



The Volunteer

Volume 1 Issue 2 The Voice of the U.S. Sanitary Commission

Spring 1861

NEW COMMISSION FORMED!!

President Lincoln signs

bill making the USSC an official agency. The President reluctantly signed, stating that the USSC could well become the "fifth wheel to the coach", obviously not yet seeing the need for these women's efforts. His mind would soon be changed. During the next four years of civil war the volunteer work of thousands of women in the U.S. Sanitary Commission would cut the disease rate of the Union Army in half, and raise around Twenty-five million dollars in support of the Northern war effort.

In the spring of 1861 a collection of very well to do ladies from New York and the Women's Central Association of Relief along with a group of highly influential gentlemen met in New York City. This meeting was the beginnings of what was to be known as the U.S. Sanitary Commission, whose roots came initially from the work done by the British Sanitary Commission during the Crimean War, years earlier.

Despite the skepticism of men in general and often blatant defiance from physicians, surgeons, the military and the Federal government, the work went on. Women tirelessly

canvassed neighborhoods for donations, worked as nurses, organized diet kitchens in the



Seal of the
United States
Sanitary Commission

camp, ran hospital ships, knitted socks & gloves, sewed blankets & uniforms, baked food, organized Sanitary Fairs that raised millions of dollars worth of goods and funds for the Federal army.

HELP FOR TROOPS!

"Depots" were set up to collect, organize and repack food and supplies being sent by wives, sisters, mothers, and sweethearts who had joined together in thousands of ladies aids societies all over the north. Sanitary agents prowled the camps inspecting the living conditions and the hospitals, setting standards for the hiring of medical personnel. An added accomplishment of the USSC was that it allowed women to hone organizational and administrative skills during their experience with the commission, which was an important advancement for women, as they entered the world of business more and more.

After the war, the USSC worked with Union Veterans to secure their bounties, back pay, and apply for pensions, until it was finally disbanded in May of 1866.

Katherine Wormeley, commission activist, once said of
The U.S. Sanitary Commission that it is . . .

"The great artery, which bears the people's love to the people's army."