

# Michigan Teacher

Promoting Excellence in Michigan Heritage Education  
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## Michigan Women in the Civil War

by Catherine Messana

It was often called the “**War Between the States**” but the Civil War was more than just a battlefield over southern states leaving the Union or the end to slavery. Women were not allowed to serve in the military but this **conflict** gave some women an opportunity to do more than stay home and care for family.

Many women supported the war effort by raising funds, making bandages and providing food to soldiers. Women organized the Michigan Soldier’s Relief Association to help do these things. A few women even worked in manufacturing jobs, doing the work their men left behind.

Some women became camp followers, also known as “Daughters of the Regiment”. These women did not go into battle but they served the armies by cooking and washing.

Here are the stories of two Michigan women who fought with and cared for northern armies during the Civil War.

*Anna B. Etheridge* began her service with the Michigan Volunteers providing nursing care for the wounded on the battlefields. Soldiers and newspaper reporters called her “Gentle Annie” or “Michigan Annie” for the work she did. Annie Etheridge served first with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Michigan Regiment in the Army of the Potomac. Then, when the 2<sup>nd</sup> Michigan moved west, Annie was transferred to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Michigan Army. She served on many battles including Antietam, Second Bull Run, Chancellorsville and the Battle of Gettysburg – always bravely putting herself in the field to take wounded soldiers to safety. Annie, herself, was under fire on several different occasions and eventually earned the rank of “sergeant”. Annie Etheridge later joined the 5<sup>th</sup> Michigan regiments and in 1864, when women were ordered by General Grant to leave the battlefield, she worked with the hospital transport service at City Point in Virginia. Annie continued to nurse soldiers through the end of the war. She was given the *Kearny Cross*, a medal honoring bravery in enlisted men. After the fighting was over Annie Etheridge accepted a government posi-

tion in Washington D.C. and married a war veteran.

Although women were not allowed to serve in the armies of the Civil War it is estimated that more than 400 women (both north and south) actually saw **combat**. These women often disguised themselves as boys in order to fight. It was fairly easy to use a convincing **disguise**. The women would cut their hair short and wear loose fitting clothing as did most soldiers. Since the regiments marched or were in combat for long periods of time, they seldom changed clothes or bathed. Most slept fully clothed. Soldiers were mostly civilians and had little experience with weapons so women learned how to fight just as the men did. When women were found out, it was often because they became ill or died.

*Sarah Emma Edmonds*, served for two years in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Michigan **Infantry** as a soldier and nurse. She **enlisted** in Detroit on May 25, 1861 disguised as a young man, “Franklin Thompson”.

Sarah was a master of disguises and became a spy for the Union Army. She posed as a young black man, named Cuff, gathering information as both a cook and while building strongholds with the southern armies. She disguised herself as an Irish lady peddler while she sold goods to the confederates. Once, she just escaped discovery by stealing a horse and was wounded by a bullet on her arm. Sarah/Frank’s other covers included an old black woman; a young white man; and a rich, pro-south young man. She is known to have gone on 11 spy missions while continuing to work as a male nurse in between spy jobs. Franklin Thompson is known to have participated in the battles of First Manassas, Fredericksburg and Antietam, never having been discovered.

On April 19, 1863 army records show that Franklin Thompson deserted. Sarah fell ill with malaria and was afraid that she would be discovered if she had to be hospitalized. She checked into a **civilian** hospital and re-enlisted as a female nurse once she had recovered. Sarah continued to work as a nurse in Washing-

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ton D.C. until the end of the war.

Sarah Emma Edmonds wrote two memoirs about her time in the war (*Unsexed or the Female Soldier* and *Nurse and Spy in the Union Army*). She later married and raised three children. In 1884 Sarah received a government **pension** of \$12 per month for her military service. A letter from the secretary of war, dated June 30, 1886 recognized her as “a female soldier who... served as a private... rendering faithful service in the ranks.” She died in Texas on September 5, 1898.

The experiences of these women who fought and nursed during the Civil War helped to change the way many people thought of women and their abilities. Women began speaking out for the emancipation of slavery and talking about the right to vote. Other women worked tirelessly too. *Pauline Cushman*, a Michigan actress became a spy who was caught, tried and sentenced to hang by the southern armies. Pauline escaped and was rescued by Yankee soldiers. *Bridgett Drivers* slept just outside the army encampments but was considered “fearless” and “brave” as she rode her horse onto battlefields giving first aide to wounded soldiers. *Annie Lillybridge* followed her man into battle and is known to have killed a Confederate captain. *Lois Bryan Adams* was a well known Detroit poet and editor who went to Washington D.C. in 1863 but continued to write for Detroit newspapers about the Michigan armies in order to keep the families at home informed.

These are just a few stories of the courageous Michigan women of the Civil War. They are the most documented ones. Historians

are still uncovering tales from this war but many stories will never be told.

If you would like to read more about women of the Civil War period try these:

*Gentle Annie: The True Story of A Civil War Nurse*, by Mary Francis Shura, Scholastic Inc, New York, copyright 1991.

*Petticoat Spies: Six Women Spies of the Civil War*, by Peggy Caravantes, Morgan/Reynolds Publishing, Inc., Greensboro NC, copyright 2002.

*Women of the Civil War*, by Stephen Currie, from the *Women in History* series, Lucent Books, Farmington Hills MI, copyright 2003.

*Spies in the Civil War: Untold History of the Civil War*, by Albert A. Nofi, Chelsea House Publishers (www.chelseahouse.com), copyright 2000.

## Activities and Rubrics for Teachers

### For Discussion

1. War is difficult for everyone involved. What other ways are there for solving conflict? Defend your answer.
2. Women today are allowed to enter the military but may not see combat. Is this OK? Defend your answer.

### Geography

1. Annie Etheridge fought at both Chancellorsville and Gettysburg. Locate these on a map. How far from where you live are these places?
2. Armies of the Civil War traveled by foot or horse. How would you travel to these places today? How long would it take?

### Activities

1. Plan a trip to Gettysburg. Locate information about things to do and see there (write the Chamber of Commerce or look on the internet). Plan the driving route using maps.
2. Write a letter.  
*Girls: Imagine all the men you know (father, brothers, uncles and friends) have gone off to war. You have had many dinner-time discussions about slavery and the “War Between the States”. Write a letter to your dad or brother and tell them how you feel. Tell what you want to do and why.*

*Boys: Imagine your dad, your uncles and older brother have enlisted in the fight between the states. Your sister talks about joining too, even if she has to disguise herself as a boy. Write a letter to your dad or mom. Tell them how you feel. Tell what you want to do and why.*

### Vocabulary

Define each word:

War Between the States,  
combat,  
documented

conflict,  
enlisted,

infantry,  
civilian,

disguise,  
pension,

Choose an activity to show what you have learned:

1. Consider the question: *Should women have enlisted in the armies of the Civil War?*

Write a response which includes the following elements:

- a. A clearly stated position
- b. A brief explanation of historical circumstances related to this issue
- c. A description of how women handled the issue and why
- d. Explain why you believe as you do
- e. Support your position with Core Democratic Values

Benchmark Rubric:

<b>Benchmark (I.4.LE.1)</b>	<b>Apprentice</b>	<b>Basic</b>	<b>Meets</b>	<b>Exceeds</b>
<i>Identify problems from the past that divided their local community, the State of Michigan and the United States and analyze the interests and values of those involved.</i>	Includes 2 or fewer elements; logical reasoning and clarity are weak or non-existent.	Includes element (a) and at least 2 other elements; logical reasoning may be sporadic or weak. Statements may be vague.	Includes all elements using logical reasoning and clear statements.	Includes all elements using logical reasoning, clear statements and demonstrates extraordinary analysis.

B. Create a poem or play or story to dramatize the life of one of the women soldiers. Introduce yourself; describe the time and place you have lived; recount memories, goals and achievements. Use specific examples given in the article.

Benchmark Rubric:

<b>Benchmark (I.2.LE.3)</b>	<b>Apprentice</b>	<b>Basic</b>	<b>Meets</b>	<b>Exceeds</b>
<i>Recount the lives and characters of a variety of individuals from the past, representing their local community, the State of Michigan, and other parts of the United States.</i>	Tells basic information and several events during the person's life.	Includes some but not all of the following information: time and place person lived, significant events in life, goals and achievements, character through examples.	Describes the time and place the person lived, sequences significant events during life, and identifies goals and achievements, character through examples.	Describes time and place the person lived, sequences significant events during life, identified goals and achievements, reveals character through examples, takes on the persona of the character and reflects the context in which the person lived.

C. Write a letter to Annie Etheridge or Sarah Edmonds analyzing her decision to enlist. In your letter use these elements: the decision the woman made; how you might view this decision; how other soldiers might view this decision; how the decision might affect other soldiers and/or her family. You may also want to include how people might feel about Annie or Sarah's decision today.

Benchmark Rubric:

<b>Benchmark (I.4.LE.2)</b>	<b>Apprentice</b>	<b>Basic</b>	<b>Meets</b>	<b>Exceeds</b>
<i>Select decisions made to solve past problems and evaluate those decisions in terms of ethical considerations, the interests of those affected by the decisions or the short-term and long-term consequences in those decisions.</i>	Completes two elements. Letter may not be logical or appropriate for grade level.	Completes at least 3 elements in a logical letter.	Completes at least 5 elements in a logical, grade-appropriate letter.	Completes all elements in a logical letter, showing unusual insight and includes how people might feel today.

**Michigan History Day  
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**Triumph and Tragedy in History**

**2008**

**The Individual in History**

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[www.nationalhistoryday.org](http://www.nationalhistoryday.org) for more  
information about History Day.

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The Great Lakes Explorers Globe lesson plan found in this issue was selected from the award winning *Immediately Michigan* a collection of over thirty, ready-to-use, K-12, original Michigan related lessons written and tested by Michigan Teachers. *Immediately Michigan* is available from the Historical Society of Michigan for only \$14.95 plus \$3.00 shipping and 6% sales tax. Contact HSM at the address below or call (517) 324-1828 to order a copy of this valuable teaching resource.

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WHAT WORKS IN THE CLASSROOM**

*Michigan Teacher* welcomes articles, lesson plans, and classroom activities on Michigan history related topics for students in grades K-12. Also, please share with HSM any exciting projects you and your students are working on relating to Michigan. Please fax your correspondence to HSM at (517) 324-4370 or e-mail [hsm@hsmichigan.org](mailto:hsm@hsmichigan.org).

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