



# Alexandria Times

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## Out of the Attic

### Julia Wheelock: teacher, sister, nurse, author

*Alexandria Times, March 22, 2018*

Image: Julia Wheelock, From Julia S. Wheelock, *The Boys in White: The Experience of a Hospital Agent In and Around Washington*, New York: Lange & Hillman, 1870. BABEL.HATHITRUST.ORG.

**B**uilt by The Lyceum Company in 1839, The Lyceum served many purposes through the 19th and 20th centuries – lecture hall, performance space, library, meeting space, Civil War hospital, private home, office building, the Commonwealth’s first Bicentennial Center and now, the city’s history museum.

One person who passed through when The Lyceum, or Lyceum Hall as it was then known, served as a hospital was Julia Wheelock, a teacher from Michigan. In September 1861 her brother Orville enlisted in the Eighth Michigan Infantry. A year later, Julia learned that her brother had been seriously wounded during the Battle of Chantilly. He laid several days on the field, had a limb amputated and was finally taken to a hospital in Alexandria – Lyceum Hall.

She travelled to Alexandria with Orville’s wife Anna and Anna’s sister Sarah and began searching for Orville. On arriving in wartime Alexandria, she wrote in her diary, “Soon the ancient city of Alexandria – ancient in American history – heaves in sight. It presents a gloomy, dingy, dilapidated appearance.”

As they searched for Orville, Anna lost hope and shared that he had come to her in a dream, telling her, “My work is done, I’m weary and must rest.” They witnessed a funeral procession during their search, and Julia noted, “How unlike a funeral at home! No train of weeping friends follow his bier; yet one of our country’s heroes, one of the ‘boys in white,’ lies in that plain coffin.” They went to Lyceum Hall, and after much confusion, the director of the hospital told them that Orville had died there a week earlier. Julia noted that, like the soldier in the procession they saw earlier, her brother “died like thousands of others, far from home and friends, with no loved kindred near.”

She also noted, however, that they spent time at Lyceum Hall with “an angel of mercy in human form ... Miss [Clarissa] F. Jones, of Philadelphia.” Miss Jones had “watched [Orville] day by day as he grew weaker, she stood beside him in his dying moments, held his icy hand in hers, wiped the death dew from his brow, received his last message for his wife and child, and, when life had fled, prepared him as far as she could for his burial. Such are her daily duties.”

Anna and Sarah returned to Michigan, heartbroken. Julia, however, stayed in Alexandria and joined the Michigan Relief Association, a group focused on caring for Michigan troops. She assisted nurses, fed soldiers, wrote letters home for soldiers and provided general care and support for the suffering wounded. She also traveled to the front to care for wounded immediately after battles.





## Office of Historic Alexandria City of Alexandria, Virginia

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After the war, Julia worked for the Treasury Department in Washington D.C., returning to Michigan in 1873. She published "Boys in White, Experiences of a Hospital Agent in and Around Washington" in 1870, drawing from her diaries to recount her wartime experiences.

*"Out of the Attic" is published each week in the Alexandria Times newspaper. The column began in September 2007 as "Marking Time" and explored Alexandria's history through collection items, historical images and architectural representations. Within the first year, it evolved into "Out of the Attic" and featured historical photographs of Alexandria.*

*These articles appear with the permission of the Alexandria Times and were authored by staff of the Office of Historic Alexandria.*