

## Information Sheet

**R**      **Risley, Alice Cary, 1847-1939.**  
**478**      **Papers, 1857-1991, bulk 1863-1939.**  
            **Seventeen folders.**

### **MICROFILM**

This collection is available at [The State Historical Society of Missouri](http://The State Historical Society of Missouri). If you would like more information, please contact us at [shsresearch@umsystem.edu](mailto:shsresearch@umsystem.edu).

This collection consists of correspondence and miscellaneous papers of Alice Cary Risley, a volunteer nurse for the Union army in New Orleans during the Civil War, and a postwar resident of West Plains, Missouri. Risley was active in the National Association of Army Nurses of the Civil War and the Ladies of the Grand Army of the Republic. She corresponded with members of these organizations and with former soldiers.

Alice Cary Farmer was born on 1 November 1847 in Wilmington, Ohio. Her parents were natives of Massachusetts, and, through her mother's family, Alice was related to Alice and Phoebe Cary, noted poets of Ohio. When Alice was three years old the Farmers moved to New Iberia in the Bayou Teche region of Louisiana, where her father made barrels for use in the sugar trade.

As Unionists with northern political opinions the Farmers were not welcome on the Bayou Teche after the Civil War broke out. In the fall of 1861, Alice's father fled and went into hiding in New Orleans, leaving his family in New Iberia. Her mother was accused later of being a spy, and in August 1862 she fled with Alice, paddling an open boat most of the way to New Orleans, which by then was occupied by Union forces. There they were reunited with her father.

After its capture in April 1862 New Orleans became the primary staging area for Union efforts to recapture the lower Mississippi Valley. The city was crowded with Yankee troops, and public buildings and hospitals were filled with sick and wounded soldiers. Many of the Union infantry regiments were New England units, and in the St. James Hospital Alice's mother found men of the 26<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts Infantry, which had been recruited in her hometown of Townsend, Massachusetts. Some of the soldiers were in fact the sons of her former schoolmates.

The Farmers volunteered their services to the hospitals and began a daily routine of visiting the various locations in New Orleans, bringing food and delicacies. When the wards became full they took patients into their own home, sometimes for weeks at a time. Their work was entirely voluntary although the army did allow them to draw rations for the soldiers they sheltered away from the hospital. Their service to the sick and wounded continued through September 1865.

After the war the Farmers left New Orleans, relocating first in Massachusetts, then Iowa, and finally in Illinois. In 1870, near St. Louis, Alice married Samuel A. Risley, a former officer of the 177<sup>th</sup> Illinois Infantry and signal officer in General Grant's army before Vicksburg. Risley had been hospitalized in New Orleans in 1863, stayed at the Farmers' home, and had corresponded with Alice following the war.

After his marriage, Sam Risley came to West Plains in Howell County, Missouri, to establish the *South Missouri Journal* in partnership with B. F. Olden. Later their appointments as postmaster and assistant postmistress at West Plains and Sam's election as mayor put the Risleys among the most prominent of Howell County's citizens in social and civic circles. Sam died in 1895, and in her later years Alice lived in Jefferson City and Columbia, and with her son in Alexandria, Louisiana.

Alice was active in the Women's Relief Corps of Missouri, the Ladies of the Grand Army of the Republic, and, especially in the years after Samuel Risley's death in 1894, the National Association of Army Nurses of the Civil War. This organization, composed of women who had volunteered their services in hospitals during the war, met annually as an allied group at the national encampment of the Grand Army of the Republic. Alice was elected national president by the nurses in 1915 and held the post until her death in 1939, when she was the last surviving member of the National Association of Army Nurses. Alice attended Grand Army of the Republic reunions faithfully for forty years. She was featured often in stories in the national press which usually described her meetings with graybearded veterans whom she had once nursed in New Orleans. The Ladies of

the Grand Army of the Republic Circle #76 at West Plains was named after Alice Risley. She died in Alexandria in 1939, and is buried in Oak Lawn Cemetery in West Plains. In 1940 state officials of the Ladies of the Grand Army of the Republic dedicated a granite marker at her gravesite.

Alice Risley's papers and memorabilia were donated to the Harlin Museum at West Plains in 1990 by her grandson, John Bohn, in behalf of the descendants of Alice's daughter, Florence Cary Risley. The collection consists primarily of incoming correspondence along with miscellaneous papers concerning the National Association of Army Nurses and the national encampments of the Grand Army of the Republic. The correspondence addressed to Alice Risley begins with a single letter in 1857 and continues through 1935. There is only one folder of war-dated material but it includes letters written before and after the family's flight from the Bayou Teche, a pass from the provost marshal of New Orleans, and a loyalty oath signed by Alice's mother, Phoebe Farmer. During her service in army hospitals she received letters from soldiers and their families in Maine, Massachusetts, and New Hampshire thanking her for attention to hospital patients. There is also a postwar invitation to a "Grand Anniversary Ball" hosted by Co. B, 26<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts Volunteers, at Groton Junction, Massachusetts. Alice later became an honorary member of this regiment as well as the U.S. Veteran Signal Corps Association, a group to which her husband belonged, and corresponded with the officers of the organizations.

Her correspondents in later years included many soldiers whom she had aided while they were sick, as well as Gen. William Jewel of the Grand Army of the Republic, Margaret Grandle of the Ladies of the Grand Army of the Republic, William H. Taft, who looked into pension matters for her, and author George W. Cable, who answered her questions about Cables she had known in New Orleans during the war. Some of the material from the 1880s consists of recommendations by veterans for her appointment as postmistress of West Plains, and some from the early 1900s is stamped "U.S. Pension Office" and was apparently submitted to support her claim for a pension based on wartime service. A register of the correspondence has been prepared and has been filmed with the collection.

The miscellaneous papers include a wartime memoranda book containing the names of soldiers and notations of those who had died, an autograph book with signatures and verse by soldiers and friends, and a folder of poetry and verse, ca. 1854-1867. There are also "General Orders" issued by the president of the National Association of Army Nurses, 1915-1935, papers concerning the national encampments of the Grand Army of the Republic, 1909-1931, an undated address delivered to the Women's Relief Corps, newspaper clippings featuring her life and her activities during the Civil War, and ribbons and badges from various reunions.

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*Loaned for microfilming*

### **Shelf List**

This collection consists of correspondence and miscellaneous papers of Alice Cary Risley, a volunteer nurse for the Union army during the Civil War, and a postwar resident of West Plains, Missouri. Risley was active in the National Association of Army Nurses of the Civil War and the Ladies of the Grand Army of the Republic. She corresponded with members of these organizations and with former soldiers.

Folders 1-9: Correspondence, 1857-1935

- Folder 1: Correspondence, 1857
- Folder 2: Correspondence, 1861-1868
- Folder 3: Correspondence, 1886-1889
- Folder 4: Correspondence, 1890-1896
- Folder 5: Correspondence, 1900-1907
- Folder 6: Correspondence, 1911-1919
- Folder 7: Correspondence, 1922-1929
- Folder 8: Correspondence, 1932-1935
- Folder 9: Correspondence, undated

Folders 10-17: Miscellaneous papers, 1854-1991

Folder 10: Poetry and verse, ca. 1854-1867

Folder 11: Memoranda book, ca. 1861-1865

Folder 12: Autograph book, ca. 1864-1892

Folder 13: National Association of Army Nurses of the Civil War, General Orders and miscellaneous papers, 1895-1931

Folder 14: Grand Army of the Republic, national encampment papers, 1909-1931

Folder 15: Women's Relief Corps of Missouri, address, n.d.

Folder 16: Newspaper clippings, 1925-ca. 1940

Folder 17: Miscellaneous items, ca. 1909-1991

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### Index Cards

Bohn, Fred.

Bohn, John.

Bohn, Phil.

Cable, George W.

Cureall (Mo.).

Farmer, Phoebe P.

Farmer, Phoebe W.

Grand Army of the Republic.

Howell County (Mo.).

Illinois—History—Civil War, 1861-1865.

Indiana—History—Civil War, 1861-1865.

Iowa—History—Civil War, 1861-1865.

Ladies of the Grand Army of the Republic.

Louisiana—History—Civil War, 1861-1865.

Maine—History—Civil War, 1861-1865.

Massachussets—History—Civil War, 1861-1865.

Military nursing—Louisiana.

National Association of Army Nurses of the Civil War, 1861-1865.

New Hampshire—History—Civil War, 1861-1865.

New Orleans (La.)—History—Civil War, 1861-1865.

New York—History—Civil War, 1861-1865.

Nurses—Louisiana.

Ohio Society of St. Louis.

Risley, Alice Cary, 1847-1939.

Risley, Annie J.

Risley, Samuel A., -1894.

St. James Hospital (New Orleans, La.).

Sill, Henry F.

Sons of Veterans, U.S.A.

Sons of Veterans of the Civil War.

Taft, William H. (William Howard), 1857-1930.

United States. Army. Artillery Regiment, 5<sup>th</sup>.

United States—History—Civil War, 1861-1865.

United States—History—Civil War, 1861-1865—Medical care.

United States—History—Civil War, 1861-1865—Societies, etc.

United States Veterans Signal Corps Association.

Veterans—United States—Societies, etc.

West Plains (Mo.).

Whittenmyer, Annie.

Women's Relief Corps of Missouri.