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Masquerade as Oneself: The Women Soldiers of the US Civil War¹

“Posed as a Woman for 60 Years.” A chilling but powerful headline discussing a man who for 60 years lived as a male citizen in a community but was born female. The title of this article drew an immediate interest for the possibility of researching and discussing a limited to unknown part of Civil War History, Women Soldiers. Women soldiers during United States Civil War were women from both sides, the Union, and the Confederacy, who masquerade as males in order to serve as active soldiers. The Civil War brought forward for fighting which include: saving what has been established or fighting to ensure that part of the country was not going to break from the rest of the country. Women soldiers who served are not as well known population of brave soldiers of the Civil War. These brave individuals not only fought bravely but also fought through a constant fear, of being discovered. No historical evidence for why any of these women chose their male name is known. Verification and research of assumed women soldiers is near impossible as many of the suspected and known women soldiers never identified their female names with their male names. Those that we as historians and scholars do know about have direct primary source evidence of each of their names. Some key questions while researching these soldiers include: Why did women soldiers choose to disguise their identity and

¹ Unless specifically addressing one of the soldiers by a certain name through a historical document, or source, the use of pronouns in this paper will be exclusively they/them/their. The pronouns of she/her/hers and he/him/his are very valid pronouns for many individuals who are transgender, gender non-conforming in our modern era but during the era in which these individuals were living and serving in the war the idea of pronouns to distinguish for historians and scholars was not as important.

risk being caught to serve in an all mans military? Were the reasons for disguising their identity similar or different depending on if a woman was in the union or confederate army?

Answering these questions ultimately requires examining several soldiers who bravely served. Women soldiers during the Civil War served for numerous reasons as demonstrated by several key themes, including: that some of these women always identified as a male; some women disguised themselves as men only during the war to follow their male family members into the wars, some of these women were escaping from a previous life, potentially using the war as a disguise to allow themselves to dress as a man, and how some women would wear women's clothing at times and men's clothing at other times, presenting as a man during the battles but dressing as a woman when interacting in certain social events.

Historiographical discussion

Starting in 1958, historians and other scholars began writing about thousands of soldiers who fought in the war. These soldiers were unique from because they were born female, and masqueraded as men. Historians and scholars authored biographies about specific women soldiers, or developed sources which cover all of the women soldiers. Additionally, authors began to write about women and gender during the war. To study the historiography of women soldiers it is important to explore the different types of books, and articles available starting with biographies, sources with many women soldiers, and sources that explore all women during the Civil War.

Gender during the Civil War is vital to understanding the experiences the soldiers of both side faced during the war. Historically, individual historians focus on traditional Civil War scholarship, examining the experiences of individual troops, individual battles, or looking at

Civil War leaders, all through a predominantly male perspective. The mid-twentieth century is when Civil War scholarship added the study of women's history and social/cultural history.² Where do women soldiers fit into this larger scholarship? Historians could argue they fall exclusively into women's history because all these women soldiers were born and raised as female. Historians could argue that cultural/social history fits because these women were challenging cultural and social norms of the day. Arguably either argument is and could be valid.

The two biographies available cover only a one known woman who masquerade to serve in the war and have the most known and available documentation. One example of these is *The mysterious Private Thompson the double life of Sarah Emma Edmonds, Civil War Soldier* which is written by Laura Leedy Gansler. Gansler's biography examines the majority of the life of Private Thompson and has a good examination of their life during the war. She argues that Sarah's experiences were known but not much was shared until after her death. The other biography written is by Sylvia G.L. Dannett, titled *She rode with the generals, the true and incredible story of Sarah Emma Seeley alias Franklin Thompson*. This biography is the earliest known writing on women soldiers outside of newspaper articles, and provides an argument about the adventurous and brave individual that Sarah/Franklin was. To go fight in the war, return from the war, marry a man after the war, and live with a hidden but open secret that their husband knew about shows the strength they had.

Sources with many women are combined examine the various roles that women could have in the war effort. These include: nurses, spies, soldiers, or staying on the homefront taking care of the home. The sources looking at the other types of roles provide an additional research topic, one which I may pursue in a future project. An example of this is *Liar, Temptress, Soldier Spy*

² Catherine Clinton & Nina Silber (eds), *Battle Scars Gender and Sexuality in the American Civil War* (New York, NY, Oxford University Press, 2006), 4

which examines four different women who served in the Civil War in different capacities. In this volume the author Karen Abbott does a good job of incorporate all four women's stories throughout the book, while following two specifically (Emma Thompson/Frank Thompson and Sarah Wakeman/ Lyons Wakeman). A broader look at women during the Civil War is captured through works done by Richard H. Hall in his books *Patriots in Disguise Women Warriors of the Civil War* (1993) and *Women in the Civil War Battlefield* (2006). Both of these cover some of the same information about women in the Civil War but the 1993 book looks directly more at the women soldiers and the 2006 book looks at women in the civil war more broadly.

The book originally bringing this topic to the light for me as a Historian is *They Fought Like Demons, Women Soldiers in the American Civil War* written by DeAnne Blanton & Lauren M. Cook. Their book while not written as a edited volume is structured similar to an edited volume. The chapters have a clear and helpful exploration of many aspects of why these women would choose to masquerade as men to serve in the war. One chapter in particular, looks at the means and motivations of the soldiers. Their argument for women soldier motivation for joining the war effort was for either the reasons to stay near a loved one, or they joined to allow themselves to dress as men and help their country in the war effort. ³ The number of women soldiers they describe not discussed as part of the research for this paper shows the number of women soldiers in the war was numerous. The work of Blanton and Cook is one example of the variety in methods used to research and write about all the women soldiers during the war.

Methodology

³ Blanton, DeAnne, and Lauren M Cook . *They Fought like Demons: Women Soldiers in the American Civil War* . Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press 2002. 28-29

Civil War women soldiers have scholarship that is heavily represented in the literature by secondary sources, written by professional historians and scholars, all with a variety of written coverage, and methods. The few available primary sources come from two known memoirs, surviving letters, a pension file, a soldiers home file, and newspaper articles written in the early twentieth century. Historians and scholars mention obituaries of many of the women, none of which for this project I was able to locate, with the exception of articles about Albert Cashier. Secondary sources reference most of the primary sources, and almost all the secondary sources refer back to each other which causes any historian examining this topic to have to carefully check sources and verify cited pages for accuracy. When accurate though secondary sources help to lead to primary sources especially the newspaper articles which are primarily from small towns where these women soldiers lived after the war concluded.

Because the sources all cover either one specific female soldier, look at a collection of different female soldiers, or look broadly at women during the Civil War the use of the sources varies in different ways. Additional sources include looking at how masculinity and femininity were either positively or negatively affected by the disguising of these women on both their male and female fellow soldiers and citizens.

Because of the limited number of available types and number of primary sources one of the ways primary sources are being used is to help enforce what is being seen in the secondary sources. That is, helping to answer the research questions addressed above. Why did women choose to disguise themselves as men to serve in the war? In the case of Sarah Emma Edmonds she dressed to transgress the notions of what it was meant to be “feminine” in society.⁴ Madame Loreta Janeta Velazquez disguised herself to follow her husband into war, with his full knowing

⁴ Edmonds, Sarah E. *Memoirs of a Soldier, Nurse and Spy: A Woman's Adventures in the Union Army*. Dekalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press 1999. xx

about her chosen actions of wanting to dress as a man. From her memoir one of the scenes that resonates the most is her description of her first time wearing male clothing and how their husband “permitted me to dress myself in one his suits, and said he would take me to the bar-rooms and other places of male resort, and show me what I would be compelled to go through should I persist in unsexing myself.”⁵

Primary sources for this include two memoirs, each memoir of a woman soldier who served in the Union and Confederate soldiers. Two have one memoir from each side of the war is an amazing but significantly important way to see a viewpoint into the war from different perspectives. These memoirs also help to see the commonality of why these women chose to disguise themselves as men. In both of the memoirs, these women discuss their having always wanted to dress like a man but for both the war was a way for them to live out their desire. In the letters, examples are also available to show the desire to dress like a man and to live as a man. The newspaper articles help to show mostly what post war was like, and what would happen if an individual was discovered. In the case of Albert Cashier, in their old age, they were put into a mental health institution. The pension file is also for Albert Cashier and shows the level of support they got from their fellow soldiers, which is also seen in other examples discovered through the secondary sources.

Analyzing the sources for all the women soldiers in the Civil War is done primarily through looking at each individual soldier and their story. Because these women could not and would not have served under their female name, analyzing and comparing one to another is

⁵ Velazquez, Madame Loreta Janeta. *The Woman in Battle: A Narrative of the Exploits, Adventures, and Travels of Madame Loreta Janeta Velazquez*. Edited by C.J. Worthington . New York, NY: Arno Press 1972., 53

challenging when it comes to historical documentation. On a broad understanding of societal views and army expectations comparing these soldiers is easier.

One of the limits of this topic is looking at the sources available and remembering the ways in which these women could use their stories as a measure of gaining fame or helping to support themselves post-war. There is a note in the introduction to *Memoirs of A Soldier, Nurse, and Spy* where the idea of selling this memoir was done by Edmonds “was to provide the readers with entertainment worth paying for, and she naturally adopted colorful, exaggerated, dramatic style for her era in order to enhance her fascinating story.”⁶ In her introduction to the Memoir, Elizabeth D. Leonard does address her discussion of being a spy as part of the making a story to sell, with hard evidence to proof what is shared is true not true.⁷ As a reader of the memoir, I tend to read the soldier aspects of her memoir as true and not written to help sell her story. Selling your story after the war could have been appealing, and to best understand why Edmonds story would be similar to a tabloid magazine today it is critical to have an understanding of what femininity, masculinity, and cross dressing have in understanding the Civil War especially around gender.

Femininity, Masculinity, and Cross Dressing Behavior during the Civil War

Before exploring each of individual women soldiers it is crucial to have a good understanding of what was viewed as appropriate feminine qualities in the mid-1850s- early 1870s in the US, what was seen as masculine qualities, and what or how was cross dressing viewed by society. Examining all of these different aspects of society can be done through a centralized lens of nationalism around the war itself. Expectations of men were to join the war

⁶ Edmonds, *Memoirs of a Soldier*, XXI

One thing to keep in mind is in her memoir Edmonds discusses her time serving as a soldier but also discusses serving as a Spy.

⁷ Edmonds, *Memoirs of a Soldier*, XXI

effort, women were expected to keep the home, and cross-dressing allowed for women to move into joining the war effort on the front.

Femininity and the Civil War

Femininity and the era is not as commonly written as the masculinity explored below. An examination of femininity is critical to help understand what qualities or expectations women soldiers were choosing to either escape from or were desiring to not have part of their daily lives. Victorian attitudes around femininity affected not only a woman's individual view herself but also how men in their lives viewed and interacted with these women. Janet Weaver a fourteen-year old girl in 1862 best described the "perfect woman".

A "perfect woman must be amiable, kind, and affectionate. [She] must manifest all the "love of a mother" in raising her children. When her husband comes home an ideal wife and mother does not go to meet him with a troubled brow but tries to look cheerful and bright and make him feel that he is always welcome at home." ⁸

Men were the providers the protectors, and women kept the home and family strong and good. This "perfect" woman for many women was their form of nationalism.

The nationalism that occurred both in the Union and Confederate armies show that the side of the war did not matter, but what mattered was how individuals especially women did their part/role toward this large national cause, to either save the union or to separate and build a new nation. Nationalism expression for women was limited to denied when compared to their male counterparts. Part of femininity is understanding how women could express their nationalism. Women did this through homemade products, military rallies, village parades, flag raisings, and

⁸ Ott, Victoria E. *Confederate Daughters*. Illinois, Southern Illinois University, 2008, 100

fairs.⁹ Women were expected to stay at the home front and to help keep moral and the local community moving forward. Masculinity or men and their nationalism were focused on service and providing for the home outside of the home.

Masculinity and the Civil War

Masculinity generally is our understanding as a society of what qualities we look for in a man. The Civil War brought forward the need to define what are the qualities that society as a whole wants to see from men. This idea of manliness and the military ideal helped to shape what males born as males and males born as female who fought in the war had to meet to not be suspected of being anything other than a male who was ready and willing to fight for his country. Nineteenth-century society defined power, initiative, and assertion as masculine.¹⁰ This military ideal is of particular importance to understanding what all the women soldiers below had to face on a daily basis because it helps to clearly define what each of the women soldiers were defining for themselves to avoid being discovered. During the war especially there was a new male language of struggle being expressed. This new male language which was rarely if ever used in female usage, was the language of battle.¹¹ Descriptions of “warfare of existence”, where “Human life is not a playground but a battlefield, in which individuals may make their lives sublime. From the cradle to the grave, our life is a scene of unending conflict.”¹² Many of the women soldiers not only had their own internal battles about their true identity but also the battle

⁹ Clinton, Catherine, and Nina Silber (eds). *Divided Houses Gender and the Civil War*. New York, NY, Oxford University Press, 1992 , 255

¹⁰ Blanton, DeAnne, and Lauren M Cook . *They Fought like Demons: Women Soldiers in the American Civil War* . Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press 2002., 57

¹¹ Rotundo, E. Anthony. *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1990., 232

¹² Rotundo, American Manhood, 232- 233

of what if they were discovered. Males, in some ways, helped women soldiers to identify and share a struggle of living life on a daily basis. Yes the battles being fought internally for men versus the women soldiers was different but having the language of battle can and very likely helpful to many of the women soldiers during the war.

Crossing Dressing and the Civil War

Cross-Dressing is not something unique to the Civil War. Cross-dressing has history in Europe, and all over the world. Famous cases of “cross-dressing” can be scene in Edo Japan through the Wakashu who thrived during the same years as the Civil War.¹³ What makes the Civil War have perhaps a lesser instance of cross-dressing being actively seen as an issue is the fact that a war was happening that needed able bodies to help fight. Cross-dressing for women soldiers happened for many reasons. For some it was a way to join the war effort and fight alongside men as an ‘equal’, for others it was helping them live their true authentic self with some serving in the war, and for some it was an escape from the feminine expectations of society. For many women who cross dressed into men's clothing the desire to never return to womens clothing following the war was strong. An unidentified drummer girl who was wounded at Gettysburg vowed that “they may do what they please but she [would] never wear women’s clothing again.”¹⁴ An example of someone who was not a woman soldier but served in the medical field, this woman is Mary Edwards Walker.

¹³ Joshua S. Mostow and Asato Ikeda, *A Third Gender Beautiful Youths in Japanese Edo-Period prints and paintings*. Ontario, Canada: Royal Ontario Museum, 2016

¹⁴ Blanton, DeAnne, and Lauren M Cook . *They Fought like Demons:* , 57

Mary Edwards Walker is classified by at least one Historian as “the most famous American crossdresser.”¹⁵ One argument that Walker made is that “the clothes make the woman,” and she defined this every time she dressed for work as a surgeon in the army during the Civil War.¹⁶ The one thing that Walker helps with understanding crossing dressing and the Civil War is that for many of the women soldiers, choosing to dress like a man defines who and whom they were. Her forward thinking helped to make a better historical understanding possible.

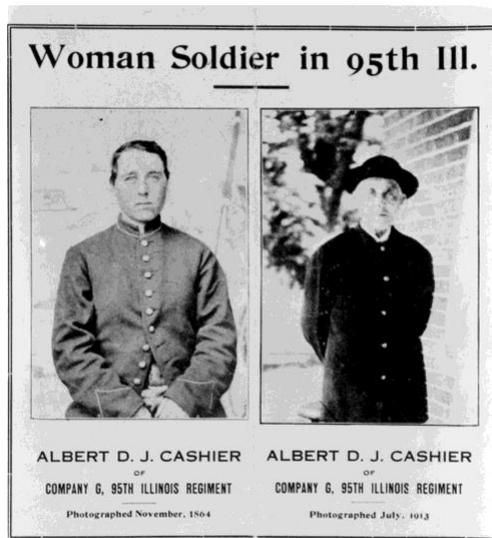
Living as a man, a lifelong journey

Jennie Hodgers (Albert Cashier), and Sarah Emma Edmonds (Franklin Thompson), two women soldiers who through documentation lived the majority of their lives as a man. Both Hodges and Edmonds served for the Union army. Their wartime experiences were similar but distinct. Historians know far more about Edmonds than Hodgers because of Edmonds memoir. Hodgers life is known through newspaper articles, their pension application, and their application to live in the Soldier’s home. Living your life for many years as a man without the majority of individuals around you knowing about your life is admirable and encouraging to individuals today that the lifelong struggle to know who you are is okay. Understanding the life long journey of these individuals for the purposes of this paper will go in alphabetical order, using the male names of the individual soldiers.

¹⁵ Fischer, Gayle Veronica. “A matter of wardrobe? Mary Edwards Walker, a Nineteenth-Century American Cross Dresser.” *Fashion Theory The Journal of Dress, Body, and Culture* 2:3, 2015, 245-268, DOI: 10.2752/13670498779476181, 246

¹⁶ Fischer, “A matter of wardrobe?”, 247-248

Jennie Rodgers (Albert D. J. Cashier)



Both pictures taken of Albert Cashier. ¹⁷

Left picture: During the Civil War (unknown year)

Right picture: Toward end of life (unknown year)

Who was Jennie Rodgers?

Jennie Rodgers is the picture of an individual that America was founded for. Rodgers came to the United States as an Immigrant. Born in Ireland in on December 25, 1844, and found her way to US many years before the Civil War as a stowaway clad in boy's clothes, and adopted a boys name. ^{18 19 20}After arriving in the US Rodgers found herself taking up residence in Belvidere, Illinois, which is located northwest of Chicago about 75 miles. ^{21 22} Not much is known about her life in Ireland or why she made the move to the United States. An assumption

¹⁷ NPR of Illinois, <http://www.nprillinois.org/post/little-soldier-big-mystery#stream/0> (November 15, 2018)

¹⁸ Leonard, Elizabeth D. *All the Daring of the Soldier: Women of the Civil War Armies*. New York, NY: Penguin Group 1999. 185

¹⁹ Unknown Author, "Posed as a man 60 years "Albert" Cashier, who served in Civil War, committed to insane asylum, *The Sunday Star, Washington D.C. 469, 19541*, March 29, 1914

No known documentation is available to understand why Rodgers chose the name of Albert Cashier.

²⁰ Headquarters Illinois Soldier's and Sailor's Home Quincy, Illinois, Application for Albert Cashier, Illinois State Archives

²¹ Leonard, All the Daring, 185 & MapQuest, <https://www.mapquest.com/us/illinois/belvidere-il-28203525> (November 20, 2018)

²² Unknown Author, "Posed as a man 60 years "Albert" Cashier,

of why she moved to America could be because of the Great Famine, causing stress and need to relocate for her family and herself.

Her military service could only happen if she was a he. When the Civil War started, Jennie Rodgers enlisted with the Illinois Company G, 95th Illinois Infantry i as Albert Cashier on September 4, 1862. ²³ ²⁴Prior to the war, Rodgers had already been using the name and dressing like a man, the war provided a way for Albert to help their country.

As a soldier Cashier was not the tallest of their fellow soldiers but they were one who was held in continuous high regard. Historian Gerhard P. Clausius wrote one of the earliest known articles about Albert Cashier published in 1958, and his article provides some of the best details about Cashier available. Known as “the little fellow” Cashier stood five feet tall. ²⁵ Throughout the war Cashier and his comrades fought in many battles, primarily in the western field of operations, being one of the first regiments to enter the battled and defeated Vicksburg. ²⁶ Cashier was described as behaving with gallantry, and was highly regarded by his fellow soldiers. ²⁷ They were a good soldier, was able to withstand the long marches, the rigors of camp life, and (when) handling a musket in battle, he was the equal of any in the company. ²⁸ They managed to make it through the war without being discovered for who they were. They were discharged from the army on August 17, 1865 for the reasons of no longer required. ²⁹

Post war Cashier was able to live a life back in Illinois as a strong and well liked member of the community. After the war they moved south to a community of Saunemin, Illinois where

²³ Leonard, All the Daring 195

²⁴ Headquarters Illinois

²⁵ Clausius, G. P. (1958). The Little Soldier of the 95th: Albert DJ Cashier. *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society (1908-1984)*, 51(4), 380-387., 380

²⁶ Clausius, The Little Soldier, 381

²⁷ Unknown Author, “Posed as a man 60 years “Albert” Cashier,

²⁸ Clausius, The Little Soldier., 381

²⁹ Headquarters, Illinois

they made a living as a truck gardener and handyman around town. In 1911, while working as a handyman, Cashier was working in the garage of State Senator Ira M. Lish and was injured by an automobile and sustained a fractured leg.³⁰ A local physician was called and through examination discovered Cashier's gender was not male but female. The Senator and Physician agreed to keep Cashier's now discovered identity a secret, and agreed to help Cashier apply to live at the Soldier's and Sailors' Home in Quincy, Illinois. In their application to the Illinois Soldier's and Sailor's Home Cashier gave some great details about themselves from personal description to when they enrolled in the military to when their pension file was filed.

The injuries suffered from the automobile had them bedridden, causing the need to have a move to a group home. At the time of their injury Cashier was sixty-six years old.³¹ After several years of living in the home, their mental health declined to the point that in 1914 they were transferred to the state hospital at Watertown (now East Moline). At the time of their admittance their symptoms were described as having "no memory, noisy at times, poor sleeper, and feeble".³² where they were able to live until their death in October of 1915.³³ Their journey coming from Ireland to living a long and good life as a handyman, to the end of their life still showing support from others to live among other veterans makes Cashier's story a unique one.

Cashier not only lived a good life, before, during, and after the war but the Veteran status' that Cashier achieved are quite honorable. Senator Lish and their comrades helped Cashier with applying for entry into the Soldiers Home. Additionally, they helped them apply for their pension using their male name, all while knowing that they were born female. Their

³⁰ Clausius, *The Little Soldier*, 381

³¹ Clausius, *The Little Soldier*, 385

³² Clausius, *The Little Soldier*, 386

³³ Davis, Rodney O. "Private Albert Cashier as regarded by his/her comrades." *Illinois Historical Journal*. 82:2, 1989, 109

pension application was submitted on February 14, 1890, and because on the pension application there is a second date of April 29, 1911, the original application was likely denied but was approved in 1907 with the support of her fellow soldiers and the state senator.³⁴ Part of being admitted was the fact that “he is so far disabled by total disability as to now be incapable of earning his own living.”³⁵ On their pension file they are listed as an invalid and the certificate number for their pension is 1001137.³⁶ The pension they received was for twelve dollars a month, payable on the 4th of the next July at the Chicago Pension office.³⁷ In addition to getting a pension, upon her death in 1915, Cashier was buried with full military honors in the cemetery at Saunemin, Illinois, and was buried not using their female name but as Albert D. J. Cashier.³⁸ The remarkable life of Cashier is one that Historians and scholars have limited documentation about, but what is available tells a tale that is unique among the different women soldiers. The nationalism that Cashier had choosing to disguise themselves in the opposite gender to serve and live in the masculine expectations of society is quite remarkable.

³⁴ Headquarters Illinois

³⁵ Headquarters Illinois

³⁶ Pension File, Cashier

³⁷ Headquarters, Illinois

³⁸ Clausius, 386

Sarah Emma Edmonds (Franklin Thompson)



Left Picture: Franklin Thompson

Right Picture: Sarah Emma Edmonds ³⁹

Who was Sarah Edmonds?

Sarah Emma Edmonds lived a slightly different experience than Albert Cashier. Both Edmonds and Cashier immigrated to the United States. Both took on the identity of self declaration of a male early in life. Edmonds migrated to the United States from Canada. In her own words Sarah described their journey to the US:

“I left my rural home, not far from the banks of the St. John’s River, in the Providence of New Brunswick, and made my way to the United States. An insatiable thirst for education led me to this for I believed then as now, that the “Foreign Missionary” field was the one in which I must labor, sooner or later.” ⁴⁰

Similar to Cashier, Edmonds was able to find good people to surround themselves with describing the individuals around themselves as good people, and kind. ⁴¹ Born in December

³⁹ Edmonds picture, (<http://mcculloughsaga.com/sarah-emma-edmondsan-unlikely-union-soldier/>) (November 20, 2018)

⁴⁰ Edmonds, Sarah E. *Memoirs of a Soldier, Nurse and Spy: A Woman’s Adventures in the Union Army*. Dekalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press 1999, 4

⁴¹ Edmonds, *Memoirs of a Soldier*, 3

1841, Edmonds journey to the northern United States would have her arrive close to the start of the war. The war declaration gave Edmonds a couple of choices. “It is true, I was not an American - I was not obliged to remain here during the terrible strife - I could return to my native land where my parents would welcome me to the home of my childhood, and my brothers and sisters would rejoice at my coming.... But these were not my sire, to seek my own personal ease and comfort while so much sorrow and distress filled the land.”⁴² A return to Canada would potentially would have been negative for Edmonds because of their identity as a man and not as a woman. The nationalism that Edmonds showed by choosing to stay in a country that was not one of their birth and to ensure that their new home could see their dedication.

Thompson’s military service brought them directly into battle when fighting with the 2nd Michigan Infantry Company F.⁴³ During their military service they served in many assigned including: the Secret Service, serving as a postman, and others were part of their overall military career while on the battlefield.

One of the major debates about Edmonds/Thompson time during the war is if they were strictly a soldier or if they served in other roles. Their memoir hints to Historians and scholars of being in three different roles during the war: a soldier, a nurse, and a spy. A cautionary way to examine Edmonds memoir comes from Historian Elizabeth Leonard when she writes “Edmond’s primary purpose for writing her memoir was to provide readers with entertainment worth paying for, and she naturally adopted the colorful, exaggerated, dramatic style of her era in order to enhance her already fascinating story.”⁴⁴ Historians including Leonard do not dispute their

⁴² Edmonds, *Memoirs of a Soldier*, 3

⁴³ Edmonds, *Memoirs of a Soldier*, xiv

⁴⁴ Edmonds, *Memoirs of a Soldier*,xxi

military service during the war but its the claims in their memoir about being a spy that is called into a debate, mostly due to lack of documentation to proof if they were or were not a spy.

Living as a man, a war journey

Women soldiers were not all as fortunate as Edmonds and Hodgers to fight in the war and survive the war. The Civil War was one way for many women soldiers to leave the expectations of society as a woman and move into the expectations of being a man by dressing as a man and joining the war. Historians and scholars know of thousands of possible women soldiers but only a few documented cases survive. Logically, the number of documented cases makes sense. The individuals were trying to stay under the radar and not provide any reason to be caught. The number of women soldiers who brought their secret to their deaths during the war was high. One documented woman soldier who died surviving her country was Sarah Rosetta Wakeman or Lyons Wakeman.

Sarah Rosetta Wakeman (Lyons Wakeman)



Lyons Wakeman ⁴⁵

No known photo of Sarah Wakeman can be located.

Sarah Wakeman is one of the woman soldiers who was almost lost to history. Wakeman died during the war, and from known records her identity as a woman at the time of her death was not discovered or at least not revealed. They were buried under their male name of Lyons Wakeman, and like many soldiers of the Civil War was a name on a grave marker. Why would they be lost to history though? It was not until 1940 that Sarah Wakeman/Lyons Wakeman's story was discovered in the attic of a member of the Doane family when a young Jackson K. Doane first discovered hand written letters from Sarah and from Lyons in his aunt's attic. ⁴⁶ From 1940 through 1976 Wakeman's letters sat in a trunk in the attic of Jackson's aunt. In 1976 Jackson was helping his aunt clean up her attic when they re-discovered the letters and made the important historical connection that Sarah Wakeman and Lyons Wakeman was the same person. ⁴⁷ For a little over 100 years, Wakeman's secret was kept a secret. Historically, having these letters available to read in a printable volume is remarkable

⁴⁵ Wakeman photo (<https://ehistory.osu.edu/biographies/sarah-rosetta-wakeman>), November 20, 2018

⁴⁶ Wakeman, Rosetta.. *An Uncommon Soldier: The Civil War Letters of Sarah Rosetta Wakeman, Alias, Private Lyons Wakeman 153rd Regiment, New York State Volunteers*. Edited by Lauren C. Burgress, Pasadena, MD: The Minerva Center 1994., XV

⁴⁷ Wakeman, *An Uncommon Soldier*, XV

and a valuable asset to understanding fully some of the experiences of the women soldiers during the war. But who was Wakeman? What was their military service like? Did they survive the war?

Who was Sarah Wakeman?

Sarah Rosetta Wakeman was born on January 16, 1843, and was the eldest daughter of nine children, living in Afton, New York.⁴⁸ Unlike Cashier and Thompson, Wakeman was born and raised in the US. Wakeman's youth was spent dressed in girls clothing and she did dress in male clothing until the war. Their military service and their reason for dressing as a male are written throughout her letters which were discovered in Aunt Doane's attack. The early life of Wakeman cannot be located via her letters. Her early life is only known because Historians have through careful research pieced her life together. A life of hardship is what appears through her letters to be the reason for her to want to join the military.

Joining the military in any war is never an easy or a choice made without discussion amongst the individual and their family, or the individual to themselves seeing what they do either for their country for themselves. Wakeman seems to have joined the war to truly help their family survive. They enlisted with the 153rd New York on August 30, 1862 and reported their name as "Lyons".⁴⁹ In the letters, Wakeman lists their name as either Sarah or "Edwin" and the use of either name is never consistent. The first use of Edwin appears to be in 1863.⁵⁰ Because Rosetta/Edwin (Lyons) uses the same last name, any letters will be introduced using the surname and first name will only be introduced when it's helpful to the letter or the quote itself. In a letter

⁴⁸ Wakeman, *An Uncommon Soldier*, 8

⁴⁹ Wakeman, *An Uncommon Soldier*, 10

⁵⁰ Wakeman, *An Uncommon Soldier*, 55

written on November 24, 1862 Wakeman tells their parents and siblings about joining the military:

“I received your letter on Sunday the 23. I was very glad to hear from you and I learn that you are all well. I am well and enjoying good health... When I got [to Utica] I saw some soldiers. They wanted I should enlist so I did. I got 100 and 52\$ in money. I enlisted for 3 years or soon [as] discharged. All the money I send you I want you should spend it for the family in clothing, or something to eat. Don't save it for me I can get all the money I want.”⁵¹

Enlisting from this letter came through necessity to help their family. They never really discuss in any of their letters on why they chose to enlist and not have one their brothers join the war. Historically we will never know, but the assumption can be made that Wakeman possibly was always interested in “wearing pants” and the war provided a means for them to express themselves in a way they could not at home. While fighting was hard the fear of discovery and needing to return to a previous life was also one that Wakeman and many other soldiers experienced as part of their military service.

Fear of discovery, or having to return home was the last thing Wakeman would have wanted to do. Freedom through clothing, and a masculine name had to have been liberating and freeing. Wakeman is a great example of what Mary Walker was arguing throughout her career. Wakeman while they may not have had a large formal education (an assumption based on the family size and needing to help send money home), Wakeman knew that anything shared to their family would be their word against their families. In a letter from January 20, 1864 Wakeman

⁵¹ Wakeman, *An Uncommon Soldier*, 18

Note that all letter quotes are in the same wording and punctuation as Wakeman. This is done to avoid taking away the feel and level of clarity that Wakeman can only provide in their own words.

wrote to their father signing the letter as Edwin R. Wakeman and says “I can’t come home this winter, for they have let some go home and they haven’t come back yet. Now they won’t let any more go home out of my company.”⁵² The truth is, Wakeman could have chosen to return home at anytime by revealing their gender, but they chose not to. The truth is Wakeman severed nobly and fought for the freedoms they deemed important.

Unlike Cashier or Edmonds, Wakeman did not survive the war. While records do not show that Wakeman’s female identity was ever exposed they did pass away during the later times of the war. May 3, 1864, Wakeman was admitted to the 153rd Regimental Hospital complaining of chronic diarrhea, the most deadly disease of the Civil War.⁵³ After initially being admitted to the Regimental Hospital they were transferred to the Marine U.S.A. General Hospital located in the New Orleans Barracks on May 22, 1864, and they passed away June 19, 1864.⁵⁴ Sadly, their death was not known to their family or regiment until August of 1864. They were buried with a soldiers burial in Chalmette National Cemetery in New Orleans with the name Lyons Wakeman.⁵⁵ Lyons Wakeman was only 21 years old at the time their death. History can only wonder what Wakeman could have accomplished if they had not died from chronic diarrhea.

Thousands of soldiers died during the Civil War, but Wakeman is the only known soldier with documentation of their life and their transition from being female to make to serve in the war. Having a short but noble life Wakeman’s life could have been lost to history if it was not for their letters being saved by their family to be rediscovered. Women soldiers served for the

⁵² Wakeman, *An Uncommon Soldier*, 60-61

The editors putting the letters together lead to the conclusion that she could have gone home at anytime should they choose to expose themselves. They chose not to.

⁵³ Wakeman, *An Uncommon Soldier*, 80

⁵⁴ Wakeman, *An Uncommon Soldier*, 81-82

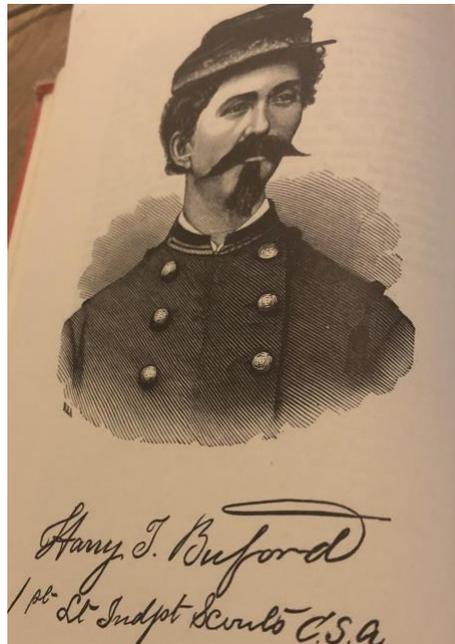
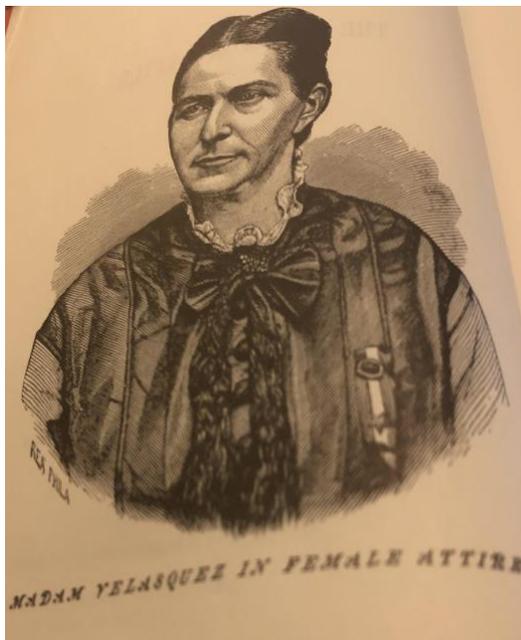
⁵⁵ Wakeman, *An Uncommon Soldier*, , 82

reasons of themselves but for some the women who chose to serve was to follow family or friends into the war to ensure that others were safe.

Living as a man, a journey of following loved ones

Women soldiers and their tales thus far have all been Union soldiers. The number of known women soldiers all served in the union army with one exception. This exception is of Loreta Janeta Velazquez. Velazquez is unique not only because they lived in the south and served for the Confederate army but they also was the only known soldier to enter the war masquerade as a man to follow her Husband into the war. Their experiences in the war are unique and their memoir originally published in 1876 tells a lot of unique information about what the war would have been like as a Confederate soldier and leader.

Loreta Janeta Velazquez (Harry T. Burford)



Left: Madame Velazquez in female attire ⁵⁶

Right: Harry T. Burford in male attire ⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Velazquez, Madame Loreta Janeta. *The Woman in Battle: A Narrative of the Exploits, Adventures, and Travels of Madame Loreta Janeta Velazquez*. Edited by C.J. Worthington . New York, NY: Arno Press 1972., front of book

⁵⁷ Velazquez, *The Woman in Battle*, between pages 59-60

Who was Madame Velazquez?

Similar to Cashier and Edmonds, Velazquez immigrated to the United States to presumably have a better life. Born in Cuba on June 26, 1832, and was the last child of their parents.⁵⁸ Their move to the United States came when they were almost one year old and their father fell heir to a large estate. One unique part of the story that Velazquez shares through their memoir is that the “idea of being a man”, and after all her family was in bed to dress myself in my cousin’s clothes, and to promenade by the hour before the mirror.⁵⁹ The idea of joining the military was from a young age and they describe their desire to be in male clothing as “gay in uniform of an office.”⁶⁰ Prior to discussing their military experience, Velazquez provided a detail about their assuming of male attire, the only known soldier to do so.

Choosing to masquerade oneself in male attire is not something one would share lightly or with just anyone. Even in modern society, the sharing of being gender-nonconforming or transgender is done with caution and care. Velazquez was clearly open with her husband about the desire to dress in men’s clothing. Their husband tried to convince them they were not in the need to dress like a man to truly no avail. One tactic he used was to try and describe the least pleasing features of masculine life but no description of what he told Velazquez is included in the memoir. A true loss to history. But the night before their husband departed to join some army buddies he allowed them to dress in one of his suits and escorted them to bar-rooms and other places of male resort. The best part of the larger description is in Velazquez’s own words when surveying themselves in the mirror:

“Braiding my hair very close, I put on a man’s wig, and a false mustache, and by tucking

⁵⁸ Velazquez, *The Woman in Battle*, 40

⁵⁹ Velazquez, *The Woman in Battle*, 42

⁶⁰ Velazquez, *The Woman in Battle*, 42

my pantaloons in my boots, as I had seen men do frequently, and otherwise arranging the garments, I managed to transform myself into a very presentable man. ⁶¹

Velazquez was fortunate that her husband was willing to help them see what even a brief taste of what men are like, and helping them to make the informed decision about if dressing as a man was something they wanted to. Their husband gave excellent perspective after their night out “I have done this to-night for the purpose of showing you what men are like, and how they behave themselves when they are out of the sight and hearing of women...what you have seen and heard is nothing to what you will be compelled to see and hear in camp, where men are deprived of female society.” ⁶² The disguise detail they provide however for when dressed as a soldier and serving are the most detailed available.

“My coats were heavily padded in the back, under the arms to the hips” to help hide the shape of a feminine body. When in New Orleans they had a French army tailor make a dozen fine wire net shields which could be worn and were by no means uncomfortable. Once [I] become accustomed to male attire, and to appearing before anybody and everybody in it , I lost all fear of being found out, and learned to act, talk, and almost think as a man.” ⁶³

Not only their description of taking on their disguise as a male soldier is unique about Velazquez and their memoir but they are also able to provide us with when they chose their name being used while in the army. The name chosen twas Lieutenant Harry T. Burford, C.S.A. and while the exact reason for not choosing the name specifically they describe the first time they saw their name on a trunk their “heart fairly jumped for joy, and I felt as if the dream of my life were

⁶¹ Velazquez, *The Woman in Battle*, 53

⁶² Velazquez, *The Woman in Battle*, 55

⁶³ Velazquez, *The Woman in Battle*, 57-58

already more than half realized.”⁶⁴ Their only regret in choosing to dress as a man for the war was “the necessity to part with my long and luxuriant hair.”⁶⁵ Changing every aspect about yourself is not easy.

Velazquez like their Union counterparts served as a strong member of the military. Their memoir in great detail describes their military career fighting for the confederacy a cause that was of importance for Velazquez. Similar to Cashier from the Union Army Velazquez was never discovered while serving and they ended up living a strong and good life. Velazquez followed their husband into the war but through their own military service gave a positive memory of Harry T. Bradford for their fellow soldiers.

All these women either shared their story, or their story has been rediscovered by Historians and scholars. It is too bad that individuals cannot live their true self and serve in the war, but serving for them was not only a way to dress how they internally felt but to serve their country and to help make a difference for their lives, the lives of the families, and the lives of other Americans.

Conclusion

Women soldiers in the Civil War were not the first nor the last time history will see brave women choose to masquerade themselves in order to serve their country. Serving your country has an impact on an individual. The Psychology of Service has demonstrated that “the Civil War experience changed men; most men who served for any period of time underwent a psychological transformation... the wartime experience created new identities.”⁶⁶ Prior to the

⁶⁴ Velazquez, *The Woman in Battle*, 61

⁶⁵ Velazquez, *The Woman in Battle*, 63

⁶⁶ Mitchell, Reid, *Civil War Soldiers*, 56

Civil War, Deborah Sampson is one of the most famous women soldiers in US History having served in the Revolutionary War. ⁶⁷Others that served in the Spanish American War have also been documented by historians. The bravery to want to serve (no matter the war), the bravery to take a big chance and masquerade oneself, and the bravery to desire to go daily with the risk of being exposed and possibly socially shamed is one of the reasons that these soldiers are an important part of our history. Historically it is unfortunate that we do not have more examples of these brave women, but the stories of Cashier, Thompson, Wakeman, and Harford show us as historians and scholars that amazing individuals can bring new and unique perspectives to our understanding of history. All the women soldiers who served in the war were changed, took risks to serve, and have deep respect for their desire to serve their country and also to live their true authentic selves. Masquerading as oneself is a true and lived experience by these individuals, which help put them in to a unique part of Civil War History, the history of women soldiers.

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⁶⁷ Coudert, Aluys, "Feminine Warriors in U.S. History fought bravely disguised as men", *The Sunday Star*, Washington D.C., July 22, 1923

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Appendix A: