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THEY WENT TO WAR TOGETHER The story of Jared and Mary Brainard

By Amanda Becker



Mrs. Mary Brainard who served as an army nurse and was awarded a pension by special act of Congress

FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

This is Amanda Becker's second contribution to the *Nuggets of History*. She is a history teacher at Auburn High School where she teaches a unit on local history to her students. Amanda is enthusiastic about teaching young people about their home town and making it interesting. This article is about Mary Brainard, a young woman who followed her husband to war during the Civil War. As Amanda points out in this very well researched article, women in the Civil War were not as rare as most of us thought.

We all remember special teachers who inspired us and sparked a special interest in a particular subject. After reading her article, I felt that Amanda was one of those special teachers who inspire their students.

Amanda attended Auburn High School in the late 90s, graduating in 2000. She attended Rock Valley College, graduating with an Associate's Degree in 2002. She went on to Rockford College, graduating in 2005. While at Rockford College she wrote her senior seminar paper on Rockford Industry. Since graduating she has been teaching at her alma mater, Auburn High School.

NOTICE TO RESEARCHERS

If you have a subject that you have researched, or an idea for an article that you would like to pursue, give me a call. I would like to encourage original research into some aspects of local history that have not been adequately pursued. I can be reached at 986-4867 (evenings) or 987-5724 (day).

Thomas Powers, Editor

THE ANNUAL HISTORY FAIR

The annual History Fair at Midway Village is coming up on January 14, 2012. The 7th and 8th grade classes at St Peters School will prepare projects on local history that will be judged by volunteers from the Rockford Historical Society. The winners from this competition will go on to the regional History Fair in Dekalb. The winners from Dekalb will go on to the State Fair in Springfield. We are looking for volunteers to judge the projects. If you have never participated in this I would encourage you to come. You will be surprised at the quality of the work these young people do. The judging will start at 9:00 in the Lake View Room at Midway Village. Coffee and donuts will be provided. Allow about two hours.

They Went to War Together

By Amanda Becker

The attack on Fort Sumter was a pivotal point in time for every American. The Civil War changed lives and made "regular people" do extraordinary things. On April 20, 1861, women from around Rockford had raised \$1,200 in order to produce uniforms for the Rockford Zouaves. They used blue cloth donated by the local merchants and worked on Sundays. By April 24, 1861, the first group of soldiers from the area left for Springfield only days after the firing on Fort Sumter. Crowds came to the train station to see them off. Later that evening, a mass meeting was held at the Winnebago County Courthouse. It was so well attended that it had to be moved outside, and the people did not mind that it was raining because their emotions ran high. \$10,000 was raised for the war effort by the end of the night.

Men were eager to enlist. W. Ashton Johnson wrote in his article, "The Nation at War," for *Nuggets of History, Vol. 26, No. 2, 1989*, "There were 793 volunteers who received a \$60 bounty from the County Board of Supervisors in August of 1861." By September of 1861, 13 companies of soldiers had organized; and by the end of the war, approximately 3,000 men from Winnebago County served.

The scene is still played out in homes across America today: husbands bidding tearful goodbyes to their wives and families as they go off to war. Mary and Jared Brainard were different. Having been married for almost six years, both Mary and Jared enlisted to defend the Union in 1862.¹ Jared enlisted on August 9th, 1862 in the 74th

¹ Mary Jane (Conger) Brainard was born on July 9th, 1832 in Franklin County, New York, and her husband Jared H. Brainard was born on December 12, 1829 in Wallington, Connecticut. They were married probably in Rockford on November 20, 1856, and they lived on Mulberry Street in Rockford.

Illinois Infantry, Company D in order to serve for three years.² Mary followed her husband and enlisted on September 7th, 1862 as the 74th's regimental nurse.³ No information has been found to suggest that Mary had any formal nursing training; but most other nurses in the Civil War did not have any either. Nurses were simply needed fast, and Civil War medical techniques were basic.

Mary could have stayed home and waited for Jared to return to Rockford after his term of service ended but she did not. According to her "Declaration for [a] Nurse's Pension," she was, "...employed as nurse by appointment on or about the 28th day of September, 1862." This means that she had to speak with the commanding officer, Colonel Jason Marsh, and ask him personally if she could join the regiment as a nurse. Due to Jason Marsh's liberal personality and Mary's strength- Mary was allowed to become the regimental nurse.⁴ She was the only nurse for the entire regiment, and is not listed on the common company muster roles. Unlike men of the time, women were not pressured into enlisting for the armed services. Why did Mary enlist? Mary had no children, she listened to the sermons given in

<p><i>Edward Baird</i> Rank, <i>Private Co.</i> Reg't _____ Complaint _____ Admitted <i>Sept 28, 1862</i> To No. <i>9</i>, U. S. A. Gen'l Hosp., Lebanon, Ky. Rec'd to duty _____, 18 _____ Deserted _____, 18 _____ Disch'd from service _____, 18 _____ Sent to G. H. _____, 18 _____ On furlough _____, 18 _____ Died _____, 18 _____ Remarks _____ _____ _____ _____ Ky. Reg. No. <i>447</i>; H. No. _____; Page <i>72</i> (1864-52) U. S. - 475 Copy 104</p>	<p><i>Thomas H. Baird</i> Rank, <i>Private Co.</i> Reg't _____ Complaint _____ Admitted <i>Sept 28, 1862</i> To No. <i>9</i>, U. S. A. Gen'l Hosp., Lebanon, Ky. Rec'd to duty _____, 18 _____ Deserted _____, 18 _____ Disch'd from service _____, 18 _____ Sent to G. H. _____, 18 _____ On furlough _____, 18 _____ Died _____, 18 _____ Remarks _____ _____ _____ _____ Ky. Reg. No. <i>447</i>; H. No. _____; Page <i>72</i> (1864-52) U. S. - 475 Copy 104</p>
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² Jared was trained at Camp Fuller which was "...a temporary rendezvous point for Illinois volunteers from the northern counties.... Between August and November, four regiments of men were organized and trained at the camp...." Jon W. Lundin, *Rockford, An Illustrated History* (Chatsworth, CA: Windsor Publications, Inc., 1989), 51.

³ At the beginning of the Civil War, two of Mary's brothers enlisted in the Union Army. One survived the war, while the other was killed by a member of his own company.

⁴ Jason Marsh appointed Ruben Armstrong, an African American, as the regimental barber.

church, her husband had enlisted, and above all else she most likely just wanted to do her part.

In a paper by Jane E. Schultz entitled, *Ten Common Myths about Women in the Civil War, and How to Dispel Them*, she wrote; "Historians have generally told us from 1865 on that several thousand women served as nurses in hospitals, camps, and battlefields in the Civil War. But this number is artificially low. At the National Archives... the carded service records of Union hospital attendants... revealed that more than 21,000 women served as nurses, cooks, matrons, [and] laundresses..."

Most Civil War era nurses carried simple items with them in order to help the wounded soldiers. They carried extra pairs of socks for the men because, after so many days of marching, their socks developed holes. Rags were carried in order to stop bleeding, and wash cloths were needed in order to clean/cool down wounds or to sooth a high fever (most soldiers died from disease and not from bullet wounds). The most heart-felt piece of gear was a stationary kit in order to write a letter to a sick, wounded, or dying soldier's family. In the early days of the war, it was believed that only men should serve as nurses in order to spare women the horrific sights and experiences of war; but as the war went on, men were needed more for fighting than for healing.

After a month of training at Camp Fuller, the 74th Illinois Regiment left Rockford at the end of September, 1862. Most of the population of the city came out to the train station to see all of the men leave. Mary was the only woman on the entire train. The 74th Regiment, "...reported for duty at Louisville, KY., where the Army of Ohio,- afterward known as the Army of the Cumberland,- was then being organized under General Don Carlos Buell," according to the

Adjutant General's Report. In testimony for her military pension, Mary wrote on a form simply titled "Evidence" that she served as the 74th Regiment nurse from September 28 to October 28th. During this time the 74th Regiment, "engaged in several skirmishes with Bragg's Army" and was held in reserve at the Battle of Perryville on October 8th according to the Adjutant General's Report. Between October 9th and into the month of November, the army marched. Mary wrote in her "Evidence" paper, "I was then detailed as a nurse in Hospital No. 9 at Lebanon Ky. Nov. 1st, 1862, by order of Dr. C. McDermont Med. Dir. approved by J. A. Brady, Post Surgeon, and continued as a nurse in Hospitals of said J. A. Brady...." When Mary was detailed to the hospital, she was not completely left behind by all of her Rockford comrades....

One hospital, as described by the *Louisville Daily Journal*, *Bowling Green*

Dispatch, in March of 1862, was:

"...divided into four wards each having a ward master assisted by 38 attendants. ... The men are all in cots with clean straw mattresses and clean linen; over each man's cot is his number and a hook with a long slip of foolscap paper with an open envelope attached to the bottom of it. The prescription and direction of the paper, which is taken down by the nurse, a record made of it opposite the man's name, and from there to the apothecaries [put the medicine in the envelope so the nurses have it the next morning]. I noticed one thing which struck me particularly; there was not the slightest offensive smells, which to those who are in the habit of hospital visiting, would be very noticeable."

Where was Jared when Mary worked in the Lebanon, Kentucky hospital? He must have been fighting alongside the other men of the

74th Regiment. Not Jared. The *Rockford Morning Star* obituary for Jared affirmed that, "They [Jared and Mary] went from here [Rockford] to Louisville, KY., and it was there they both remained [in Kentucky] most of the time.⁵ Jared saw active service [in the Battle of Perryville], but on account of his wife being with him, he was detailed to hospital duty for a year when they worked side by side tending to the sick and wounded soldiers."

Jared worked alongside his wife instead of fighting. Jared must have asked Col. Jason Marsh to be put on hospital duty in order to stay with his wife and Marsh approved. On the other hand, the army, in need of help in the hospitals, could also have approved his request in order to stay with his wife. As per his military record, "Jerrard [sic] Brainard" was admitted on the same day to the No. 9 General Hospital in Lebanon, KY as his wife. His rank was listed as "Nurse Hosp[ital] Corps.," just the same as Mary's.

Throughout November, 1862 to April, 1863- Mary and Jared were listed either as "field nurses" or as "privates" in the Lebanon, Kentucky Hospital Muster Rolls. In March and April of 1863, Mary was listed as being a "matron." Matrons were in charge of many other nurses, supplies and entire hospitals in some cases. Nurses chosen to be matrons were well-respected, organized, and tireless. Due to her matron rank, she actually outranked her husband...

In May and June of 1863, things changed. Jared was listed as being sick in Lebanon, Kentucky, and Mary appeared on the "Hospital Muster Roll of No. 14 (Officers) U.S.A. General Hospital, at Louisville, KY." as a "f[ield] nurse" (The reasoning behind her "demotion" is assumed to be due to her change in hospitals). Jared and Mary were

⁵ The only documents that tell of Mary and Jared working together in the Lebanon hospital are Jared's Rockford Newspapers obituaries and when their military records from the National Archives are compared.

separated at a critical time for Jared. Mary worked in the Louisville Hospital while Jared lay sick in Lebanon.

On August 31st, 1863, Mary appeared on the, "Hospital Muster Roll of No. 2 U.S.A. General Hospital, (Branch No.14) at Louisville, KY" as a field nurse. However, on the line where it asks, "Present or absent" she is listed as being "not stated." According to her obituary, "The strain undermined her health and she was obliged to return north." In a newspaper article written by Herman G. Nelson in 1958 entitled, "Mary Brainard: An Heroic Name of Civil War Era," he stated that "She was then a mature woman of 28 years. She served as a nurse in Lebanon, Ky., hospital and later in Louisville, where she contracted malaria and was discharged with two years [sic.] of nursing service to her credit."

By September, Jared was transported to Louisville where Mary was waiting. On September 16, 1863, his discharge papers stated that he was, "...incapable of performing the duties of a soldier because of chronic pneumonia... [and] is feeble bodied and unfit for the invalid corps." In his obituary from the *Rockford Morning Star* he, "...was discharged on account of ill health, and with his wife returned to the city [Rockford]."

The Adjutant General's Report affirmed that the 74th was marching from Stephenson Ala., to Valley Head Ala. between August 30th and September 18,th 1863. The regiment's mission was to "occupy and hold" Valley Head. Jared and Mary's mission was to return to Rockford and recuperate from sickness. Their time with the 74th Illinois Volunteer Regiment and in Kentucky Hospitals was over.

After the war, Mary devoted her time to teaching Sunday school at Court Street M. E. Church.⁶ In her obituary it was quoted to say that, "She was known by a larger group of children than any other person who ever lived in Rockford." She was an avid writer and submitted pieces of work to the "Golden Censer," a religious-minded publication. Mary also spent time writing poetry (her first was *Esther Gray and Other Poems*, 1871, followed by *Memorial Pictures of War and Peace*, 1873, and lastly *Heart Offerings*, 1881).⁷ In *Memorial Pictures of War and Peace*, (her poems reflected her time spent in Louisville and Lebanon because the poems she wrote were entitled, "War," "The Hospital," "The Lost," "Loyal," and simply "Home."



Army nurses of the Civil War could not receive government issued pensions until an Act of Congress passed on August 5, 1892. Since Mary was a government employee, and not a part of the civilian Sanitary Commission, she could file for a government pension. Government pensions were not always guaranteed because applicants had to file for them on their own accord, or in some cases they could be denied for various reasons. On October 8th, 1892, Mary filed as an invalid for a military pension for her services as a "Nurse med[ical] sup[er]int[endent] U.S. Vol[un]teer[s]." In her "Declaration for [a] Nurse's Pension" she claimed that she was, "...unable to earn support by reason of old age [she was 60 years old at the time of her claim] general disability, rheumatisms, disease of the chest, and weak

⁶ She eventually became the Superintendent of the Court Street Methodist Church Sunday School.

⁷ Mary's, *Esther Gray and Other Poems*, was dedicated to "the girls of our country." She dedicated *Memorial Pictures of War and Peace* to the Nevis Post of the G.A.R.

ankle....” Her doctor, Clinton Helm who lived down the street from where she lived, affirmed her claim. It took a year for the government to approve her claim. From April 18, 1893, Mary received twelve dollars a month until her death. According to Jane Schultz’s paper, *Ten Common Myths about Women in the Civil War, and How to Dispel Them* “...fewer than ten percent of those who earned wartime wages as relief workers applied for them, and fewer still were granted pensions.”

Jared continued to work as a molder in Rockford until he retired and filed his pension paperwork in 1901. On August 11th, 1904, Jared Brainard died due to complications of bronchitis. His service was held at the Court Street M.E. Church, and the G.A.R. organization participated. Mary had been in failing health too, and in the following year on October 7, 1905, Mary died...but her story does not end there.

In April, 1923, the Daughters of Union Veterans of the Civil War named their unit, or “tent” as the national organization called them, after Mary J. Brainard. The members of the Mary J. Brainard Tent, No. 57, did many things for the community. They placed a wreath for, “...all veterans on the public library lawn” during the Memorial Day ceremony. They, “present[ed] American flags to schools, scout troops,...[and] [t]he American flag in the board of supervisors’ room at the courthouse,” according to the Rockford newspaper. One reason for the courthouse donation may be linked to Lewis F. Lake. Lake was a circuit clerk and a Union veteran who began the tradition of placing a flag on the Brainard grave each year. “When Lake became unable to carry on the practice, the women themselves started performing the ceremony [of placing the American flag on Brainards’ grave]” according to the newspaper. Today, I have picked up the tradition and place two flags at the gravesite for the spring and summer months.

Today's military is full of "Mary J. Brainards" - women who are serving in the military and are not exceptions to any rules.

Sources not previously mentioned:

- Brooks, R. Chad. "A Call to Arms... Our Heroic Young Men." Hal Nelson, Ed. *Sinnissippi Saga: a History of Rockford and Winnebago County, Illinois* (Rockford, IL: Winnebago County Sesquicentennial Committee, 1968), 146.
- Civil War Era nursing information was obtained in an interview with Antina Richards-Pennock- a Civil War re-enactor in the 1st United States Sharp Shooters Co. C. and the Berdan's Home and Aide Society.
- Mary and Jared Brainard's military and pension records were requested from the National Archives and Records Administration.
- Schultz, Jane E. *Ten Common Myths About Women in the Civil War and How to Dispel Them.* July, 2008. <http://www.fpri.org/footnotes/1315.200807.schultz.mythswomencivilwar.html>.

The Author wishes to thank Jean Lythgoe for giving her the opportunity to portray Mary Brainard in this past summer's Greenwood Cemetery walk (which led to the development of this article). James Molloy for the Kentucky hospital information. John Molyneaux for pushing her into creating a better article, and Ernie Stokes for taking time in editing this article.

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Statement of Purpose: To enlighten and to educate people about their place of residence, to entertain with stories and fact, and to enrich lives regarding what is available to enjoy, to treasure and to honor.

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