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evolution from a trained occupation to a profession... Her contributions to nursing and especially to preserving our history will continue to inform scholars as well as those new to nursing.

With the same dedication, Alice Friedman served on the executive committee of MNA's Lucy Lincoln Drown Nursing History Society. She was part of making sure that Linda Richards and Mary Eliza Mahoney were inducted into the National Women's Hall of Fame at Seneca Falls, and that Sara E. Parsons was inducted into the American Nurses Hall of Fame. Among her many joys in 1996 was personifying Lillian Wald, her public health nurse ideal, in "Ethics, Nursing and a Century of Revolution: Contributions to Personal Health Care," a panel discussion that the Lucy Lincoln Drown Nursing History Society presented at ANA's centennial convention in Washington, DC.

Alice "lived her life with kindness and courage" remembers her friend and colleague, Ann Sheridan. Fittingly Rabbi Benjamin Wefner prayed, "May [Alice's] presence continue to be felt by those who loved her and now carry her memory." Alice helped nurses to make those who had preceded them a presence in their practice.

References

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Walt Whitman: Civil War Nurse

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The Civil War (1861-1865) resulted in more than 600,000 casualties. Many died a horrible death, lacking the basics such as clean dressings, adequate food and even minimal pain relief. Thousands more were wounded and survived in part because of the care provided by recovering soldiers and untrained volunteer nurses. Walt Whitman was one of these volunteer nurses (Figure 1).

**"Bearing the bandages, water and sponge,
Straight and swift to my wounded I go,
Where they lie on the ground, after the battle
brought in,
Where their priceless blood roddens the grass
the ground,
Or to the rows of the hospital tent, or under the
roof'd hospital."**

Prior to the Civil War, Whitman worked as a newspaperman as well as wrote short stories and poems. In 1862 Whitman went to Fredericksburg to search for his brother, whom he believed was wounded. While there he saw "a heap of amputated feet, legs, arms, hands, &c., a full load for a one-horse cart" outside of a field hospital. These "human fragments, cut, bloody, black and blue, swelled and sickening" shocked and dismayed him. Whitman also saw "several dead bodies...each cover'd with its brown woolen blanket."

**"To the long rows of cots up and down each
side I return,
To each and all one after another I draw near,
not one do I miss,
An attendant follows holding a tray, he carries
a refuse pail,
Soon to be fill'd with clotted rags and blood,
emptied, and fill'd again."**

At the end of December Whitman left Fredericksburg in charge of a trainload of wounded soldiers who were headed to Washington. In the nation's capital he began making daily rounds of military hospitals.

**"I onward go, I stop,
With hinged knees and steady hand to dress
wounds,
I am firm with each, the pangs are sharp yet
unavoidable,
One turns to me his appealing eyes--poor boy! I
never knew you,
Yet I think I could not refuse this moment to
die for you, if that would save you."**

Whitman's hospital work was independent of any organization and he was not paid for the nursing care that he provided to the wounded soldiers.

**"On, on I go, (open doors of time! Open
hospital doors!)
The crush'd head I dress, (poor crazed hand
tear not the bandage away.)
The neck of the cavalry-man with the bullet
through and through I examine."**

Sanitation in these makeshift hospitals was virtually nonexistent. Blood poisoning, gangrene, typhoid, dysentery, malaria, and tetanus were common, and malnutrition and scurvy increased as the war dragged on. Three out of every four operations were amputations. It was in these horrific conditions that Whitman sought to comfort and care for the wounded.

**"Hard the breathing rattles, quite glazed
already the eye, yet life struggles hard,
(Come sweet death! Be persuaded O beautiful
death!
In mercy come quickly!)"**



Figure 1
Photo of American poet Walt Whitman 1887.
Source: Adam Cuerden. This work is in the public domain.

There were no trained nurses in the United States at this time. (The first trained nurse, Linda Richards, would not graduate until 1873.) However, Dorothea Dix was given the official title of Superintendent of Female Nurses by the Union Army in 1861. Whitman was never recognized with an official title.

**"From the stump of the arm, the amputated
hand,
I undo the clotted lint, remove the slough, wash
off the matter and blood,
Back on his pillow the soldier bends with
curv'd neck and side-falling head,
His eyes are closed, his face is pale, he dares
not look on the bloody stump,
And has not yet look'd on it."**

**"I dress a wound in the side, deep, deep,
But a day or two more, for see the frame all
wasted and sinking,
And the yellow-blue countenance see,"**

Walt Whitman, America's poet, died in 1892, at the age of 72. The cause of death was military tuberculosis. His autopsy report further noted that he was free of alcoholism and syphilis.

The question remains, was Walt Whitman really a nurse? He was untrained and unpaid and never received any formal mandate to care for the wounded soldiers in the Civil War hospitals. However, none of the female nurses who are commonly recognized as important figures in this era were trained and there is no evidence that they received pay for their services. The care that Whitman provided reminds one of the care that nurses provide today. He paid attention to the psychological needs of his patients, conversing with them and writing letters for them. Whitman provided physical care, including changing putrid dressings. His compassion and concern for the men is obvious from his poetry. It is without a doubt that Walt Whitman deserves recognition as an important nurse who practiced holistic, patient-centered care during the Civil War.

References

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