

The South Danvers Observer

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Written and published by Nancy Barthelemy

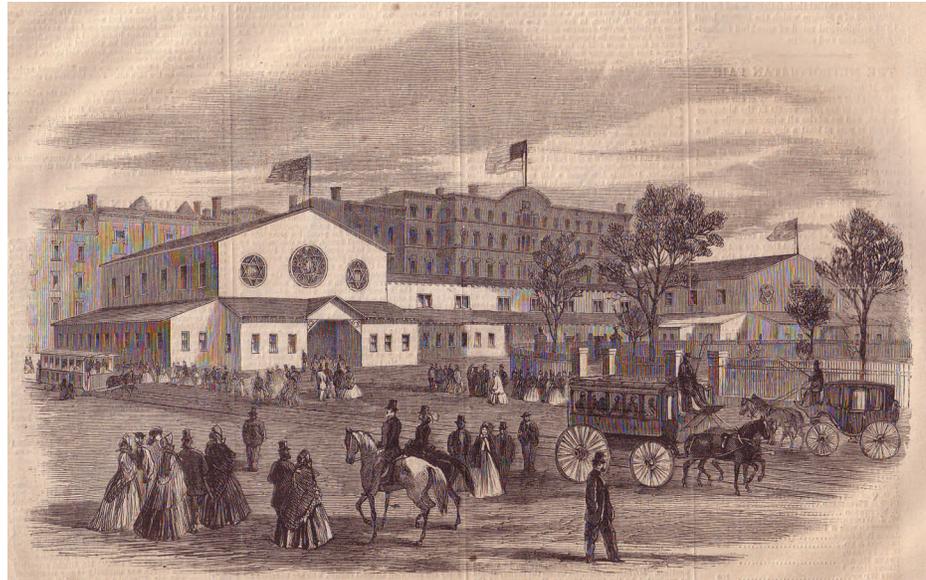
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*"Soon shall the voice of singing,
Drown war's tremendous din,
Soon shall the joy-bells' ringing,
Bring peace and freedom in.
The jubilee bonfires burning,
Shall soon light up the dome,
And soon to soothe our yearning,
Our boys are coming home."*

*From "Our Boys are Coming Home"
in the South Danvers Wizard
May 3, 1865*

The Success of the Ladies Soldiers' Aid Society



United States Sanitary Commission Fair in New York City, 1864

Fall 1865— We report with mixed feelings the recent disbanding of our South Danvers Ladies Soldiers' Aid Society. Though none of those aided by their tireless efforts will soon forget what they have done, and though we have only pride for all their work in easing our soldiers' suffering, we are gladdened that the need for such a society has finally ended. But it is worth remembering their accomplishments since the war began over four years ago.

The Society was formed by Eunice Cook on April 24, 1861, just two weeks after the attack on Fort Sumter. It was the third Soldiers' Aid Society formed in our Union, preceded only by Haverhill and Brookline, Massachusetts. By mid-May they had sent several boxes of clothing and

bandages to General Devereux in Salem for delivery to those from our town serving in the Salem Light Infantry.

With the formation of the United States Sanitary Commission in June 1861, the Society responded to their call for supplies. Though the women scheduled themselves to meet once a week to sew and prepare packages for the wounded, more often than not they met several times a week.

When an appeal from Mrs. Almira Fales—a women hired by the Sanitary Commission to work in transporting the wounded from the battlefields to hospitals—appeared in the *South Danvers Wizard*, our ladies responded with their customary fervor.

In the over four years of the Society's existence, they organized or participated in a number of fairs, similar to those run by the Sanitary Commission in New York, Philadelphia and Boston. Through these fairs, our ladies raised nearly \$3400 in cash for the needs of the Sanitary Commission.

In addition, they sewed much needed clothing and sent dozens of boxes and barrels of bandages, blankets, food and other supplies to Washington City for the benefit of the wounded men.

In the Society's final report, they state they will take the money remaining in their account, amounting to \$134.16, and donate it to the Relief Fund for the benefit those left widowed and orphaned by the war.

Eunice Cook and Mrs. Almira Fales

The friendship began simply enough. When an appeal came from Mrs. Almira Fales through our *South Danvers Wizard* in September of 1861 for clothing and bandages, our ladies, led by Eunice Cook, responded within days to meet her need. In just a few months, a common bond—to aid the wounded soldiers—led to a friendship between the two women.

Nearly a year after her first appeal to those in our town, Mrs. Fales came to South Danvers to visit with her new found friend. Many of us remember that day in 1862, not long before our celebration of Thanksgiving. Those who were fortunate enough to make her acquaintance cannot forget Mrs. Fales's warmth and strength. It was a strength she needed, because only six months later, on May 3, 1863, her son Thomas Hartbenton Fales, a corporal in the 2nd Rhode Island

Infantry was killed in the Battle of Salem Heights.

As devastating as his death must have been, she was prevented from recovering his body for burial. In addition, she also had the worry for her other son Charles who served in the army. Through it all, her labors never ceased. Instead, Thomas's death spurred her on to treat every wounded soldier as she would her own son.

On July 22, 1862, just a little over two months after her son's death, she wrote to Mrs. Cook saying, "I feel now that I must work harder and do more for the living than I have ever done, and to this end I go daily 6, 8, 10 or 12 miles to the distant camps, forts and hospitals where a female is seldom seen, and furnish the sick and suffering boys with all with things you good ladies are sending me from time to time. I wish I could do more."

"We wish we could speak of all the elements that have conspired to our success in New England; but they are too numerous. From the representatives of the United States Government here, who remitted the duties upon soldiers' garments sent to us. . . down to the little child, diligently sewing with tiny fingers upon the soldier's comfort-bag, the co-operation has been almost universal. Churches, of all denominations, have exerted their influence for us. . . Their service has been for the soldiers' sake; but the way in which they have rendered it has made us personally their debtors, beyond the power of words to express."

Abby W. May, Executive Director of the N. E. Auxiliary Commission regarding the work in New England for the wounded soldiers

Abby Williams May and the New England Auxiliary Commission

" . . . people of all descriptions, all orders of taste, every variety of habit, condition, and circumstances, joined hands heartily. . . and have worked together as equals in every respect. There has been no chance for individual prominence. Each one had some power or quality desirable in the great work; and she gave what she could. In one instance, it was talent, in another, money—in another judgment—in another, time—and so on."

Abby W. May describing her work with the N. E. Auxiliary Commission

During the War, the New England Auxiliary Commission, comprised of 150 Soldiers' Aid Societies throughout Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont and Massachusetts, collected over \$150,000 in cash and \$1,200,000 in supplies for the work of the Sanitary Commission. It held its first Sanitary Fair in Boston in December 1863 and brought in \$146,000 for that one event! Miss Abby W. May has been the president of this chapter since 1862. Born in 1829, into a progressive and intellectual family, she quickly devoted her time, heart and money to end the evils of slavery. And when the war

began, she shifted her attentions to relieving the suffering of the men serving in the war.

Like Almira Fales, Miss May worked in transport service. When she returned to New England, Miss May devoted her energies in organizing this local chapter of the Sanitary Commission. She has shown herself to be a natural leader through her efforts to weave together the work of so many local agencies into a greater cause. Part of her ability to bring together so many women and societies is her belief that each person has a unique gift that can enhance the cause of all.

Mrs. Almira Fales



Almira Fales in 1863

"She is full of quaint humor, and in all her visits to hospitals her aim seemed to be to awake smiles, and arouse the cheerfulness of the patients; and she was generally successful in this, being everywhere a great favorite."

*Description of Almira Fales
by Dr. Linus P. Brockett*

The work Almira Fales has done these last four years is not the kind easily assumed by those who are young. Mrs. Fales is no longer young, but she has demonstrated the kind of devotion and passion few can emulate. Many wonder where she gained such strength. Though she has seldom discussed her past, we have learned that her fervor to aid those in need has been formed through a lifetime of hardship and trial.

Almira Fales was born Almira Newcomb in Pittstown, New York in 1800. In 1829, she married Alexander McNaughton, a merchant from Monroe, New York. Together they had two children. Sarah was born in 1830 and Alexander in 1832. Not long after her son's birth, however, both her husband and young daughter died.

She does not speak of those years but we can imagine the hardships she endured, a young widow alone with a small son. In 1837, she married an older widower, Leander Lockwood of Connecticut, who had five children from his marriage to Hannah Dann. In 1840 or 1841, they left Connecticut for Burlington, Iowa where they ran a hotel. The enterprise was a success, probably due in no small measure to Almira's unending good humor. While there, Almira had two more children, Charles and Thomas Hartbenton.

Leander Lockwood died in 1845, leaving Almira with eight children, Alexander from her first marriage, Charles and Thomas from her second marriage and her five step-children from her marriage to Leander. With a family to support, she didn't waste any time in finding work. She applied to the Mission School of the Winnebago Indian Agency at Fort Atkinson and secured a position teaching domestic economy for two years.

Joseph Fales was then the Auditor for the State of Iowa and a widower with three children of his own. During

his work, he and Almira met. Their courtship doesn't appear to have been long, as it was obvious they were well suited for each other. In 1847, they married and returned to Burlington, Iowa until 1853 when Mr. Fales was offered a position as an Examiner at the Patent Office in Washington, D.C.

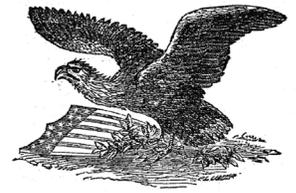
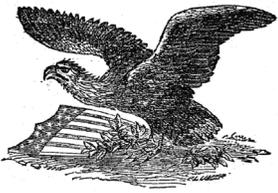
A year later, a young woman arrived to begin her work as a copyist in this office. Her name was Clara Barton.

When rumors of impending war grew during 1860, it was Almira Fales who first began to collect bandages and lint despite being scoffed by many who believed she was wrong.

When the men of the Sixth Massachusetts Regiment were attacked in the Baltimore Riot on April 19, 1861, Almira Fales rushed to meet the train as it arrived in Washington City carrying the wounded soldiers. Clara Barton went as well, moved by the same spirit to do all she could to help.

When the United States Sanitary Commission was formed in June of that year, Mrs. Fales was recruited by Frederick Law Olmsted, one of the Commissioners for that Board. She was given two ambulances to transport the wounded to hospitals.

But Almira Fales did not confine herself to this important work. She also tended to the wounded, searched for lost soldiers and did all in her power to insure that those being cared for in the hospitals received all she could give. And when it was necessary for the men to be returned to hospitals closer to their homes, Mrs. Fales often accompanied them on the train or steamship for those long journeys home, sometimes being the only woman on board.



Onward to the Capitol (continued)



Fitch Poole

Just months after the first shot was fired in the war, our very own Fitch Poole traveled to Washington City to witness for himself the work of our legislators.

While there, he saw much that astounded and alarmed him, especially in regard to the care of the wounded. When he went to visit the men from our town who were in nearby hospitals, he hoped to learn how he could best help them. What he witnessed gave ample proof for the need for the creation of the United States Sanitary Commission. And ample reason for the need for the thousands of Soldiers' Aid Societies created throughout our Union.

In July of 1861, Fitch Poole

reported:

"the patients in the several hospitals were lying on mattresses on the floor. . . We could not but think how cheering and soothing it would be to these sufferers of they could be attended by some Florence Nightingales. This was the time and place for such ministering spirits. We are pained to say that some came away from these hospitals under the impression that the wounded of Massachusetts had not had the surgical attendance which their needs demanded. . . We wish this may not prove true, but the truth should be known. The most satisfactory reasons for this neglect or omission should be demanded and given. . ."

The United States Sanitary Commission

It was not long after the attack at Fort Sumter when our government realized they were not equipped to cope with the vast number of wounded soldiers who flooded into Washington City. Beyond that, it soon became obvious that the unsanitary conditions found at the hastily erected hospitals were allowing scores of men to needlessly die.

But when ordinary citizens stepped forward to help, they were not welcomed by the War Department or its medical staff. As far as they were concerned, the last place civilians, and especially women, were needed was in working with the wounded.

The idea for the Sanitary Commission came from a determined group of New York State women in April of 1861. And under pressure from them and others, President Lincoln approved the creation of The United States Sanitary Commission on June 9 of that year.

This agency was the first ever to deal in an organized fashion with the

inevitable casualties of war. And though their work has saved countless lives that might otherwise have been lost, we cannot ever forget that their work could not have continued without the hundreds of Soldiers' Aid Societies organized and operated by the women of our Union.

In the words of Henry Bellows, President of the Sanitary Commission, "Hundreds of thousands of women probably gave all the leisure they could command, and all the money they could save and spare, to the soldiers for the whole four years and more. . . Amid discouragements and fearful delays they never flagged. . . and their work was as systematic as it was universal. A generous emulation among the Branches of the United States Sanitary Commission, managed generally by women. . . brought their business habits and methods to an almost perfect finish. . . No words are adequate to describe the systematic, persistent faithfulness of the women who organized and led the Branches of the United States Sanitary Commission."

The pressure upon the Medical bureau has been very great and urgent, and though all the means at its disposal have been industriously used, much remains to accomplish by directing the intelligent mind of the country to practical results connected with the comforts of the soldier by preventive and sanitary measures.

The Medical Board would in my judgment derive important and useful aid from the counsels and well-directed efforts of . . . a commission of inquiry and advice in respect of the sanitary interests of the U.S. forces. . . with reference to diet and hygiene of troops and the organization of military hospitals."

Robert C. Wood, Acting Surgeon General to Simon Cameron, Secretary of War on May 22, 1861