



Refreshment Saloons in Civil War Philadelphia

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<http://housedivided.dickinson.edu/sites/journal/2010/07/13/refreshment-saloons-philadelphia/>

Not all of the heroes of the Civil War fought on the battlefield. In Philadelphia, the volunteer refreshment saloons provided some of the most important service. Northern newspapers praised the city's saloons which served as safe havens where "the dusty soldier [could] wash off his travel stains." William M. Cooper, a merchant, was the first to decide that his storefront on Otsego Street should aid Union troops passing through his city. The Cooper Shop Volunteer Refreshment Saloon opened on May 26, 1861. Cooper became the committee's president and served in this position until the war's end. The Cooper Shop soon entered into a friendly rivalry with the larger Union Saloon, which opened the same week, but the dramatic individual efforts of the Cooper Shop leaders gave it a special place in the hearts of Philadelphia's residents. All of these war time establishments proved important as places of rest where soldiers obtained food, drink, places to wash, and even medical care. The saloons helped forge a collective war effort.

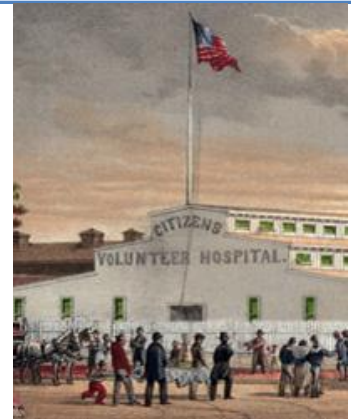


Cooper Shop Refreshment Saloon
circa 1862

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The Cooper Shop Saloon added a second floor hospital in October 1861. Dr. Andrew Nebinger, Jr. received the appointment as the surgeon-in-charge. He agreed to work as a volunteer and did not receive a salary for his service to the wounded soldiers. Admired by many who came into contact with him, Nebinger's surgical skills received praise from fellow doctors such as C.E. Hill who described the surgeon as one of the finest men he had ever met, saying, "his kindness to the sick, and his untiring zeal for their comfort, proves him to be a philanthropist of the first order..." Others described Nebinger as an expert doctor who possessed great administrative ability and devoted patriotism, which gained him respect among the soldiers and their families.



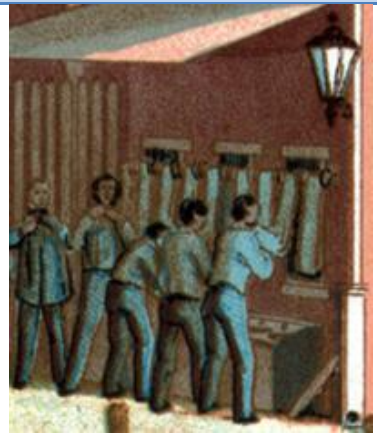
Citizens Volunteer Hospital
Philadelphia, circa 1862



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The soldiers and their families seemed to appreciate the efforts of the Cooper Saloon. After leaving Philadelphia Sergeant N.P. Gale of New York wrote to Cooper, "many a soldier has thought of your kindness." The refreshment saloon committees provided traveling soldiers with small comforts such as food, drink, and bathing facilities, while the doctors and nurses provided more urgent medical care to those returning from the battlefields. The parents of young soldiers often expressed their gratitude to Nebinger, whose "faithful efforts" and dedication to his patients helped save their sons. According to historian J. Matthew Gallman, the refreshment saloon's "greatest benevolent contribution cannot be measured by returns on ledger sheets, but by the long hours devoted to sewing clothes, cooking food, and ministering to wounded soldiers."

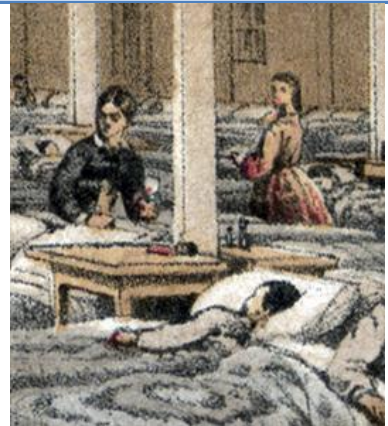


Citizens Volunteer Hospital

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Along with Nebinger, Anna M. Ross became a fixture in the lives of Union soldiers at the Cooper Shop Hospital. She played a large role in its management through her appointment as the hospital's Lady Principal until her death, reportedly from overwork, in 1863. Ross's patients and coworkers praised her since she showed "energy, perseverance, zeal, and endurance [which] were seen, in combination with tender sensibility, love, and self-sacrifice." Her dedication to the hospital and its patients made the Cooper Shop Hospital one of the most warmly remembered institutions created in the midst of the Civil War. In one particular instance Ross displayed these fine qualities while tending to a dying lieutenant from New York. According to a history of women's work during the war, she never left his side and tried to ease his pain by cooling his forehead and offered him support by saying, "call me Anna and tell me all which your heart prompts you to say."



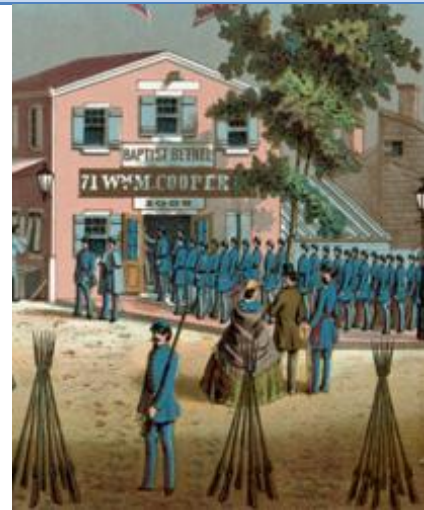
Volunteer Nurses



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Philadelphia's citizens rallied around the Cooper Shop by providing about \$70,000 during the course of the war, the equivalent of nearly one million dollars today. Also, about 400,000 soldiers passed through the Cooper Shop Volunteer Refreshment Saloon during four years of fighting. The success of these saloons in Philadelphia had an impact on the way people in other places viewed their local relief efforts. A woman from New York complained that her state sent soldiers through without giving them a place to rest while "Philadelphia lets no regiment, of whatever State, whether going to or from battle, pass hungry through her streets." Soldiers from other states also noted that "anyone who thinks there is any lack of support for the war has only to march through Philadelphia." The saloon continued dedicating its resources to the Union troops until August 28, 1865 when the 32nd U.S. Colored Troops and the 104th Pennsylvania became the last two regiments served in the Cooper Shop before it closed at noon.



Cooper Shop Refreshment Saloon

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When William Cooper died in poverty in February 1880, various newspapers and the Grand Army of the Republic appealed to former soldiers for donations to support the surviving members of his family. Former soldiers immediately offered to "shoulder the entire indebtedness of the late Mr. Cooper, if they be allowed what they term 'the humble honor.'" Andrew Nebinger and his family remained an integral part of Philadelphia's society after the war as leaders in city's public school system. According to one history of the public schools, the family left Philadelphia "memories that will long be cherished and honored." Anna M. Ross embodied the persona created by Pennsylvania women during the Civil War which, according to William Blair and William Pencak, was "imbued with patriotism and loyalty to the country." She also received unique posthumous recognition from the Grand Army of the Republic as it named Post 94 in Philadelphia after her -- a rare honor for a woman.



William M. Cooper



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Philadelphia made several great contributions to the Union war effort on the home front, including its volunteer refreshment saloons. They began with the charity of William M. Cooper who dedicated his work space to the Union cause. Dr. Andrew Nebinger held a special place in the hearts of the soldier's families because he cared for sick and wounded men without demanding pay while Anna M. Ross left an unforgettable legacy as she worked herself to death while caring for the soldiers. Their stories illustrated how the citizens of Philadelphia provided humanity in a time of bloodshed and left a tremendous impact on the home front efforts during the Civil War. The New York Times noted the importance of the refreshment saloons, "even though the individual benefactions were small, they were invaluable; and have caused the greater part of the Union army to entertain a kind and grateful feeling for Philadelphia."



Philadelphia, PA
circa 1857



Further Reading

Blair, William and William Pencak, eds. *Making and Remaking Pennsylvania's Civil War*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001.

Brockett, Linus Pierpont and Mary C. Vaughan. *Woman's Work in the Civil War: A Record of Heroism, Patriotism and Patience*. Philadelphia: Zeigler, McCurdy & Co., 1867.

Curtis, John Trevor. *The Public Schools of Philadelphia: Historical, Biographical, and Statistical*. Philadelphia: Burk & McFetridge Co., 1897.

Gallman, J. Matthew. *Wartime: A Social History of Philadelphia During the Civil War*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990.

Moore, James. *History of the Cooper Shop Volunteer Refreshment Saloons*. Philadelphia: Jas. B Rodgers, 1866.

Taylor, Frank H. *Philadelphia in the Civil War, 1861-1865*. Philadelphia : The City, 1913.



Document 1– C.E. Hill to Editor, December 29, 1861

<http://hd.housedivided.dickinson.edu/node/32977>

Source Citation –

C.E. Hill to Editor, December 29, 1861, Philadelphia, PA, in James Moore, ed., *The History of the Cooper Shop Volunteer Refreshment Saloon* (Philadelphia, PA: J.B. Rogers, 1866), 120-123.

Transcribed Text –

Cooper Shop Vol. Refreshment Saloon,
Philadelphia, Dec. 29th, 1861

Mr. Editor: - "I am much pleased with the journey thus far to the seat of war. No accident has occurred. The boys are all in the best spirits; in fact, their spirits seem to rise rapidly as they near the land of Dixie. We are stopping over Sabbath in Philadelphia, at the above named saloon, where we have been treated with the kindest hospitality. We were met at the ferry by one of the committee, who conducted us to the saloon, where we found tables groaning beneath the real substantial of life. The hall is 150 feet long, by 30 wide, and will accommodate about 350 persons at a time. It is splendidly decorated with wreaths of evergreens, and a great variety of paintings and flags, and is well lighted with gas. At the further end of the hall is a large eagle, stuffed and perched upon a frame enclosing the Declaration of Independence. We were supplied with every thing we could possibly wish. Since this hall was established, one of the committee informs me that they fed over 225,000 soldiers.

Connected with this hall is a hospital, large enough to accommodate thirty patients with all the conveniences the sick can possibly need. Andrew Nebinger, M.D., is the surgeon in charge, and a finer specimen of a gentlemen I never met. His kindness to the sick, and his untiring zeal for their comfort, proves him to be a philanthropist of the first order; and, in fact, the committee vie with each other in their attention to the soldiers. One cannot but feel at home among them. This Society is but the beginning of one of the most noble institutions ever formed, and committee appointed, for an institution called the Cooper Shop Soldiers' Home. It is to be a home for disabled soldiers- made so by the present war- throughout the State. It is to be arranged that the man drawing a pension, can pay a small sum, that he may not feel his dependence, but that he has a right to all the benefits arising from the Society. I would cheerfully notice the indefatigable efforts of the matron, Mrs. Elizabeth Vansdale, and the principal directress, Anna M. Ross, whose constant care is spoken of with kindest feelings, by the suffering inmates of this home of the soldiers. They are nobly acting the part of tenderer ones at home, whose hearts ache at the sad tidings of suffering heroes away in a strange land. If you were only here now as the shades of night are gathering around us, and could see how comfortable everything is, you would join with me in saying, 'soldiers were never better cared for than in this hall.' This building is owned by William M. Cooper, and was used for a cooper shop until the breaking out of the war. The ladies being in the habit of feeding the soldiers in the street as they were passing through the city, Mr. Cooper offered this building that they might be better accommodated. It is, and has been, kept up by free contributions from the citizens of Philadelphia, through all of its departments. ... Major Pixley, our fife-major, has been sick for two days, but falling into so good a place of refuge, together with the kind attentions of these people, he is much improved, and will accompany us on our way."

Yours in haste, C.E. Hill, M.D.



Document 2– Fannie W. Overton to William M. Cooper, February 24, 1862

<http://hd.housedivided.dickinson.edu/node/32983>

Source Citation –

Fannie W. Overton to William M. Cooper, February 24, 1862, Philadelphia, PA, in James Moore, ed., *The History of the Cooper Shop Volunteer Refreshment Saloon* (Philadelphia, PA: J.B. Rogers, 1866), 57-58.

Transcribed Text –

“Mr. Wm. M. Cooper, of the Cooper Shop Volunteer Refreshment Saloon, and the Committee:

“Dear Sir:- I am under greater obligations to you and your lady Committee, than any others on this earth, God alone excepted, for He is every where. I am a widow with but little of this world’s goods; and have received many favors, but thou hast outdone them all; and on the judgment day I hope my children will rise up and call you blessed. There is but little prospect of my seeing any of you, except the one who has been at my humble cottage, on such an errand of mercy with the law of kindness on his tongue; but do not fail to meet me in heaven, for through grace I am striving to get there. The cords that bind me to earth are being severed, while those that draw me to heaven are strengthening.

Dr Nebinger: thanks to you. God bless you for your faithful efforts to relieve the sufferings of, and restore my dear, my oldest son. May the Great Physician hold you precious in his sight- soul and body, - and when you are removed hence, may it be to the land where inhabitants never say, ‘I am sick!’

Rev. Joseph Perry: you found my boy a disabled soldier in the hospital; you reminded him that he had a soul to save, as well as a body to heal. A thousand thanks to you for it; I prayed God to put in his pathway just such a friend as you. The blessed intelligence, that “he was enabled to say that his trust was in the crucified Saviour, and that we would meet in heaven,” made my heart beat with joy, while it ached with grief. How much I owe you for rendering me this good, God only knows!

Mr. Struthers: you in unison with your lady were friends to the fatherless boy- the stranger among you. The Lord reward you a thousand-fold! To one and all, I return thanks, hearty thanks.

“Yours, under a deep debt of gratitude,

Fannie W. Overton

River Head, L.I., Feb. 24th, 1862



Document 3– N.P. Gale to William Cooper and C.V. Fort, March 13, 1863

<http://hd.housedivided.dickinson.edu/node/32981>

Source Citation –

N.P. Gale to William M. Cooper and C.V. Fort, March 13, 1863, Philadelphia, PA, in James Moore, ed., *The History of the Cooper Shop Volunteer Refreshment Saloon* (Philadelphia, PA: J.B. Rogers, 1866), 125-126.

Transcribed Text –

“CAMP OF 11TH N.Y., HAVELOCK BATTERY,
“NEW FALMOUTH, Va., March 13, 1863.

“To Messrs. Wm. M. Cooper, Fort, and others.

“GENTLEMEN: - I this day send you a little token of our gratitude, in the form of a card of thanks, with the names of our officers and members of the 11th New York (Havelock) Battery annexed thereto.

“We should have done so sooner; but our time has been so much employed, that we found it impossible. Many a time have our boys talked of the kind treatment received from you at the Cooper Shop; and I hope that you will consider the motto yet a good one, viz.: ‘Better late than never.’ The design is rough; but, friends, we are in a rough country, and miss our comforts and conveniences that, were we there, (at home) we could obtain. We hope to do our duty to God, our country and our friends, and may God in his mercy hasten the day that we all shall see that flag- the Stars and Stripes- floating over the United States of America, the land we now hope will be the land of the free. Ah! Many a soldier has thought of your kindness, as he lay down upon his hard couch, and munched the hard cracker; and we will thank you, citizens of Philadelphia, and you may rest assured that a soldier’s thanks are sincere. You will oblige us, if you will inform us if the memorial gets safe into your hands.

“Respectfully yours,
“SERGT. N.P. GALE.”