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# **THE ALEXANDRIA CHRONICLE**



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## ***"BANDAGES and BROKEN BONES"***

### ***THE CIVIL WAR DIARY OF ANNE READING***

*Introduction by Margaret Garrett Irwin*

Anne Reading was born in Bethnal Green, London, England on September 24, 1826, the eldest of eight children born to John and Anne Reading. She trained and worked as a nurse in various London hospitals, in particular St. Mary's Paddington. In 1855 she travelled to the Crimea with Florence Nightingale and nursed the sick and wounded of the British Army.

Her main diary commences with a dramatic description of her six week voyage to New York in September, 1860 aboard a sailing ship. Their ship was first becalmed in the Thames River and had difficulty even getting beyond Margate. However, in the Atlantic they

encountered very heavy weather. At one point she reports, "I heard a loud crack above my head. I looked up and saw two of the sails on the top yards caught by the wind and in a moment they were split and torn into ribbons and flying about in all directions." Later when things were calmer "...the sun is still shining brightly, most of the passengers have recovered from their sickness -- the children are playing about -- the German women are knitting -- the men folk are puffing on their pipes -- the dog watch is set."

After many delays due to adverse winds she arrived in New York and stayed with her sister Jenny until obtaining

work in St. Luke's Hospital. Her sister lived in Yonkers and she said "Yonkers is a very pretty place ... a kind of country town." However, "factories are as plentiful as blackberries -- the latter are to be found in abundance here." Anne wrote interesting observations on a variety of subjects ranging from the nursing and medical methods of the time as observed in New York hospitals to such simpler things as the people, not to mention the swans and ducks, she saw in Central Park.

The following year witnessed the start of the Civil War and her descriptions of the life of ordinary New Yorkers in wartime are vivid. "New York is in a state of agitation, as crowds forcibly pull down secessionist flags and substitute the Stars and Stripes, economic depression sets in and it is distressing to see -- the want and deprivation -- but it is much worse in other parts of the country."

In 1862 Anne left St. Lukes and traveled south to the headquarters of the Union Army in Washington. She was first employed by the Sanitary Commission and then the Federal Army. The rather fearsome Dorothea Dix, Superintendent of female nurses to the Federal Army, also known as the American Florence Nightingale hired her and posted Anne to Fort Monroe. During the sea voyage, a companion directed her attention to "The Cambridge, an immense ship of war that had an engagement with the Merrimac. We saw the far

famed vessel of war the Monitor." On this journey, Anne had her first sight of how the 'coloured' people lived in the South and she compared them to characters she has read of in "Uncle Tom's Cabin."

From here on, Anne's saga is the story of her life among the wounded of both sides, and of the hardships of a war in which medical techniques had not yet caught up with the advances in guns and explosives. She outlined in great detail her experiences in the field and on hospital ships; finishing her service in Alexandria, Virginia. The diary chronicles the impact of events on the soldiers who had been involved in actions which can only be described as atrocities. More moving, however, are her descriptions of the shock of the war on the ordinary people of America both white and black. The general social unrest which developed in the northern cities as the war continues and the riots against the drafting of young men into the army against their will makes particularly interesting reading.

Anne married Andrew Furry in October, 1862 and soon gave up nursing and returned to the New York area. While waiting for him to be released from the army, she worked as a forewoman in a tobacco factory. Her health was not good at this time. She later was employed in a hat factory.

Anne provides a detailed account of the death of President Lincoln; an eye witness account of his lying in

state and his funeral procession through New York in 1865.

The last portion of the diary addresses the Furry's married life in Chester, Pennsylvania, Germantown, Pennsylvania and Newark, New Jersey. There are descriptions of the aftermath of the Civil War interspersed with family events like the marriage of her sister Jenny who subsequently moved to Michigan where she experienced the tragic death of her 15 year old brother-in-law who drowned under the ice after a skating party.

About five years later, Anne Furry's mother, Anne Reading makes an extended visit to her daughter Lizzie. The diary concludes with the return of mother and daughter to Bethnal Green, London, England in 1871.

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The Alexandria Historical Society would like to thank Mrs. Margaret Irwin for allowing the Society to print excerpts from Anne Furry's Diary which pertain to hospital life in Alexandria, Virginia. The editor would also like to acknowledge Mrs. Ruth Lincoln Kaye who introduced him to Mrs. Irwin and who was helpful in securing the diary for publication.

**"Bandages and Broken Bones"**

**The Civil War Hospital**

### **Experiences of Anne Reading in Alexandria, Virginia**

"...Late last night, I received a telegraph message from Miss Dix desiring me to go immediately to Washington. I arrived there safely on Wednesday afternoon about 4 o'clock, August 20th [1862].

Having travelled all night, I went direct to the residence of Miss Dix and was much disappointed when I found that lady had gone to Baltimore. I was there directed to go to the Union Hospital, George Town -- the place appointed by the government for the reception of nurses till they are sent to the different stations appointed for them. I was then shown into a room--I was going to say an empty room for there was not anything in it but three miserable looking little beds. One was to be occupied by myself; the others by two females who were strangers to me. They had come from Boston and like myself were waiting to see Miss Dix.

I went downstairs and told the steward that I had been travelling all night and that as I came straight from the depot, I had not had any breakfast. He said he would go and order some for me. In about a quarter of an hour, a coloured man came up and civilly informed me my breakfast was ready. I went down expecting a comfortable repast. I was very much disappointed when I tasted the coffee. it was such miserable stuff, little more than colored

water, that I could not drink it so I asked for a glass of cold water. That and a piece of dry bread composed my breakfast. I might certainly have had butter if I chose but the smell of it almost made me sick so I did not venture to taste it.

After I had finished my frugal meal, I went upstairs into my solitary bedroom and was glad to lie down even on that miserable bed and there I lay for the rest of the day for I had been so shaken in those clumsy cars that I could hardly move, I was so stiff and tired.

The next morning I rose early and went in company with a lady who had come over for the purpose of visiting the different hospitals and one of the nurses from Boston went with us. We reached the house of Miss Dix by 8 o'clock. She received us very politely. She told the nurse who came from Boston that she could go back to the hospital and she would let her know as soon as she had decided where to send her. Then she came to me and said "My dear Mrs. Reading I have so many places that require your services that I hardly know which of them to send you to but this lady is going with me to visit the hospitals in Alexandria, perhaps you would like to go with us." Of course I thanked her and said I should be most happy to do so. She said "I shall be engaged for an hour or two and as I think you will be as comfortable here as anywhere else, you had better remain here till I am ready. While you were waiting, here are the morning newspapers and

there are some nice books with which you can amuse yourself till my return." I thanked her and took off my bonnet and settled myself down comfortably. About 11 o'clock, an old lady brought in some wine and water and some sweet cracknels. About an hour after she came in again and said she had made a nice cup of tea for me which I enjoyed very much after the morning's walk.

When Miss Dix was at leisure, we all proceeded on our way to Alexandria -- after visiting and inspecting the different hospitals in that place we came to the General hospital.<sup>1</sup> Almost everyone employed there had some grievance to complain of. The nurses said they were overworked and the Doctors did not behave well to them. As for the surgeon in charge, he was a perfect brute and much more to the same effect. Miss Dix smiled and said to me "This is the very place you should come to for you do not mind these horrid doctors and these poor things are so afraid of them that it makes them miserable." I thought it was not a very pleasant prospect but I was resolved to make the best of it, so I made no remarks about it.

The great man of the establishment was not at home so the ladies did not like to leave me there but on our way back to the steam boat we met the great man himself. Miss Dix accosted him and said "Good morning, Doctor. I have found a most excellent nurse for you." He turned about abruptly and gruffly replied "Madam, I

have not any room for another nurse." Then she began telling him who I was and where I had been. He considered for a moment and then said "Well, she may come to my office, I will try and put her somewhere." And so we left him.

After thanking Miss Dix for the interest she had taken in my behalf, I took leave of her and hastened to the office of the Doctor. When I got there, I found him engaged but presently he came to me and gave me the charge of a small medical ward in the general hospital in which were some very severe cases.

The next morning I commenced dressing their wounds. I quite astonished the Doctors for our English way of dressing wounds is far superior to theirs. The head doctor soon made his appearance bringing with him several doctors to see my English method of bandaging.

The next day he sent for me and when I went into the room, I found him engaged in conversation with several other doctors. I was going to retire but he called me back said "Madam, I am going to give you charge of the large medical ward." Then turning to the other doctors, he said "Gentlemen, this is the best nurse I ever met with. She can dress wounds equal to any surgeon and not one of our people can compare with her in putting on a bandage."

**September 20th [1862]--**  
Last Monday I had the pleasure of receiving a letter from my

Sister Jenny. (the same nurse Jenny who I have mentioned before as being engaged with me in Saint Luke's hospital). She left that place to go to England and has now returned to New York. As soon as I received her letter, I went immediately to the surgeon in charge and informed him of her arrival. He said: "We will write for her to come direct." I told him it would be necessary to have a note from him to the quarter master requesting him to give Jenny government transport to Washington.

Jenny went to Mrs. Duremas who was a friend of Miss Dix. As Mrs. Duremas lived in New York she sent a telegram to Miss Dix respecting Jenny. That lady returned a message by telegraph to say she was to come here immediately. So Jenny came at once fully armed with her transport ticket and her telegraph message. I was very pleased to see her in good health and looking so well.

Her coming here was a great satisfaction to me as I had none to speak to but those horrid doctors as the nurses had called them. It was Saturday morning when she came here and I had my hands full of business but I took her in to my private apartment and then went to the surgeon and told him she had come. He was surrounded by several of the officers so he just took her papers from me and said "All right, I will see to them presently."

I went back again to Jenny and after I had provided some

refreshment for her she lay down on the bed for she was very tired having travelled all night. In the afternoon the surgeon came and said that Jenny and myself were to take the floor consisting of several rooms between us. This hospital had formerly been a very large hotel but is now used to accommodate our sick and wounded men. Our private room is rather too small for the two of us but we have the satisfaction of having it entirely to ourselves.

After our long separation we had much to say to each other. ...

When Jenny was staying at Saint Luke's Hospital, Sister Harriet told her that she had a cousin named John Hamilton who had been severely wounded in the battle and that he was now in Fairfax Seminary Hospital<sup>2</sup> and she would be very glad if Jenny or myself could go and visit him. About a week after Jenny came here, I asked Dr. Summers to let me have an ambulance as it was too far for us to walk to Fairfax. The Doctor said: "Yes, certainly."

So after dinner when we had attended to our patients, the ambulance drove up to the door. We had to go through an open country with immense high hills. From the top of the hill we were then ascending we had a fine view of Alexandria and the Potomac River. In the distance we saw Washington and the capital while all around the hillsides were covered with thousands of tents and encampments. When we got on the high ground our ambulance

had to stop awhile to allow some infantry regiments to pass. I do not know how many there were of them but their number must have been considerable for they covered about a mile of ground.

It was a fine sight for their flags were flying, their bayonets fixed and glittering in the sunlight. After them came some artillery, about fifty pieces of brass cannon, all mounted on carriages drawn by four horses to each piece, then followed the ammunition and baggage wagons. We thought it a very grand sight but Jenny said it would make Mother tremble if she saw them.

After a pleasant ride we arrived at Fairfax Seminary and were there informed that John Hamilton had been removed to the high school<sup>3</sup> about half a mile further on through a fine old wood where there had been made a sufficient clearance to allow an ambulance to pass through.

When we got to the high school, we were requested to walk upstairs. We went into a large room that had evidently been used as a school room, a naked uncomfortable looking place yet in this place, there were between fifty and sixty beds. Here we found poor John Hamilton, very weak and emaciated but still very much like Sister Harriet having just such expressive dark eyes as she has got.

He told us they had not any female nurses there nor any of the comforts usually enjoyed in other hospitals. Although

he felt hungry, he could not possibly eat the food allowed in that place. The bread was very coarse and hard without any butter to make it palatable, fresh beef boiled with beans but not any potatoes or any other kind of vegetable of which he was particularly fond. Sometimes he had a little gruel but it was so nasty. He could not think what

sight to see the camp fires in the light shown between the trees. At intervals we could see the dark forms of the men moving about fixing their camp kettles or preparing for their evening meal.

The next time we went to see poor John Hamilton. We took him some currant jelly with which he was very much pleased



**THE MANSION HOUSE HOSPITAL**  
[A portion of the building is still located  
on the S.E. corner of Cameron & Fairfax St.  
Photograph by Andrew Russell]

they put into it to make it so very nauseous.

I felt very sorry for him and wished he could be removed or transferred into our hospital for our patients fare very well and have everything that their situation requires.

As we were returning home and had reached the highest ground in the twilight of the evening, it was an interesting

and also some fine grapes that were given to me. He said his back was getting sore with lying on it so long in one position. I promised to make him a ring pillow as soon as I got back to Alexandria, a thing not known here but very common in a London hospital. As soon as I got back I had three of them made on purpose for him.

The next day, Jenny took them to him together with a

handkerchief and a sponge and a couple of towels. These necessary articles are not available in the seminary hospital.

A few days after this, Dr. Summers came through the wards bringing with him two gentlemen and a lady. As they passed me they bowed very politely. One of the gentlemen looked at me for a moment, whispered to the Doctor and then he came back and shook hands with me and said "Don't you know me Mrs. Reading?" Then when he spoke I remembered he was Dr. Drake of the Daniel Webster steam ship but not having on his uniform I did not recognize him till he spoke to me. He seemed pleased to meet me again and gave me an invitation to go on board his ship this afternoon, which I accepted with thanks.

It was a lovely afternoon and I always feel much better on the water than I do on the land. I went and spent a very pleasant afternoon and returned in time to attend to my patients.

It is now the latter end of October and the weather is getting very cold. One day I took the opportunity of telling Dr. Summers that my room was now excessively cold and a stove could not conveniently be fixed there but as one of the nurses in another part of the hospital was going away, I should like to have her room. He speaks so very abruptly. He said "How did you know that nurse was going away?" I did not give him any direct answer. He gave a sort of a grunt and said "You women know

everything." After giving me orders respecting my patients he was going away but I said "Now Doctor, am I to have that room?" He said: "Go on and be quiet for I am now going to Baltimore." Then he smiled and walked away but said no more about it. However, I felt sure from his manner that I should have the room some time or other.

At the latter end of the same week I met him again. Since he had not spoken about the room I wanted I thought I would remind him of it in an indirect way. So I said "Doctor, are you going to starve us?" He turned around sharply and said "Why don't you have enough to eat?" I replied "Yes, but we are starved with cold for we have not any fire and you know my sister has been ill in bed for four days." The Doctor had himself attended her. He immediately called his orderly or servant and told him to bring the key of the room that I had asked for and gave it to me.

It is a nice comfortable room much larger than mine and carpeted all over with an English open grate and real English coal to burn in it. A good chest of drawers and other conveniences add greatly to our comfort.

October 30, 1862 -- This day at 2 o'clock in the afternoon I was married by license at the Episcopal minister's house, the ceremony differing but slightly from that of the established Church in England. My husband is at present in the army and expects

to remain in Alexandria during the winter and afterwards if our lives are spared, we hope to return to England together. I have decided on remaining where I am with my sister for the present.

I have just received a letter from Portsmouth, Rhode Island with the offer of a situation to take charge of a surgical ward in the army hospital at that place. I declined with thanks, giving as my reason for so doing that I was very well situated for the present and would not like to leave my sister.

Last Monday, Jenny went again to see John Hamilton and took with her a nice little roasted bird with which he was much pleased as such luxuries are not provided there.

The next day, I was agreeably surprised by receiving a visit from Dr. Watts, the late house surgeon at Saint Luke's. He has been for some time past, surgeon in one of the volunteer regiments. He had kindly been to see John Hamilton and he heard from him that I was here. So he had come to see me and was very much pleased to find that Jenny was here also. After some pleasant conversation about old times he departed. A few days afterwards he came again bringing with him 2 bottles of wine for John Hamilton requesting me to send them to him. He then bade us goodbye saying he did not know when he should see us again as his regiment was ordered down south.

**November 2nd** -- We have had a terrific snow storm which lasted the whole of Thursday and Friday so that we could not go out but on Saturday it was very fine. I asked Dr. Summers to allow me to have an ambulance to go to Fairfax Seminary. There were not any here at present so he wrote an order to the quartermaster and in a short time, it was driven up to the door. We had a very cold ride. The poor picket guards looked dreadfully cold as they kept sentry along the road. The wind was piercing cold but being well wrapped up, I did not feel it so as those poor fellows did.

I found poor John looking much worse than when I last saw him and I do not think it possible he will entirely recover. He has a very bad wound from a minnie ball which broke his leg just above his knee. Poor fellow, he is so weak he could scarce keep from crying. The tears were in his eyes when I shook hands with him and bade him goodbye.

Many of our wounded men have recovered and have left the hospital and their places are filled up with the sick and wounded brought in from the camps. Poor fellows, it would make anybody's heart ache to see how much they suffer with their deep wounds and shattered limbs.

We have now a nice looking young man about 18 years old. He is a native of Indiana. He had his leg taken off above the knee nearly 3 months ago. It healed up all but a small place about the size of a shirt

button. About 10 days ago, it began to look red and the wound has now spread until it is as large as a cheese plate and there are full two inches of bone sticking out. The Doctor says he thinks it must be taken off higher up. Poor fellow, Jenny says she is real sorry for him. He is so patient under his extreme sufferings. He never complains but is very grateful for the attention we pay him.

Another patient is an orderly sergeant from Michigan, one of the western states. A piece of bomb shell struck him, shattering his arm. This afternoon it was Jenny's painful duty to hold him while the Doctor probed it and took out 4 pieces of bone. He kept on saying: "Jerusha, Jerusha, Doctor, can't you find anything else to put in there?" The Doctor said coolly: "Oh, that arm will be good enough by and by."

There is another poor fellow who came from New Jersey. A rifle ball struck his foot. One day when Jenny was dressing it, she saw a black spot in the middle of the wound. She took the forceps or small pincers and gently drew it out. It was a piece of the upper leather of his boot which the ball had carried along with it. She could not at that time get out the piece of stocking so it had to remain in the wound.

Another patient is a Dutchman. The ball went in a slanting direction just above the elbow and was taken out just below it. When it was

extracted, it was quite flattened having struck so hard against the bone. Another poor man's arm is sadly shattered and he is so weak the Doctor says he is not strong enough to undergo the operation as it will be necessary to take it out at the socket. The man told us he was one day in a Secession (Secesh) House. The people of the house were quarreling with him and threatened to cut his throat. He said he did not like the idea, so to save his life he was in the act of jumping out of the window, when the provost guard who was passing at the time, called out to him to halt. Knowing the danger that threatened him from within, he did not obey the order. The guard seeing him run, fired at him, and the ball passed through the arm quite close to the shoulder. I dress his wound and Jenny waits on him, helps him to dress and writes his letters for him. He is very grateful to us but says if he could only get hold of that rebel who shot him, he would pay him with interest for all he has made him suffer.

As I have said before, Jenny and I have charge of the patients between us so sometimes she dresses their wounds and sometimes I do. Whoever is most at leisure attends the case which requires immediate attention.

We have another sergeant from Massachusetts which is a famous place for mills. He says if ever we give up nursing and go to Lowell, he has plenty of influence there that would at any time provide employment for

both of us.

As we have here patients from various countries I will just mention one that comes from Ireland. His arm had to be taken out at the socket. He was so bad that we thought he was going to die. At his request, the priest was sent for and also his wife. They lived near the hospital so they came every day but Paddy said he was not going to leave them yet. After the worst was over, he rallied and appeared to gain strength every day. After a time he got well enough to walk about. He then asked the Doctor for a pass to go out until 4 o'clock in the afternoon. He did not come back home until the next morning. So he was put in the lockup for some hours. When he was let out, the Doctor asked him what made him stay out all night. "Sure Sir," say he, "My wife, Bridget has taken 2 new rooms and I had to go and see them. Faith and mighty, pretty and snug rooms they are, Sir." The Doctor advised him for the future to inspect new rooms in the day time and not at night.

I have heard a report that female nurses are not to be allowed in military hospitals but it is to be hoped for the sake of the poor sufferers that it is only a report as female nurses so much better understand how to administer comfort to the patients.

I fear that it is not only a report as in many places worn out citizens are being introduced as nurses. We had one of them here. He was an old man from Boston. He was

both lazy and dirty. One day his rooms were inspected. They were in a dirty and untidy state. He had been reprimanded several times but showed no signs of amendment so he was put in the lockup which is a strong room at the top of the house. As soon as the door was locked, he kicked out the panels of the door with his great heavy boots. They then sent up the guard with bayonets. They brought him down by main force and took him to the slave pens. While there he got fighting with the guard and two days after he was brought back with an ugly black eye which he got in the affray with the guard.

After his affray he thought proper to behave himself a little better but this was only put on. About a week after one of the men asked him to get a 5 dollar bill changed for him. He left the hospital directly after breakfast to get the change and never returned. So that was the last we saw of the 5 dollar bill and that is what the yankees call "skedaddling."

I am afraid I shall tire my friends with a description of so many our patients and their fearful sufferings and yet these are only a few out of the many.

I shall now turn to a more pleasing subject at least for a while. We have a chaplain who resides in the hospital. He is a very kind and pleasant man. When anything is wanted by the patients that is not provided by the hospital, we apply to him as he has at his disposal

wine jellies, etc. provided by the different societies and he always kindly gives whatever is required.

We have divine service performed on Sundays by our chaplain in the large dining room and on Tuesday evening in the same place we have a prayer meeting for all who can attend and a singing class every Thursday evening when circumstances will permit. It is quite a treat to us to turn from the sight of so much suffering and the almost unbearable smell of their wounds to those opportunities of refreshing the mind and spirits for it is, needless to say under existing circumstances, that we are sometimes depressed in spirits as well as wearied in body when at 9 o'clock at night we take our last round and see that all our patients are comfortably settled for the night.

Once more I must refer to scenes of sorrow and suffering. Last Thursday, November 23rd, we had a large number of sick and wounded brought in from a place called Sulphur Springs. I was busy attending my patients when one of the orderlies came into the room, half carrying, half dragging a poor young man apparently 20 years of age and dropped him on the first bed he came to. At first I thought he was dying. I poured a few spoonfuls of weak brandy and water down his throat. Then he opened his eyes. As soon as he was a little revived, we undressed and washed him and placed him comfortably in a clean bed.

I got the address of his father and immediately wrote to him. All day we watched by the young man anxiously. The next day he was worse. The Chaplain sent a telegraphic message to his father but still he didn't come. We were obliged repeatedly to give him stimulants to try and keep life in him if possible till his father came. Jenny and I sat up with him for we could not leave him. Then the Chaplain came in and prayed with and for him but life could hold out no longer. Just before 10 o'clock he breathed his last so peacefully that the Chaplain who was watching with us could scarcely believe that he had ceased to breathe.

He was quite sensible to the last. About 10 minutes before he died, he opened his eyes and looking upward he said "Don't you see there?" I asked him what it was. "I see almost into heaven. It is so bright and beautiful. I see my sister Lizzy. She died long ago but she is there." Then he asked me to tell his father that he died quite happy. He closed his eyes, clasped his hands and did not speak again.

I was much pleased today when a lady was announced of the name of Miss Gillson. I became acquainted with her in a steam boat hospital ship. She was a kind friend to the sick and wounded. She often visits the hospitals bringing with her many necessaries and comforts for the patients. I have not seen her since last July. Yesterday she was in Washington and hearing that I was here, she came on purpose to see me.

There were many enquiries on both sides and much to tell each other. She was obliged to shorten her visit so I accompanied her to the boat. As we were going along, she went into a confectioners and bought a nice half dollar cake which she kindly presented to me. We bade each other farewell and she promised to renew her visit the first opportunity.

I have just received a letter from my old friend Dr. Watts with his photograph enclosed. Dr. Summers has kindly allowed me to have an ambulance once more to go and see John Hamilton. I found him looking better than when I last saw him.

**November 26th** -- This afternoon Miss Gillson came again and brought 3 gentlemen with her. After some general conversation respecting my patients, hospitals, etc., the gentlemen asked me if there was anything in particular that my patients were in want of. I told them what was most needed and they promised to send the things I had mentioned.

Last Monday I went to the convalescent hospital to see Dr. Smith, formerly he was the surgeon on board the same hospital ship as myself. After talking for some time about my patients, the hospital etc., I asked him what he had got to give me for my poor men. If any person comes to the hospital or I meet any one I know and think they have it in their power to give, I begin begging and thereby procure for the poor fellows many

necessaries and comforts which they otherwise would not have. The Dr. laughed and said "I see you have not forgotten your old propensity of begging for the boys. Well, I have not got very much for you this time. I can only give you four bottles of currant wine and a bundle of pocket handkerchiefs." I thanked him and told him the smallest donation would be thankfully received.

However, at the same time, I must further trespass on his kindness and beg of him to allow his servant to carry them to the hospital for me. So he gave me a pass to one of the men and bid him to return to Alexandria with me.

Miss Gillson's friends did not forget their promise for I have received from them 56 shirts, 120 towels, 120 pocket handkerchiefs, 6 bottles of currant wine, 6 bottles of lemon syrup and a quantities of jellies. These are very acceptable presents for we must have taken in 75 men from the convalescent camp.

Having no female nurses there, the men are in a filthy state. We scarcely know what to do with them, not on account of their sickness but they are literally eaten up with vermin. However, we have done our best towards cleansing them and giving them clean linen and putting them in the best order we can in so short a time for in a day or two we must send them and as many as we can of our convalescent patients to one of the hospitals in the North--for there has been another Battle and we must make

all the room we can.

Beds were made up, sponges, soap, clean linen and towels were all in readiness. It was well that we were prepared for on Saturday night, seven hundred wounded men were brought into Alexandria. I do not know how many were located in our hospital but every bed was filled in everyone of the wards.

Amongst the wounded was a rebel officer who had been taken prisoner. In his case the scripture injunction was fulfilled "If thine enemy hunger feed him, if he thirst give him drink." If this our enemy had been our best friend more could not have been done for his comfort and more could not have been done for him if he had been one of our own Chief Officers. He was shot through the spine of his back. Though quite conscious, he was entirely helpless from his waist downwards. His friends were immediately written to and he was frequently visited by his friend, a Baptist minister and a kind Christian lady, the wife of a member of Congress.

He is a fine, noble looking man and a great man in his own state, having been the Governor of Georgia in 1860.<sup>4</sup> His sufferings were very great but borne with great patience and resignation. He lingered till Christmas Day and then departed we hope for that better land where there are neither wars nor rumors of wars. He was Jenny's patient and she waited on him to the last.

One of my patients departed on the same day but in a very different state of mind to the rebel officer. This poor fellow was wounded in the hip and mortally injured in his kidneys. He became delirious soon after he was brought in and continued to rave until a few minutes before he died. A strong man was obliged to be at his bedside nearly the whole time for it was almost impossible to keep the bedclothes on him. He would struggle till the perspiration poured off his face. He fancied he was trying to get the men out of the way of the enemy. Sometimes he would shout out "Flat, lie down flat boys and then the balls will fly over you." Then he would lie still for a minute but as soon as he had recovered his breath, he began again. He fancied he was left behind his comrades and begged us to help him to get his things together that he might rejoin his regiment but nature could no longer endure such violent struggles. He expired after he had been in the hospital 48 hours. He had not slept during the whole time.

A great many that were brought in at the same time are in a fair way of recovery. There is a fine brave young man who has had his right arm taken off just above the elbow. He says he only wished he could hold his gun. He would be at them again and give them another chance for his other arm.

One poor young man has been shot through the knee. The Doctor has cut right across

both above and below the knee to find the ball. He bears the agony wonderfully only saying "Oh, Doctor that does hurt." Then turning his face to me, he said "Will you please Mrs. Reading give me a glass of water."

Amidst so much suffering we had not had time to think about Christmas but I knew that there would be something extra provided for the boys' dinner but as we had so many patients to attend to, we could not find time to sit down to our own dinner. So Jenny and I agreed that we would have a nice supper at our own expense in our own room where we could have it quiet after the patients have all been attended to.

Jenny went to the market and bought a nice loin of pork and some fruit and eggs to make an English plum pudding. Jenny was to be the cook but on Christmas day there were 2 deaths and many of our poor men were so much worse that pork and pudding were laid aside almost unthought of; we were so busy the whole of the day with our poor patients.

12 o'clock is the usual hour for the patients to have their dinner but all was bustle as we were getting ready for inspection so the poor fellows did not have their dinner till 3 o'clock. By that time they were so hungry that when the dinner bell rung, there was a general rush for the dining room. Turkeys vanished quickly. Fowls and chickens seemed to have found their wings and flown away. Oyster

soup became scarce and the boys declared the pudding and pies would have been more to their liking if there had been more of them.

Everything was devoured at dinner so the poor boys did not get any supper but had to go supperless to bed. A poor return for all that they had done and suffered for their country but their government supplies are very scanty. It may be because there are so many to provide for.

We did not get our supper after all but the next day we were a little more at leisure so in the evening, Jenny cooked our pork and plumb pudding. We had a small pitcher of nice ale and we enjoyed our supper very much. The pudding quite put us in mind of times past when we were in dear old England and all our associations there.

We could not long enjoy our quiet for one of my patients is in such a state that I cannot leave him for any length of time. He was shot through the arm some 4 or 5 months ago. The Doctor thought the arm ought to be taken off but on account of his extreme weakness, it was put off from time to time. I have myself at different times taken out several small pieces of bone. Since then his arm has been a little better. He is able to get up and walk about but at times he is quite insane. He fancies that the man who shot him is still seeking his life. At such times he is quite overcome with terror and then he cries just like a frightened child. He seems afraid to go

near anybody except Dr. Summers, Jenny and myself. He clings to us till the paroxysm is over. Then he goes to sleep and when he wakes up, he is quite calm again.

A few days ago he came to me and told me with great glee that Jim Wells, his persecutor was dead and then for a little while he seemed to forget his terror but a very short time elapsed when he fancied there was another man after him seeking his life. Yesterday, he came to me and told me very seriously and in quite a confidential manner that Jim Well's ghost had been in the hospital during the night. I asked him if he had seen it. He replied 'no' but he had heard it telling Dr. Summers that he could not rest in his grave, so he had been permitted to appear in the hospital to say that John Walker was an innocent man and that if he was killed, the poor ghost would be sent to hell. Poor John, he is perfectly harmless but he jabbers away till his words are quite unintelligible.

Alexandria is such a dreadful dull place. Jenny and I have not a single acquaintance here and if we had, we have not any time to spare so that we could go to see our friends. There is scarcely anybody or anything to be seen in the streets except soldiers and if we want to buy anything it is so dear we have to pay half as much again as we should elsewhere. I bought a new Cobourg dress but I had to pay 5 shillings and one penny per yard for it and 9 (?) per yard for glazed lining worth 4

(?) per yard. ... Jenny bought a pair of boots. She gave 2 dollars and a half for them. She could have bought them in New York for one dollar and everything else in proportion.

Last Monday, 12 more poor wounded men were brought in from Dumfries. One poor man was shot through the body near the liver; another through his lungs and a third has his right leg shot off just below the knee.

On Friday last we sent about 50 men from this hospital to Providence, Rhode Island. As we are in daily expectation of another battle, we are clearing out as many as are convalescent that we may be ready for the reception of the wounded.

**January 18, 1863** -- One of our poor boys died yesterday. He had been brought in about a month ago. He had been shot through the knee. His wound was healing up and he seemed better in health. About 2 days ago, he told me he had got a sore throat. I immediately applied some lineament and wrapped a flannel round it and gave him a gargle. I took the greatest care of him but nothing would stay the disease. Yesterday his face and throat were dreadfully swollen inside and out. Poor boy he died at 3 o'clock this morning quite conscious but not able to speak.

This is the second patient that we have lost lately with diphtheria. We were very sorry for him. He was such a nicely behaved and good tempered boy.

On Friday I wrote to his father telling him how ill his son was and today I have written to inform him of the poor boy's death.

Jenny and I are both very sorry we are going to lose Dr. Summers for though rough in manners he has been a kind friend to us. He has been promoted to be medical director and someone from New York is coming to take his place.

Among the last lot of wounded that was brought in there was a captain. He had his leg shot off just above the knee. As soon as his wounds were dressed, I wrote to his wife. She lived in New Jersey, near New York. She came as soon as possible. When she arrived in Alexandria, she could not obtain a lodging at any of the boarding houses near here, so I have accommodated her in my own room to the best of my ability. She is a very pleasant woman but she talks so much. I suppose that is to make up for her husband's silence for he is a patient, quiet man and seldom speaks unless spoken to. His knee is healing up nicely and he hopes to start for home in a week or ten days.

We have here an attendant or man nurse. He has been in America only about 2 years. Before he came over here, he was the bathroom attendant at St. Thomas's hospital in London, so when we have an interval of quiet, we have some fine chats about the hospitals in dear old England. It sometimes beguiles a dull half

hour.

We have now fairly entered on the New Year. When I look back on the past and think how wonderfully I have been preserved and blessed with health and strength, I do indeed feel unfeignedly thankful that I have been spared in the midst of danger and surrounded with the sick and dying.

The strong man has been cut down in a moment of time and the young men have been cut off in the midst of health and strength. How many wives have been made widows and children made desolate orphans since I have been here? The sorrow and the suffering, I have witnessed, no person can have any idea of unless they have been placed in similar circumstances.

I frequently indulge myself in thinking and contrasting the beginning of last year with the beginning of this. Notwithstanding all the drawbacks and unpleasant duties I have had to perform, I must confess that I feel more comfortable and contented now than I did then....

Notwithstanding there is so much suffering here, the men in general are very cheerful and most of them very patient. When circumstances will permit, we have plenty of singing which enlivens us very much for the boys are very fond of singing and music. At Christmas which is counted as a holiday even here, the Doctors made some fine speeches. One white headed old doctor caused much

amusement when called upon to speak, he asked for a glass of water. As it was some time before it was brought, the old gentleman said "Ladies and Gentlemen, you must excuse me for keeping you waiting so long. I am like an old pump. We are obliged to put something in before anything can be got out of it."

Sometimes discussions are held upon various subjects by the convalescent patients and this is a special treat to Jenny as they are held in her ward. My ward has all the worst cases in it. One evening the chaplain gave an entertainment in one of the lower wards and all the convalescent patients were invited.

Sometime ago I mentioned one of Jenny's patients who she used to call him Indiana boy. He had his leg taken off and little hopes were entertained that his life would be spared but he was so patient and good tempered that Jenny paid special attention to him and now she has the satisfaction of seeing him in a fair way of recovering.

On the evening of this singing entertainment, she dressed him and with the assistance of a man in the ward, she got him downstairs. The poor boy was very much pleased as he had never been out of the ward since he was brought into the hospital. He told the men next day that Jenny was so proud of him now he was getting better that he had been obliged to get up and take her down to the meeting.

They all laughed heartily at him for his wise speech but he took it all in good part and seemed to think it a good joke.

Another of Jenny's patients is an orderly sergeant who has been here some time. When he was brought in, Dr. Summers said the only way to save the arm would be to perform an operation called Exsection, that is to take the splintered bone out of the elbow joint. As he was not strong enough to have it done just then, the Doctor said he would put it off for a few days. So Jenny and I talked the matter over by ourselves and we both thought it could be done without that painful operation being performed.

She paid more than usual attention to his medicine and diet. She dressed his arm three times a day instead of once and every morning she burnt the slough off with nitric acid and then scraped the bone. After the few days were up, she was rewarded by seeing the arm get better and by persevering in her attentions, it is now nearly well and he has got leave of absence for forty-eight hours and is gone to visit his regiment. Had it not been for her patience and perseverance in all probability he would have lost his arm. Since he has been in the hospital, he has now been promoted and Jenny had the satisfaction of sewing on his first shoulder straps on his uniform.

Again, we have a fresh lot of patients brought into the hospital. It is heart

sickening to see them. They are so dreadfully mutilated. I think they look more shocking than any I have yet seen.

The ball went in at the back of one poor young man's head and came out at the front bringing with it his hair and brains. Happily his sufferings soon came to an end for he died as soon as he was brought into the hospital. In another man, the ball went in at the back of his head but did not touch the brain but it came out carrying his left eye away with it but he is now much better and will soon be in the convalescent ward.

I have mentioned a great number of bad cases but they are as but the single drop in the bucket.

Some person I do not know who, has made it their business to inform Miss Dix that I am married and that lady appears to be greatly offended because I had not previously made her acquainted with my intentions. As our good friend Dr. Summers is gone, I do not think I should be comfortable here any longer. My husband wishes me to go to Philadelphia and board and lodge with his friends till he shall be at liberty to leave his regiment. Jenny says she will not stay in the hospital after I am gone so she is going to Hastings on a short visit.

Having sent in my resignation to the proper authorities, I prepared to leave the Mansion House Hospital. Our poor men were all very sorry when we told them we were going to leave

them.

A few days previous to my leaving the hospital, I caught a severe cold. The wind blew very cold as I crossed the water from Alexandria to Washington so that by the time I got there I was seriously ill, my throat being very sore and greatly inflamed but after taking proper medicine and a few days rest I felt considerably better.

When I left the hospital, I had no idea that I should have so much trouble in getting the money due to me but it was in consequence of their being so many officers to be paid off first. Many of them had to be in attendance two or three days before they could get a settlement.

The Secretary of the Sanitary Commission told me that they had opened a nurses home and asked if I would like to stay there for a little while till I could get my pass papers signed. As I had not decided in my own mind where I would go, I accepted his offer. So I slept at the home that night.

The accommodation was greatly superior to that home provided by Miss Dix. This institution deserved the name of home for every comfort is provided for those nurses who are waiting for their papers to be signed or are going to be transferred from one hospital to another. ...

Breakfast was ready by 8 o'clock, the coffee and bread and butter were very good.

After breakfast I retired to my room and equipped myself for walking.

First of all, I went to the office of the Sanitary Commission as they had promised to get Jenny's and my papers signed for us. There I had to wait till 11 o'clock but the clerk did not come. I stayed a few minutes longer, but he did not come so I was obliged to leave without seeing him for I had promised my sister that I would meet her at the railway depot at 11 o'clock.

When I got to the railway depot, I found poor Jenny almost froze for the weather was intensely cold. The Doctor at the hospital had kindly let her have the use of an ambulance and she had been waiting out of doors with the luggage being afraid to leave it for fear of missing me.

After seeing poor Jenny in a warm place, I returned to the office. The clerk had come and he told me that the officer whose business it was to see after the papers had sent him with them to the Surgeon General. When the Surgeon had examined the papers he said they did not specify whether we were volunteer or contract nurses and they did not give transportation - that - a free passage to volunteers.

Having never been placed in such circumstances before, I did not know how to proceed. After considering for a little while, I thought of Miss Dix. I knew she could advise me. So I went to her residence. She was just going out but as soon

as I told her my business she kindly returned indoors and wrote a certificate on our papers stating that we were paid nurses.

Then I returned to the office and the clerk once more took the papers to the Surgeon General and this time fortunately for us, he gave us the order for our free passage to New York. I thanked the clerk for the trouble he had taken. He said I was quite welcome and he was very sorry we had been detained so long. He said we should have to travel all night and would require some refreshment. He asked me if I would accept a bottle of sherry which I accepted with thanks.

We left Washington in the evening and arrived safe in New York next morning at 7 o'clock. We went immediately to the house of my German friend Sophee where we received a hearty welcome..."

#### ENDNOTES:

1. The General Hospital was the Mansion house Hospital located on the east side of the 100 block of North Fairfax Street in the building which formerly housed James Green's Mansion House Hotel. After the war, this structure was known as the Braddock House Hotel and still later called the Carlyle Apartments. Portions of the building were razed in 1973.
2. The Fairfax Seminary Hospital was situated on the grounds of the Protestant Episcopal Seminary on Quaker Lane. The Seminary buildings were converted into hospital wards as thousands of wounded Federal soldiers convalesced here during the Civil War. See also: Peter Henriques, ed., "Second Manassas and the End of the War for Corporal James Tanner, U.S.A." in Northern Virginia Heritage (June 1984), Vol. VI, No. 2, p. 3.
3. Founded in 1839 as a preparatory school for the Theological Seminary, The Episcopal High School was established on adjoining grounds, which contained a house originally named Mount Washington. The

structure was built about 1804-5 by Elizabeth Custis Law, a granddaughter of Martha Washington. During the spring of 1992, this dwelling was rediscovered by T. Michael Miller and subsequently verified by Denys Peter Myers, architectural historian emeritus for the National Park Service. With the Seminary next door, buildings at the High School were utilized as hospital wards during the Civil War.

4. Ms. Reading's reference to a former Georgia Governor being a patient at the Mansion House Hospital has not been verified.



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## UNITED STATES CIVIL WAR MILITARY HOSPITALS IN OCCUPIED ALEXANDRIA, VIRGINIA

- Ambulance Stable (temporary construction) -- S.E. corner of Prince and Patrick Sts.
- \*Baptist Church Hospital (150)-- Downtown Baptist Church, East side, 200 block of South Washington St.(numbers in brackets denote patient capacity of hospital)-- [\*asterisk indicates the building is still extant]
- Contraband Hospital and School -- 300 block of South Washington St.
- Fairfax Street Hospital -- 119-133 N. Fairfax St. (also known as the Mansion House Hospital)
- \*First Presbyterian Church Hospital -- Old Presbyterian Meeting House, West side of the 300 block of South Fairfax St.
- Friends Meeting House Hospital (100) S.W. corner of Wolfe and St. Asaph Sts.
- \*Grace Church Hospital (75) West side of the 200 block of South Patrick St.
- Grosvenor House Hospital (160) N.W. corner of Washington and Princess Sts.
- \*Grosvenor House Hospital Branch -- 614 Oranoco St.
- Hallowell Hospital (50) Entire North side of the 700 block of Cameron St.
- HQ--2nd Division General Hospital Division -- N.W. corner of Prince and Columbus Sts.
- Kemper School Hospital -- not located
- \*King St. Hospital (100) 200 King St.
- L'Ouverture Hospital and Contraband Barracks -- Entire block bounded by Prince, Payne, Duke and West Sts.
- \*Lyceum Hall Hospital (80) -- 201 S. Washington St.
- Mansion House Hospital -- 119-133 N. Fairfax St.
- McVeigh Hospital -- N.E. corner of Cameron and St. Asaph Sts.
- \*Methodist Episcopal Church Hospital -- Washington Street Methodist Church, West side 100 block South Washington St.
- Methodist Protestant Church Hospital -- West side 100 block of North Washington St. near King St.
- \*Powell [Fowle] Hospital -- 811 Prince St.
- \*Prince St. Hospital (95) -- R.E. Lee Camp Hall-- 806 Prince St.
- Quartermaster Hospital -- (temporary) -- S.E. corner of Lee & Cameron St.
- Queen St. Hospital -- 603 Queen St.
- \*St. Paul's Church Hospital (120) -- St. Paul's Church -- East side 200 block of South Pitt St.
- \*Second Presbyterian Church Hospital -- N.W. corner of Prince and St. Asaph Sts.
- \*Seminary Hospital -- At the Protestant Episcopal Theological Seminary and the Episcopal High School, North Quaker Lane
- Sickel Hospital (temporary) -- Six blocks each side of West St. between Oranoco and Pendleton Sts.
- Slough Hospital (temporary) -- South side of Duke St., West of Soldiers' Rest, South of railroad tracks
- U.S. Military Railroad Hospital -- Inside USMRR stockade on Duke St.
- Washington Hall Hospital -- South side of the 600 block of King St. near Washington St.
- Washington St. Hospital (174)-- East side 200 block of North Washington St.
- Wolfe St. Hospital (100) -- S.W. corner of Pitt and Wolfe Sts. [Tuscan Villa]

NOTE: Address locates main hospital building. In many cases, adjacent buildings were also used. In most cases, temporary auxiliary buildings were constructed.

Source: Courtesy of William B. Hurd. Alexandria, Virginia 1861-1865 (Alexandria, Va.: Fort Ward, City of Alexandria, 1989), pp. 23-24.

## A Letter from Judson to Miss Sarah Stillson

### General Hospital Mansion House

Alexandria, Va., August 23, 1862

The following letter was written by a federal soldier named Judson to Miss Sarah Stillson of Dansville, New York. She was a teacher who taught at various schools in Steuben County, New York. I would like to thank Mrs. Carol Drake Friedman of Centreville, Virginia who brought this letter to my attention. [Editor]

"Dear Friend Sarah,

Yours from Rochester came to hand this P.M. and I hasten to reply. I truly was surprised when you said I owed you two letters, for my friend I have written you two since I heard from you -- one while you were at Farley's and one in care of Mrs. Wilcox at Nunda, and have received nary reply from either.

My health at present is quite good with the exception of now and then a day. I am now taking care of the wounded, dressing and treating their wounds and doing such things as seems to need to be done. My health is not good enough for service in the field, so I must make myself useful where I can. I see a great deal of suffering, and often my eyes are wet from viewing and hearing the poor men in such pain. A great many have had to have their limbs amputated, this seems almost cruel, and one dear boy, only nineteen years old, has had to have both his limbs (or legs) taken off above the knee. Such sights as this makes me sick of war, and I would often wish, if wishing would bring me there, that I was in my clean kind home again, away from this strife. But, Sarah, God wisely directs all things, and it may be for some wise purpose that I am here. It may be to teach me some wise lesson. I hope so, for were it not that I am compelled, I would not remain one day. Call me unpatriotic or what you will.

I enjoy myself very well here. There are two of Sister's friends here nursing. They are ladies of the first quality and I enjoy much in their society, which I often seek. They are passionately fond of reading and writing. I have told them much of you and now that they may know more of you and appreciate you as I do, I wish you would write me a long foolscap richly composed letter so that I can read it to them. Now don't write it as though they were going to read it, but natural. But, I want them completely charmed with your good rich and beautiful ideas, which I know that you are full of. Please do this immediately, won't you?

you?

There are something near five hundred sick and wounded in this hospital. McClellan's army have been arriving for the last few days, going to reinforce Pope. The troops are continually coming in late. Excuse haste this time for I have lots to do. Write immediately, don't wait a day. What are you doing in R? (Rochester)

Direct as this is headed, I am called, so I must go. Good-bye. Ever your true friend.

Judson

Write soon."

## THE U.S. HOSPITALS IN ALEXANDRIA

A writer in the Washington Chronicle gives a sketch of the Hospitals in this place.

The First Division General Hospital has its headquarters in Alexandria, at the corner of Fairfax and Cameron streets. The headquarters are known as the Mansion House Hospital, and occupy a building which was, formerly a hotel, the largest in Virginia. (?) It has been used as a hospital for two and a half years .... As a hotel, it was capable of accommodating five hundred people. A very convenient arrangement in this hospital is the presence of a sort of dumb waiter, by which not only provisions are transported from story to story with dispatch and promptitude, but also by which the wounded can carefully be raised or lowered on stretchers from one floor to another.

The Mansion Street Hospital is the largest in Alexandria. Some two months ago a tragic incident occurred here. One of the patients who was insane, managed to get through a window in his ward and catch hold of the eaves of the building. There he hung for a little space, and finally fell upon the balustrade below, injuring himself so seriously as to die in a few hours. He was a resident of Syracuse [New York].

The 3d division general headquarters are at the corner of Prince and Columbus streets. The hospitals which we visited, formerly belonged to the Rev. Dr. Johnston, [806 Prince Street] who went to Richmond where, for all that is known to the contrary, he yet resides. The house is commodious, and, for a confiscated dwelling, is very fine. It is known as the Prince Street Hospital. That and the Powell [Fowle] Hospital [811 Prince Street] opposite,

These mansions are known as the Johnston and Powell Houses, Mr. Powell [Wm. F. Fowle] was formerly a merchant, and like Mr. Johnston went to Richmond. Almost opposite this Prince-street Hospital lies a mansion and garden, which, if we understood our informant right, belongs to a relative of the late owner of the Johnston House. The garden is a beautiful and spacious garden, affording a delightful place of repose to those who have tasted the dangers and distress of battlefields, and have experienced all the unutterable pangs which under the most favorable circumstances, beset hospital life. The sun was gloating over the bright beauty, of the wide spreading verdure when we took a peep within this garden and the air which lazily stirred the million leaves was tinted with the attenuated perfume of young flowers. The lady who owns these grounds may be pardoned if she felt at first afraid that some of their beauty might be marred by the tread of careless feet or the desecration of ruthless hands. She has had, however, no cause to fear this. The soldiers have respected the privileges she has accorded them. They look and enjoy, but handle not, and leave the grounds as inviting and inviolate as when they entered them. ... Alexandria, though it does not give the visitor an impression of being a peculiarly charming locality ought to be an excellent place for a patient to recover in. It is a very quiet place. ... [Alexandria Gazette: May 20, 1864, p. 2.]



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