

## Historical Essays: 1

Historical essays usually are included as part of my novels. They are there for readers who want to know a little more about the era and are short and easy to read.

The material below comes from *The Enlistment*, a short story/novella. In the story, Maggie's second daughter, Frankie, learns that her beau Patrick will be going to Camp Fair Oaks in Flemington to join the 15<sup>th</sup> New Jersey Volunteer Infantry Regiment. So, she disguises herself as boy and runs away from home so she can be with him.

### Civil War Laundresses

Leverette, Mary Marlowe. "Laundry During the Civil War - The Laundress." *The Spruce*. 09 07, 2016.

<https://www.thespruce.com/laundry-during-the-civil-war-laundress-2146296> (accessed June 03, 2017).

Mescher, Virginia. "Virginia's Veranda." *Ragged Soldier*. 2013.  
[http://www.raggedsoldier.com/final\\_laundry\\_vv.pdf](http://www.raggedsoldier.com/final_laundry_vv.pdf) (accessed April 2017).

When I started to write about Frankie's adventure at Camp Fair Oaks, I had no clear idea what laundresses did and bought into the idea that female "camp followers" primarily were prostitutes. How wrong I was! Both Leverette and Mescher make it clear that all laundresses were not women of ill repute. In fact, Mescher notes that the army wanted women of good character as washerwomen, although Leverette suggests that some laundresses most likely engaged in sexual activities with the soldiers and/or were husband-hunters like Lily. On the other hand, most probably were like Rosa and Becky, who followed the men in their lives.

### Food and Housework

Beecher, Catharine E. *A Treatise on Domestic Economy, for the Use of Young Ladies at Home and at School*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1845.

—. *Miss Beecher's Domestic Receipt Book: Designed as a Supplement to Her Treatise on Domestic Economy*. New Year: Harper & Brothers, 1846.

I used Beecher's *Treatise* for information regarding mid-nineteenth-century tools and processes that people might have used to wash dishes. Remarkably, the items washed first, middle, and last in those days was the same process I learned

for washing up in the pre-dishwasher days of my youth! The rest of the book is a fascinating glimpse into women's domestic lives and what Beecher thought and advised her readers to adopt (i.e., she hated corsets and promoted exercise). I turned to Beecher's *Domestic Receipt Book* to research the foods my characters might eat. Foodies might find this book a fun read and even might dare to make a few of dishes, although with adjustments for contemporary tastes.

## Female Soldiers

"Female Soldiers in the Civil War." *Civil War.org*. n.d.

<https://www.civilwar.org/learn/articles/femalesoldierscivilwar> (accessed June 06, 2017).

Wakeman, Sarah Rosetta. *An Uncommon Soldier: The Civil War Letters of Sarah Rosetta Wakeman, alias Pvt. Lyons Wakeman, 153rd Regiment, New York State Volunteers, 1862-1864*. Edited by Lauren Cook Burgess. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.

There are a number of books and articles available that deal with women passing as men among the ranks of Civil War soldiers. My main sources for this story about female soldiers were the articles found in the Civil War Trust website ([www.civilwar.org](http://www.civilwar.org)) and Lauren Cook Burgess' curation of Sarah Rosetta Wakeman's letters. These gave me insight into the life of female soldiers, who they were, and why they fought. The Civil War Trust's web page, "Female Soldiers in the Civil War" notes that while women's participation in the military was secretive and thus makes hard numbers impossible to obtain, "conservative estimates of female soldiers in the Civil War put the number [of women soldiers] somewhere between 400 and 750." Interestingly, women joined up for many of the same reasons as men: patriotism, pay, the desire for adventure, and more. They also enlisted if a loved one, such as a husband, was in the service.

We may wonder why females in the ranks were not more readily discovered. Incredible as it seems today, several reasons have been suggested. 1) Victorian modesty dictated that things such as bathing and attending to nature's call often were done in private, thus many soldiers would be modest. 2) Soldiers tended to sleep in their clothing. 3) Physical examinations were cursory. As long as the prospective soldier did not present with obvious signs of illness, he was deemed healthy and there was no need for him to remove his clothing. 4) Uniforms were heavy and bulky. 5) The general lack of military experience among men meant that female soldiers experienced the same learning curve as the men and did not stand out among the ranks. 6) Gender in the nineteenth century was associated with the clothing one wore. Succinctly put, if a woman donned men's clothing, she was perceived to be a man, at least by other men. For, despite their masquerade, Lauren Cook Burgess writes in her Introduction to *An Uncommon*

*Soldier* that other women did seem to be able to recognize their same-sex comrades. She postulates that this may be because women could see beyond the façade of dress. Thus, in *The Enlistment*, Bill Crenshaw is able to recognize Frankie, even though Maggie's daughter is dressed as a boy.

My character Bill Crenshaw has her roots in Union soldier Sarah Rosetta Wakeman. Like Wakeman, Bill left a household comprised of numerous mouths to feed and an indebted father. Women were paid low wages and had limited job opportunities, so when Bill and Wakeman saw that they could earn more money as a soldier and realized it would help them provide additional income for their families, they enlisted.

### The Fifteenth New Jersey Volunteers

Bilby, Joseph G. *Three Rousing Cheers: A History of the Fifteenth New Jersey from Flemington to Appomattox*. Hightstown, NJ: Longstreet House, 1993.  
Haines, Alanson A. *History of the Fifteenth Regiment New Jersey Volunteers*. New York: Jenkins & Thomas, Printers, 1883.

One of the biggest frustrations in writing this novella was the lack of specific information on the Fifteenth New Jersey Volunteers. I was excited to discover not one, but two books on the subject. The work by Haines is a first-person memoir published 23 years after the end of the Civil War. The other by Joseph Bilby is a contemporary history of the regiment. They provided details about the regiment's founding, camp activities, and the regiment's reception in Lambertville as the soldiers left for the war. And imagine my surprise when, upon receipt of the Bilby book, I discovered that it had been signed by the author. It may not be technically a collector's item, but I was thrilled to see the author's signature. Those interested in military history in general and New Jersey military history during the Civil War might find these two books a worthy addition to a collection. Although the Bilby book is out of print, one can still find copies for sale on the internet. The Haines book, on the other hand, has been reprinted and is readily available for purchase.

### Railroad Information

*Travelers' Official Railway Guide for the Railways (June 1870)*. Central Pacific Railroad Photographic History Museum. June 1870.  
[http://cprh.org/Museum/Travellers\\_Guide\\_6-1870.html](http://cprh.org/Museum/Travellers_Guide_6-1870.html) (accessed June 22, 2017).

Another challenge in writing *The Enlistment* was learning train routes and schedules. When I realized that I was going to have to coordinate the train

departures and arrivals of my characters, I had no idea where to look and thought I was going to have to make something up. In other words, I was going to have to put the “fiction” into “historical fiction.” But then my partner and train fan Dan Bush suggested I consult something called *The Travelers’ Official Railway Guide for the Railways*. It was a book put out in the nineteenth through twentieth centuries either yearly or bi-annually. The *Railway Guide* provided travelers and train stations with timetables for all railroads in North America as well as other information. While writing THE ENLISTMENT, I was unable to find a guide earlier than 1870. Apparently, that was the first year it was published under that name. I did find another guide under another name, but since I had already gone into great detail about the train schedules in the story, I decided to use the 1870 schedules. After all, I’m not writing a detailed text on the history of train schedules in Warren and Hunterdon Counties, New Jersey. I’m writing historical *fiction*.