



## *THE LADIES AID SOCIETY*

On Monday morning April 22, 1861 (ten days after the start of the American Civil War), the women of Columbus met and organized a Ladies Soldiers Aid Society in the First Presbyterian Church. Their purpose was to solicit contributions of money, flannel, blankets, woolen socks, and other necessities for the men in the field. They elected Mrs. Governor Dennison as president, Mrs. H. F. Norton to serve as treasurer, and Miss Pamela Sullivant as secretary. They soon opened a sewing room to cut and assemble soldier's shirts. In its first annual report, the Society reported that the cutting room had been open continuously since its inception, approximately 557 days.

More than 10,000, volunteer run, Soldiers Aid Societies sprang up in the North, and, in June 1861, the federal government established the United States Sanitary Commission (USSC) to coordinate their efforts. The Columbus Ladies Aid Society became a part of the United States Sanitary Commission during the summer of 1861. Men gained control of the Columbus organization because it was deemed that men had the needed political skills to deal with the government and the military. William M. Awl became the president of the local society. However, the women of the local societies thirty-six auxiliaries did most of the work.

On April 9, 1862, two days after the Battle of Shiloh, Mr. Francis C. Sessions, Columbus branch representative, left for the battle site with fifteen boxes of hospital supplies from the Ladies Aid Society of Columbus. A number of sick and wounded were

brought back to Columbus, and, on April 22, 1862 the Ladies Aid Society established a Soldiers Home in a room in the railroad depot to accommodate incoming patients. The Society helped build a 45 bed hospital west of the depot the following year to care for sick, disabled, and wounded soldiers traveling through the city. In 1864, embarrassed that dead soldiers were being carried to the cemetery in a wagon, the local Ladies Aid Society purchased a hearse.

Throughout the war, the Society held picnics, sanitary fairs or bazaars, and Tableaux Vivants to raise money. Tableaux vivants "living images" were a popular form of amateur entertainment. "Actors" were placed in a static position reminiscent of a particular historical event with the idea of bringing the image to the viewers minds in a three-dimensional form. Songs and poems often accompanied these scenes.

The money earned from these activities financed the purchase of more than 90 percent of the medicines used by the army surgeons during the war. It also paid for perishable goods such as meat, vegetables and, fruits and for non-homemade items such as tents and cots. Soldiers Aid Societies also collected blankets, quilts, coverlets, shirts, drawers, and socks, pillows, pillow cases, sheets, towels, boxes and barrels of canned fruits, jellies, wines, cordials, rolled bandages, lint, and medicine. Nationally, these women raised \$4.9 million and collected \$15 million in non-perishable foodstuff, blankets, and clothing. The women of Columbus raised nearly \$75,000 in money alone.