

## United States Sanitary Commission

The United States Sanitary Commission, a nation-wide volunteer program providing for the comfort of sick and wounded soldiers during the Civil War, had its beginnings in the Women's Central Relief Association of New York. It was patterned after the British Sanitary Commission of the Crimean War.

The U.S. Sanitary Commission was made up of three divisions: The Preventative Service provided inspectors for the soldiers' camps. These inspectors were attentive to dangers from change of climate, exposure, malarious causes, hard marching or any failure of supplies or transportations. The Department of General Relief had as its duty was to supply food, clothing, bandages, hospital furniture and medicines for the wounded on the field and the sick and wounded. This division comprised 80% of the work done by USSC. The third division was the Department of Special Relief which maintained Soldiers' Homes which furnished shelter, food and medical care to men who, for one reason or another, could not get it directly from the government.

The U. S. Sanitary Commission was approved by the War Department June 19, 1861. The officers were: **Rev. Henry Whitney Bellows D.D.**, President throughout the life of the Commission; **Samuel Howe** the Director of the Commission; and **Frederick Law Olmstead** the Executive Secretary. The USSC was disbanded in 1866.

Notable women who were associated with the U. S. Sanitary Commission were: **Dorothea Dix**, **Clara Barton**, **Elizabeth Blackwell**, **Mary Livermore**, **Louisa May Alcott**, and **Mary Ann Bickerdyke**.

The achievements of the volunteers of the Commission during the Civil war were: raised \$25m throughout the war; provided nurses; ran kitchens; operated hospital ships; ran soldier's homes; provided for sanitary equipments to hospitals; organized Sanitary Fairs to raise funds for the programs; and helped veterans with pension applications, etc.

The Logan County Sanitary Commission was organized later in 1861. The following articles explain the beginning of this organization. Lincoln

Herald, Lincoln, Illinois, 21 November 1861 – **Meeting of the Sanitary Commission** - "Pursuant to previous announcement, the citizens of Lincoln turned out en masse – and at an early hour on Monday evening (Nov. 17, 1861); the spacious court room was crowded with the chivalry and beauty of our city, anxious and willing to act and contribute, for, the relief of our sick and wounded soldiers.

"The meeting was organized by calling **Mr. Beaumont Parks** to the chair. The circular distributed by the Sanitary Committee of the government, explaining the wants and privations of our hospitals, was then read, after which followed speeches, warm, eloquent speeches, by **Messrs. Garrison, Latham, Austin, McGalliard**, and others. The principal object of the meeting was to form an organization of ladies, who shall act with like organizations throughout the loyal States, in furnishing articles of clothing and comfort to our wounded and diseased soldiers. **Mrs. (Lucy) Scroggins** was appointed President, **Miss Mary W. Judy**, Secretary, and **Mrs. S. C. Parks**, Treasurer.

"The interest and sympathy cherished by our people for their friends in arms, assumed a practical phase, and in a few moments the subscription papers exhibited a handsome sum, much of which was at once paid, notwithstanding hard times. About one-half of the audience consisted of ladies, whose cheerful faces, brilliant sallies of wit and repartee added infinitely to the good humor and joviality of the occasion. The cause is in their hands, and those who were not present, *and everybody else* are invited to lend a helping hand to the noble work entrusted to the country women of America. Good cheer, activity and unanimity characterized the meeting, and with these feelings the meeting adjourned.

**Beaumont Parks, Ch'n  
P. W. Harts, Sec.(106<sup>th</sup> Co H)"**

**"An Appeal to the Ladies!** Ladies of Lincoln and vicinity, we appeal to you for aid. By a special call many of the citizens of this place met on Monday evening last at the court house. After listening to several patriotic speeches from gentle men present, there was received by subscription an immediate payment of \$85,25 for the purchase of

necessaries for the sick and wounded of our brave western troops. The ladies then organized themselves into a Soldiers' Relief Circle, choosing a President, Secretary and Treasurer. The meeting then adjourned until Tuesday, 2 o'clock, p. m. at which time more explicit arrangements were made, and we now stand as a circle pledging ourselves to give six hours of labor each week, either in the circle or at our homes for the soldiers. We ask you to flock around our standard to assist in this glorious work. Although much has been done to alleviate the suffering soldier, there is yet great lack of bare necessities. Join our circle we earnestly entreat you. You whose hearts glow with the fire of patriotism and sympathy for the soldiers who fight our battles, and die that we may continue to live a happy people.

"Come, join us and help to knit and sew. From the ladies of the county we ask what we expect to contribute ourselves – liberal donations of sheets, blankets, comforters, pillows, and linen or cotton cloths without seams, and by all means, woolen yarn for the society to manufacture into socks, and even the socks already manufactured will be thankfully received. We know the heart of the soldier will bless you, and us for the slightest manifestation of those kindnesses. When we consider that the soldier goes with his life as the sacrifice, we ought surely to be willing to give the petty offering of labor and donations, that they may be supplied with real and pressing wants. A subject so weighty needs, on our part, only a moment of reflection to decide what we should do. To make it convenient for persons in the country, donations can be left at **S. C. Parks** office where they will be cared for by an appointed committee. We earnestly entreat that you will not neglect our appeal but that you will by your actions say it means I. Send in immediately.

**Lucy Scroggins, Pres.  
Mary W. Judy, Sec."**

Fighting by the soldiers pretty much came to a halt during the winter months. Winter weather was hard on men, horses and military equipment. Protecting the soldiers from adverse weather was the primary work of the sanitary commissions.

**28 November 1861 – "Winter and the Soldiers** - As the chilling winds of winter are fast coming upon us, the sufferings of the soldiers – the healthy as well as the sick ones – must be

apparent to all. We are glad to see the ladies aroused, and at work. With characteristic benevolence they have organized themselves into a Sanitary Commission for the manufacture of articles the relief of the soldiers, such as blankets, mittens, socks, under-clothes and such other garments as may be desirable. – Let those whose hands are as yet unemployed be touched by the sufferings of the sick and wounded in the hospitals, and in the camps on the fields where nothing but a light structure in the shape of a tent can furnish any protection from the wind and rain and snow and sleet. Sons, brothers, fathers, cousins, friends, exposed to severe suffering, and many of them to death, will bless them for each manifestation of remembrance and sympathy. Ladies of Lincoln! Let all unite heartily, and cheerfully, in this work of love and charity."

As soldiers returned home on furloughs or for recruiting efforts, they often performed the duty of speaking to meetings of the sanitary commissions of the various counties and towns. The documented names of soldiers making speeches to the Lincoln Sanitary Commission were: **Capt. Thomas Larison** (2<sup>nd</sup> Cavalry), **James Chalfant** (106<sup>th</sup> Infantry), **Captain John Ashurst** (106<sup>th</sup> Infantry), and **Lieut. John Everly** (106<sup>th</sup> Infantry).

Early in the efforts of the commission to pursue its goals, word was received from some contributors that they were not willing to make donations since they could not be sure that their donations would reach the intended soldiers. The following article alleviated those concerns.

**28 November 1861 – "How to Send Contributions** – Some persons have refused to contribute anything for the soldiers, fearing that they would not reach their destination. All risk may be obviated by directing the goods to the Colonel of the Regiment, (giving its number) for such a Company, naming its letter and Captain. For instance, a box for **Capt. Holden's** (7<sup>th</sup> Inf) company should be directed thus, **Capt. Holden, Co. H. Col. Cook's Reg., Fort Holt, Ky.**, and in like manner in **Capt. Larison, Cairo. Nothing should be sent to the Quartermaster at Chicago.**"

From time to time the commission officers would provide information for the public to report the progress of the commission. – **What We Have**

**Done** - That the people may know we were in earnest in our solicitation for aid published in the Herald of last week, we will give as near as possible a statement of the workings of the fraternity since its organization. The cause so noble and magnanimous, called for and received the warmest co-operation among our Union loving people. – And as we anticipated, the spacious court room at each session, has been well filled with smiling faces, busy hands and honest hearts. Really the heart of the people of Lincoln is a noble one. When aroused to action, none would scarcely dare to cope with like energy. Money to the amount of \$103,50 has been received by the Treasurer; \$64,56 of the same being paid to the purchasing committee, to furnish material for work for the society, besides a long subscription list as yet unpaid. Number of garments and pieces manufactured by the society, 220; of new comfortables by society, 30; donated, 24. Total value of donated articles, estimated by committee, \$67,25.

“Aggregate capital of society, not giving account of unpaid subscriptions or value of work done by society, being \$170,75.

“And as the spirit of enthusiasm does not seem to flag, we would say that the treasury is still open for money from the gentlemen and donations from the ladies. After this, the society meets but once during each week. All who feel an interest in the same, and desire to make themselves useful to the soldier are earnestly invited to attend.

**Lucy Scroggins, Pres.  
Mary W. Judy, Sec”**

Except for one attempt at what I call Social Engineering (*12 December 1861 - The Ladies’ Sanitary Commission – The Social Wants of the Community*), the local sanitary commission kept to its goal of providing comfort to the sick and wounded soldiers of the Civil War.

As more and more married men left Logan County for military service, there were more pressures put on the women at home to care for their families. This left them little time to contribute to the work of the commission. Efforts were made to help those families missing the bread winner of the family.

*12 December 1861 – “The Needy at Home* - The truly Christian heart is not partial in the distribution of the blessings. While it is true that

we should respond cheerfully to the wants of the sick and wounded soldiers on the battle field, it is also our duty to see to the comfort of the soldiers’ families in our midst. – We therefore suggest the subject for the consideration of the ladies and gentlemen of the Lincoln Sanitary Commission. An efficient committee shd be appointed to ascertain if there are any that need assistance in Lincoln and vicinity.”

Various churches organized committees to see to the families of the missing men.

The sanitary commissions continued their work with fewer hands to do the work.

*12 December 1861 – “Contributions for the Soldiers* - The Ladies’ Sanitary Commission of this place has prepared the following for the sick and wounded soldiers, besides numerous articles not numerated.

“15 cushions, 15 pair socks, 60 rolls of bandages, 14 pair drawers, 12 flannel shirts, 10 cotton shirts, 6 bed ticks, 5 gowns, 24 towels, 24 handkerchiefs, 57 pillow cases, 13 sheets, 15 pin cushions, 50 new comforts, 110 blankets, 30 comforts and 2 quilts. The list speaks well for the society.”

During the winter of 1862 the commission efforts waned and in the Spring of 1862 the organization had to be reinvigorated.

*01 May 1862* – “We are informed that the Ladies of Lincoln and vicinity have again organized a Sanitary Commission to procure and forward necessities for the sick and wounded soldiers. We sincerely hope that all will aid the society by all possible means in the truly beneficent undertaking. The regular meetings will be held on ----- of each month.”

The editors of the papers did what they could to encourage the participation of the public in the work of the commission.

*08 May 1862 – “Honor to Whom Honor is Due* - To the ladies of Logan – mothers, sisters and daughters of the gallant soldiers in the filed – we all owe a debt of gratitude: A want has only to be mentioned to them to be supplied. Their hearts are full of sympathy, and their hands ever ready to do a deed of mercy for the suffering. Be it said, and truthfully said, to the honor of every woman whose feelings have been enlisted for the safety of our brave Logan sons, that amid the dreadful dangers and exposures of war, numbers of wounds

have been healed, and numbers of the sick restored to health through their timely beneficence. Since our last issue we have been pleased to learn that these ladies have filled quite a number of large boxes (10), here and at other places in the county, with all manner of little things for the sick and wounded, and have sent them forward on their errand of mercy.

"We ought none of us forget these acts of humanity. They are the beautiful, legitimate manifestation of woman's nature, and we should fully appreciate them. Our women have given up their best offerings to the country they love – have given their sons, brothers and husbands to fight and die for it – and it will be the rankest ingratitude if our people, for a single moment, forget them. They did not come to us, or go before the public asking for showy demonstrations, or the passage of high sounding resolutions in their praise; but they demand, as they richly deserve, the purest, sweetest, profoundest sympathy of every true and manly heart. But for such as those, we should have nothing to dignify, or to love, with the name even of country. They are the ones who cement the very foundations of the Republic in their places. It is they who first inspire their valiant sons with the love of their native land, and then send them forth with their lives in their hands, to do or die for the cause that is dearest to us all. Let none of us forget these disinterested, faithful, noble women. They should be kept in remembrance continually, and cherished as the first and last hope of the glorious country which we love."

*15 May 1862 – "The Ladies' Sanitary Commission* - This society is now regularly organized and holds its weekly meetings on Friday of each week at the Court House. There had been a considerable quantity of necessaries furnished, but more is still wanted. It is expected, and urgently requested by the President of the Society, that our citizens, one and all, contribute generously and immediately whatever will be of service to the sick and wounded soldiers. The Society will see that the contributions are carefully forwarded and appropriately applied."

The lessons learned from the winter of 1862 prompted the government to take a leadership role in the Sanitary Commission in an attempt to

stabilize the delivery of sanitary goods to the hospitals. A continuous flow of these goods was necessary to compensate for the waning interest in the commission work during the winter.

**"The Sanitary Commission** - The Government, for reasons which it doubtless deems sufficient, has determined to dispense with the services of the Sanitary Commission in the care of the sick and had taken upon itself to be responsible for the management of all the hospitals and depots for the ailing and wounded soldiers. The hospital ships, bedding, supplies, etc., heretofore allowed to the Sanitary Commission and other voluntary organizations, have therefore been placed under the exclusive care of the medical department of the army."

This governmental effort extended to the states as well.

*04 September 1862 - "State Sanitary Bureau* - Springfield, August 28, 1862 -  
*To The People of Illinois:*

"On the 20th inst., I called your attention to the wants of the soldiers of our State, now in the hospitals, and in the field fighting the battles of our country.

"I would again suggest that citizens of each county form Sanitary Associations for the purpose of supplying systematically such articles as are needed, and in order that they may reach the proper points, that the person who has charge of each county will correspond with **Col. John Williams**, Commissary General, at Springfield, as to the quantity and kind that can be furnished weekly.

"Numerous and liberal contributions have been made in various articles and some money, but up to this time no systematic arrangements have been made by which it can continue through the fall and winter. Many persons who cannot contribute in stores, will, I doubt not, be willing to contribute in money. – To such persons I can give the assurance that Col. Williams is a gentleman of the highest reputation for integrity and superior business capacities, and that all such contributions will be faithfully applied to the purposes for which they are donated.

**Richard Yates,**  
Governor of Illinois"

The efforts of the Lincoln Sanitary Commission did not go unnoticed by the officers receiving the sanitary goods being sent by the local group. The following letter was received by the president of the Lincoln Sanitary commission.

"All honor to the noble ladies who, with loyal hearts and industrious hands, are ministering to the wants of the suffering soldiers. The response of Col. Williams, published below, shows what disposition has been made of the contributions heretofore furnished by the ladies of our society:

Office of State Commissary Gen.  
Springfield, Ill., Oct 17, '62.  
*To the Sanitary Soldiers' Aid Society, Lincoln,  
Illinois:*

"Dear Madam: - On the 8th inst., we received in response to an urgent call at that time, for relief of our wounded soldiers at Corinth, very promptly from your society, a large and valuable box of Hospital Clothing, which went forward in charge of our **Col. Williams** to the relief of our wounded. He has just returned, and reports that our wounded in the recent battles at and near Corinth, are all well cared for, many of them full as comfortably situated as they would be at home.

"For your prompt and very liberal response please present to the ladies of your association my hearty acknowledgments.

"I would be much pleased to have your further aid in this good work, and would respectfully solicit your correspondence with this office.

"With Respect, Truly Yours,  
**John Williams**, Commissary Gen., Ill."

Some of the women who participated in the Sanitary Commission were: **Mrs. Barnum; Mrs. Bates; Mrs. Blain; Mrs. Brown; Mrs. Clark; Mrs. Crang; Mrs. Crihfield; Mrs. Duff; Mrs. Dustin; Mrs. Elliott; Mrs. Evans; Mrs. Hodgen; Mrs. Jenkins; Mr. Larison; Mrs. Latham; Mrs. Merton; Mrs. Miller; Mrs. Niles; Mrs. Nillburn; Mrs. Parks; Mrs. Pegram; Mrs. Randolph; Mrs. Rudolph; Mrs. Smith; Mrs. Webster; and Mrs. Wyatt.**

Lincoln's was not the only Sanitary Commission in Logan County. Each of the towns had its own. Other organizations also participated

independently to work for the cause or for support of local needs of soldiers' families. The following articles provide information of these efforts.

**15 January 1863 - Grand Union Festival** - The Festival prepared and gotten up by the ladies of the Sanitary Society, at the Odd Fellows' Hall last Tuesday evening, is universally acknowledged by all who attended to have been the most magnificent affair ever inaugurated in Lincoln. About four hundred persons were present, comprising the beauty, intelligence and refinement of our city... At the close of the Festival, Hon. **S. C. Parks** made a brief but highly appropriate address, thanking the citizens, in behalf of the ladies, for the generous manner in which they responded to their supper...

We are requested by the ladies to return their thanks to all those who assisted them in getting up their supper. They desire especially to thank the late and present Sheriff of the county for the use of the Court House - **Mr. Small** for his generous assistance - the Odd Fellows for the use of their hall, and the Lincoln Brass Band and the young misses for the excellent music with which they enlivened and diversified the evening's entertainment. All performed their part well, but it seems to us that Mr. Small and his family did even more, and we are glad to learn that our citizens have acknowledged it with something more substantial than words.

The proceeds amount to about one hundred and sixty dollars.

**22 January 1863 - Benevolent Society.** - We are requested to state that this Society holds its next meeting at the residence of **Mr. G. A. Brown**, Tuesday evening, Feb. 5th. The object of the association is a laudable one, and should be well attended.

**Sanitary Association.** - Is again in progress. The meetings are largely attended, and much useful work is being accomplished. The ladies have, by their energetic and patriotic labors, succeeded in raising funds with which to purchase materials, and the society again goes forward on its mission of mercy and humanity. Let our citizens attend the meetings and contribute to their interest. **Mrs. Lucy Scroggins** is President, and

**Miss Mary W. Judy**, Secretary of the association.  
Regular meetings, Friday night of each week.

**Odd Fellows' Festival** - Prepare for the feast! Another grand Festival is in prospect. The members of the I. O. O. F., of this city, design giving a grand Union Charity Festival at their Hall, on Thursday evening, January 29th. The object is to raise a Relief Fund for the benefit of soldiers' families and the poor of the community needing assistance. The cause is a noble one – worthy of the organization that proposes it, and will be seconded by every man, woman, and child in the community that can do aught to make it a success. The ladies who desire to furnish provisions for the occasion are requested to report to **J. S. Medcalf**, Esq., who will see that their contributions are properly apportioned. Tickets, fifty cents, to be had at the principal offices and stores.

*05 February 1863 - "Sanitary Register"* - We have received the first number of this paper, read before the Sanitary Society at its last meeting. It is edited with a good deal of tact and ability by **Miss M. C. L. Greer** and Mr. **Albert Smith**. With the exception of one or two articles, bordering somewhat on personalities, it is much more than an ordinary school paper. The following lines would do credit to the pages of the best conducted magazine:

**Land of the Free,**  
Awake! Awake! ye freemen!  
Gird on again your mail –  
Fling out your banner,  
To catch the rising gale!  
And this shall be our motto,  
To float o're land and sea,  
To shout on ev'ry hillside.  
A Free Land for the Free!

**Relief for the Soldiers** - The following will explain itself, and we hope will meet with a hearty

response from the generous still patriotic citizens of Logan county:

H'dq'rs 106th Regt. Ills. Vols.  
Kenton, Tenn., Feb. 12, 1863.

"Special Order, No. 5

**"James N. Thacker**, Hospital Steward of 106th Illinois Volunteer Infantry, will proceed to Logan county, Illinois, for the purpose of procuring sanitary stores for the use of the regiment – it not being possible to procure the same here. He is entitled to transportation accordingly.

"By order of

**R. B. Latham, Colonel**  
106th Ills. Vols. Com'd'g post."

"Mr. Thacker has arrived in this place, and publishes the following:

"To the People of Logan County

"I have been commissioned by Col. Latham to procure sanitary stores for the 106th Regiment. The Regiment needs all kinds of bedding and clothing necessary for the comfort of the sick, and also all kinds of dried fruit. Let every one who wishes to contribute to the comfort of our sick and suffering soldiers give a bed-tick, sheet, comfort quilt, blanket, shirt, or pair of drawers or socks, or some dried fruit.

"Please forward immediately to the subscriber at Lincoln.

**"Jas. N. Thacker**, Hospital Steward, 106th Regt. Ills. Vols."

**"Soldiers' Relief Supper. - Mr. S. H. Fields**, Secretary, requests us to say that the Atlanta Soldiers' Aid Society will give a supper at the Good Templars' Hall, in that place, next Wednesday evening. All interested in the cause invited to attend, and we hope a large delegation will be present from Lincoln."

Sources:

Logan County During the Civil War... - William J. Donath, 2006