

## **Susan Augusta Pike Sanders (1842 – 1931)**

Susan Augusta Pike Sanders was born on March 25, 1842, in Maine. She was the third of seven children and the first daughter of Harrison Wallace Pike and Susan A. (Mayberry) Pike. In 1854, her family moved to Bloomington, Illinois, to join her uncle, Meshack Pike, who had opened the Pike House Hotel there.

Sue spent much of her life helping others. Like her mother, she valued reading, writing, and education. She kept scrapbooks of newspaper articles and later gave them to the McLean County Historical Society. She also wrote about her experiences in public service.

Sue started teaching in June 1858 at the Reeder District school in Heyworth, Illinois. In 1861, she hung an American flag, "Old Glory," over her desk. Some of her students, who were from families with Southern sympathies, didn't like this. They took down the flag, stomped on it, and tried to bury it. Sue talked to them about what the flag stood for, and when she asked who would help her protect it, one boy said he couldn't because his father wouldn't allow it. After Sue explained more about the flag, the boy promised to defend it with his knife if necessary. Because of her bravery, Sue was given a bronze medal that was shared across the country.

In 1861, Sue joined the Women's Relief Corps (WRC), also called the "Girls of '61," an organization formed to help Union soldiers during the United States Civil War. Sue had four brothers and nine cousins who fought for the Union. Her brother Edward earned a Medal of Honor for saving his regiment's cannon during battle. Sue's brother Alpheus was one of the youngest soldiers, enlisting at just 15 years old. Sue and other women in Bloomington made clothing, quilts, food, and medical supplies for the soldiers. The WRC raised over \$18,000 (about \$442,000 in 2008), helping both soldiers and their families.

Sue became an active leader in the WRC. In 1892, she gave a speech at a national convention in Washington, D.C., calling on the women to protect their meeting from intruders. During World War I, Sue revived the WRC in Bloomington and became its president. She also served as president of the national organization.

Sue was also involved in other community projects. In 1892, after moving back to Bloomington, she became president of a group working to improve the Girls' Industrial Home. She helped create the city's first public library and became president of the library board. She also helped raise funds for the Delavan Cemetery and co-founded a social club in 1880. In 1902, Sue became historian for the Letitia Green Stevenson Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution.

Even with all her public work, Sue was a devoted wife and mother. She married James T. Sanders in 1867, and they had four children. One child died in infancy, and another, their daughter Bernadine, died at 15. Sue continued her community work while caring for her family. Sue passed away on September 8, 1931, after suffering a stroke. She had been ill for some time and was hospitalized a few weeks before her death. She was buried next to her husband and one of their children at Evergreen Memorial Cemetery.