By volunteering during times of war, Hoosier women stepped out of traditional, passive gender roles and made a positive contribution to the war effort both at home and abroad. For this part of the research project, the focus is on the volunteer roles Hoosier women played during the Civil War, Spanish-American War, and World War I. We are focusing on these three wars because not until World War II were women allowed to formally enlist in the military services, therefore volunteering was the only avenue in which they could perform their “patriotic duties”. At this point in the research, the Civil War is the main focus because it is the first war in which Hoosier women would have volunteered. The research database at the Indiana Historical Society has produced information on three women who served as nurses in Murfreesboro, Tennessee for the Union forces. Analysis of their diaries and letters written during their time of service will uncover their reasons for volunteering, the duties they performed, and the conditions in which they worked. In addition to these primary sources, a variety of secondary sources will provide the overall context, and, for the Civil War section of the project, a comparison with the more well-known volunteer roles of Southern women. The next phase of primary research for the Civil War section of the project will be to search the papers of Hoosier Civil War Governor Oliver Morton at the Indiana State Archives. Many women wrote letters to Morton during the war and useful information may be available there as well. At this time, research is also uncovering background information on the women who worked at Murfreesboro to see if their families’ stances on the war helped to inspire their sacrifices to the Union cause. All of this will then serve as a basis of comparison to the Spanish-American War and World War I. It is possible that without the dedication of these women to their volunteering duties, the casualty rates in the Civil War (over 600,000), the Spanish-American War (385), and World War I (over 50,000) would have been much higher. Finally, this project will be included in a growing body of research on Hoosier women and the duties they have performed and are currently performing during times of war.

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