

Cordelia Harvey: Breaking Women's Nursing Rights in the Civil War

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"I would not exchange the memory of their grateful faces and their heartfelt 'God bless you's' for anything in this world." - Cordelia Harvey

Imagine you are a wounded soldier in the Civil War and you are transported to a hospital. In that hospital, there are many soldiers dying from pneumonia, typhoid, diarrhea, and malaria. It is humid and stuffy in the hospital and all you want to do is go home. You see a woman in a black cape and you find out her name is Cordelia Harvey. She comes over to you and starts talking with you. You feel a sense of home and comfort wash over you. She reminds you of your mother back home in Wisconsin. This is the feeling Cordelia Harvey would give to soldiers she encountered in the hospital during the Civil War.

Cordelia Harvey, also known as "Wisconsin's Angel", would wear a black cape while working in the hospitals caring for soldiers. There are two reasons that might explain why she wore her black cape. First, she could have worn it to mourn her dead husband Louis Harvey. Second, she could have worn the cape to cover her head and hair so that she would look less attractive while she was taking care of the soldiers.

When you think of Civil War nurses, you most likely are imagining a woman with an apron and a hat with a Red Cross on it. However, what you might not know is that women were not allowed to help on the battlefields during the war and were initially not allowed to help in hospitals. It was not until there was a shortage of nurses that women were allowed to help even though men were reluctant. Today, female nurses are allowed to do everything male nurses are allowed to do and are just as valuable as male nurses. The Civil War was a war between the southern and northern states. It was fought from 1861 to 1865. There are two main reasons for the Civil War, the end of slavery and state and federal rights.

During the Civil War, Cordelia helped in many ways, including by being Wisconsin's sanitary agent. As sanitary agent, Cordelia treated the soldiers' illnesses and wounds. As a female nurse during the Civil War, Cordelia helped break the barrier for women's nursing rights.

During the war, more soldiers died from sickness than from battle. For every soldier that died in battle, two died because of sickness¹. Many nurses would also catch the illnesses from the soldiers. These illnesses led to the shortage of nurses which opened the door for women. Nursing staff was so badly needed that a number of women, many without any health care knowledge or experience, came to help. Religious organizations also responded and sent females to assist. This was unusual as it was believed that women should stay home and cook, clean, and care for the children. Women came to be very valuable and served to add comfort to soldiers. In fact, some soldiers described Cordelia as a mother.

Cordelia was born and raised in Barre, New York. At age 18, she moved with her family to Kenosha, Wisconsin, where she took up teaching. She met her husband, Louis Harvey, after moving to Wisconsin. They moved to Clinton, Wisconsin. Wisconsin held a good part of her heart because that is where she met her husband and had her daughter, who died in infancy.² At the time of the war, Wisconsin had a population of 775,881 people, which was not big compared to the population of many other states. Wisconsinites helped out as much as they could during the Civil War. Camp Randall was a training facility of the Union army during the Civil War, where more than 70,000 recruits were trained.

¹ *History Net*. Historynet , Sept. 1999, www.historynet.com/civil-war-nurses.

² Kann, Bob. *Cordelia Harvey: Civil War Angle* . Wisconsin Historical Society Press , 2011

Prior to the Civil War, the Harvey family served an important role in Wisconsin. Louis was elected secretary of state in 1859. Cordelia became the 7th lady of Wisconsin when Louis was elected governor of Wisconsin in 1861. Louis was described as “generous, genial, and possessing an unusual flow of humor”. While on a trip to deliver supplies to the troops down south, Louis died when he slipped and fell into the river. Cordelia felt lost without her husband. During a visit with senator Timothy Howe, he noticed how lost she looked and suggested that she become Wisconsin’s sanitary agent. Cordelia was hesitant to take the job at first but then she remembered her husband’s passion of helping Wisconsin’s soldiers during the Civil War and so she decided to continue his work. Cordelia would have to work with men who were not happy she was there, but they respected her for her hard work and needed her help. Cordelia got to see the conditions of the Civil War hospitals first hand. She spoke of the pneumonia, typhoid, and camp fevers, and the rampant fearful, scourge of the southern swamps and rivers.³ Although Cordelia was the sanitary agent for Wisconsin, she paid little attention to the state lines. She helped all men, even the Confederate soldiers, as if they were her own children. This care and attention got her the title “Wisconsin Angel”. People began to think of her as a hero even though Cordelia said that she was merely doing her job.

Cordelia wanted more women to assist in the Civil War. In a letter Cordelia wrote, she wanted to encourage women to do more during the war by explaining how much the soldiers appreciated the food given by the women⁴. Her efforts continued to break barriers for women and with her encouragement, more women helped during the war.

³ Hurn, Ethel Alice. *Wisconsin Women in the Civil War*. 1911.

⁴ Site, East Side. "Orphanage Series: Connecting with Our past." *Madison Newspapers, Inc.*

Through her work, Cordelia eventually fell ill like many other nurses during the Civil War. She returned to Wisconsin to be with her family. She recovered quickly while back at home and realized that being close to family helped her recovery. She realized that if the soldiers were allowed to come north closer to their family to recover, they too would recover quicker.

Cordelia broke more barriers by being a woman who advocated to improve conditions for soldiers. She asked Governor Salomon, the governor of Wisconsin, to open a military hospital in Wisconsin. He told her to speak with President Lincoln and to provide President Lincoln with petitions that had been signed by over 8,000 Wisconsin citizens. President Lincoln was hesitant about establishing a hospital in Wisconsin because he thought that if the soldiers went home, they would want to stay home. While Cordelia was working in the fields, she saw that this was not true. She met a soldier named Charley who needed to be discharged or at least go home to recover. He said “No” that he wanted to keep his promise to the Union Army⁵. This proved to Cordelia that establishing a hospital for recovery in the north closer to home would not mean a soldier would quit the cause. Soldiers would continue to be loyal.

After the Civil War, Cordelia gave a detailed speech that explained her meeting with President Lincoln. She said that as he walked in the room, Lincoln raised his eyes asking, “Mrs. Harvey?” She replied, “Yes, I am glad to see you, Mr. Lincoln.” He greeted her with kindness, but Cordelia saw that his face showed none. Instead, she said he had a stern look of disapproval. She felt like he had already decided against the hospitals in the north. Lincoln said, “Madam, tis matter of northern hospitals has been talked of a great deal, and I thought it was settled, but it seems not. What have you to say about it?” Cordelia replied, “Only this, Mr.

⁵ Kann, Bob. *Cordelia Harvey: Civil War Angle*. Wisconsin Historical Society Press
, 2011

Lincoln, that many soldiers in our army on the Mississippi River must have northern air or die. There are thousands of graves all along our southern rivers and in the swamps for which the government is responsible.” Cordelia told Lincoln that many more men would heal quicker if they were sent to a northern hospital. Lincoln said “Yes, yes, I understand you; but if they are sent north they will desert; where is the difference?” Cordelia responded with “Dead men cannot fight, and they may not desert.” Lincoln said, “They would desert.” She replied, “You must pardon me when I say you are mistaken; you do not know our people... They are true and loyal to the government.” Lincoln said” Well, well, Mrs. Harvey, you go and see the secretary of war and talk with him and hear what he has to say.”

President Lincoln told Cordelia to visit the Secretary of War, Edwin Stanton and bring a note given to her by Lincoln. The note told Edwin to listen to Cordelia, a bright and intelligent woman. However, Edwin indicated that he sent the surgeon-general to New Orleans to examine all the hospitals and nothing could be done until the surgeon-general returned. However, this was untrue and Cordelia returned to meet with Lincoln. She told President Lincoln about her conversation with Edwin but told Lincoln she had nowhere else to turn. Lincoln maintained that he believed the northern hospitals were a big humbug. Cordelia would not leave until she got what she wanted, a woman on a mission which was unusual for the time. Cordelia said, “I came to plead for the lives of those who were the first to hasten to the support of the government, who helped to place you where you are, because they trusted you... I know that a majority of them would live and be strong men again if they could be sent north. I say I know, because when I was sick among them last spring, surrounded by every comfort, with best care, and determined to get well, I grew weaker day by day, until my friends brought me north. I recovered entirely, simply

by breathing northern air.” Lincoln snapped, “You assume to know more than I do.” She replied with “You must pardon me, Mr. President ... it is because I do know what you do not know, that I come to you... I believe the people have not trusted you for naught. The question only is whether you believe me or not. If you believe me you will give them hospitals.” Lincoln went on, “you assume to know more than surgeons do.” Cordelia replied, “Oh no, Mr. Lincoln, I could not perform an amputation nearly as well as some of them do. I come to you from the cots of men who died, who might have lived had you permitted. The soldiers of Wisconsin have been faithful to the government ... They will be loyal to the government ... If you will grant my petition you will be glad as long as you live.” Lincoln was still unsure about the hospital and told her to meet him the next day.

The next day, Cordelia waited over 3 hours to meet the president. President Lincoln announced that he had ordered the establishment of hospitals for soldiers in Wisconsin. Cordelia was so happy that she wept for joy. When she returned to Madison, she got a letter from Secretary Stanton, saying that he ordered the opening of the Harvey Hospital. Cordelia broke barriers for women by convincing President Lincoln to build a hospital in the north. Such efforts were unheard of by women during the times. This hospital would impact many soldiers and children’s lives.

The Harvey Hospital was opened in Madison, Wisconsin on October 1863 with 106 patients. Cordelia did not work in the Harvey Hospital, she continued her work as a sanitary agent traveling from hospital to hospital around the states. At the end of the war in 1865, there was no need for the Harvey Hospital but Cordelia was not done with her mission. When wives lost their husbands during the war, they would have to abandon their kids because they were

unable to take care of them⁶. As a result, Cordelia brought 6 to 7 children to Wisconsin whose parents had been killed or abandoned them. Cordelia continued to be an outspoken advocate and convinced the governor of Wisconsin to convert the Harvey Hospital into an orphanage for soldiers' children. With the help of her friends, Cordelia was able to convert the hospital into an orphanage. Cordelia served as the first superintendent for the orphanage, "all orphans over the age of 4 and under 14 years, whose father's enlisted, and were killed in the army and their mother was dead or unable to take care of them could stay at the Soldiers' Orphans House⁷". The orphanage had dormitories, sleeping rooms, a schooling room capable of seating 150 children, an infirmary, and a sewing room. The kids studied reading, spelling, geography, math, grammar, and writing. The kids would also have chores. The boys would cut wood, feed the hogs, and milk the cows. The girls would cook, wash, and sew. Cordelia cared for the children a lot, she even took the time to learn each child's name. The state eventually took over the orphans house in 1867. Cordelia again broke barriers by being an outspoken woman advocate for children in need.

Cordelia settled down and married Rev. Albert T. Chester and they moved to Buffalo, New York, where she taught school until Albert died. She moved back to Wisconsin with her sister and died on February 27, 1895, in Clinton, Wisconsin. She was buried with her first husband Louis P. Harvey, at Forest Hill Cemetery in Madison, Wisconsin. The orphanage Cordelia fought for was eventually closed. The building burned down in a fire and was not rebuilt..

⁶ Journal, Wisconsin State. "CIVIL WAR ORPHANS NEED MADISON HOME: WHAT YOU SAID 150 YEARS AGO." *Madison Newspaper Inc.*

⁷ Hurn, Ethel Alice. *Wisconsin Women in the Civil War*. 1911.

In Cordelia's letters, she did not brag about her work, instead she would say "the little I have done". She claimed she was just doing her job, even though she did much more than most women, even men, of her time. Cordelia helped in many ways during the Civil war, being a sanitary agent for Wisconsin, advocating for the establishment of a Wisconsin hospital with President Lincoln, and creating a home for soldiers' orphans. Cordelia helped break the barrier for women by becoming a nurse in male dominated hospitals and by being a woman advocate for children and soldiers of Wisconsin. She impacted many people's lives, from soldiers to orphans. She was persistent in getting Lincoln to agree to the hospital, which was rare for a woman at that time. Her efforts helped shape the career of women nurses today who get treated with the same respect and have the same role as male nurses. Women may still face problems in today's society, but Cordelia helped by serving in a position in a male occupied profession and by advocating in a way that was uncommon for women of her time. Cordelia brought glory to Wisconsin's name and her efforts are the reason why people call Cordelia the "Wisconsin Angel".

Appendix A



This is a picture of Cordelia Harvey during the Civil War.

Cordelia Harvey. Digital file, 2002-2019.

Appendix B

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To his Excellency, Abraham Lincoln, President of the United States.

The undersigned, citizens of _____ County, in the State of Wisconsin, beg leave most respectfully to present their earnest appeal in behalf of the sick and wounded volunteers from Wisconsin, (as well as in behalf of all other sick and disabled loyal soldiers of the Armies of the United States,) who are suffering disease and death, which they can only be rescued from by the establishment of suitable hospitals in the North, or by a return to their own homes. The invigorating atmosphere of our Northern climate would give them life and strength—the heated and feid air of our Southern Hospitals only wasted energies and final death. Do our Fathers, Husbands, Sons and Brothers deserve this? Will an enlightened and christian government permit that which they can so easily prevent? Our noble ones must not be denied the right to life and health because disabled in their country's service.

We therefore pray that our sick and disabled soldiers be granted such furloughs as shall enable them to return to their homes, recover their health and be again prepared for service. And that proper Hospitals be established at once in Wisconsin for those who have no homes. Humanity to our soldiers and justice to our country alike demand this.

And, as in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

<p>Mrs. M. P. Morris Mrs. E. W. Kelley Mrs. J. M. Graham Mrs. P. E. Pratt Mrs. M. H. Bufford Mrs. H. R. Clifton Sarah C. Spauld Mrs. Claudia Smith Mrs. Mary Reynolds Miss Martha Linn Maryanna Smith Mrs. Emily Howe Mrs. H. Leonard Mrs. C. M. Branched Catherine Smith Mrs. Eliza Knight Mrs. J. J. Thomas Mrs. Maxwell</p> <p><u>F9022</u> CI</p>		
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This is a picture of one of the petitions that Cordelia showed Lincoln.

*Petition to President Lincoln . 1864. Wisconsin Historical Society ,
1999, www.wisconsinhistory.org/Records/Image/IM75288*

Appendix C



This is a picture of the Harvey Hospital. This hospital was eventually turned into an orphanage.

"Harvey Hospital ." *Harvey Hospital* .1863-1866.

Appendix D



This is a picture of a recruiting poster from the Red Cross.

Getty image. *Red Cross Recruiting Poster*. 1917. *PBS News Hour*, [drive.google.com/](https://drive.google.com/open?id=1xxTpS6Nuk6JBd6A6sRSOZ0J9ihOauYr4)

[open?id=1xxTpS6Nuk6JBd6A6sRSOZ0J9ihOauYr4](https://drive.google.com/open?id=1xxTpS6Nuk6JBd6A6sRSOZ0J9ihOauYr4).

Annotated Bibliography

Primary Sources:

Barret, Celia. "Cordelia Harvey, Civil War Heroine ." National History Day . Reading.

I used this source for more information on my topic and to help me visualize my paper. This is one of the last sources that I used. It is one of the best secondary sources.

Brockett, Linus Pierpont. *Woman's Work in the Civil War A Record of Heroism, Patriotism, and Patience*. E-book, 2007.

This source haAnnotated Bibliography

Primary Sources:

Cordelia Harvey. Digital file, 2002-2019.

This picture is primary because it was taken around the time Cordelia Harvey lived. This picture showed what Cordelia Harvey looked like. I used this picture as an appendix in my paper.

Federal Medical Dispensary. 1863. *Fort Pulaski* .

This is a primary source because it is a letter from the time Cordelia lived. This is a good primary source because it has important details of the Civil War. I was able to get a connection to the theme from this source.

"Harvey Hospital ." *Harvey Hospital* .1863-1866. Accessed 15 Dec. 2019.

This picture is primary because it was taken around the time Cordelia lived. I used this picture in my paper as an appendix. This picture is a good source because it shows the impact Cordelia had.

Hurn, Ethel Alice. *Wisconsin Women in the Civil War*. 1911.

This source is a primary source because it was from around the time Cordelia lived. This was one of my best primary sources because it contained many details and information on my narrow and broad topic. I was able to get many connections to the theme from this source.

"Letter of Cordelia Harvey." *WER*, 2017. Accessed 15 Dec. 2019.

This source showed me what Cordelia's letters looked like. I used this to show what Cordelia's letters look like. This source showed that Cordelia was persistent.

Getty image. *Red Cross Recruiting Poster*. 1917. *PBS News Hour*, drive.google.com/open?id=1xxTpS6Nuk6JBd6A6sRSOZ0J9ihOauYr4. Accessed 23 Jan. 2020.

This is a primary source because it is from the time Cordelia lived. I used this picture in my appendix. This was a great source to show my broad topic.

Letters and papers of Mrs. Cordelia Harvey, 1862-1864. 1862. *The State of Wisconsin Collection*.

This source showed me what Cordelia's letters looked like. I used this to show what Cordelia's letters look like. This source showed that Cordelia was persistent.

Petition to President Lincoln . 1864. *Wisconsin Historical Society* , 1999,

www.wisconsinhistory.org/Records/Image/IM75288. Accessed 11 Dec. 2019.

This is a primary source because this petition was made during Cordelia's life. This source shows how persistent Cordelia was. I used this source because it showed how persistent Cordelia was.

Secondary Sources:

Barret, Celia. "Cordelia Harvey, Civil War Heroine ." National History Day . Reading.

I used this source for more information on my topic and to help me visualize my paper.

This is one of the last sources that I used. It is one of the best secondary sources.

Brockett, Linus Pierpont. *Woman's Work in the Civil War A Record of Heroism, Patriotism, and Patience*. E-book, 2007.

This source has a lot of information on my topic. I used this source for information on my topic. I was able to make many connections to the theme from this source.

"Cordelia Harvey Persuades President Lincoln to Establish Northern Hospitals." *Wisconsin Historical Society* , Wisconsin Historical Society,

www.wisconsinhistory.org/Records/Article/CS3515. Accessed 7 Jan. 2020.

This website is one of the last ones that I used. This website had a Cordelia explaining her meet with Lincoln. I used this website for Cordelia explaining her visit with Lincoln.

Culpepper, Marilyn M. *Trials and Triumphs: Women of the American Civil War*. East Lansing, Michigan State UP, 1994.

This is one of the books I checked out from the library. This book had good information on my broad and narrow topic. I used this source for my broad and narrow topic.

Farms, Horseshoe Bay, director. *"Cordelia Harvey" at Horseshoe Bay Farm* . 2013.

This is one of the two videos I used during my project. It was a great source about Cordelia Harevy. I used this source for more background and information on my topic.

Harvey Elementary . Kenosha , WI.

This is a good source because it shows the impact Cordelia had. I used this source because it show the impact Cordelia had. This is one of the pictures I thought about using for my paper.

Harvey Hospital Marker. HMI,

www.historicmadison.org/Madison's%20Past/connectingwithourpast/harveyhospitalmarker.html. Accessed 15 Dec. 2019.

I used this source to see the impact my topic had. It was a good source for important details on the aftermath of the event in my topic. This is source also helped me find a good source to email.

History Net. Historynet , Sept. 1999, www.historynet.com/civil-war-nurses. Accessed 20 Nov. 2019.

This is one of the first sources that I used when I started researching in November. It was a great source about important details from Civil War nurses. I used this source to get basic information on my broad topic.

Kann, Bob. *Cordelia Harvey: Civil War Angle* . Wisconsin Historical Society Press , 2011.

This is the first source that I used when I started researching in November. It was a great

source that gave me a lot of information about my topic, Cordelia Harvey. I used this source to get basic facts on the background and event of my narrow topic.

, performer. *Cordelia Harvey: The Wisconsin Angle*. PBS, 2010.

This source was one of my best sources. It was one of the two videos I watched. I used this source for information on my topic.

. Email interview. Conducted by Makenna S. Kampmann, 6 Dec. 2019.

This was one of my best primary sources. I used this source because it showed the impact Cordelia had. I was able to make a connection to the theme from this source.

McKinney, William. "Mrs. Cordelia A. P. Harvey ." *Wisconsin Electronic Reader*,
digicoll.library.wisc.edu/WIRReader/WER0108.html. Accessed 21 Nov. 2019.

This source has a lot of background information on my topic. I used this source for information on the background of my topic and also my topic. I was able to make connections to the theme with this source.

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Wisconsin Magazine of History, 1992.

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This is one of the first sources that I used when I started in November. It gave me a lot of background information on my broad topic. I used the source for information on the background of my broad topic.

Stika, Daniel L. *When Lincoln Met Wisconsin'S Nightingale*. 2017.

This is the second book I read for this project. It gave me someone that I could've interviewed. I used this source for information on my narrow topic.

Tertiary Sources:

Ingolf, Robert Finley. "Wisconsin." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 26 Apr. 2019, pp. 1-10.

This source gave me a lot of information on my broad topic. It was a great source about Wisconsin and its history. I used this source to get basic facts on the background on my broad topic.

Journal, Wisconsin State. "CIVIL WAR ORPHANS NEED MADISON HOME: WHAT YOU SAID 150 YEARS AGO." *Madison Newspaper Inc.* [Madison]. This source was great for what impact my topic had. I used this source for the impact my topic had. I found many like this source.

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This is the first source I used when I started researching in November. It was a great source about important details of the Civil War. I used the source to get basic facts on the background part of my broad topic.

Site, East Side. "Orphanage Series: Connecting with Our past." *Madison Newspapers, Inc.*, 2

Aug. 2004. This newspaper gave good information about my topic. I used the newspaper for information on my topic. I was able to make a connection to the theme with this source.

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first sources that I used when I started in November. It gave me a lot of background information on my broad topic. I used the source for information on the background of my broad topic.

Weber, Jennifer L. "American Civil War." 2019. *American Civil War*. This is one of the first

sources that I used when I started in November. It gave me a lot of background information on my broad topic. I used the source for information on the background of my broad topic.