

Ladies' Relief Hospital

What was originally a tavern before eventually becoming the Union Hotel, this building was repurposed as the Ladies' Relief Hospital in August of 1861, which it would remain for the duration of the war. It 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 demanded that Lynchburg's women be allowed to run a hospital with her as the "President." 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 death 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 as a young woman



Lucy about the time of the Civil War

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.