



*First to respond to the need  
of Civil War wounded, creator of  
the diet-kitchen for army hospitals,  
and founder of soldiers' orphans' homes was*

**ANNIE WITTENMYER,**

*Iowa's Civil War Heroine*

by RON FISHER

# The Iowan

MAGAZINE

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**G**UNS OF two armies thundered over the heads of the woman and two men as they rode across the countryside near Vicksburg, on their way to an army hospital.

A shallow canal lay between them and the hospital, but the woman, Mrs. Annie Wittenmyer, assured by the men of the safety of the water crossing, didn't hesitate in urging her horse into the swift, turbulent water. The two men, General Cyrus Bussey and an Army surgeon, who were unaware that barriers at the mouth of the canal had given way, rushed to drag the half-drowned woman from the flooded canal.

In spite of the drenching, Mrs. Wittenmyer went on to visit the hospital. That incident and her reaction are typical of one of the most remarkable women of the Civil War. The trip was only one of hundreds she made in the service of her state and the Union.

At the time, Mrs. Wittenmyer was in her thirties, with snow white hair which set off her blue eyes and fair complexion. With a gracious kindly manner she combined a high degree of courage, a strong sense of social responsibility, a deep religious feeling, and an independence rare in women of that time.

She was born Annie Turner in Sandy Springs' County, Ohio, on August 26, 1827. Her father, John G. Turner, was originally from Kentucky, where the family for several generations had lived on a plantation near Louisville.

She was educated at an Ohio Seminary, where she received more advanced training than was usual for young women of that time. When she was 20, Annie married William Wittenmyer, a wealthy merchant from Jacksonville, Ohio; in 1850 they moved to Keokuk.

In Keokuk Mrs. Wittenmyer saw many children playing in the streets because their parents could not afford to pay the school tuition. Beginning what proved to be a long career of public service, Mrs. Wittenmyer converted one of her large upstairs rooms into a school room, hired a teacher, and enrolled the poor children. Not satisfied simply with providing a school, Mrs. Wittenmyer

organized the church women to help wash and clothe the children. Later the school was moved into an empty warehouse where about 200 children were educated.

Some time later, Mrs. Wittenmyer established a Sunday School in the same building and so was one of the founders of the Chatham Square Methodist Episcopal Church of Keokuk. In her spare time, she dashed off several hymns used in the services—some of which are still sung today—and helped with the teaching in both the Sunday and the private schools.

And then came the War.

With three brothers in the service, it was not surprising that Mrs. Wittenmyer—now a widow—was interested in the welfare of the Iowa regiments. Moreover, the location of Keokuk brought to its people an early realization of war. To Keokuk, the "Gate City," came news fresh from the camps and battlefields to the south. Thousands of men embarked at Keokuk or were transported past it to be swallowed up in the maelstrom of the war. To Keokuk, too, came the backwash of the war. As the fighting went on, boat after boat stopped at the wharves of Keokuk to unload wounded men. The hospitals were crowded with soldiers who needed care, food, and clothing.

The women of Keokuk rallied to the demands of relief work and, under the direction of Mrs. Wittenmyer, formed the Soldiers Aid Society of Keokuk. The women worked untiringly in the hospitals and gathering supplies to be shipped to the camps and hospitals to the south.

But it wasn't long before they realized that they needed first hand information concerning the needs of the men. At first, they relied on personal visits by women who had husbands, brothers or sons at the front, but it soon became the regular duty of Mrs. Wittenmyer to travel along the front, visiting hospitals and camps and reporting their needs to the women at home.

Conditions among the sick were described by Mrs. Wittenmyer in a report to the women of Iowa submitted after a tour of the hospitals early in November,

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1861. She reported that there was a lack of many stores and supplies which the government intended to furnish but could or did not.

Of this she said: "Many of our surgeons are noble men, who are doing all they can for the comfort of their men; but there are others who will best secure the interest of themselves and their men by resigning their positions immediately."

Among the things needed for the hospitals Mrs. Wittenmyer listed the following: "Bed-shirts and drawers, made of canton flannel, bed sacks, pillow-sacks and cases, size for cot, sheets and comfortables, size for cots, yarn socks, slippers, or cloth shoes, towels, lint, bandages, and old linnen (sic) or cotton clothes, wines, jellies, dried or canned fruits, farina, corn starch, etc."

She also urged that at least two experienced women nurses be provided for each Iowa regiment.

At first Mrs. Wittenmyer worked as the unofficial executive agent of the aid societies organized by the women in the various communities in Iowa. Her first trips were made at her own expense, but later the Keokuk Aid Society paid her expenses.

Mrs. Wittenmyer spent several years traveling up and down the Mississippi River and in the hospitals and camps, and she left many vivid accounts of her experiences.

Seven hundred and fifty sick and wounded soldiers from Sherman's Army at Milliken's Bend were packed on the steamboat, "City of Memphis," on their way to the hospitals at St. Louis. Some of the men were delirious and their cries mingled with the whirl of the wheels and the splash of the water as the boat pushed upstream.

On the floor of one of the cabins a soldier lay on his blanket, his fever-racked head on his knap-sack. Mrs. Wittenmyer stepped to his side and asked, "What can I do for you?"

"You can write to my wife if you get through alive and tell her I died on the 'City of Memphis,'" he replied.

She took down his name and address, spoke a few words of encouragement to

him, and then asked, "Could you drink a cup of tea?" The man refused. "Could you drink a glass of lemonade?" she persisted.

The sick man's face brightened. "Where could you get it?" he asked.

"Make it," she answered. "I have lemons and sugar and there is a whole river full of water at hand." The patient gratefully drank the lemonade—and lived to thank Mrs. Wittenmyer years later.

On one occasion, in winter, the men of a hospital were living in small tents. A bad storm blew down the tents and the men were in danger of freezing to death. Mrs. Wittenmyer arrived with a wagon full of supplies and two women to help her and she set to work raising the tents and issuing the supplies. In addition to blankets and warm bed clothes each man was given a new pair of wool socks. As she reached the last tent and the last two men she turned to the sack of supplies to draw out two pairs of socks, but there was only one pair left in the sack. "Oh Mrs. Porter," she said to her assistant, "What shall I do? There are two men and only one pair of stockings."

The two men began to laugh, and one of them said, "There is no great loss without some profit, Jim." And they laughed again. At last one of them explained. "You see, miss, we've each of us lost a leg, and one pair will do us both."

While Mrs. Wittenmyer was resting one day in a hospital at Vicksburg she noticed a patch of weeds near the tent door was shaking, "as though partridges were running through them." She asked a surgeon about it and he smiled as he said, "Why those are bullets!"

"Bullets? Do bullets come so near as that?"

"Oh yes," he said. "They are flying around here quite thick."

"Do you consider yourself safe while in this tent? It seems to me the bullets are coming very close."

"It is considered very safe," he said. "The bullets fall a little short, you see."

Three days later an officer was killed while sitting in the same chair, watching the same little patch of weeds.

Near the beginning of the war Mrs. Wittenmyer noticed what no one else seemed to notice—that the soldiers would recover more certainly and quickly if taken out of the uncomfortable hospitals and sent home for a period instead of being left to take their chances of getting well under canvas or board barracks, often under fire. Surgeons and army officials approved and, again and again, with steamboats load-

ed with the sick and wounded, she accompanied or sent them up the river to their own homes.

In one of her few completely cheerful experiences, Mrs. Wittenmyer told of how she and Mrs. W. M. Stone entertained General Grant, General McPherson, and General Stone at dinner in a dilapidated house in Vicksburg soon after its surrender. The Negro cook was so awed by the news that General Grant was to be among the guests that she secured the services of two professional colored waiters with swallowtailed coats, white vests, and white gloves, although a tin platter served as a tray and the guests had to enter the dining room by walking up inclined planks, because the stairs had been destroyed by a shell.

Mrs. Wittenmyer came near death many times, undoubtedly, but one of her closest calls extended over a period of several weeks. She had requested an ambulance from the quartermaster, but instead he sent a fine, silver-mounted carriage, captured at Jackson, which Mrs. Wittenmyer later found drew the fire of the Confederates. It was reported in Vicksburg that an old, experienced general, too crippled to ride horseback, made his rounds in the carriage, and the Southern soldiers made it a target every day. In most cases the shot fell low, but the wheels were chipped until they became quite a curiosity.

Not one to be bothered by mere animals, Mrs. Wittenmyer's tent was once erected where the lizards were so numerous "the feet of our cots were put in jars of water, and we tucked up the covers about us so as to keep them off of our beds. We could hear their little feet scratching as they raced after each other over the tents." That's the sort of thing that cost the army a lot of nurses.

Along with managing the distribution of supplies and reporting the needs of the soldiers to the women at home, Mrs. Wittenmyer was busy with other relief work. Women who came to the camps to visit their wounded relatives often required assistance which Mrs. Wittenmyer's familiarity with military life enabled her to give. Letters were written for the very sick. Women sometimes wrote to Mrs. Wittenmyer to thank her for news, sometimes even for a comforting personal notification of death. The return of the little personal belongings of the dead soldier was often a real service to friends at home.

Mrs. Wittenmyer's work for the state became official on September 11, 1862, when the General Assembly passed a law making it the duty of the Governor to appoint two or more Sanitary Agents

for the state, one of whom it was expressly stated should be Mrs. Annie Wittenmyer. The Governor was also authorized to fix and pay the salaries and expenses of these State Agents and to provide state funds for the purchase and transportation of supplies for the Iowa soldiers. Her salary was \$100 a month.

Mrs. Wittenmyer's position was probably not much affected by this law. She was already recognized by many of the men in command of the Army as an official representative of Iowa relief organizations. In most cases Mrs. Wittenmyer had been given free transportation for herself and goods and even free telegraph service. President Lincoln gave her a pass which said "Let this lady have transportation to any of the armies, and any privileges which are not objected to by the commanders of the armies respectively." And Edwin Stanton, Secretary of War, gave her a pass which said in part: "It is also specially enjoined upon all officers to afford her every facility in carrying on her charitable purposes; it being shown that she is worthy of great respect."

Like all public workers, Mrs. Wittenmyer received her share of criticism. Early in February, 1863, a letter in the "Iowa State Press" charged that Mrs. Wittenmyer had offered to sell butter and eggs to the Sisters of Charity in charge of a hospital at Memphis, and that, when they refused to buy, she refused to give them necessary sanitary stores.

When Mrs. Wittenmyer saw the charge, she fired off an answer. "I have never in that hospital or any other hospital, sold or offered to sell, goods, eatables, or sanitary stores, or refused to give hospital goods, or any aid that it was possible for me to render, during the eighteen months I have served my State as Sanitary Agent . . . I have no time, or capacity, or desire, to peddle butter and eggs."

During one of her visits to a hospital Mrs. Wittenmyer overheard a wounded soldier refuse his breakfast. The man turned out to be her youngest brother and the breakfast he had turned down was "a tin cup full of black, strong coffee; beside it was a leaden-looking tin platter, on which was a piece of fried fat bacon, swimming in its own grease, and a slice of bread." Mrs. Wittenmyer, after nursing her brother back to health, resolved that something should be done about the abominable state of hospital food. From this resolution came Mrs. Wittenmyer's greatest contribution to human welfare—the special-diet kitchens.



*Amie Wittenmyer worked for pensions for nurses after retiring to her son's home in Pennsylvania, where she died in 1900.*

No part of the Army service was so defective as the cooking department in Army hospitals. Few of the men employed as cooks were competent. Most of them had been trained after being assigned to duty, under unfavorable conditions, and without the proper facilities. One general kitchen provided food for all—patients as well as staff.

Where there were women nurses in a hospital, and they could get a little stove of their own, special dishes were prepared for the worst patients; but there was no general system of providing a suitable diet for the thousands in need of delicate food.

In December, 1863, Mrs. Wittenmyer proposed the establishment of the special-diet kitchens in each hospital with two experienced women as supervisors or dietary nurses. The food for each patient requiring a special diet was to be prescribed by the surgeon in charge, prepared in the special-diet kitchen, and served to the patients according to the name or number on the diet slip. A simple idea, but revolutionary at the time.

The commanding officers and the surgeons, at first hesitant, were soon asking for diet kitchens and women to as-

sist in them. The United States Christian Commission decided to take over this work and early in May, 1864, Mrs. Wittenmyer resigned as State Sanitary Agent to devote all her time to the superintendence of the diet kitchens. Before the close of the war more than 100 of the kitchens were installed.

In these kitchens all kinds of food needed or craved by sick men were furnished if it was possible to secure them. Such items as toast, milk, chicken, gruel, tomatoes, and jellies took the place of camp fare. Some of these special foods were secured from the commissary, but most of the extra diets were furnished by private gifts through the Christian Commission. Some of the diet kitchens furnished meals for as many as 1,500 very sick patients at one time.

Some of the instructions Mrs. Wittenmyer sent to the women she placed in charge of the kitchens are interesting not only because they reflect the manners of the time, but also because they shed light on Mrs. Wittenmyer's personality. For instances, "A spirit of censoriousness and evil speaking and intermeddling, unchristian anywhere, is doubly mischievous here, and dangerous to all

concerned. First impressions of what can and ought to be done in a large hospital are very likely to need the correction which extended experience and candid observation are sure to give.

"Neatness and simplicity of dress, are intimately connected with your success.

"A uniform Christian deportment, above the shadow of reproach, and the avoiding of the very appearance of evil, is absolutely necessary."

However, all was not smooth cooking for the diet kitchens. Problems arose involving the securing and distribution of supplies; transportation was a constant worry; plus all the hundreds of other minor irritations which accompany mass organization.

The human element, too, was a problem. The cooks did not always get along together. There were complaints that some of the women had danced in the hospitals instead of serving the sick men. Some of them did not get along too well with the men in charge. One woman was so influential with the surgeon that "her will appears to rule everything." Another woman said she needed no suggestions from Mrs. Wittenmyer and would not report to her



This sketch of a Civil War nurse was published in Harper's Weekly August 17, 1861.

and that she defied removal. But that's what she got.

Mrs. Wittenmyer remained in charge of the special-diet kitchen work until the war ended and the hospitals gradually emptied. Of her work General Grant said, "No soldier on the firing line gave more heroic service than she rendered." Mrs. Wittenmyer herself said, "It is the verdict of history that this system of special-diet kitchens saved thousands of lives. During the last eighteen months of the war, over two million rations were issued monthly from this long line of special-diet kitchens, established, many of them, almost under the guns."

In Iowa Mrs. Wittenmyer's most enduring work was the founding of the home for soldiers' orphans. In going about her work, dying soldiers committed to her their children. To leave them unprotected and unprovided for was to many the one regret in dying.

In October, 1863, Mrs. Wittenmyer brought forward a proposition to start a soldiers' orphans' home. The plan was successful and Governor Stone was elected President of the organization. The first home was opened near Farmington in July, 1864, and another at Cedar Falls in August, 1865. These homes were soon full and in October, 1865, Mrs. Wittenmyer went to Washington and secured from Secretary Stanton ("subject to the approval of Congress") thirty acres of land adjoin-

ing Davenport and the new government barracks there, which had cost the government \$46,000 but remained unused. She also was given \$6,000 worth of supplies to aid in furnishing them. When Congress met, the barracks had been remodeled and were filled with orphans, so Congress had no choice but to approve the gift.

As with the special-diet kitchens, there were problems involved in running the orphanage. One of the women in charge of the home at Farmington wrote to Mrs. Wittenmyer of her troubles in discipline. "We have 52 children in the home. Nine of this no. are over 12 years old. Five of them girls. The boys are unruly, one or two were unmanageable at home, and here where the children are all wild noisy untaught and full of life these older ones lead off, and it is equal to training cattle except that the children can make more noise."

After success of the home had been assured, the property was offered to the state, and was accepted, and became one of Iowa's many charities.

Soon after the war Mrs. Wittenmyer moved to the home of her son, Charles, at Sanatoga, Pennsylvania, and busied herself with church and temperance work and wrote several books. She became interested in securing pensions for Army nurses and through her efforts the Army Nurse Pension law was passed, which authorized payment of \$12

per month to 550 former Army nurses.

It was not until 1898, however, that Mrs. Wittenmyer herself received a pension. At that time she was over 70 years old and within two years of her death. The House Committee recommended the passage of this special pension bill in the following report:

"Mrs. Wittenmyer served the soldiers during the entire Civil War, with the approval of Secretary Stanton. At the request of the Surgeon-General of the Army she collected supplies for the sick and wounded amounting to about \$200,000 in value, established dietary kitchens, which became a recognized part of the hospital service, and appointed dietary cooks, who are recognized by the Pension Office . . . Mrs. Wittenmyer also used about \$3,000 of her own funds in furnishing food delicacies, etc., for the soldiers.

"She is now old and in straightened circumstances. A generous government that she did not desert when it needed heroes and heroines will not desert her now. The case is a worthy one."

The bill providing for a pension of twenty-five dollars a month was approved on May 14, 1898.

Mrs. Wittenmyer died in her home in Pennsylvania on the night of February 2, 1900. Her work received little recognition in the official records of the Civil War. However, George D. Perkins, former editor of "The Sioux City Journal," spoke for the thousands of men who received aid from her in an editorial written at the time of her death:

"She belonged to Iowa during the Civil War. She was a leader among Iowa women in the collection and distribution of sanitary supplies for soldiers in the field. I was a member of Co. B, Thirty-first Iowa, and soon after our regiment reached Helena, Arkansas, I was taken violently ill. Our camp was utterly destitute of hospital supplies. The boys fixed me up as well as they could. It was in the winter season and the rain fell almost incessantly. The boys gathered leaves and dried them and made a bed for me. My soldier overcoat was my pillow. In this situation, too weak to move more than my eyes and fingers, Mrs. Wittenmyer found me. She talked with me in such a cheery way, and when she left she said that in a few days they would have me in better shape. I do not remember all that followed, but I do remember that one day soon after her visit a real pillow took the place of my overcoat under my head . . . Of course, this is only one small incident in the army work of Annie Wittenmyer; but it is enough to enshrine her in my sacred memory." □

# WEEKLY GATE CITY.

KEOKUK: 1861

MONDAY MORNING, NOV. 25.

## Report of Mrs. Wittenmyer, to the Soldiers' Aid Societies of Iowa Ladies.

Having been delegated by the Keokuk Aid Society to visit the hospitals of the West, for the purpose of ascertaining their arrangements, and the wants of the sick and wounded among our volunteers, I am instructed to lay before you a brief report of their condition, and to furnish you with a list of articles needed to promote the comfort and secure the convalescence of the sick soldiers, from our State, who are now in hospital.

That there has been great distress among our troops on account of sickness, and that a lack of hospital stores and comforts has aggravated their sufferings, I may not conceal.

That there should be a lack of such hospital furniture and stores as the Government proposes to supply, may be a matter of surprise to some, but when we take into consideration that the Government, at the commencement of this war, was almost in a state of disorganization, and that within the compass of a few months, a vast military campaign has been set on foot, involving millions of dollars, and the health and comfort of hundreds of thousands of men, and that the Government has had to contend with an injured credit and hordes of dishonest army contractors, there is little cause to wonder that her supplies are not more bountiful.

But some of our soldiers have still more serious difficulties to contend with,—their surgeons have not made the necessary requisitions, are lacking in moral character, addicted to intemperate habits, or are overbearing to their men and exhibit but little concern for their health, comfort, or cleanliness.

We may not be able to remedy all of the evils connected with the hospital arrangements of our brave Iowa volunteers; but we have done, and are still doing a great deal to ameliorate their condition, and we hope that very soon, aided by the societies throughout the State who are co-operating with us, we will be able to render their condition very comfortable.

I am requested by our soldiers to express to you, ladies, their deep and heartfelt gratitude for the substantial testimony you have given them, in the way of comforts and delicacies, of your interest in their welfare and your high appreciation of their services; and I have been assured that the consciousness that hundreds of

ladies in their own State were thinking of them, and laboring for their comfort, has cheered many a sick soldier, through dark hours of pain, suffering and neglect.

The ladies of our State have done nobly—let us continue our efforts—much still is to be done.

We hope to be able to place in each Regiment, at least two good and efficient female nurses, who will labor for the comfort of our sick, and have charge and take care of our hospital stores. We are fully convinced of the importance of this measure and have secured the services of some of our best ladies for this work. Some of them are already in the field, others will soon follow. Most of the nurses heretofore have been taken from the ranks and are distressingly awkward and rough in their approaches to the men, and know little or nothing about taking care of the sick. A woman of intelligence and character could do more to inspire confidence and render the sick comfortable than a half dozen such men, for women are peculiarly adapted to the kind and delicate offices of a sick room.

Women, weak and dependent as they are, are the most efficient agents for doing good, either as nurses or visitors among our hospitals. They are received with a degree of confidence and cordiality that no man, however great his military or medical reputation, can command, and with womanly hearts and womanly tact, they can lay hold of influences that men cannot reach.

Several instances of this kind have recently transpired under the supervision of our society, demonstrating this fact beyond controversy, and proving to us the importance of having female delegates frequently in the field. And the importance of such a measure is still more apparent when we reflect that, the medical and nursing departments of our army are fraught with a ten-fold interest, as regards the saving of valuable life, above any other department.

Another very serious difficulty that our sick soldiers have to contend with, and one which they feel as bitterly as another is, the impracticable plans of the Sanitary Commission. St. Louis has been made by them the great rendezvous of the sick of the Western division of the army, and it is their plan to draw away the sick from their regiments for a distance of from 100 to 200 miles, and concentrate them at that place. Very extensive preparations have been made there for their accommodation, and, already, there are nearly three thousand sick soldiers in St. Louis.

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While we can but speak in terms of praise of the Sanitary Commission, as regards the St. Louis hospitals, the impracticability of their plans will appear, when we take into consideration the fact that, most of our troops are at remote distances from that post, and any attempt to transport *very sick men* to that point would be hazardous to human life—if not very sick, it would be a needless expense and trouble. Besides, our sick soldiers are decidedly opposed to being separated from their regiments and companions, (who are ready to stand by them to the death,) and placed in a promiscuous crowd of strangers in a General Hospital.

The consequence is, that while large sums of money are being expended in St. Louis for hospital purposes, the regiment hospitals are grossly neglected, and our sick are left to choose between staying with their regiments, and suffering the privations and dangers consequent upon a lack of suitable hospital stores and nurses, and of going to St. Louis at the hazard of their lives. They mostly choose to stay with the regiments and suffer; and the depths of anguish and despair which have wrung with agony many a noble spirit, God alone can fathom.

Many of our Surgeons are noble men, who will do their duty in the camp or in the field, and are doing all they can for the comfort of their men; but there are others who will best secure the interest of themselves and their men by resigning their positions immediately.

It is painful for me to speak of these things and I do it only from a sense of duty, and for the purpose of showing how many difficulties our sick soldiers have to contend with, and the importance of laboring for the regiment hospitals.

As far as my observation extended our troops are well clothed and well fed, and but for the disabilities under which they labor with regard to hospital supplies, &c., &c., the comfort of the men would be tolerably well secured. But the miasmatic districts in which some of our regiments have been quartered, has been very fatal to their health.

This is especially true of the Iowa 2d, 3d and 7th.

The Second, which has suffered more severely on account of sickness than any other, has been brought up from Bird's Point to St. Louis to recruit, and the health of the regiment is improving slowly. There are at this time about 200 out on furlough, 300 to be prescribed for daily, in camp, and 80 in the General Hospital. Some of the sickest of the men were left behind, in Cairo.

Nov 25, 1861  
"THE GREAT DUST HEAP CALLED HISTORY"  
R. I. DICKEL  
KEOKUK, IOWA

THE KEOKUK DAILY GATE CITY



MONDAY, MARCH 4, 1861

Mrs. Annie Wittenmyer.

The Third, which has been in Quincy for the last six weeks recruiting, has been ordered to St. Louis and is now considered fit for duty.

The Seventh Regiment had two hundred on their sick-list before the battle of Belmont; as they suffered severely in that conflict their number has been greatly increased.

The health of our other regiments is comparatively good—being more recently called into the field and at a more favorable season of the year, they are not likely to suffer so severely.

The articles needed for hospital use are—

Bed-shirts and drawers, made of Canton flannel, bed-sacks, pillow-sacks and cases, size for cot, sheets and comfortables, size for cots, yarn socks, slippers, or cloth shoes, towels, lint bandages, and old linen or cotton clothes, wines, jellies, dried or canned fruits, farina, corn starch, &c.

Any one, or all of these articles will be most acceptable, and if forwarded here, will be taken immediately on to where they are most needed. We are in correspondence with the various regiments and hospitals, and we will frequently visit our hospitals and we pledge ourselves that, whatever stores are sent to us will be taken to where they are most needed, and used for the comfort of our sick soldiers.

We make no appeal to your patriotism or generosity, for we are persuaded that you will heartily co-operate with us in our effort to make them comfortable.

Banded together as we are for a high and noble purpose, let us, true to our country and humanity, and trusting in God, go forward in the prosecution of the work before us with zeal and courage, and may civil and religious liberty crown our efforts.

Published by order of the Keokuk Ladies Aid Society.

ANNIE WITTENMYER,  
Corresponding Secretary.

Keokuk, Nov. 14th, 1861.

Nov 25, 1861

THE GREAT DUST REAP CALLED HISTORY  
R. J. BICKEL KEOKUK, IOWA

—THE CIVIL WAR

4. Aid from Home.

While the men of Iowa were in the Union army fighting to hold the nation together, the women at home were bravely serving their country too. Every heroic deed in battle was matched by a courageous act far from the scene of bloodshed. For every shattered body at the front there was a broken heart in some home. The men who enlisted risked their lives but the women they left behind endured unusual hardships. Many worked in the fields, some went to nurse the wounded soldiers, and every one tried to help win the war.

At first the ladies expressed their patriotism with flags which were presented to the companies on the eve of their departure or while in training camp. An emergency, however, soon tested the valor of Iowa women. The men in the first regiment of volunteers had no uniforms for campaign service. None could be obtained from the United States government. Finally, Governor Kirkwood sent a man to Chicago to buy cloth. All he could get was "some very poor, thin, sleazy gray satinett, half cotton and half wool, only fit for summer wear."

Loyal women in the home towns of the First Iowa companies gladly undertook to make this cloth into uniforms. Under the direction of local tailors they went to work. At Dubuque nearly 250 cut and basted, trimmed and stitched for nine days. There was much puzzling over the strange-shaped pieces that went into the men's clothing.

Amid smiles and frowns and the din of female voices the garments were fashioned with little regard for sizes. It was said that some of the soldiers had to climb on a chair to reach the pockets in their trousers. The coat collars were either just a little above the small of the wearer's back or several inches over his head. Nor could the women resist a few adornments. One company wore blouses with green collars and another was distinguished by trimmings of red flannel. Nevertheless the soldiers were glad to get their uniforms, and they appreciated the

prayers and hopes that had been sewed into them.

No sooner had the first regiments gone south than the people at home began to plan ways of making army life as comfortable as possible. In each community supplies of food and clothing were gathered and sent to friends and relatives in camp. Soldiers' and societies were organized for this purpose. In August, 1861, the Keokuk aid society sent Mrs. Anna Wittenmyer to visit the Iowa regiments and see what the soldiers needed. Women all over the state were invited to work through the Keokuk society.

Meanwhile, Governor Kirkwood asked Rev. A. J. Kynett of Lyons to unify all the relief work in Iowa. He formed the Army Sanitary Commission to encourage aid for the soldiers and to save the expense and losses of goods sent privately. This organization worked with the United States Sanitary Commission to improve the health of the army. The Keokuk aid society had the same object, but was interested mainly in the welfare of Iowa soldiers. In November, 1863, these two associations were united to form the Iowa Sanitary Commission. No doubt hundreds of lives were saved and much suffering relieved by the generous help of the people at home.

More soldiers were killed or disabled by sickness from exposure, bad food, and epidemics than by "run fire" in battle. The medical service of the army was not able to treat such cases properly, and

the men were helpless to take care of themselves. They needed vegetables and fruit to eat. Steady rations of meat and hard bread caused scurvy, indigestion and general weakness. Colds were common. The hospitals were scarcely better than the camps.

When Mrs. Wittenmyer returned from her visit among the troops, she urged the women at home to supply the articles that the government was not furnishing. Potatoes, onions, sauerkraut, corn meal, pickles, dried fruit, molasses, butter, and eggs were needed, she said. And the women of Iowa responded with food, clothing and other things worth thousands of dollars.

One of the most successful ways of raising money and supplies for relief work was by means of fairs. In June, 1864, gifts from 300 towns in 62 counties of Iowa were collected at Dubuque for the Northern Iowa Sanitary Fair. Among many strange articles offered for sale at the booths in the city hall were a piano, a cannon, a harness, several pumps, two lightning rods, "three dollars worth of French chalk," a whatnot, a rocking horse, farm machinery, two town lots, and a hive of bees. When the fair closed at the end of eight days, the profits amounted to nearly \$90,000. The Iowa Central Fair at Muscatine and the Southern Iowa Fair at Burlington produced about \$20,000 each.

Some of the money raised by the aid societies, sanitary commissions, and fairs was used to establish homes for soldiers' orphans. A state orphan asylum was opened at Farmington in July, 1863, and another at Cedar Falls in September of that year. Through the influence of Mrs. Wittenmyer, into whose care many a dying soldier had placed his children, the military camp grounds at Davenport were obtained and the Farmington home was moved there in 1865. The Cedar Falls orphans' home was closed in 1876.

Early in the war, hospitals were established in convenient northern cities for the care of sick and wounded soldiers. Keokuk, being well situated for that purpose, was chosen as a good place for an army hospital. After the bloody battle of Shiloh, orders came to prepare for 300 wounded men. The Estes House, a large hotel built in the boom days before 1857, was hastily cleaned and furnished for the patients. The people of Keokuk supplied sheets, pillows, blankets, bandages, towels, and all kinds of wholesome food. Hundreds of wounded soldiers were nursed back to health in the military hospitals of Keokuk. And from the doors of the old Estes House and other buildings wound a daily procession to the burial ground just west of the city, which became Iowa's only national cemetery.

While most of the women of Iowa were busy at home sewing, knitting, and producing food for the soldiers, a few ventured to the camps and battlefields. Mrs. Ann E. Harlan, wife of the Senator, was very energetic in caring for the wounded after the battle of Shiloh. Mrs. I. K. Fuller was the first Iowa army nurse, and many others followed her example.

One day when Mrs. Wittenmyer was visiting a military hospital in Missouri, she noticed that one of the patients refused to eat his breakfast. On the tray was a tin cup full of black coffee, a piece of greasy bacon, and a slice of bread. The patient was her own sixteen-year-old brother, sick with typhoid fever.

As a remedy for such conditions, Mrs. Wittenmyer proposed to have at each hospital a special diet kitchen run by women. They would see that sick men got the right kind of food. The army surgeons finally agreed to try the plan and the United States Christian Commission began the work in May, 1864, with Mrs. Wittenmyer in charge. By the end of the war more than a hundred of her diet kitchens were supplying soup, milk, toast, jellies, tea, and vegetables in place of regular army rations. President Lincoln praised her work and General Grant declared that no soldier was more heroic than she. When Congress gave her a pension, "no precedents as to the value of her services" could be found.

# THE GATE CITY.

## KEOKUK:

TUESDAY, JUNE 8, 1863

### REPORT OF MRS. WITTENMYER TO GOVERNOR KIRKWOOD.

HON. SAM. J. KIRKWOOD, GOVERNOR OF IOWA.

Dear Sir.—I have visited, during the last three months, most of the Iowa Regiments in the field, and it gives me great pleasure to report that with but few exceptions I have found their camps and hospitals in as good condition as circumstances would admit.

Some of our Regiments occupy positions of honor, and great responsibility, and most of our officers and troops are spoken of in terms of praise and commendation by the Commanding Generals of the Western Department.

The health of our army is greatly improved, owing mainly to the distribution of large supplies of vegetables and anti-scorbutics, but we have now about thirty thousand troops in a section of our country made desolate by the ravages of war—the sickly season of summer is approaching, and unless a generous supply of vegetable food is contributed by the loyal people at home, scurvy, debility and great mortality must result. I therefore call your special attention to the sanitary organizations of the State, and urge upon you the importance of securing unanimous and concentrated efforts.

I am receiving large contributions from all parts of the State, but, up to this time, the supply has not been equal to the demand. This will be a matter of surprise

to those who have carefully calculated the amount necessary to supply so large an army, but persons unacquainted with the Commissary Department, are liable to reach false conclusions. It is found, upon calculation, to require 500 bushels of potatoes to supply one pound to each man in the field, from this State, and 812 bushels of dried apples to supply one fourth of a pound to each man, and other things in like proportion. But the character of the work now before us, which has assumed such immense magnitude, is one that ought to command the aid and sympathy of every generous loyal person in the State.

I have received, during the last three months, from the soldiers' aid society of the State 1153 packages, (barrels and boxes,) of goods and vegetables, and \$125 58 in money. A full exhibit of the receipts and disbursements will appear in my annual report. I have, during the time, received from the U. S. Government ten bales of cotton for comfortables, which has been manufactured by the aid societies in the West with great acceptability, and are now being distributed for use in the general and post hospitals. I have just received and caused to be sold another lot, (14 bales,) of cotton, given me by the U. S. Government for sanitary purposes, on which I have realized \$2,000-18, which is now on deposit, and which, according to the instructions from the Government, I will apply to the purchase of such supplies as are most needed by the army.

The Government is offering me safe and prompt transportation for sanitary supplies, and every facility for carrying out the generous intentions of our people.

Owing to recent orders, no more goods can be sent at the cost of the Government

to particular individuals or regiments, but all supplies must go into a common fund for general distribution.

The transactions, briefly mentioned in this report, together with my hospital labors, an immense correspondence, and over three thousand miles travel, have so completely occupied my time, that I have not been able to devote as much attention to organizing societies in the State, as I had hoped, but I can safely report a large increase in the number of societies, and greater enthusiasm in regard to the sanitary affairs throughout the State, than ever has existed heretofore. Hoping that I have done some good, and that my labors may meet your approbation,

I am very respectfully

Your obedient servant,

ANNIE WITTENMYER,

State San. Ag't.

EXECUTIVE OFFICE, IOWA.

Iowa City, May 18, 1863.

To the People of Iowa:

The foregoing report of Mrs. Wittenmyer, State Sanitary Agent, shows fully that the efforts to supply our noble men who are periling their lives in defence of our common liberties, with those things needed—and not furnished by our Government—to preserve them in health, or restore them when sick or wounded, are not on such a scale as to meet the pressing demand. Our people do not yet appreciate the magnitude of this work.—Mrs. Wittenmyer gives some figures, which show at a glance that no limited or fitful supply will answer the purpose, nothing short of a full, strong, constant stream. Should all our troops be supplied to-day, to-morrow quickly comes with its wants equally urgent—so that,

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THE GREAT DUST HEAP CALLED HISTORY  
- B. J. BICKEL - KEOKUK, IOWA

## Annie Wittenmeyer's Work Recalled by Pennsylvanians

**Aunt of Miss Mayme Turner Keokuk Woman Was Prominent in Establishing Diet Kitchens and Relief Organizations.**

ried in 1850 to William Wittenmeyer, a merchant, was at the front from April, 1861 until the close of the war. "She introduced diet kitchens for the sick and severely wounded and her plans were accepted by the Sanitary and Christian Commission, the surgeon general and all high officers of the government."

Miss Mayme Turner of Keokuk, R. F. D. No. 1, a niece of Mrs. Annie Wittenmeyer, has received a clipping from Pottstown, Pa., telling of the honors paid Mrs. Wittenmeyer, one time resident of this community and active in the civil war hospital work in Keokuk. On the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Pottstown Red Cross, tribute was paid to the memory of Mrs. Wittenmeyer.

Mrs. Wittenmeyer was said to have spent \$3,000 of her own money and gathered and distributed \$200,000 worth of supplies along the front lines. She was instrumental in helping found the Soldiers' Aid Society in Iowa. Branches were established over the state and the organization was called the forerunner of the Red Cross. She was active in the founding of the W. C. T. U. and was its first president. She was active in the Anti-Saloon League organization, too, and helped found the national Woman's Relief Corps.

Mrs. Wittenmeyer, it will be remembered, was among the patriotic women of Keokuk who helped in the hospital work here in the war of the rebellion. She was commissioned by Gov. Kirkwood of Iowa to take over the work, and received the commendation of President Lincoln, General Grant, Secretary Stanton and others. She was given access to all of the Union hospitals on and off battlefields, and her greatest contribution to humanity was the correction of diet kitchens in connection with the field and base hospitals.

Her death occurred in Pottstown in 1900.

The story is told that in making the rounds of one of the Keokuk hospitals she found a typhoid fever patient being fed the wrong food, and in looking at the case discovered it was one of her own brothers.

### First in This Work

The Pottstown paper says "she was first to engage in humanitarian work in this country, and her efficient and unselfish service won the support and commendation of men high in the government." The article goes on to say that before Florence Nightingale won honors for her service in the Crimean war, "Annie Wittenmeyer had been recognized as a philanthropist and pioneer in humanitarian service to the poor and the soldiers during the trying days of the Civil War."

Three of her brothers enlisted in the Union army and Mrs. Wittenmeyer, who came to Keokuk from Jackson, Ohio, where she was mar-

however bountiful the supply may be for a time, it must be constant as the need, to do justice to our noble soldiers in the field.

Some few communities have done their whole duty in this matter. Many have done well, but a very large number are sadly behind the just demands of their country and its brave defenders.

Will the good people of each community in the State, canvass carefully the following questions? What is our duty in this matter? and have we done it?—And let an honest, practical answer to go forth that shall gladden the hearts and relieve the wants of those so justly entitled to our assistance. The letter of Mrs. Wittenmeyer of March, 3d, specified the articles most needed, to be cranberries, onions, sour-kraut, corn meal, pickles, dried fruit, potatoes, molasses, soda crackers, toasted rusk, butter, eggs, condiments, cider vinegar, &c. There have been some temporary impediments to shipping, which are now all removed.

All packages from any part of the State, put on board of any of our lines of public transportation, and addressed to Mrs. Annie Wittenmeyer, care of Partridge & Co., St. Louis, Mo., will be sure to go where most needed, at the expense of the Government. Will the people of Iowa take earnest and systematic action in this important work.

SAMUEL J. KIRKWOOD.

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Annie Wittenmyer

# Davenport Home Plans

## Centennial Party



THIS IS THE ADMINISTRATION building at the home. The orphanage actually had its start in Van Buren County in July of 1864, but at the end of that year it was given use of the new barracks at Davenport's Camp Kinsman.

By Gene Raffensperger

THE Iowa Annie Wittenmyer Home in Davenport, which has been "home" for more than 11,000 children since its founding, will note its 100th year of service next Sunday.

Hundreds of "graduates" of this home are expected to return for the daylong open house and celebration. The peaceful setting of the tree-shaded grounds and red brick cottages represent a living memorial to the woman whose compassion for children made the home possible.

Mrs. Annie Turner Wittenmyer, who lived in Keokuk and Davenport, was known as a "battlefield angel" during the bloody Civil War. She toured the fighting fronts and hospitals, attending the wounded and seeing that proper food was given to those in hospitals.

At war's end she worried about the fate of the children orphaned by the conflict. She campaigned for establishment of the Iowa Soldier's Orphans Home, and

in 1865 became its first superintendent. The Iowa Board of Control took over management a year later, and in 1949 renamed the place "The Iowa Annie Wittenmyer Home," in honor of the woman who founded it.

Today the home no longer is solely for children of war veterans. Any dependent, neglected or abandoned youngster is eligible. An average of 300 are in residence and they range in age from infants to 18 years. Many "graduates" of the home have gone on to success in professional and business life. Two who are well remembered at the home are Wayne King, band leader, and the late Billy Sunday, big league ballplayer and world famous evangelist.

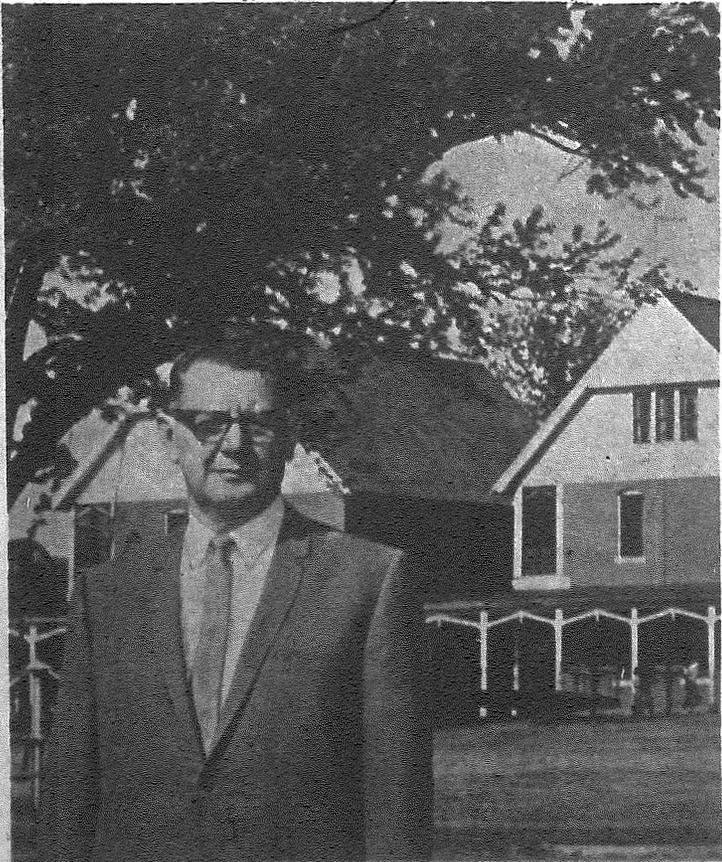
THE GREAT DUST HEAP CALLED HISTORY"  
R. J. BICKEL KEOKUK, IOWA

THE GREAT DUST HEAP CALLED HISTORY  
R. J. BICKEL KEOKUK, IOWA



CHILDREN at the institution sometimes return to their own homes, sometimes to foster homes. They live here, grouped according to age and sex, in cottages. Each cottage is supervised by a man and his wife, who live on the premises.

Centennial Party Page 2



SUPERINTENDENT of the Annie Wittenmyer Home is James Holmes. Behind him in this photograph are some of the cottages in which the children live.