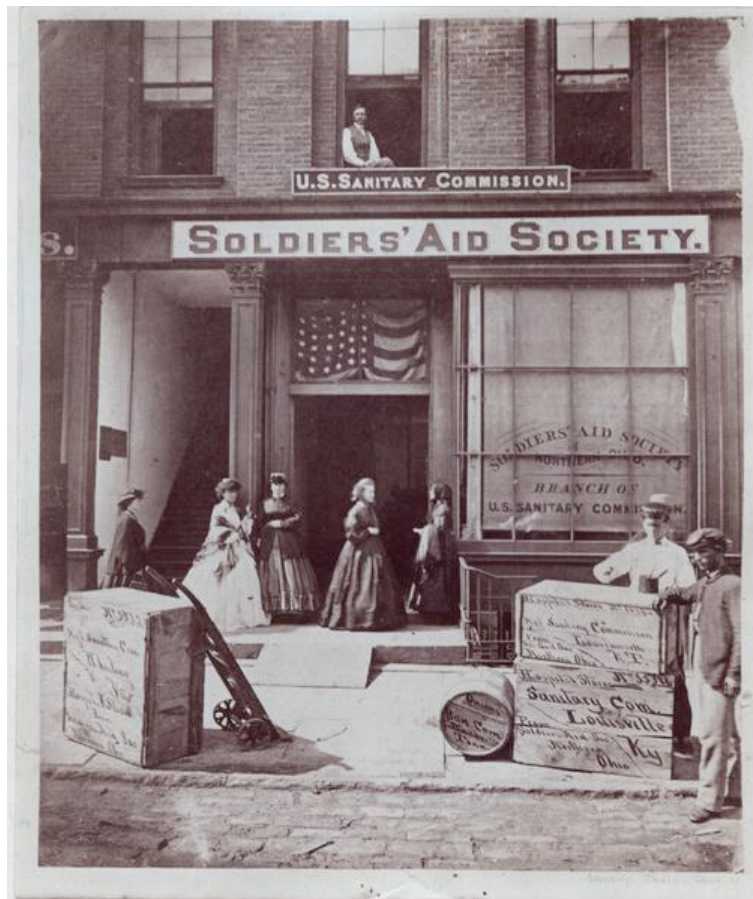


Portrait of Rebecca Rouse



Rebecca Rouse (1799-1887) moved to Cleveland in 1830, at the age of 31. As a true organizer, she first founded the Ladies Tract Society, which distributed Christian pamphlets in the hopes of encouraging morality. In 1843 Rouse established the Martha Washington and Dorcas Society (MWDS) as the city's first relief organization. Much of her work focused on temperance, or fighting what she considered the evils of alcohol, but the MWDS also provided food, clothing, wood, and even job placements for families in need. By 1852, Rouse had disbanded the MWDS and founded the Society for the Relief of the Poor, the Protestant Orphan Asylum, and the Cleveland Ladies Temperance Union.

A decade later, as the Civil War brewed, Rouse organized the Ladies' Aid Society just five days after President Lincoln's call for troops. This organization was renamed the Soldiers' Aid Society and was a precursor to the American Red Cross. As its president, she raised vast amounts of money by organizing sanitary fairs. Sanitary fairs were fundraising bazaars that became the most popular way of supporting the Union during the Civil War. Cleveland's women raised funds, opened a soldiers' home and hospital, and created an employment agency for discharged soldiers. They were pivotal in supporting Union soldiers.

For Kids!

What are some ways you can help your community?