

Ladies' Relief Hospital

Initially, this corner on Main Street was home to Dibrell's Tavern, later it was expanded and operated as the Union Hotel. During the war it was repurposed as the Ladies' Relief Hospital in August of 1861, and would remain as such for the duration of the war. The hospital was founded and managed by Mrs. Lucy Wilhelmina Otey, with the assistance of Mrs. John M. Speed, and Mrs. Cornelia Jordan. Otey took a stand against the entire Confederate Medical Department and lobbied for a hospital to be run by Lynchburg's women. She traveled to Richmond and obtained permission to do so from Confederate President Jefferson Davis. Similar stories can be found in most southern cities. The Civil War opened the nursing profession to women, a field that had been male dominated field. The death rate in this hospital dropped from ninety-three deaths in the first two years of the war to just thirty-six deaths in the final two years, with roughly the same number of admissions. Because of their reputation for quality care, the worst cases were sent to the Ladies' Relief Hospital.



Lucy Otey about the time of the Civil War



The Ladies' Relief Hospital was located on the east corner of Sixth and Main.

Now the site is home to the Academy Center of the Arts, built in 1900.

It became unwritten law during those years [1861-1864] to always send the worst wounded men to the Ladies' Hospital – Mrs. August Forsberg, "Hospital Reminiscences," sections reprinted in the Lynchburg News Nov. 27th 1960, and Dec. 9th 1960.

I did not write you this morning as I usually do, because I have been at father's house all day sewing for the soldiers. While I was there, I was sent for to see old Mrs. John M. Otey, who was at Mrs. Spence's making arrangements to establish a Ladies' Hospital for the soldiers in opposition to Dr. Owen's. You know, perhaps, that he will not allow the ladies to enter his hospital, or to do anything for the patients. Mrs. Otey proposes to have a house and a matron, and a staff of hired nurses, all under the supervision of the ladies with a change everyday of those who are to stay in the hospital and direct the cooking and general service. If the scheme can be carried out it will be a good one, and the poor men will be far more comfortable than they are now. I promised Mrs. Otey I would cooperate with her as far as in my power, but that I do not think I could do any nursing. I think you would not like me to do that - Susan Blackford to Charles Blackford, July 8, 1861.