

Captain Sally Louisa Tompkins Robertson Hospital – Richmond, Virginia

Sally Louisa Tompkins was born November 9, 1833 in Mathews County, Virginia at Poplar Grove.

In a May, 1861 letter to her brother, Col. Christopher Q. Tompkins, she wrote, “*I hope you will be able to distinguish yourself in battle and be a second George Washington.*” Following the battle of First Manassas Sally convinced Judge John Robertson to allow her to operate a hospital out of his home at Main and Third Street in Richmond. He and his family had sought refuge elsewhere in Virginia.

It quickly became apparent that her hospital had the highest percentage of patient recovery. In the fall of 1861 the CSA government standardized the hospital system under the command of the Confederate Medical Department. A woman was not allowed to run a hospital. However, due to the success of the Robertson Hospital, President Jefferson Davis commissioned Miss Tompkins a captain in the Confederate cavalry. Officers of the CSA military could run a hospital. She declined to be placed on the government payroll.

Sally was now outside of the Medical Department’s supervision, running a private hospital, and could issue orders & draw rations to supplement her own personal family monies and the donations she received for hospital operations. Her hospital treated over 1300 patients during the four years and only 73 died. Sally attributed her success to “*the best nursing and perfect cleanliness.*”

Robertson Hospital always had soldiers begging for admission. Although she had limited space Sally said, “*My hospital can never be too crowded for a Mathews or Gloucester County soldier.*”

Postwar, Sally devoted herself to the Episcopal Church and gave liberally of her means and personal service. At St. James Church in Richmond there is a pictorial stained glass window in her honor.

When the Confederate Women’s Home was established on Grace Street in Richmond, Sally, whose fortune was depleted, was invited to live there as an honored guest.

She was a special guest of honor at many reunions of Confederate veterans. In 1905 she was elected an honorary President of the Virginia UDC. When the Mathews Chapter of the UDC was formed in 1908 they chose to be named the Sally Tompkins Chapter.

Sally Louisa Tompkins died on July 26, 1916 and is buried at Christ Church in Mathews County. A portion of the inscription on her cemetery monument reads:

“I was hungered and ye gave me meat
I was thirsty and ye gave me drink
I was sick and ye visited me.” (Mathew 25)

(UDC Magazine, Richmond, March 2011, “Captain Sally Tompkins” by Deanna R. Bryant, p.10-11.) Virginia Cavalcade, Vol. 6, “The Captain was a Lady” (summer 1956-spring 1957), p. 35-41.) VHS files, Richmond, Virginia, Tompkins Papers, MssI T5996, Micro File C538, p. 246-338.)