

Historical Notes to accompany letter dated:

07/30/62: 034

Historical Notes

Cyrus Hardaway's letter home of July 30, 1862 confirmed the deteriorating physical condition of McClellan's army as it grew sicker perched on Harrison's Landing on the Virginia Peninsula. It was a precarious situation, "There are a great many sick ones and a great many are dying every day." In response to his army's strategic and unhealthy predicament, and over McClellan's objections, Lincoln ordered the termination of McClellan's *Peninsular Campaign*, and the return of the Army of the Potomac to near Washington, D.C.

Among the many changes occasioned by the Civil War, medicine, medical care, and nursing were among the more notable. American women, both Northern and Southern, encouraged by the heroism of Florence Nightingale during the Crimean War, volunteered in numbers contradictory to their incorrectly perceived role as protected and privileged. Working for volunteer agencies, providing books, clothing, spiritual nurture, or directly providing hospital assistance, American women fully participated in the war.

Many women earned enduring fame for their Civil War contributions. Prominent among Northern women was Clara Barton, an unmarried Patent Office clerk. During the war, on an almost superhuman scale, she established soldier's aid societies, organized medical supplies, and periodically worked in battlefield hospitals comforting the wounded and making life miserable for shoddy medical surgeons. After the war, she traveled to Europe and upon her return, established the American Red Cross.

It is unfortunate that we do not have the ability to read Mary Ann Hardaway Beardslee's corresponding letters written to her son during the Civil War. They no longer exist. Those letters would be most useful in determining what she was thinking and feeling while her son was engaged in fighting the Civil War. Occasionally by reading Hardaway's letters very closely, we can obtain a limited view of her thoughts and feelings. In Hardaway's letter written to his mother on July 20, 1862, we can imply that like many other American women, she not only sent supplies to her son, but also, wanted to know what to send to other "sick soldiers."