job status put them in the middle class, allowing her to continue life as usual during the war. Her daily entries were brief writings about work, family activities, the travelers who boarded with them, and her courtship with John W. Johnson. Addie wrote over ninety short entries throughout the year, describing the fun she had going shopping, dancing, visiting town, getting her picture taken, attending festivals, and getting ice cream. Her leisure activities, her father's purchases of one hundred dollars of cloth on April 7, 1864, and eighty-eight sheep for two dollars and fifty cents apiece just two months later April 28 paint a picture of the higher wealth status of her family.40

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40 Tripp, ”The Diary of Addie Tripp,1864,” 160.
Addie never mentioned the war once in the year, but she did discuss the rhythms of work that she was responsible for; as a daughter, she was most involved with the "wash," ironing, and sewing. The wash usually took the entirety of her day. On Tuesday, May 3, she observed, "I am doing general housework. I do not get time to do much else I worked out in the yard a little while this morning…." Addie splits her work into general housework, family work, and outside work. Outside work concerned planting, fruit and vegetable picking, and beekeeping. She also records cooking and baking. Because of the frontier nature of Wisconsin at the time, Addie illustrated that women were responsible for physically demanding labor outside of war. Boarders made a frequent appearance, and she wrote, "Fri. September 16. This morning they are here for breakfast. We have twenty-two in the family while the Thrashers are here." The threshing took three days. It was likely that while living at home with her family, she worked every day doing both physical and domestic labor. Addie's family occasionally hired help with sewing, establishing her class status.

Despite working diligently, Addie was available to have fun, writing, “Fri. June 24. Johny comes out after me with splendid horses & carrage to go in town to a Masonic festival we have a pleasant ride in town I enjoy it very much I stay to Mr. Barlows all

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41 Tripp, “The Diary of Addie Tripp,1864,” 159.

42 Threshing is the process of separating the edible parts of grain from the straw. Before mechanization, it was often put into piles and beaten with a flail or held in clumps and beaten on the surface. It is unclear in this situation if it was mechanized or not.


44 Tripp, "The Diary of Addie Tripp,1864," 162.
night after the festival.” 45 Addie's manual labor brought her no income, and it was solely revenue to support the boarding business and her family. It was evident that Addie worked hard physically at her family's home, and her social and emotional well-being was seemingly not further complicated by the Civil War. However, the amount of labor she did was likely increased, possibly by additional boarders in the home, additional food needs, food production, or as extra time spent working for her family.

Mary Schaal Johns
Women with fewer economic resources during the Civil War, like Mary Schaal Johns, experienced different hardships. When her husband left her alone, they had a newly built five-room cottage, three children under five years of age, a cow, and a few chickens. 46 Mary was put in a position for numerous extraordinary labors. Mary’s survival relied upon her physical labor, but she also performed immense maternal and emotional labor. Women like Mary also partially represent the continuity of women’s labor during this time because in unsettled areas agricultural and physical labors would have been present regardless. In most respects the women chose to live in and immigrate to these areas and subsequently committed to agricultural and physical labor.

Mary Schaal Johns was born close to Berlin, Germany in 1838. She emigrated to Mayville, Wisconsin, in 1848, her father, a blacksmith, thought his children would have a better life. 47 Mary’s mother, Loisa, died six months after Mary was born. Mary’s father


then married Loisa’s sister Wilhelmine. In total Mary had twelve siblings, five including Mary, born by her mother, and then eight half-siblings born by Wilhelmine. It took eleven weeks by boat for the family to emigrate to America, landing in New York and then a train to Buffalo when her brother Julius, two years old at the time, died. Next, they traveled to Milwaukee, Wisconsin finally settling in Mayville. In 1851 Mary’s mother (aunt-Wilhelmine) died, and four months later, her father passed away suddenly. A man who rented a room from them found the children places to live, and Mary was sent to live with the Davis family about twelve miles from Mayville. The Davis family was extremely poor and worked Mary very hard. Eventually, and with some encouragement, she ran away. She then spent two years after that working various jobs. In 1855, when Mary was seventeen, she met and married her husband, August Johns, a 26-year-old recent immigrant from Germany and a cooper by trade. They settled in Oakfield, WI, about fifteen miles from Mayville, and had three children before the American Civil War broke out in April 1861.

Mary recalled that at the onset of the war, “Everything was excitement.” By 1862, August felt it was his duty to enlist for service, and Mary supported this decision as they both felt enslaved people should be freed. He signed on with the company from Oakfield, subsequently ending up in Company F of the 21st regiment, mustering out on


August 13, 1862. Living in Oakfield, Mary was isolated when her husband departed; unlike Mayville, Oakfield was primarily populated with an already adapted English-speaking community. Mary and her husband had anticipated that her neighbors would be able to help in her husband’s absence; instead, Mary would be on her own, performing countless and thankless labors for her family’s survival.54

Mary described how the three years that August was enlisted were incredibly challenging for her, having had their fourth child just six months after he left. With little financial support, she executed a range of paid and unpaid labors to support her family in her husband’s absence. She said, “On rainy days, I brought the sticks in the kitchen and laid them, one at a time, with the ends resting on two chairs, while I sawed them in two. I would set a child on each end of the stick to hold it steady.”55 She depended on her children for help to get things done and keep the house warm. Mary’s sister drove from Mayville weekly to drop off denim cloth. Mary used the denim cloth to sew overalls, which she sold for fifty cents per pair. She made these without a sewing machine and produced one pair a day.56 Because this task took all day, Mary would stay up extremely late to do all the remaining domestic labor by candlelight. She described how

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her neighbors would ask her if she had slept because her candles were lit so late into the night.\textsuperscript{57}

Once a month it was necessary for Mary to travel to Fond du Lac, seven miles away, to receive her allotted $5.00 in county support that she was entitled to for being a soldier’s wife. Without a means of transportation, Mary had to watch for neighbors and catch a ride with anyone she could, sometimes unsuccessfully. These monthly trips left Mary’s four young children home alone throughout the day and into the night.\textsuperscript{58} When Mary received letters from her husband, she used to pray that God would not let her become a widow and her children orphans. She said, “When I nursed my baby, the hot tears rolled down my cheeks, and my baby looked up as if she wondered why I wept.”\textsuperscript{59} The emotional labor this caused her was heightened because of the firsthand knowledge of being an orphan herself.

Mary had a frugal husband who helped with the income by only keeping 3 of the 13 dollars a month he earned as a soldier, and he also washed shirts for other soldiers for 10 cents apiece.\textsuperscript{60} Mary said she fainted for the only time in her life the day August came home from war and was very proud to say that her husband came home to a household free of debts.\textsuperscript{61} That was clear evidence of how hard she worked. Mary showed exceptional perseverance during the Civil War with four young children to care


for, a house to run, animals to keep, and tasks to earn money. Mary’s social class affected the amount of labor she accomplished while her husband was gone. Her experience displays the physical and emotional labor as well as the pride and perseverance she took in her life.

Service, Smocks, and Supplies

Figure 1 "United States Sanitary Commission: Our Heroines. Published April 9, 1864, by Harper’s Weekly

Women supplying patriotic and medical labor are much more prolifically written about. Information on them is easier to find as this type of women’s labor was and is praised in society. The above figure displays the admiration for the Sanitary Commission that the public developed. This print was made by famous political cartoonist Thomas Nast and presents the various women of the Sanitary Commission.
on the battlefield, in the hospital, making supplies at home, and working at the Sanitary Fairs, which they organized to raise money to help the war effort.\footnote{Thomas Nast, “United States Sanitary Commission: Our Heroines,” Published in Harper’s Weekly 9 April 1864.} The US Sanitary Commission was an integral part of the war effort, and it was implied that the formation was to cover the shortcomings of the government and their care for the Union Army.

Women’s socially accepted sphere of domesticity at the time included caretaking, though there was initial pushback from the government. Caretaking was a feminine task, yet they should have only attended to their own households. When the army ultimately agreed to allow women to be nurses it was under the direction of the United States Sanitary Commission. Nationally recognized names like Mary A. Livermore, Mary Bickerdyke and Dorothea Dix held many positions of power and through those positions instituted change through politics and reform efforts.\footnote{The more famous of these women who found power in organizing were at least 10 years older than my case studies and at most 38 years older. At the start of the war Mary Livermore was forty-one, Mary Bickerdyke was forty-four, Clara Barton and Dorothea Dix were both fifty-nine, and Cordelia Harvey was the youngest at 37. This may have impacted their ability to attain position and changed their wealth status and ability and knowledge to volunteer.} Dorothea Dix is known for her early work in mental health and positions during the war including the Superintendent of Women Nurses, she was said to have very high standards.\footnote{Livermore, \textit{My Story of the War}, 232. \cite{Giesberg2008} Giesberg, \textit{Army at Home}, 78.} While working with Women’s Central Association of Relief and the US Sanitary Commission with Dr. Elizabeth Blackwell it was said, “A woman must be mature in years, plain almost to
homeliness in dress, and by no means liberally endowed with personal attractions, if she hoped to meet the approval of Miss Dix.”

Clara Barton is a distinguishable name, even if there is not a direct recollection of what she did. Barton was a very active Civil War Union nurse; it was her mission to spread the word about the need for medical supplies, even resorting to advertising in newspapers. She was present at many famous battles, worked with President Lincoln, and even held the same position as Dorothea Dix. After the war, she worked tirelessly to connect friends and families with missing soldiers. In 1865, Clara went to Switzerland as a member of the International Red Cross and by the 1880s, had established the American Red Cross. Because of Barton’s skills in organization and experiences she gained during the Civil War she was able to pioneer advancements in humanitarian efforts.

In Wisconsin Cordelia Harvey, the “Wisconsin Angel,” was the Governors’ wife at the start of the Civil War. Harvey’s husband suddenly and accidentally died early in the war while on a tour of war encampments. Wanting to continue supporting the war effort in honor of her husband she went to go work with the US Sanitary Commission.

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65 Giesberg, Civil War Sisterhood, 41.
Brockett and Vaughn, Woman’s Work in the Civil War, 101.


67 Keira Stevenson, “Clara Barton.”

68 Keira Stevenson, “Clara Barton.”

69 Allen, Wisconsin’s Reluctant Heroine, 5.
Visiting the hospitals that were little more than shacks Harvey describes the conditions, “Pneumonia, typhoid, and camp fevers, and that fearful scourge of the Southern swamps and rivers, chronic diarrhea, occupied every bed.” Harvey showed up day after day in these hospitals supporting the sick and wounded in any way that she could. She sent for aid from the Western Sanitary Commission and then returned to Wisconsin to rally support and enthusiasm for women to continue making and sending the much-needed supplies.70

Harvey, like other well-known women of the time, did not shy away from conflict and fought many men in charge to get her way whether it was getting the discharge of a patient, getting a patient admitted, or urging the openings of new hospitals she did not quit until she was successful.71 This includes several encounters with President Lincoln wherein she negotiated funding for a hospital to be built in Wisconsin. Lincoln suggested it be named after her, but she respectfully asked that it be named for her late husband. Finding out the President had signed the order she said, “I could not speak, I was so entirely unprepared for it. I wept for joy; I could not help it. When I could speak, I said, “God bless you! I thank you in the name of thousands, who will bless you for the act.” The real result was three convalescent camps in Wisconsin in Madison, Milwaukee, and Prairie du Chien. The Harvey hospital was founded in 1863 and visited

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70 Hurn, Wisconsin Women, 109.
71 Hurn, Wisconsin Women, 110-113.
by many famous Civil War women, after the war it was used as a soldiers' orphans' home. Which was the project Mrs. Harvey worked on after the wars end.\textsuperscript{72}

The public and scholars alike have long remembered the Civil War because of the battles and bravery of men. While their sacrifices should be recognized, women are continually left out of the equation unless they made a name for themselves. The battles of men would not have been won without the sacrifices of women’s time and labor contributing food and supplies to the men of the front. During the beginning of the war, propaganda campaigns praised women, using them as motivation for fighting by connecting mothers, lovers, sisters, and friends to the flag as a symbol of patriotic duty. The propaganda used the ideology of Republican Motherhood, shaped by the memory of the Revolution, to show that the role of a mother was to sacrifice her son for their Country.\textsuperscript{73}

\textsuperscript{72} Hurn, Wisconsin Women, 116-120.

\textsuperscript{73} Locke and Wright, \textit{American Yawp}, chap. 14, sec. 4.
The illustration above is the rhetoric used to display how men could be inspired to join the cause, convincing them to do their patriotic duty to gain honor. Four of the above six images depict women’s roles in influencing men to join the ranks. Those roles include those of a wife, lover, sister, and mother, but instead of care taking they are using coercive measures to shame and guilt the men in their lives. The wife and lover both make their relationships conditional on their partners willingness to fight. The sister is interesting, the artwork makes the captain “little” exaggerating the size difference insinuates her brother was less manly than him unless he joins. In the mothers frame she encouraged violence from her young son belittling the soldier as only a “parlor soldier” with the caption, “How mothers may arouse the slumbering lion in their sons'
Curiously, the last two frames use fathers, and both involve an economic correlation. It is unclear if the father standing with his son in front of the bounty sign was threatening to turn his son in or if he wanted him to serve to add money to the families’ coffers. The last one is economically, and class based, the son was expensive in costing $5000 for a commission. Significant because families needed to keep lineage ties for wealth but also there was backlash because wealthy people were able to pay their way out of danger.

Another way strongarm measures existed were rallies and fairs which were organized far and wide, with officers addressing the crowds gathered and encouraged men to join up. While women and girls beseeched their men to be brave with promises of continued romance or matrimony. The rallies used nationalistic music and singing which further fostered a patriotic fervor, which were employed as tactics of compulsion to move men to join the fight. Flag raisings resulted from a wave of national patriotism, which inspired women to display national colors and work sewing flags for different military units using whatever materials they could. Banquets were organized for the soldiers before departing, which provided food from the area’s people and ended with parades or dancing. Poems, stories, and drawings idealized the women’s role in the home, waiting for their gallant men to return. Media showed them worrying if men would

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74 Frank Leslie, “The Art of Inspiring Courage” Cartoon, Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper, October 1863. Tulane University.

75 Hurn, Wisconsin Women, 24.

76 Hurn, Wisconsin Women, 24,25.

77 Hurn, Wisconsin Women, 27-30.
return or not and showing the strength of women in maintaining the war effort by putting their matronly skills to work, making supplies, and keeping their homes. By the war's end, women were displayed in a different light, ultimately revealing their domestic suffering.78

Women of the north not only served but encouraged men to be of service, working in any way possible, few women were untouched by the call to provide supplies for the frontlines, every hospital needed bandages, every soldier needed food. Cordelia Harvey rose to some fame through her work, but another Wisconsin woman lesser known nationally also immediately went to work for the war, Emily Quiner.79 Without Emily’s education and middle-class status it would have been unlikely that anyone would know of her extensive participation in the war, her journal writing provides a peek behind the curtain of the war in a way the other women in this category do not.

Emily Quiner
Emily Quiner was born January 26, 1840, in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, the oldest of five. She and her family moved to Watertown, Wisconsin, when she was ten years old, where her father published the local newspaper; then, in 1858, they moved to Madison.80 Emily began keeping her diary on April 14, 1861, just after Fort Sumter was


79 Quiner’s name has three results in a google search where Harvey has over three thousand and Mary Livermore has over 28,000. This illustrates the way historians have picked women of means and power to continually write about when great women exist elsewhere and should be seen and studied.

attacked at twenty-one years old.\textsuperscript{81} Later at twenty-three, she and her sister Fannie went to volunteer at Gayoso Union Army Hospital in Memphis.\textsuperscript{82} Emily’s final entry was September 27, 1863, starting the last paragraph with “Farewell my journal….”\textsuperscript{83} Emily Quiner embraced patriotism from the outset of the war, immediately going to work helping provide supplies and care for men and transforming her work roles.\textsuperscript{84} The diary of Emily Quiner is a wholly different look at the war. She appears reasonably wealthy, well educated, and decently connected which allows her to become much more involved in supporting the war effort. Emily’s father was a claims agent and author of a valuable collection of publications and records during the Civil War. Emily and her sister helped make this collection in part, although they received no credit. Emily wrote long and thoughtful journal entries.\textsuperscript{85} At the beginning of the war, she volunteered to raise money for the war effort and made patriotic items, including shirts, flags, and meals for soldiers.\textsuperscript{86} Emily frequently talked about the meetings, parties, and speaking engagements that boosted morale and gathered women as volunteers to aid the men at the beginning of the war. These events were highly nationalistic, often including the singing of the Star-Spangled 

\textsuperscript{81} Quiner, “The Diary of Emily Quiner, 1863,” 265.

\textsuperscript{82} Quiner, “The Diary of Emily Quiner, 1863,” 265.


\textsuperscript{84} Jo Ann Daly Carr, \textit{Such Anxious Hours: Wisconsin Women’s Voices from the Civil War} (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2020), 9.

\textsuperscript{85} Quiner, “The Diary of Emily Quiner, 1863,” 265.

\textsuperscript{86} Quiner, 14-22 April 1861.
Banner and other patriotic songs.\textsuperscript{87} Besides teaching, her life was wholly wrapped up in the war effort.

During the summer of 1863, Emily and her sister Fannie took up another form of labor that was further opened to women during the war: nursing. They volunteered to go to Memphis to serve as nurses.\textsuperscript{88} In her journal, Emily agonized over the men she cared for, taking extra time to ensure that their last hours alive were not sad or lonely. She wrote, “Friday, July 10th. Dreaded to go to my ward this morning, the air is so bad there, there are some very sick men here, and they require my constant attention, I already feel very much interested in some of them.” Another entry on July 15th revealed, “I feel too anxious about my men to go anywhere, there are three or four that may die any hour, Kent is very low tonight. I have sat by him all the afternoon; he is very quiet. It seems as if I could not bear to see him die.” Then on July 16th, she wrote, “Kent is dead, he breathed his last a half hour ago. I closed his eyes they prepared him for the grave and took him away, I shall never forget the sorrow I felt his death, he was so young a patient, so lonely and homesick and so grateful for everything I did for him, I shed as bitter tears over his dying bed as I ever wept in my life.”\textsuperscript{89}

Even when Emily’s time volunteering was over, she was reluctant to leave. She spent time making rounds and saying goodbye to everyone. During her time at the hospital, Emily frequently discussed her exhaustion.\textsuperscript{90} After being home for a month,

\textsuperscript{87} Quiner, 17 April 1861.
\textsuperscript{88} Quiner, “The Diary of Emily Quiner, 1863,” 265.
\textsuperscript{89} Quiner, “The Diary of Emily Quiner, 1863,” 267-269.
\textsuperscript{90} Quiner, “The Diary of Emily Quiner, 1863,” 270.
Emily was supposed to return and help at the hospital; both her father and her friends begged her to stay in Madison. She reluctantly decided to remain in Madison, writing her lengthy final entry on September 27, 1863, “I am so miserable about it, I have always longed so much to be able to do something in this great struggle for the life of the Nation, and now that an opportunity offers, I have thrown it away…” she continued, “I never knew so much real happiness in my life as I experienced in the few weeks which I spent by the bedsides and ministering to the wants of the sick and dying in the Hospital…” 91

Emily finishes the journal reflecting on how she changed throughout the war: “looking back on myself at that time, I see a lighter heart, a youthful face lit with far more hope for the future and joy for the present than it would be possible to find in the one now bending over these pages, yet I am sure that were it possible I would not exchange the one for the other.” 92 Emily gave her whole self to patriotic toil during the Civil War. She expended considerable patriotic, emotional, and physical labor as she felt it was her duty.

Bereaved, Boundless, and Bold

Women during the Civil War were met with grief everywhere in the media, in their communities, and in their homes. Countless women surrendered with broken hearts to the separation of themselves and their kin. In addition, women attempted to honor their country with loyalty by working for the war from home. “—northern women were

91 Quiner, “The Diary of Emily Quiner, 1863,” 272.

92 Quiner, “The Diary of Emily Quiner, 1863,” 273.
encouraged to accept soldier death quietly.”

Many women turned patriotic work and nursing to honor their loved ones, whether dead or gone. Community and kinship connections served to hold up women bereaved by loss or sadness. This meant many women moved to be closer to larger networks of kindship. Women turned to religion as a crutch to lean on while they were muddling their way through sorrow. Like the US Sanitary Commission, the need for community and peace created The United States Christian Commission. Instead of meeting the physical and material needs of soldiers they addressed their spiritual welfare. “In the summer of 1863, the religious life of the people began to be quickened. There were revival meetings and activity in building new churches everywhere.”

Margaret Vedder Holdrege

Margaret Vedder Holdredge of Berlin, Wisconsin, is one such woman who represents overwhelming changes in the breadth and depth of both the emotional and maternal labor women performed in the absence of men during the Civil War. Margaret Holdredge was born February 26, 1840, in West Milton, New York. The youngest of eight, she and her family moved to Berlin, Wisconsin, when she was nine. Margaret married Burton Holdrege during the war on September 9, 1863. While visiting Burton’s family in New York, Margaret started a diary on January 1, 1865. Burton left to help with the Union efforts from there, and Margaret went back to Wisconsin to stay with her

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93 Giesberg, Army at Home, 144.
94 Hurn, Wisconsin Women, 126.
family who owned a book and stationery store/meat market. Holdredge wrote about banal day-to-day activities but principally about missing her husband.

In her diary, Margaret wrote most about missing her husband Burton, how she wanted to hear from him, and her prayers for his safety. Margaret’s diary provided numerous examples of the added emotional labor of the women regarding their spouses who were soldiering in the Civil War. In her diary entry from January 14, 1865, she stated, “I hardly know what I shall do when he is gone. It will be so lonely without him. If only I could go with him but I cannot so I must try and make myself contented without. His mother thinks I don’t feel as bad as she does about it, but I don’t believe in showing my feelings if I can help it…”

Margaret’s mother-in-law seemed to have little sympathy for what she was going through, which compounded the emotional burden carried by her during his absence. During the eight months she and Burton were separated, she wrote forty-one entries and mentioned Burton 34 times. Every entry included a wish to see him, hear from him, or know that he was okay and would come to get her soon. She worried about Burton, and thoughts of him seem to overtake her every waking hour. March 27, 1865, a day after receiving a letter from her husband, she wrote, “I feel a little lonesome and began to want to get another letter from Burton, but I would a little rather see him.” On April 10 she wrote, “I thought perhaps I should get a letter from Burton but was disappointed.”

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96 Holdredge, “The Diary of Margaret Vedder Holdredge, 1865,” 164.

97 Holdredge, “The Diary of Margaret Vedder Holdredge, 1865,” 165.
On June 1st she received a letter and then wrote, “Oh how I wish I could be with him now…”

During this time, Margaret displayed profound anxiety about the circumstances she had found herself in during the war. Margaret turned to religion, attending various Christian churches in the area before she pledged herself to the Presbyterian church on July 1. She wrote about how pleasant the day was, feeling content in her decision to devote herself to Christ, continuing, “Oh I should be so happy if Eliza and Mary had joined with me and my dear husband, if he was only a Christian.” Margaret had found a source of comfort in a congregation that supported her, likely easing her emotional labor burden. Holdridge’s primary focus in her diary entries is her husband but she does talk about the array of domestic duties she performed, food, and the weather.

Cecilia (Odigomokwe Hollowfoot) Connor

Cecilia (Odigomokwe Hollowfoot) Connor was an Ojibwe woman born in 1834 somewhere in northern Minnesota, possibly in what is now the Fond du Lac reservation but because of the many treaties and lack of records this is speculation. It is unclear the number of siblings she had beside her one sister Sophie. Cecilia’s family and the village moved around the area seasonally, following resources and participating in the fur trade. Cecilia managed to survive a wave of smallpox around 1839. Sometime after that, her community was to move to Meenon, also known as Blueberry country or what

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98 Holdredge, “The Diary of Margaret Vedder Holdredge, 1865,” 170.


is now Burnett County, Wisconsin. Cecilia’s community and kinship ties were deeply rooted in her culture and heritage, conveying many recollections of her fondness for community gathering. Cecilia’s father worked with fur traders over the years and that is how Benjamin had come into her life in 1852. Benjamin was a young fur trader, had spent the winter at Fond du Lac. Benjamin went to Cecilia’s mother for healing after the cold weather damaged his feet and then pursued Cecilia and was liked by her family. Stuck in the village for the winter, Benjamin made plans with Cecilia and her family to use their sled dogs to travel for trade which Cecilia would also go; this was a common practice for fur traders to have accompanying indigenous women. A year after meeting, Benjamin and Cecilia were officially married June 10, 1853.

This family narrative discussed the labor of the family members and the communities in which they lived. By this account, Benjamin and Cecilia were an active part of their community participating in Indigenous practices often giving what they could to help support those around them in need, even if it impeded them. Benjamin was a well-read man who was interested in politics as well as being a mediator between the Indigenous people he lived with and the US Government attending treaty meetings. Benjamin gave up fur trading in 1858. In the spring of 1860, Benjamin moved Cecilia

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103 Lafayette Connor, *Cecilia*, 35.
106 Lafayette Connor, *Cecilia*, 76.
and their two sons, William (about 5) and Zach (infant), to Alden Township in Polk County, Wisconsin, in a birchbark canoe via riverways.\textsuperscript{107}

The journey for the family was long, full of stops to rest and repair their canoe, and encounters with many other people and travelers.\textsuperscript{108} Arriving in the fall of 1860, Cecilia and Benjamin took the time to fix up their permanent residence on Cedar Lake, to be joined later by Benjamin's brother Andrew and his wife Sofia, Cecilia's sister.\textsuperscript{109} By the outbreak of the war, Cecilia and Benjamin were settled in and starting to farm their land and raise animals. Andrew was called by the government to serve in the Civil War in 1863, his wife, Cecilia's sister had a baby shortly after and a relative of Sophia and Cecilia’s came to stay and help at the homestead. The neighborhood they settled in was predominantly Scandinavian immigrants, which they formed relationships with helping each other when they could. Cecilia formed a bond and friendship with one yellow-haired woman through both of their broken English.\textsuperscript{110} Cecilia also began to become known as a healer in the community. Cecilia described her new friend as ‘sick’ with worry for her kin and community members involved in the war. Cecilia’s yellow-haired friend included her in the community of ladies. Her friend was pregnant and worried,
Cecilia was there for the birth and right afterwards the mother fell terribly ill. Cecilia took the baby and fed and cared for him while the mother rested and got healthy.111

Benjamin was drafted in September 1864, as he was relaying the news to Cecilia she abruptly left and went to the lake. This is where she made the decision to travel back to her family with the kids, she understood her survival and the care of her children depended on her ability to rejoin her relatives. She went to work immediately repairing the canoe and planning her trip with the children. Cecilia left in early August and Benjamin would stay at their homestead until he was notified that he had to leave.112 The journey back up the rivers was just as adventurous as when her and Benjamin had moved south to Polk County, meeting new people, weathering through some bad storms, and the physical and emotional demands of parenting and traveling in the wilderness with three young children.113 Cecilia had decided she may never see Benjamin again or their house they had built, but at least she was safe within her community again.114

Conclusion

“The story of the war will never be fully or fairly written if the achievements of women in it are untold.”- Frank Moore, 1867.115

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111 Lafayette Connor, Cecilia, 111.

112 Lafayette Connor, Cecilia, 116.

113 Lafayette Connor, Cecilia, 114-126.

114 Lafayette Connor, Cecilia, 127.

115 Frank Moore, Women of the War: Their Heroism and Self-Sacrifice (Hartford, Connecticut, 1867) p IV.
Regardless of social class, women's labor during the Civil War changed in the absence of their husbands. This is reflected in the lives of five women: Cecilia (Odigomokwe Hollowfoot) Connor, Adelaide (Addie) Tripp, Margaret Vedder Holdrege, Emily Quiner, and Mary Schaal Johns illustrate continuity and change in women's work, including the added emotional, patriotic, and physical labor demanded of women in the absence of their male kin. The power, pride, and perseverance shown by Addie Tripp and Mary Schaal Johns demonstrates the ability of these women to survive and help their families flourish. While these two women are not in similar social class their work was still impacted daily. The story of Mary Schaal Johns is known by so few but the depth and breadth of her labors.

Service, smocks, and supplies are the reasons that women mobilized for the war, going to work outside of their gender norm. Emily Quiner is an ordinary Wisconsin woman that did so much for the war effort and has passed over by historians outside of Wisconsin. Notable women provided service and supplies and have been prolifically written about on a national scale. Women gained newfound independence and freedom with new methods of organizing, communicating, and traveling. Though women faced and continued to face hardships, the Civil War was a catalyst in helping women gain more independence and the courage to go against social norms and fight for rights. From these women who stepped into roles of power and paved the way for radicalizing the gender norms of the time sprouted the basis of organizations that fought for temperance and suffrage. The stories of these famous women should be acknowledged but should not overshadow those who were just as active but not as renowned.
These women bereaved, boundless, and bold Cecilia and Margaret dealing with the grief and worry of their called upon spouses and relying on the ties of kinship to keep them safe when they are alone. Margaret embraced her community of friends and sought a connection in congregation of religion to help her grieve and move forward. Cecilia made the bold decision to travel with her young children to keep them safe, returning to her kinship community.

Engaging with the primary sources that describe what these women’s lives were like during the Civil War adds to the history by filling in the historical silence present about average women at home. This type of history furthers contributions to the social aspects of history through what was necessitated by the absence of their male kin. These women are not well known, and they were not present at battles; they did not engage in any deception to participate directly in the war. Despite the separation of the women from the battles of the war, they were impacted by the outcomes and the resulting decisions of government officials.

Women, especially Wisconsin women, were significant in the Union’s victory, thanks to their continued labor and support. It is in these stories of ordinary women told by themselves that historians can see all the facets of the American Civil War. The five women explored within this paper did not fit in a single category or check a single box they were the extraordinary found in the ordinary.
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