

The price of war: A letter from Mary Kelly to Sarah Gordon

Introduction

James Kelly served with the 14th Indiana Volunteers beginning in 1861. In March 1862, his wife, Mary, traveled to the field hospital in Virginia where he lay wounded after the Battle of Winchester. She described the terrible conditions: “The wounded are dying every day. This is a three story building and very large at that and every room is full its very sad times indeed.” Despite Mary’s care, James Kelly died of his wounds, May 8, 1862.

Excerpt

Mr Kelly is wounded in the lower part of the abdomen injuring his bowels in some way a very serious wound indeed I still hope he may be one of the exceptions in this case If we remain here there wont be any Dr left thats any account for all the surgeons expect every day to be ordered on to their regiments about 20 miles from here So if we can go we had better. Mr Slocum is going tomorrow he has his thigh broken but seems in good spirits I think he will soon get well the ladies here have been very kind to our men though there are plenty of sesech here of the meanest kind

Questions for Discussion

Read the document introduction and the excerpt and apply your knowledge of American history in order to answer these questions.

1. Why is the wound suffered by James Kelly considered very serious? (To help you answer this question you may wish to speak with a teacher of biology or physical education).
2. From what you know about Civil War Era medicine, why was it unlikely that James Kelly would survive?
3. What concerns does Mary Kelly have about how her husband may be treated? How does this explain her travel to Virginia?

The price of war: A letter from Mary Kelly to Sarah Gordon

Image

Winchester Monday 31

Dear Sarah

I arrived here last night ^{Sunday} by hard travelling though we missed the train near Wheeling and was delayed about a day — found Mr Kelly very sadly wounded indeed his recovery very doubtful though some such cases have been known to recover he don't seem to suffer as much as I would expect under the circumstances I hope his and mother are doing very well you must stay with them I hope I shall soon be able to come home this is a bad place for a sick person perhaps I may try to take him on a train tomorrow in the direction of home if I can get him taken so he won't have to be changed on the cars There are some Pennsylvania wounded going tomorrow by the way of Philadelphia it may be that I may go with them He don't think he will ever get over it and is prepared to go, seems perfectly resigned — he don't complain much I think my fate is right hard

Mary Kelly to Sarah Gordon, March 31, 1862, page 1. (Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC04197.25)

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I would like to know how you are
 getting on I hope sis didnt get sick
 again

Yours Truly Mary Kelly

Mary Kelly to Sarah Gordon, March 31, 1862, page 2. (Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC04197.25)

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Photograph of James and Mary Kelly, their daughter, "Sis," and their son, ca. 1861. (Gilder Lehrman Collection, GLC04197.40)

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Transcript

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[*envelope*]

Sallie L. Gordon

Bloomington

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