

Ella Palmer

"Timeless Devotion to the Men in Gray" 1829 - November 7, 1909

Ella Palmer responded to a call to citizens to help the many Confederate soldiers who were suffering, lying on the floor and shivering without blankets in a makeshift hospital in Chattanooga, TN. Accompanied by her five-year-old daughter, Palmer donated her worldly goods to the hospital and then took charge as its matron. Palmer quickly organized two kitchens and a linen room, and she ministered to the sick and dying at all hours. Though the hospital corps had consisted of men only, the surgeons welcomed the widow's help.

During the Battle of Shiloh, Palmer was sent to Corinth, Miss., where she worked day and night in a church and under the trees, administering chloroform and binding arteries, among other services, to the most desperately wounded. She went on tirelessly to nurse many soldiers suffering from typhoid fever in Lauderdale Springs, Miss.

Palmer and her charges were constantly moved throughout the war as the enemy neared or when a hospital was more desperately needed elsewhere. At one point, when surgeons were going to leave behind seven men they thought were near death, Palmer insisted the individuals be moved too, and she returned all but one to good health. In Forsyth, GA, the hospital tents overflowed with 1,800 sick and wounded. Townspeople were struck by Palmer's devotion to her patients and helped by providing all manner of services and goods needed by the men in gray. They made bowers out of limbs, cots of leafy branches, and cups and dishes from a local clay bed. Palmer's devotion to the soldiers was impressive: traveling to Auburn, Ala., Palmer was injured when her train derailed and went over a trestle. But after just three weeks in a hospital she made her way to Auburn and resumed her nursing duties.

After the war Palmer and her daughter returned to Tennessee. In 1873 Palmer moved to Colorado, where she studied mineralogy and became an expert assayer. She discovered gold near Lake City, CO, before she died at the age of 80.

Fascinating Fact: One cruel surgeon often used a barrel shirt to punish patients. Palmer was outraged and finally took an axe to the barrel.



SOURCES:

<http://civilwar.bluegrass.net/CasualtiesAndMedicalCare/ellapalmer.html>

<http://www.civilwarwomenblog.com/2007/05/ella-palmer.html>

Mrs. Ella Palmer, mother of the wife of former Judge Charles D. Hayt, the only woman, with one exception, who went to the front with the Confederate army, died on the 7th inst. at the Boulder sanitarium at Boulder,

where she had been a patient for five months. With another woman, believed to have died several years ago, Mrs. Palmer organized the Hospital corps of the Army of the Tennessee.