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Annie Wittenmyer and Nineteenth-Century Women's Usefulness

LISA GUINN

ON JANUARY 23, 1864, Annie Wittenmyer wrote to Iowa Governor William Stone asking for additional duties to be included in her current responsibilities as Iowa State Sanitary Agent. Wittenmyer was already responsible for gathering and distributing supplies to Iowa troops and securing furloughs and discharges for wounded and sick Iowa soldiers. In addition to that extensive list, she expressed her interest in a variety of tasks, including special diet kitchens for military hospitals. Wittenmyer had already consulted with the U.S. Christian Commission (USCC) about establishing such kitchens, and the plan had met with "universal favor."¹ When she made her request to the governor, Wittenmyer had been in the field of labor doing sanitary work for almost three years. She had fought off attacks on her reputation, faced illness and dangerous travel, and been separated from her only child. Yet she asked for more responsibility, adding to an already difficult task. The question is why.

Previous studies have argued that Wittenmyer was motivated by Christian benevolence centered on the desire to do good works for society as part of a liberal Protestant theology.² I propose

1. Annie Wittenmyer to W. W. Stone, 1/23/1864, Annie Turner Wittenmyer Papers, State Historical Society of Iowa, Des Moines (hereafter cited as SHSI-DM).

2. See, for example, Tom Sillanpa, *Annie Wittenmyer, God's Angel: One of America's 'First' Ladies from Keokuk, Iowa; Historical Biography of a Christian Heroine* (Hamilton, IL, 1972); and Elizabeth D. Leonard, *Yankee Women: Gender Battles in the Civil War* (New York, 1994), chap. 2. In addition to citing Wittenmyer's Christian benevolence, Leonard also argues that Wittenmyer was motivated by an

another motive. For Wittenmyer, and for many of the women she worked with, the Civil War offered new opportunities to enter the public world where they could experience independence and usefulness as part of a new self-identity. In doing so, they could achieve a sense of their own calling as they had been taught in their liberal education — what Jane Addams would later describe as the “subjective necessity.”³ A more practical motive also influenced Wittenmyer. In short, she needed to make a living. It has been commonly believed that on the eve of the Civil War Wittenmyer was a wealthy widow. She was not a widow at all, however, but rather a divorced single mother who, while not destitute, was certainly not wealthy.⁴

As Northern men volunteered to fight in the Civil War, Northern women desired an important role for themselves. They threw

insistence that women receive recognition for the legitimacy of their work, including pay for that work, which Leonard refers to as “professionalization.” Both emphasize that as a wealthy widow, Wittenmyer could afford to do volunteer reform work.

3. While Addams used this phrase to describe settlement house workers, I apply it to Wittenmyer and the women she worked with. Addams, a beneficiary of a liberal education, argued that women who were educated often found themselves searching for a way to use that education, especially in a time when women’s opportunities, while perhaps growing, were still limited. She argued that they felt “a fatal want of harmony between their theory and their lives, a lack of coordination between their thought and action.” Jane Addams, *Twenty Years at Hull-House* (1910; reprint ed., New York, 1961), 91. See also Victoria Bissell Brown, *The Education of Jane Addams* (Philadelphia, 2004).

4. It is likely that Wittenmyer was divorced from her husband, William, sometime between 1860 and 1864. Although the divorce records have not been located, other evidence abounds to reveal that William did not die in 1860 as is commonly believed. Annie addressed the issue in a letter to her aunt, Lucy Turner, in 1868: “I do not know where Mr. Wittenmyer is. I have not heard a word of his whereabouts for a long time. He has not been to see Charlie for more than two years I think. He married again, and lived for a time in Chicago, but his wife left him about more than a year ago, which is the last I have heard of him.” Annie Wittenmyer to Lucy Turner, 12/25/1868, Davenport Library transcriptions of letters, in Special Collections, Oxford Library, Miami, Ohio. William remarried in 1864. Thomas R. Baker of Muscatine, Iowa, who has done considerable research on William, has uncovered property records from 1876 documenting that William turned the title of a house in Keokuk over to Annie in exchange for her dropping possible charges against him for back child support. Lee County, Iowa, Keokuk, Deeds, 11/28/1876, book 42, p. 399. He also found probate records from William’s death in 1879 dividing his store inventory in Centerville, Iowa, between his current wife and his two surviving children, Sallie Young and Charles Wittenmyer (Annie’s only surviving child).

themselves into war work, hoping to make a useful contribution and, for some, perhaps, gain new openings for themselves in the future. While these women did not intend to generate a debate on women's work, they did. The debate centered mainly on whether their work should be voluntary, based on the idea that it was a natural extension of women's domestic roles, or paid, giving the work a monetary value in the form of wages and recognizing it as something akin to men's work. Giving the work a monetary value also offered women personal fulfillment beyond the domestic realm and a route to economic independence. And it challenged the status quo.

In antebellum America women were not widely recognized as legitimate workers. According to historian Jeanne Boydston, "the separation of 'private' and 'public' life—of 'home' and 'work'—had become over the course of the antebellum period one of the most cherished truisms of American culture."⁵ The difference between men's work and women's was wages. Although women's work within the home did not carry a monetary value, it was valuable work. Typically, women's work was seen as invisible within the home and devalued compared to the monetary wages of the public world. Even women who worked for wages faced a devaluation of their pay based on the belief that women were only supplementing income or working temporarily before marriage. According to historian Alice Kessler-Harris, because wages were implicitly male and implied that "men had the privilege of caring for women and children," any attempt "to imagine female independence impugned male roles and male egos."⁶ Thus, any attempt to blur the lines between public and private in the realm of work would be difficult and dangerous—especially in the midst of a brutal Civil War.

Wittenmyer and the women she worked with in sanitary and diet kitchen work did not represent a cross-section of society; they were for the most part white, educated, and middle class.⁷

5. Jeanne Boydston, *Home and Work: Housework, Wages, and the Ideology of Labor in the Early Republic* (New York, 1990), x.

6. Alice Kessler-Harris, *A Woman's Wage: Historical Meaning and Social Consequences* (Lexington, KY, 1990), 10.

7. Some diet kitchen women did work in black hospitals, many of them refugee hospitals, and many of the helpers in the kitchens were black.

For these women, though, the Civil War offered the opportunity to build on the reform efforts that had already begun in the prewar period. In the nineteenth century, white, middle-class women, many of them trained in the Protestant traditions of usefulness, duty, and good works, entered the public world as part of reform organizations and as students in the emerging female seminaries, many of which taught a liberal education encouraging students to explore their own calling. As historian Mary Kelley has shown, it was often that liberal education that pushed women into reform work and taught them “to envision themselves as historical actors who had claim to rights and obligations of citizenship.”⁸

Annie Wittenmyer, a liberally educated Methodist, embraced the new opportunities the war provided when she flung herself headfirst into war work shortly after the firing on Fort Sumter. She helped to found the Keokuk Ladies Aid Society (KLAS) and became its general secretary and agent, traveling into the field to survey the needs of Iowa troops. In September 1862 Wittenmyer became a paid state sanitary agent appointed by the governor of Iowa. She resigned that post in April 1864 to focus on creating special diet kitchens for military hospitals as an agent of the USCC. Wittenmyer also founded the Iowa Orphan’s Home, which opened in the summer of 1864 to care for the orphaned children of soldiers. Wittenmyer’s usefulness became defined by the Civil War and her work during that time. She was not a women’s rights advocate in the traditional sense. Instead, she described herself as someone caught in between the discussions of “the home duties of women” and women’s “social and political privileges.”⁹ But in many ways, she exhibited characteristics of those advocates as she blurred the lines of acceptable gendered behavior by pushing women into a visible public role that was recognized with a monetary value, which became part of her self-identity as a woman who needed to support herself. But it was not easy.

On the eve of the Civil War, Wittenmyer was an intelligent, educated woman who believed she could be more useful outside the private home. Given her circumstances as a single mother, finding a way to be useful while earning a living was all the more

8. Mary Kelley, *Learning to Stand and Speak: Women, Education, and Public Life in America’s Republic* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2006).

9. Annie Wittenmyer, *Women’s Work for Jesus*, 5th ed. (New York, 1873), 5.

important. Even early in her marriage, Wittenmyer had embraced reform. In 1853, just three years after arriving in Iowa from Ohio with her husband, young son, and two stepdaughters, she started a free school and Sunday school for the children of Keokuk. Over the next several years, she suffered the loss of her son and at least two additional children born to her in Iowa and was estranged from her husband.¹⁰

When the Civil War began, Wittenmyer, motivated by the desire to be useful, headed into the field with Iowa soldiers, leaving her only surviving child behind, gobbling up whatever new tasks presented themselves. She made political connections when she could and took advantage of those connections by pitching her own ideas for new opportunities in the future, including opportunities that would allow her to make a decent living. She pushed to legitimate her work by accepting pay when it was offered, believing that women had a right to be paid for their labor, and by insisting that women had an important role to play in the larger public sphere. Receiving numerous endorsements of her sanitary and diet kitchen work from state and federal officials, however, did not prevent Wittenmyer from becoming the target of personal and professional attacks, particularly over pay and efficiency, and she spent much of her career defending her right to do the work and be paid for it and for the right of women to act in a public role.¹¹

WITTENMYER'S BATTLE BEGAN in the local ladies aid societies. Even before the creation of the U.S. Sanitary Commission (USSC), the official sanitary arm of the federal government, women had organized various aid societies all across the North. The KLAS, for example, organized on May 31, 1861, just 18 days before the official organization of the USSC and 4 months before Governor Samuel Kirkwood organized the Iowa Army Sanitary Commission (IASC), the state sanitary organization that worked

10. Iowa State Census, 1854, 1856; 1860 Federal Census, Lee County, Keokuk.

11. There are many examples of the obstacles women faced in their attempts to legitimize their own work during the war, but none is as obvious as Elizabeth Blackwell's exclusion from the USSC. For the complete story, see Jeanie Attie, *Patriotic Toil: Northern Women and the American Civil War* (Ithaca, NY, 1998); and Judith Ann Giesberg, *Civil War Sisterhood: The U.S. Sanitary Commission and Women's Politics in Transition* (Boston, 2000).

closely with the USSC.¹² In the IASC men held all of the paid positions, which the women in the ladies aid societies resented because they had been donating their time for months. There was immediate tension between the newly created IASC and the local groups. An editorial, presumably written by members of the KLAS, revealed their disdain for the IASC, and particularly for a circular it had issued that questioned the efficiency of the local societies. According to the editorial, “we presume that the gentlemen constituting that commission have taken so little interest in the subject that they were substantially in entire ignorance of what has been done.”¹³ The editorial set off a two-and-a-half-year battle between the local societies, led by the KLAS, and the IASC, led by its official agent, A. J. Kynett.

Wittenmyer was a central figure in this dispute. Although she had been an active volunteer field agent with the KLAS since before its official organization, she became a paid Iowa state sanitary agent in September 1862, appointed by the governor and entitled to a salary of \$100 per month, a fortune for a woman to earn at the time.¹⁴ Her appointment was the result of an act by the state legislature and perhaps was offered as an olive branch by the state government to ease the tension between the KLAS and the IASC. The act allowed the governor to appoint “two or more agents” but specified that one must be Wittenmyer.¹⁵ Her appointment was distinct from those of the appointed agents of the IASC, and she continued to work independently through the KLAS. Her high salary and independent work rankled some Iowans, leading to attacks on her.

12. Annie Wittenmyer made her first trip into the field in April 1861, even before the official organization of the KLAS.

13. “Soldiers’ Aid Society, Right-About Face,” *Gate City* (Keokuk), 11/18/1861.

14. *Legislative Documents Compiled by Order of the Tenth Iowa General Assembly, Which Convened in Des Moines, January 11, 1864* (Des Moines, 1864), 36, 39–40. Annie Wittenmyer confirmed her pay at \$100 per month upon settlement, meaning that she was actually not paid monthly but upon her resignation. She notes receipt of \$1,660.77 from Governor W. W. Stone on February 10, 1864. That amount included \$1,550 in compensation and \$110.77 to refund use of her own money. A private in the Union Army, meanwhile, was paid \$13 per month.

15. *Acts of Iowa* (1862), 47–48. Wittenmyer wrote to Governor Kirkwood to lobby for his support for the bill introduced by George McCrary in the Iowa House. Annie Wittenmyer to Governor Samuel Kirkwood, n. d., Adjutant General Records, 1862, SHSI-DM.

Since the creation of the IASC, Kynett had been urging the local societies to route goods through the IASC via Chicago rather than the KLAS via St. Louis. Most local aid societies were confused by this tactic. They distrusted the IASC because of its affiliation with the USSC and preferred to put their supplies in the hands of Wittenmyer, whom they had worked with since the beginning of the war.¹⁶

While Kynett was working to get local societies to work through the IASC, Wittenmyer had been working to secure the place of the KLAS at the head of sanitary work in Iowa. In early December 1861 she wrote to the KLAS vice-president that she had secured arrangements ensuring that every box of supplies sent from local aid societies would go to her and not to the IASC.¹⁷ On December 21, 1861, the KLAS voted unanimously not to affiliate with the USSC or cooperate with the IASC in its attempt to usurp the independence of the organization.

Despite these assertions of their independence, the women of the KLAS believed that their work warranted funding from the state, especially once it became known that the state legislature had appropriated funds for sanitary work. On March 21, 1862, KLAS corresponding secretary Lucretia Knowles informed Wittenmyer that while the governor had welcomed their willingness to unite with the state organization, he had not been receptive to their request for monetary aid.¹⁸ Once the governor created the IASC, with its paid male agents, Wittenmyer came to see that recognition for the legitimacy of the work of the KLAS and security for its independence could only come from a share in the state funds. Writing to Governor Kirkwood on March 30, 1862, Wittenmyer faulted the IASC for "accomplishing nothing." She

16. For distrust of the USSC, see Giesberg, *Civil War Sisterhood*. According to Giesberg, the local ladies aid societies distrusted the male-dominated USSC because it attempted to control the local societies, which saw themselves as more capable and efficient than the Washington-based national organization, especially when it came to local matters such as raising money and supplies. In an editorial on November 14, 1861, Wittenmyer criticized the USSC as impractical. She claimed that the USSC threatened the lives of wounded soldiers by removing them 100-200 miles from their regiments over tough terrain rather than having them taken to regimental hospitals, stabilized, and then removed. *Gate City*, 11/19/1861.

17. Annie Wittenmyer to Mrs. Chittenden, 12/2/1861, Wittenmyer Papers.

18. Lucretia Knowles to Annie Wittenmyer, 3/21/1862, Wittenmyer Papers.

praised the local aid societies for “their efficiency” in alone supplying the hospitals with needed sanitary goods. She warned the governor that if funding was not secured, the KLAS could not continue its good work and that fact would have to be put before the public. On April 15, 1862, the women of the KLAS did take their fight to the press. They demanded that “a portion of the fund at the disposal of the Governor for the relief of our soldiers” be placed under their control “to furnish supplies and pay the expenses of an agent to distribute them.”¹⁹

Their assertiveness paid off. Even before Governor Kirkwood appointed her as a paid agent, Wittenmyer began receiving funds from him. In her records of August 1, 1862, she acknowledged receipt of \$300, allowing her to head to Corinth, Mississippi, with a “corps of nurses” and goods from Iowa.²⁰ The next month, Kirkwood appointed Wittenmyer as a paid state sanitary agent.

Less than a month later, however, Wittenmyer accused the governor of endorsing only the IASC by requesting that all goods and correspondence be directed through it. She defended the KLAS’s record of work. How, she asked, could the governor “recognize local societies, except as tributaries, without creating dissention and confusion”?²¹ For the next year, the KLAS and Wittenmyer continued their tense relationship with the IASC.

The dispute came to a head in November 1863 at a sanitary convention in Des Moines, called for the purpose of discussing cooperation among the various aid societies in the state.²² The conveners were divided between pro- and anti-Wittenmyer factions. Some members of the pro-Wittenmyer group, including Wittenmyer herself, believed that the convention was nothing more than a trap set by Kynett and others to expose Wittenmyer’s alleged mismanagement of sanitary goods. Mary Darwin, a

19. “Report of the Ladies Aid Society,” *Gate City*, 4/15/1862.

20. Annie Wittenmyer to Governor Kirkwood, 3/30/1862, Adjutant-General Records, 1862; Annie Wittenmyer to N. H. Brainerd, 8/1/1862, *ibid.*

21. Annie Wittenmyer to Governor Kirkwood, 10/9/1862, *ibid.*

22. There were several conventions leading to the one in Des Moines, all of which attempted to soothe the tension between the local and state organizations and all of which seemed only to fuel more tension. At a convention in Muscatine, called by Wittenmyer, she proposed uniting all local aid societies into the Iowa State Sanitary Organization with the KLAS at the head. More than anything else, that was the move that most likely led to the Des Moines convention.

friend and colleague of Wittenmyer, emerged as her greatest champion, challenging the criticism of women in sanitary work in general. Darwin scolded both men and women who argued that it was not proper for women to do this work. "It seems to be questioned here," she proclaimed, "whether a woman has a right to risk her life for her country. We believe that every created intelligence has the God-given right to seek to perfect itself, to develop all its faculties and powers in any direction it sees fit." She continued, "Iowa has such, many such, we trust ministering angels to her noble souls; and let us, who cannot share their work in camp and hospital, cheer and sustain them by our labors, our sympathies, and our prayers here at home, not by calling into question the propriety of their conduct."²³

But questioning Wittenmyer's conduct was a key aspect of the Des Moines convention. Leading up to the convention, editorials began to appear in Iowa newspapers claiming that the motive for the convention was personal and not a genuine effort to effect cooperation between competing organizations. Six days before the start of the convention, an editorial noted that the purpose was to harm Wittenmyer. Why, the writer wondered, should anyone be hostile to her unless "it is because she has acquired a fame for good deeds which they envy, or holds a position which they covet"? Another editorial just a few days before the convention emphasized Wittenmyer's unpaid sacrifices, claiming that "she charged nothing for her services" and "won the gratitude of the soldiers and the admiration of the public at her own cost and charges." The writer lamented that if Wittenmyer was removed from her post, it would be an embarrassment.²⁴

Wittenmyer's accusers were busy, too. At the heart of dispute was the KLAS's refusal to affiliate with the IASC (and by default the USSC), preferring instead to maintain its identity as an independent rather than an auxiliary organization.²⁵ But more serious

23. "The Sanitary Convention," *Gate City*, 11/25/1863.

24. "The Sanitary Convention," *Gate City*, 11/13/1863; "Mrs. Wittenmyer," *Iowa State Register* (Des Moines), 11/17/1863.

25. There was probably also animosity about Wittenmyer's close working relationship with the Western Sanitary Commission (WSC) in St. Louis, an organization that had also refused to officially affiliate with the USSC. See James Yeatman to Rev. Dr. H. W. Bellows, 10/29/1861, Journal of William Greenleaf Eliot, Notebook 6, April 1861-June 1863, www.libguides.wustl.edu.



Annie Wittenmyer in the 1860s. From State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City.

charges were made against Wittenmyer herself. Rev. William Emonds of Iowa City accused Wittenmyer of selling rather than distributing sanitary goods, implying something unethical in her work.²⁶ Another critic of Wittenmyer was Ann Harlan, the wife of Iowa Senator James Harlan, and the Iowa representative of the USSC.²⁷ Two weeks before the convention Lucinda Corkhill of

26. For Emonds's accusation and Wittenmyer's response, see *Iowa State Register*, 1/19/1863 and 3/3/1863. For more on the many accusations plaguing Wittenmyer, see Noah Zaring, "Competition in Benevolence: Civil War Soldiers' Aid in Iowa," *Iowa Heritage Illustrated* 77 (1996), 10-23; Leonard, *Yankee Women*, chap. 2.

27. After the Battle of Shiloh, Ann Harlan (who was in Washington, D.C., at the time) collected supplies and distributed them to Iowa soldiers, a task similar to that performed by Wittenmyer, who also was present after that battle. In fact, Harlan was mostly silent at the convention.



A. J. Kynett, Annie Wittenmyer's antagonist. From State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City.

Mount Pleasant, Iowa, warned Wittenmyer about an impending attack by Harlan, hinting that the convention was an ambush. "You are aware," Corkhill wrote, "that Mrs. Harlan is your sworn foe." Corkhill proceeded to list the charges that would be hurled at Wittenmyer in Des Moines, including "waste of goods, embezzlement of stores, & reveling & carousing with the officers & drinking the wines & eating the delicacies entrusted" to her care.²⁸

At the convention itself, Kynett accused Wittenmyer of not properly filling out the required sanitary reports, implying that there was not a clear record of the goods distributed or money received. He insisted that Wittenmyer produce vouchers for

28. Corkhill advised Wittenmyer to show up at the convention with "all necessary proofs" of her work. Unfortunately, the letter was dated after Wittenmyer would already have been in Chicago at the sanitary fair without any vouchers. Lucinda Corkhill to Annie Wittenmyer, 11/5/1863, Wittenmyer Papers.

money received from the state and goods distributed for the local societies. Wittenmyer, having come from the field via the Northwestern Sanitary Fair in Chicago, had brought no vouchers, only a detailed report.²⁹

She did, however, offer a vigorous defense. She replied to Kynett's accusations of missing vouchers and late sanitary reports by reminding the attendees of her selfless sacrifice during the 15 months she had worked for no salary prior to her state appointment. She also emphasized the difficult and time-consuming nature of "keeping up the records and correspondence" while also attending to her duties as traveling agent, something Kynett had not experienced.³⁰ In the end, Wittenmyer survived the attacks in Des Moines and actually improved her standing.

After the convention, a new commission was created that unified the local and state organizations. Kynett resigned as the IASC was incorporated into the new commission, but he continued to criticize the work of the local societies. In his final report as IASC agent, he stated that the local societies had "labored under disadvantages to which they would not have been subjected, had they operated in connection with" the IASC from the beginning.³¹

29. The invitation to the Northwestern Sanitary Fair in Chicago, a USSC event, may have been a trap. She was personally invited to the Chicago fair by Mary Livermore, who was part of the Northwestern Sanitary Association, a USSC affiliate. That is noteworthy because Livermore and Wittenmyer were not the best of friends, stemming from Wittenmyer's refusal to ally with the USSC. Livermore was also at the Des Moines convention, and the two women had an exchange over the issue of Wittenmyer's "missing" vouchers. Wittenmyer's presence in Chicago may have prevented her from being properly prepared with vouchers at the Des Moines convention. E. A. Brainerd to Mary Shelton, 10/24/1863, Wittenmyer Papers; *Gate City*, 11/25/1863.

30. "The Sanitary Convention," *Gate City*, 11/25/1863; Annie Wittenmyer, *Annual Report of Mrs. Annie Wittenmyer, State Sanitary Agent to his Excellency Wm. M. Stone, Governor of Iowa, and the Tenth General Assembly* (Des Moines, 1864). Even though Wittenmyer had had an assistant, E. J. Mathis, since shortly after her official appointment as state sanitary agent, it was clear that she did not like filling out reports. With Mathis and eventually a second assistant, Mary Shelton, her record keeping improved. Even when working with the diet kitchens, she maintained an assistant to help with correspondence and official reports.

31. A. J. Kynett, *Report of Iowa Sanitary Commission*, 12/1/1863, 5, 19, Adjutant General Records, 1863. Even before the Des Moines convention, Wittenmyer had apparently explored the possibility of bringing charges against Kynett, a Methodist minister, before a tribunal of the Methodist Episcopal Church. She explored that idea with N. H. Brainerd, military secretary to Governor Kirkwood and a

Ann Harlan's opposition was neutralized, too. After the Des Moines convention, Harlan defended her motives by describing the local societies in their infancy as "spasmodic, irregular, and . . . inefficient." She claimed that her only motive at the convention was to create more efficient measures. Dismissing warnings that the convention would be seen as a personal attack on Wittenmyer and the local societies, she noted that the soldiers' welfare was more important than the "petty interests and ambitions of individuals."³² Almost a month after the Des Moines convention, though, Mary Shelton, Wittenmyer's assistant, wrote to Wittenmyer that Colonel John M. Hiatt, assistant provost marshal in Keokuk, "had a long talk with Mrs. Harlan and says he is convinced she will do nothing openly against you, as she knows the popular feeling too well."³³

Wittenmyer continued to work independently after the Des Moines convention. Criticism continued to follow her, however, leading her to eventually resign as state agent. In February 1864 there was an unsuccessful attempt in the state legislature to revoke her appointment. During the debate, members of the state legislature asked newly elected Governor William Stone to provide information on sanitary agents, specifically Wittenmyer, including their compensation and traveling expenses and whether they sold rather than distributed goods. Wittenmyer opted to write her response to the legislature to ensure "fair and truthful answers" and to ward off prejudice against sanitary interests.³⁴

friend to Wittenmyer. After Wittenmyer presumably asked for advice on the matter, Brainerd pleaded ignorance of the "rules of your church." Believing the threat to her was over, he advised Wittenmyer "to just let things work themselves out." N. H. Brainerd to Annie Wittenmyer, 8/7/1863, Wittenmyer Papers.

32. A. E. Harlan, "To the Soldiers' Aid Societies in Iowa," *Gate City*, 12/2/1863. Presumably the "petty interests of individuals" comment was directed at Wittenmyer and her friends. Harlan's bad relationship with the KLAS dated back at least to May 14, 1862, when the president of the KLAS sent a letter to Wittenmyer that included a dispatch from Harlan. It appears that Harlan presumed to have some power over the KLAS, prompting the KLAS president to write, "I was never more surprised in my life than when I read the contents of this dispatch. All I knew about the whole thing, is just what the dispatch contains. No instructions or request having been given to Mrs. Harlan to draw and distribute our goods." M. A. Howell to Annie Wittenmyer, 5/14/1863, Wittenmyer Papers.

33. Mary Shelton to Annie Wittenmyer, 12/14/1863, Wittenmyer Papers.

34. *Legislative Documents*, 1864, 37.

She confirmed her pay of \$100 per month "upon settlement" and noted that she had paid her own expenses to travel to sanitary fairs and conventions, although the state government did pay other expenses related to sanitary work.

The question of whether sanitary goods were sold or distributed evoked her most defensive response. Most of the time, she wrote, goods were distributed, but there had been a time when goods were sold. In January 1863, at "a time of great destitution and suffering in the army" and "at a time when there were few sanitary supplies being sent from the state" she purchased supplies *with her own money*. Those supplies were sold "at cost" to the troops and "paid for out of their company saving fund" and also used for the relief of wounded and sick soldiers at no cost to them. She emphasized that "there were no proceeds" since she bought the supplies with her own money and let the troops have them at cost or no charge if they were sick or wounded.³⁵ Clearly angry, Wittenmyer took the opportunity to scold the Iowa state government, arguing that the U.S. government had done twice as much for Iowa soldiers as the state government had, including providing her with cotton valued at \$5,000 and free transportation for hundreds of thousands of dollars' worth of goods plus transportation for other agents and nurses valued at \$4,000. Finally, she defended the usefulness of a traveling agent, writing that she had traveled over 30,000 miles in the interest of the aid societies, and "the *results* have justified the wisdom of this course."³⁶

Even that forceful response to the legislature and the defeat of the bill to remove her failed to end the criticism. On March 24, 1864, an editorial in the *Charles City Intelligencer* by state representative Henry C. Vinton, while implying that its criticism was directed toward all traveling sanitary agents appointed by Governor Kirkwood under the September 1862 act, only explicitly named Wittenmyer. Vinton specifically criticized Wittenmyer's traveling expenses and her monthly salary. He wondered why the expenses submitted in her recent report were so high if she received free transportation, free telegraph use, and free shipping costs. As Kynett and others had done, he noted that "no vouchers

35. Wittenmyer described this as "one of the most purely generous and unselfish efforts" on her part. *Legislative Documents*, 1864, 38-39.

36. *Ibid.*, 41.

accompanied" Wittenmyer's expense report. But Vinton's real complaint was about her salary, which he regarded as "unjustifiable." While implying that his issue was with the monthly amount for all agents, proposing to reduce it to \$75, he was especially aggrieved that this salary was being paid to a woman. He charged that Wittenmyer did not have the necessary "business qualifications" for such a salary and that she had "inordinate proclivities" for spending money. He supposed that there were plenty of qualified men who would take the job for \$75 or less. He concluded, "It is hoped that if the General Assembly adjourns without passing some act of limitation to the act under which the Sanitary Agents have been employed, that Governor Stone will not pay any such enormous salaries as have been paid, to any Agent much less to any female Agent."³⁷

Wittenmyer officially resigned as state sanitary agent in spring 1864, frustrated by the three years of contention. Her resignation, reported in the *Burlington Hawkeye* on April 9, 1864, showed the frustration felt by friends. The notice read: "The gentlemen 'gran-nies' of our State, we hope, will improve this opportunity to refresh their wearied brains, now that Mrs. W is no longer in their way for 'promotion.'"³⁸

Shortly after the Des Moines convention Wittenmyer began thinking about new opportunities to be even more useful than she was in her current role. On December 29, 1863, she wrote to Mary Shelton, "I have some important plans on my mind now — have written them to the President of the Christian Commission."³⁹ Those "important plans" comprised her proposal for diet kitchens in military hospitals.

ON JANUARY 24, 1864, just one day after writing to Governor Stone about expanding her responsibilities, the USCC authorized Wittenmyer to establish diet kitchens in the Western and Southwestern Departments under her official title of General Superin-

37. Henry Vinton, "A Word to the Tax Payers of the State of Iowa," *Charles City Intelligencer*, 3/24/1864.

38. *Burlington Hawkeye*, 4/9/1864. The exact date of her resignation is not known. In late April she was still signing letters "state sanitary agent."

39. Annie Wittenmyer to Mary Shelton, 12/29/1863, Wittenmyer Papers.

tendent of Diet Kitchens, a paid position.⁴⁰ At the time, the diet kitchens were to be part of the “special duties” assigned to her by the governor as state sanitary agent. Her resignation, however, ended her relationship with the state, making her an official agent of the USCC only.

Wittenmyer may have chosen to ally with the USCC in the diet kitchen work to avoid the problem of legitimacy she had experienced before. Her refusal to ally with the USSC in the past had caused her great pains as sanitary agent. She now sought the legitimacy that the USCC could provide as an organization with the support of the War Department and the federal government.

The special diet kitchens were Wittenmyer’s *pièce de résistance*. Distinct from the general hospital kitchens, special diet kitchens catered to sick or wounded soldiers who required a special diet because of the nature of their wounds or illnesses. Two women, appointed by Wittenmyer, managed each kitchen. The women were under the authority of the surgeon but were commissioned and compensated by the USCC. A special menu designed by the surgeon was given to the women, who supervised the preparation of the meals by convalescent soldiers or hired help and the distribution of the meals by army nurses in the hospital. In addition to their duties as superintendents, the women were encouraged by the USCC to visit the soldiers in the wards.

The first diet kitchen established was at Cumberland Hospital in Nashville as early as May 1864. Eventually, 50–60 diet kitchens were in place, employing more than 100 women.⁴¹ Histories written later by the USCC and Wittenmyer emphasized that the surgeons-in-charge readily accepted the women and the diet kitchens. Establishing the kitchens was not always easy, though. Delays in receiving equipment and supplies caused frustration. In addition, the surgeons did not, in fact, always receive the

40. Lemuel Moss, *Annals of the United States Christian Commission* (Philadelphia, 1868), 667–68. Eventually the diet kitchens were extended to the Eastern Departments and adopted permanently by the U.S. military.

41. Moss, *Annals of the USCC*, 665, 669–70, 682–84. Moss lists 106 women as diet kitchen superintendents plus 3 women as superintendents for various departments. Wittenmyer is listed as the general superintendent. She remained in her supervisory role until the USCC diet kitchens officially closed after the war. She dated her work from April 20, 1861, to November 23, 1865. Annie Wittenmyer, *Under the Guns: A Woman's Reminiscences of the Civil War* (Boston, 1895), preface.

women with open arms. Often there was tension between them. Nonetheless, Wittenmyer praised the kitchens. "During the last eighteen months of the war," she wrote in her autobiography, "over two million rations were issued monthly." And the diet kitchens continue to be the work most closely associated with her.⁴²

Wittenmyer's earlier experiences in sanitary work affected the way she set up and maintained her diet kitchen work. To ensure that her usefulness would not be criticized as before, she sought to secure recognition for the legitimacy of the work and fought hard to maintain that legitimacy throughout the war. Her plan, proposed and accepted by the USCC, included a supervisory role for herself and a professional role, including pay and titles, for the women she would employ. She emphasized that the women managers were not "cooks" but "superintendents," a much more professional title akin to her own.⁴³ She took this title seriously and was clearly offended when any hospital surgeon referred to the women as anything other than superintendents. On November 7, 1864, Wittenmyer received a letter from a surgeon requesting her to send female cooks for his hospital. She noted, "I answered that I employ no cooks, only superintendents of special diet kitchens and sent him all the conditions on which I would supply. He accepted but no doubt to the day of his death will call them cooks."⁴⁴ That statement is less a reflection on the role of cooks and more on the legitimacy of the women as supervisors of the kitchens.

When Wittenmyer needed to find women to become superintendents, she located and employed many familiar and trusted names from among her allies in the Iowa ladies aid societies. The women managers earned \$20 per month with expenses paid, approximately \$8 more than nurses and \$10-14 more than cooks and laundresses (more, too, than privates in the Union Army). Mary Shelton earned \$60 per month as Wittenmyer's assistant. It is likely that Wittenmyer earned more as an official agent of the USCC with special duties attached.⁴⁵

42. Wittenmyer, *Under the Guns*, 217-18, 267.

43. *Ibid.*, 261, 263.

44. M. A. Banks to Annie Wittenmyer, 11/7/1864, Wittenmyer Papers.

45. I have found little reference to actual pay scales from the USCC. Amanda Shelton recorded in her diary that she was told her pay would be \$20 per month,

Wittenmyer's desire to create special diet kitchens came from her ability to see the value of such care and the belief that women had special knowledge of such work that could and should be applied to the public world. According to the most famous story about the origins of Wittenmyer's diet kitchen work, she was motivated by her personal desire to help her brother, whom she encountered sick in one of the military hospitals in Sedalia, Missouri, early in the war. She noticed that her brother (whom she had no idea was in the area, or sick for that matter) rejected the black coffee, greasy bacon, and bread that was to be his meal. According to Wittenmyer, "There was a look of utter disgust on his face as he rejected the breakfast and waved the attendant away."⁴⁶ Wittenmyer's sanitary report of January 13, 1864, detailed a more practical reason for the diet kitchen proposal: "to use the language of an able Medical Director in the army, 'they [soldiers] are starving to death in the midst of plenty.'⁴⁷

As a sanitary agent, Wittenmyer knew that there were plenty of supplies to be had. The problem was how to provide special diets to those soldiers in need of something more than "greasy bacon and bread." Wittenmyer believed that women were uniquely suited for the work as superintendents because of their association with the domestic sphere, but she also believed that skill could be transferred to the public world and achieve a larger usefulness. Wittenmyer complained that, early in the war, the cooking departments of hospitals were defective because men who were employed as cooks were unskilled at the task. She argued that women who had experience preparing food and caring for the sick in the home would be "received [in camps and hospitals] with a degree of confidence and cordiality" not afforded to males.

and a USCC advertisement stated that the pay for managers would be \$20 per month. The USCC recorded that permanent agents in the field were paid \$40–\$70, depending on position, with subsistence and incidental expenses. Mary Shelton, aide to Wittenmyer, recorded in her diary that from January to June 1865 she received either \$60 or \$90 per month, presumably from the USCC; and she noted in a letter to Wittenmyer that Mr. Parsons (corresponding secretary in St. Louis for USCC) expected to pay her \$60 per month. I have never seen any reference to Wittenmyer's pay. Moss, *Annals of the USCC*, 147; Mary Shelton to Annie Wittenmyer, 2/26/1865, Wittenmyer Papers.

46. Wittenmyer, *Under the Guns*, 72.

47. Wittenmyer, *Annual Report of Mrs. Annie Wittenmyer*, 1864.

She believed that her own public work demonstrated the “importance of having female delegates frequently in the field.”⁴⁸

While labeling women uniquely situated for this type of work, Wittenmyer also acknowledged that the work was different from the daily tasks of domestic economy within the home. She wrote of the difficulties the women faced because “everything is to be done upon a scale much larger than that to which they have been accustomed, and often articles regarded as of prime necessity . . . at home, cannot be obtained, and must entirely be dispensed with, or a substitute be found.” Thus, the women would have to be inventive in a way that they never experienced in the home. Emphasizing the legitimacy of the women in this work, Wittenmyer argued that the “leading medical men of the West express the opinion that, in a majority of cases, the diet of patients is of more importance than medicine. . . . The kitchens have come to be regarded, not merely as an unimportant adjunct to a hospital, to be tolerated, but as a source of benefit to the sick, and service to the surgeon — indispensable where they can be obtained.” Wittenmyer also made known that the diet kitchens were endorsed by the secretary of war, the surgeon general, and even the president of the United States.⁴⁹ Comparing the women who took up the diet kitchen work to Christian martyrs, Wittenmyer praised them for not shrinking from the “dangers of *contagion, and malaria, and shot and shell.*” From the women she claimed to have learned “*what self-consecration and self-denial meant in its deepest sense.*”⁵⁰

Because of her previous experiences, Wittenmyer worked hard to ensure that the early legitimacy gained for the diet kitchen work would not be lost. Shortly after setting up the first kitchen, Wittenmyer received a letter from John A. Clark, agent for the USCC. While noting his full support for the work, Clark expressed skepticism about its potential for success. He was particularly concerned about the difficulty of recruiting women for the task. There were “few American women,” he claimed, “whose energies have not been already overtaxed who are willing to

48. Wittenmyer, *Under the Guns*, 259; “Report of Mrs. Wittenmyer, To the Soldiers’ Aid Societies of Iowa Ladies,” *Gate City*, 11/19/1861.

49. Annie Wittenmyer, *A Collection of Recipes for the Use of Special Diet Kitchens in Military Hospitals* (St. Louis, 1864), introduction.

50. Wittenmyer, *Women’s Work for Jesus*, 95–96.

make the sacrifices necessary for this labor." He agreed to support the experiment but admitted that he did it "with fear."⁵¹

In July 1864 Wittenmyer received another letter from USCC corresponding secretary J. H. Parsons in St. Louis, forwarding a letter from the USCC agent in the Memphis district, Frederick Ensign. Apparently, confusion about the role of the diet kitchen workers had set in once Wittenmyer left the area. The confusion revolved around the official orders given to Wittenmyer from the surgeon general's office authorizing her to establish the kitchens. Ensign noted that the orders pertained only to her and did not extend to the women superintendents. Thus, the official order vanished with Wittenmyer, causing problems on site in the kitchens. He suggested that the orders from the surgeon general be provided to all the diet kitchen superintendents so that they were protected when Wittenmyer was not present.⁵² Wittenmyer got right on the request. By August 1, 1864, Assistant Surgeon General R. C. Wood sent an order to all medical directors and surgeons in general hospitals in the Western Department referring to the diet kitchens as "very useful and practical" and noting that Wittenmyer had "employed proper persons to attend to their arrangement." He ordered all to "give her, *and her agents*, every facility."⁵³ That order would prove to be useful in the future when Wittenmyer sent her assistants and experienced superintendents to set up new kitchens rather than attending to the task herself.

The surgeon general's order gave Wittenmyer a renewed sense of purpose, especially in contending with obstinate surgeons who resented the diet kitchen women and did not recognize their usefulness. In July 1864 Wittenmyer had gone head-to-head with the surgeon-in-charge at Adams Hospital in Memphis, John H. Keenon. He wrote to her complaining that he had been informed that Wittenmyer intended to place women in his kitchens as superintendents. He noted, "That will not do for I know it will create trouble." He insisted that all the women sent "are to come in the capacity of cooks." After the women arrived at Keenon's hospital and proceeded to tell him they were there to superin-

51. John A. Clark to Annie Wittenmyer, 6/1/1864, Wittenmyer Papers.

52. J. H. Parsons to Annie Wittenmyer, 7/22/1864, Wittenmyer Papers.

53. Moss, *Annals of the USCC*, 670 (italics added).

tend, not to cook, he fired off another letter to Wittenmyer. This time he accused her of misleading him about the role the women would play in the hospital. He claimed that the women were doing “very little work.” Thus they were of no use to him. He reiterated his desire for “practical and working cooks” rather than “supervisors superintendents and inspectors.” When Keenon unexpectedly died on August 12, 1864, Wittenmyer reported to Assistant Surgeon General Wood that she had been preparing charges against Keenon. Although Wood would probably be told that Keenon died of disease, she noted, “There is but little doubt that he [Keenon] died of delirium tremors.” She claimed that Keenon had not been sober for weeks and had been in the company of a woman of “doubtful character.” She informed Wood that the diet kitchen women had been “treated with great indignity and driven from the hospital,” a situation she likened to the Inquisition; at times, the women even “feared for their lives.”⁵⁴

That was not all. In the letter’s opening paragraph, Wittenmyer informed Wood that he “would be deeply mortified to know all the facts, as they are disgraceful alike to the medical profession and our civilization.” In addition to her complaints about Keenon, Wittenmyer also complained about Dr. Francis N. Burke at Gayoso Hospital in Memphis. She described Burke as “intemperate, passionate, overbearing, and bigoted” and accused him of degrading the diet kitchen women “to the position of servants.” Sarah Bloor, the diet kitchen superintendent at Gayoso, had been writing to Wittenmyer for months about Burke. Bloor had been prohibited from visiting the wards and had largely been confined to the kitchen area. Wittenmyer said that Bloor had been prohibited from speaking to soldiers anywhere. Wittenmyer boldly suggested that Wood “relieve Burke and save any further trouble or scandal.” She also suggested that Wood take care in appointing a replacement for Keenon. She even included a few names of objectionable and acceptable doctors.⁵⁵

54. J. H. Keenon to Annie Wittenmyer, 7/9/1864, Wittenmyer Papers; J. H. Keenon to Annie Wittenmyer, 7/23/1864, *ibid.*; Annie Wittenmyer to R. C. Wood, 8/13/1864, *ibid.*

55. Wittenmyer also acknowledged Wood’s earlier order of August 1: “I am already under great obligation to you especially for your last order.” Annie Wittenmyer to R. C. Wood, 8/13/1864, Wittenmyer Papers.

The boldness with which Wittenmyer wrote to Wood suggests that she was willing to protect her work and the women she employed and that she felt comfortable enough, given the endorsements of the work, to speak her mind about it; but that did not necessarily translate into real power. Burke remained in his position at Gayoso, much to Bloor's distress. About six weeks after Wittenmyer wrote to Wood, Bloor wrote to her again, clearly distressed that Burke retained his position. She complained that Burke threw out "slurs" about the USCC and that she was scared to draw supplies until there was a change in command. Despite Wittenmyer's attempt to get him discharged, Burke remained at Gayoso until he was honorably discharged after the war. There is no evidence that Adams Hospital ever had diet kitchen superintendents following Keenon's death. Wittenmyer went head-to-head with several other surgeons, usually with a similar result. Despite Wittenmyer's instructions to diet kitchen superintendents that "the order of the surgeon in charge is the law of the kitchens," it is evident that she was willing to stir the pot to ensure the safety, sanity, and legitimacy of the workers, quietly insisting on "autonomous direction of the facilities she established."⁵⁶

Despite the problems some of the women encountered in the diet kitchen work, many of them found a powerful usefulness in their experience. Like Wittenmyer, the women who worked for her were also searching for their own purpose and a way to contribute during the war. She offered them the possibility of doing just that, and they recognized the significance of the unique opportunity. Some explicitly equated the work with personal usefulness. Others regretted giving the work up at the end of the war, anticipating that their lives at home would fail to live up to their experiences in war work.

SOME of the diet kitchen workers took full advantage of post-war opportunities to transfer to work that might give them that same feeling of usefulness. When she was forced to return home on account of an illness before her work was completed, Angelina

56. Sarah Bloor to Annie Wittenmyer, 10/2/1864, Wittenmyer Papers; Letters received by the Commission Branch of the Adjutant General's Office, 1863-1870, 1865, B-1072-Burke, Francis N., 20, www.fold3.com; Jane E. Schultz, *Women at the Front: Hospital Workers in Civil War America* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2004), 168.

Pettis of Wisconsin found it almost unbearable. "It's very difficult for me to accustom myself to this quiet, and seems to me aimless life," she wrote, adding, "Some of the happiest hours of my life have been spent in the Hosp., never can I forget the pleasant associations. I almost sigh, while thinking the field of labor is nearly closed. Not that I would have war. Oh no; But its developing so many characteristics that would have slept in oblivion." Sallie Cowgill of Springdale, Iowa, wrote to Wittenmyer in July 1865, "The pleasantess [*sic*] part of my life has been spent under your care and administration and [I] shall ever be grateful to you for having guided my feet in the path of usefulness. I leave the work a better I trust, and I know a much happier person than when I entered it fifteen months ago."⁵⁷

In Chattanooga in April 1865, Ruth Conrad of Keokuk expressed a desire to continue the work after the war: "I am not fully prepared to say whether I will wish to remain in the work after the war or not. I think it probable however that I will; . . . I want to labor for God and humanity in some way while I live in the world." The work was clearly important to Conrad, evident in an earlier letter to Wittenmyer when she wrote, "Never was life so full of meaning of pure, deep, earnest joy as now." Just one day after arriving in the diet kitchen work it was evident to Mary Shelton that her life had changed. She wrote in her diary that she "never enjoyed anything half so much before," adding, "How insipid everything at home seems." As the war approached an end, Mary Kibben of Mount Pleasant wrote to Wittenmyer, "I love the work very much and fear my time to go home will come before I am ready to go." Ada Miller feared that, as with the soldiers, she would find herself "unfitted" for home life, but supposed "the old ways of life will come back to me in time, that I shall not be entirely useless to myself and society!" And, as time closed in on Jennie Hogan of Muscatine, she wrote to Wittenmyer thanking her "for affording me the opportunity to come out in this work. I would not give the experience I have had in this, for the experience of half a life time in the grind of home."⁵⁸

57. A. T. Pettis to Annie Wittenmyer, 6/5/1865, Wittenmyer Papers; Sallie Cowgill to Annie Wittenmyer, 7/20/1865, *ibid.*

58. R. G. Conrad to Annie Wittenmyer, 4/26/1865, Wittenmyer Papers; R. G. Conrad to Annie Wittenmyer, 8/1/1864, *ibid.*; Mary Shelton, Diary Entry,

Jennie Hogan was able to find fulfilling work after the war; others struggled to find their way. When a delegate from the Freedmen's Bureau contacted Hogan about working in the new schools in the South, she wrote to Wittenmyer to ask if the diet kitchen work would continue. The USCC had recently informed Wittenmyer that the diet kitchens would close on August 15, 1865, or as soon as possible thereafter. Hogan clearly did not want to return to domestic life. A month before she took up her new job, she wrote, "I think we will all feel lost at home now this work is done."⁵⁹

No one expressed the sentiment of "feeling lost" better than Mary Shelton. On May 16, 1865, she wrote of her diet kitchen work, "Our work is rapidly drawing to a close. . . . Comes the question—'what will I do.'" When she returned home to Mount Pleasant on July 21, 1865, she struggled to find the same usefulness she had previously experienced. While she enjoyed being home with her family, she confessed that she was gloomy "to have day after day pass and no time for anything but housework." She got involved in the work of the Iowa Orphan's Home and, eventually, realizing that she needed to make money, took a teaching job. Even though she had been a teacher before the war, she now found the work "terribly dull" and conceded that it was "drudgery." Clearly, Shelton missed the adventurous life of travel and war work and was struggling to find purpose in her postwar life. On December 21, 1865, she wrote in her diary, "My education has cost too much to spend it this way. I look and hope for better things before many days."⁶⁰

7/15/1864, Shelton Family Papers, Special Collections, University of Iowa Libraries, Iowa City; Mary Kibben to Annie Wittenmyer, 2/10/1865, Wittenmyer Papers; Ada L. Miller to Annie Wittenmyer, 5/1/1865, *ibid.*; Jennie Hogan to Annie Wittenmyer, 6/20/1865, *ibid.*

59. Jennie Hogan to Annie Wittenmyer, 5/31/1865, Wittenmyer Papers; Jennie Hogan to Miss Fowler, 7/28/1865, *ibid.*

60. Mary Shelton, Diary Entries, 5/16/1865, 12/21/1865. For more on the Civil War experiences of Mary Shelton and her sister, Amanda, see Theresa R. McDevitt, "'A Melody Before Unknown': The Civil War Experiences of Mary and Amanda Shelton," *Annals of Iowa* 63 (2004), 105–36. A year after Amanda's war service ended, she found a renewed sense of usefulness as a bookkeeper at the Iowa Hospital for the Insane in Mount Pleasant. See Sharon E. Wood, "'My life is not quite useless': The 1866 Diary of an Asylum Bookkeeper," *Palimpsest* 70 (1989), 2–13.

AFTER THE DIET KITCHENS CLOSED, Wittenmyer went home to Iowa, determined to continue her public life and still needing to make a living. For a brief time, she was matron of the Iowa Orphan's Home, the institution she founded and that today bears her name. She left Iowa in 1868 for Philadelphia, where she engaged in missionary work with the Methodist church, became a published author and editor of several journals, and lectured publicly. She played a pivotal role in establishing the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) in 1874 and was elected the first president of that organization. In her speech accepting the presidency, she praised the work women like herself had done during and after the Civil War: "My own thought is that God has been preparing the women of this land for work, for a long time. This preparation began in the more liberal education of woman, and was greatly quickened by demands upon them during the late war; and still more intensified by the various home and foreign missionary societies which have been conducted by women in nearly all the Christian denominations in our land."⁶¹ Toward the end of her life, her focus turned back to the Civil War. As a representative of the Women's Relief Corps (WRC), she began lobbying for pensions for army nurses, a successful endeavor that took almost five years. Annie Wittenmyer died on February 2, 1900, at her home in Sanatoga, Pennsylvania, at the age of 72. She had continued her lecture schedule right up to her sudden death.

When Wittenmyer went into the field of sanitary work in April 1861, she did so motivated by the desire to be useful during a period of great turmoil. She also needed to earn a living as a single mother with no spousal support. She was not consciously trying to change the way society viewed women; nor was she looking to alter the course of history for women. Yet through her work she showed that women could be useful and efficient contributors beyond the home. After the Civil War, Wittenmyer continued to insist that women had a larger public role to play. In 1873 she published *Women's Work for Jesus*, in which she encouraged women, who made up two-thirds of the membership of Protestant congregations,

61. Jack S. Blocker Jr., "Annie Wittenmyer and the Women's Crusade," *Ohio History Journal* 88 (1979), 422.

gations, to “discuss and answer” the question of women’s roles as missionaries “and suggest plans for their own employment.”⁶²

Wittenmyer also continued to see the importance of monetary compensation for women’s work, which is evident in her fight for pensions for army nurses. Deeply affected by the destitution of now elderly women who had served so capably during the Civil War, and believing that they deserved a pension as much as soldiers and soldiers’ dependents, Wittenmyer worked to secure economic stability for them. The Army Nurses’ Pension Act became law in August 1892, guaranteeing a pension of \$12 per month to any nurse who had worked for six months during the war and had been employed by a proper governmental authority.

While the act was a victory, its parameters would not have included the diet kitchen superintendents, so Wittenmyer went back to work and was able to get the original act amended to include the diet kitchen workers, who became classified as having the “*information and skill* of a dietarian or nurse rather than that of an ordinary kitchen employe.” Wittenmyer testified to the Pension Committee that the women not only established the kitchens and superintended the cooking of the meals but also made “daily visits to the various wards to consult with patients, and suggest various delicacies that would tempt their appetites, and to administer to their wants in other ways.” Secretary of the Interior Hoke Smith added, “The dietary nurse sustains a relation to a patient which is much akin to that of a medical advisor. Physicians are themselves constantly urging the efficiency of diet as a safeguard against disease as well as a remedy therefor. It requires intelligence as well as delicate knowledge of the nature and effect of certain foods to fit a woman for such a position. They often have, for this, a peculiar fitness, and the services rendered by such women are invaluable and entitled to great consideration.”⁶³ Smith’s statement confirmed what Wittenmyer

62. Wittenmyer, *Women’s Work for Jesus*, 5–6.

63. Although Wittenmyer successfully worked to broaden the parameters of the act to include diet kitchen workers, attempts to add regimental nurses and field nurses were rejected. Overall, by the time of Wittenmyer’s death, more than 600 army nurses (including many of her diet kitchen workers) had secured pensions under the Army Nurses’ Pension Act. “U.S. Department of Interior Decisions on Pensions and Bounty-Land Claims, 1886–1930,” www.ancestry.com. The act was amended on February 24, 1893.

had known all along: that women who worked during the Civil War made invaluable, useful contributions not only to society but also to themselves.