

United States Sanitary Commission

The United States Sanitary Commission was founded in 1861 as the American Civil War began. Its purpose was to promote clean and healthy conditions in the Union Army camps. The Sanitary Commission staffed field hospitals, raised money, provided supplies, and worked to educate the military and government on matters of health and sanitation.

The Western Sanitary Commission, founded in St. Louis, was also active, though it was not related to the national organization.

Many women volunteered for work with the Sanitary Commission. Some provided direct service at the field hospitals and camps, organizing medical services, acting as nurses, and performing other tasks. Others raised money and managed the organization.

The Sanitary Commission also provided food, lodging, and care for soldiers returning from service. After the end of fighting, the Sanitary Commission worked with veterans in obtaining promised pay, benefits, and pensions.

After the Civil War, many of the women volunteers found work in jobs often previously closed to women, on the basis of their Sanitary Commission experience. Some, expecting more opportunities for women and not finding them, became activists for women's rights. Many returned to their families and to traditional female roles as wives and mothers.

During its existence, the Sanitary Commission raised about \$5 million in money and \$15 million in donated supplies.

Women of the Sanitary Commission: Some well-known women associated with the Sanitary Commission: Dorothea Dix, Clara Barton, Elizabeth Blackwell, Mary Livermore, Louisa May Alcott, and Mary Ann Bickerdyke.

The Sanitary Commission was created in the spring of 1861 by private citizens, including Henry Whitney Bellows and Dorothea Dix. The Sanitary Commission was officially sanctioned by the War Department on June 9, 1861. Legislation creating the United States Sanitary Commission (USSC) was signed (reluctantly) by President Abraham Lincoln on June 18, 1861. The Sanitary Commission was disbanded in May of 1866