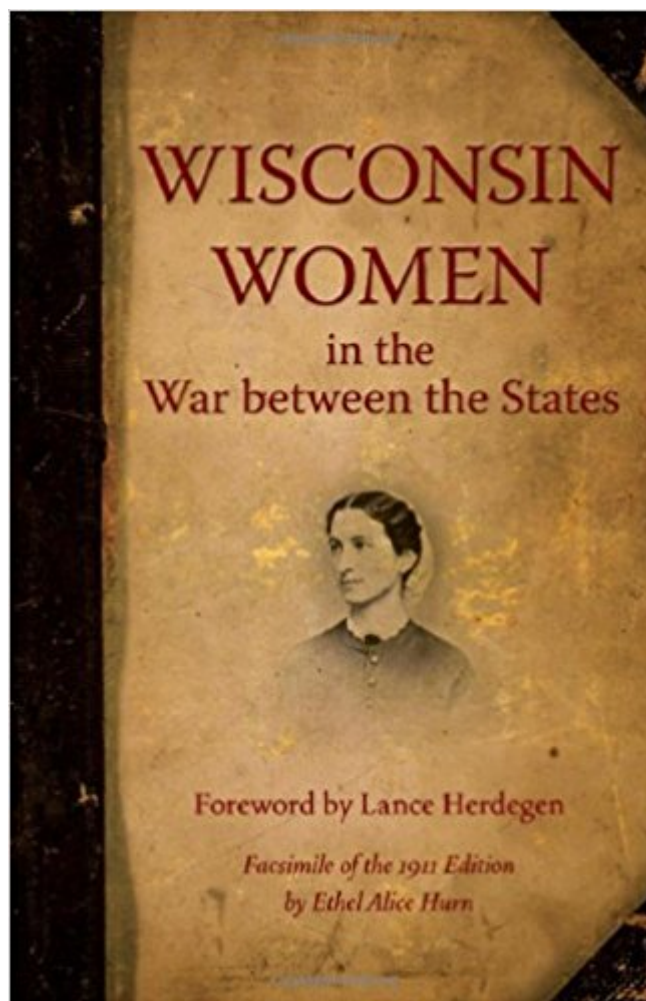


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# Wisconsin Women In The War Between The States



## Synopsis

“There was too much to be done by the most of us, to keep the wolf from the door, to give way to our feelings, and it was better so. It gave us the feeling that we, too, although not enlisted in the ranks South, had a battle to fight at home on more than one line, and the worst of all was to keep up hope against hope, that our loved ones would be spared to come back to us.” As the fiftieth anniversary of the American Civil War neared, the Wisconsin History Commission was established to develop and publish a series of “original papers” on Wisconsin’s role in what was officially called the War of Rebellion. Picked as the sixth selection and published in May 1911 was Wisconsin Women in the War between the States by Ethel Alice Hurn. In many ways it was a landmark effort. It was one of the first formal recognitions “not only in Wisconsin but nationally” of the overlooked and almost forgotten role Northern women played in 1861–1865. The author of the study was Ethel Hurn of Oshkosh, then a student at the University of Wisconsin. Gathering the material for the book proved a daunting task. During the Civil War era women could not vote, hold bank accounts, or take a direct role in business. Nevertheless, in the time of national crisis, women took over farms and shops and other endeavors, and some left quiet family hearths to move onto the public stage. They prepared food, sewed and laundered, knitted socks and gloves, and organized campaigns and fairs as relief efforts that raised millions of dollars to aid wounded soldiers and assist war widows and orphans. However, these women’s work was generally undertaken without thought of keeping a formal record. It could be found only in scattered collections of letters, newspaper files, several interviews, and the brief reports and pamphlets of soldier fairs and soldiers’ aid societies. Wisconsin Women in the War between the States is just as significant today as it was a century ago because it documented an important turning point in the changing role of women in American society. Other scholars have added to the record in the passing years, but Hurn’s groundbreaking book is welcomed back in print during this 150th anniversary of the American Civil War to be discovered and enjoyed as well as to enlighten a new generation of readers.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Wisconsin Women in the War between the States" is a history book that is history itself. This new publication by the Wisconsin Historical Society Press is a facsimile of a 1911 edition by Ether Alice Hurn. It relates the stories of the home front from a time when the War was a living memory. It brings to the readers' minds aspects of the war overlooked in volumes devoted to battles and generals. This book is organized by chapters devoted to movements by the girls left behind. It begins with the departure of the regiments during which the mothers, sisters and sweethearts, encouraged, teased and feted their men folk, all while trying to conceal their own fears. "John, if you do not enlist, I'll never let you kiss me again as long as I live!" Although the government was responsible for outfitting the troops, Soldiers' Aid Societies, with much participation by women, supplemented the issue with things such as extra socks, warmer blankets, bandages and mittens with thumbs and index fingers. Food collected and distributed for Wisconsin's regiments was sent to the field where it was often shared with fighters from other states. We often read of the hardships of the fighting men, but this book highlights the ordeals of the women who had to maintain the farms and the businesses, raise the families and keep the economy on which the Army depended going. I have often read of units mutinying because their pay was delayed and I generally thought "so much for patriotism", but this tome puts that in a different light. It points out that the soldiers were relying on their pay to send back to their families. Those who enlisted for a limited time may have received letters telling of the hardships that only their return could alleviate. One chapter is devoted to the crucial role letters played in maintaining connections between the warriors and those they fought to defend. An interesting comment is that the letters from home often told more of the overall war than the letters from the battle lines. One particular concern of the ladies was care for the wounded. Many Wisconsin women directed their attention to the field hospitals, and none so than Mrs. Cordelia Harvey. Widow of Wisconsin Governor Louis Harvey, who drowned on a tour of Wisconsin regiments at Pittsburg Landing (Shiloh), she took his mission to improve medical care for the wounded warriors right to President Lincoln whom she convinced to overrule his prior decision and

set up hospitals where the wounded could recover in the cool, healthy Northern air. As I read this I was reminded that after my uncle was wounded south of Chattanooga he was sent to a hospital in Indiana to recuperate. I mentioned that the writing is a century old. The style is different than that found in contemporary works, but sometimes what is said and the how it is phrased opens our minds to new ways of envisioning the War. Start with the title. Current practice is to refer to the Civil War, except for Southern sympathizers who prefer the "War Between The States" to emphasize that two nation states, United and Confederate, fought each other. When the War was still a life experience for some here was a Northern Woman referring to the "War between the States." Surprising isn't it? We often read of the initial enthusiasm for what was expected to be a quick war, but consider an April 22, 1861 quote from Governor Randall to the Patriotic Women of Wisconsin warning of "the long war likely to follow". Perhaps some knew. Savor Mrs. Harvey's description of her meetings with Lincoln. Picture in your mind's eye his objections and resentments, his facial expressions and, finally, his acquiescence to her request. This you can only get through the testimony of an eyewitness. Look elsewhere for tales of martial glory but delve into "Wisconsin Women in the War Between the States" to appreciate the roles these heroines, some famous but most unknown, played in our great national tragedy. I did receive a free copy of this book for review.

This book is an interesting insight into the roles of women who supported their soldiers during the civil war.....from making bandages to raising funds for hospitals, orphanages, and old soldiers homes. Good read.

This book personalized the sacrifices and hard work done by the women on the home front while their husbands, sons and fathers were off to war. It's difficult for me to adequately describe how much I was impressed by the activities organized by the families to raise money and provide much needed food, clothing and other items for the soldiers. In an era when women could not even vote, several women approached government officials with ideas to establish better hospitals and homes for wounded soldiers. I have recommended this book to many people already.

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