

Pauline Cushman

SPY OF THE CUMBERLAND



A Bibliographic Essay

William J. Christen

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Material Published before 1893 (Primary Sources).

PRIOR TO THE PUBLICATION OF, Pauline Cushman: Spy of the Cumberland, Pauline Cushman's life story and knowledge of its basic elements were based on a 1860s "vanity press" book. Almost all published information about her life eventually reverts back to that single source. This 1865 book entitled, *Life of Pauline Cushman, the Celebrated Union Spy and Scout*, was written by Ferdinand L. Sarmiento.

Sarmiento published his 373 page book about her life within a year of her highly publicized appearance in June 1864 at P. T. Barnum's American Museum in New York. Sarmiento was a merchant tailor and attorney in Philadelphia. It is not known whether she sought him out, or if he first approached her about the book, but the final product was financially beneficial to both of them. The book was made available to the public by August 1865 as the editor of the Utica (New York) Observer thanked Pauline for providing him with a copy.

This talented actress . . . has arrived in town and is stopping at the Central Hotel. The Major has our thanks for her handsome volume entitled "Life of PAULINE CUSHMAN, the Celebrated Union Scout and Spy," written by a member of the Philadelphia Bar. The book is a well written history of a life which has been more than usually varied, exciting and interesting. It is for sale [emphasis added] at MISS CUSHMAN'S entertainments.

Sarmiento's book is cut of a curious cloth. The warp of the cloth is romantic fiction, while the weft is threads of truth—quite a tailoring job indeed. In order to sort out fact from fiction, I created an annotated index of Sarmiento's book. All names, locations and incidents were listed. A brief description of the context of each item was followed by an annotated historical note. I created an index that was a useful tool in the early stages of developing the text of Spy of the Cumberland. *The Life of Pauline Cushman* is still found today in used book stores and is offered for sale on eBay regularly. Because of the mixture of fact and fiction in Sarmiento's book, it cannot be claimed

as a true primary source, but since it was written within two years of her experience as a spy and scout, it has significant historical value.

But Sarmiento's book was not the first published account of any of her adventures. It was preceded by two other publications, which were short pamphlets used to promote her lectures and to provide additional income for her or her promoters. The first step back from Sarmiento's book leads to an 1864 pamphlet and the greatest showman of the nineteenth century, Phineas Taylor Barnum. Most Americans are familiar with, or at least aware of, the typical P. T. Barnum "business plan" and his lack of regard for an exacting definition of the truth. Barnum entered into the Cushman equation one year before Sarmiento when he obtained the copyright to a modified version of the original pamphlet describing her experiences as a Federal spy.

Pauline commissioned the original pamphlet in late November or December 1863. It was published in January 1864 at the time of her public introduction as a spy at the Great Western Sanitary Fair in Cincinnati, Ohio. She sold it to raise money for her daily expenses and resources for a lecture tour. At some point before her appearances at the American Museum in New York City during June and July 1864, she and Barnum reached an agreement to continue marketing his version of the pamphlet. A year after that, she and Sarmiento's expanded the second pamphlet and filled it with extensive "enrichment" of details. The two pamphlets were apparently also ghostwritten for her.

The earliest pamphlet was *An Inside View of the Army Police, The Thrilling Adventures of Pauline Cushman, the Distinguished American Actress and Famous Federal Spy of the Department of the Cumberland*. Rickey and Carroll, in Cincinnati, Ohio published this twenty-five cent (1864 price) pamphlet. The copyright date is 1864 and was applied for "The Author" by the publishers. There was a letter printed on page three of the pamphlet from Pauline Cushman dated 15 December 1863. The letter expresses her thoughts on her "duty to furnish a correct account of the strange and trying scenes through which I passed" in her capacity as a spy for the Union army. At the end of the pamphlet "The Author" states that "He has simply laid out before you a plain and 'unvarnished' narrative, as it dropped, sentence by sentence, from the lips of the fair heroine . . ."

Based on the extensive list of other Rickey and Carroll publications available at the time, the Cushman story appeared to be one of hundreds published by the "Largest Bookstore in the West." With titles ranging from *The History of the Roman's under the Empire* to *Adela, the Octoroon*,

Cushman's story resided in the midst of widely varied subjects on the shelves of Rickey & Carroll's five-story opera house and bookstore on West Fourth Street in Cincinnati. The Cincinnati theatrical connection was likely a factor in Pauline choosing them, or vice versa.

This pamphlet laid out details of Cushman's experience as a spy in Louisville and Nashville in the late spring and early summer of 1863. It was printed just before the opening of the Sanitary Fair in Cincinnati where General William S. Rosecrans first introduced her to the public as a scout, spy and national heroine.

The second work was *The Romance of the Great Rebellion; the Mysteries of the Secret Service: A Genuine and Faithful Narrative of the Thrilling Adventures, Daring Enterprises, Hairbreadth Escapes and Final Capture and Condemnation to Death by the Rebels, and Happy Rescue by the Union Forces, of Miss Major Pauline Cushman, the Famous Federal Scout and Spy, in the Department of the Cumberland* (with a note at the bottom of the subtitle: "Truth is Stranger than Fiction"). While no author is indicated, both the editor's preface and a letter to the public by Cushman claim that it is a true telling of her trying adventures with "not one fictitious or too highly colored paragraph in all its pages." The publisher of record is the press of Wynkoop and Hallenbeck of New York City and the copyright owner is none other than P. T. Barnum.

This pamphlet differed from the former in that embellishments of her activities as a scout and spy were added. No new details of a biographical nature were added. In essence it was a reworded and extended copy of the Rickey and Carroll booklet.

No other books or pamphlets giving biographical details beyond what was found in the two pamphlets and Sarmiento's book were published during her lifetime. During the next one hundred years after her death she was mentioned in texts describing women's roles during the war, spies, female soldiers and heroines of the Civil War. There were no references to any other published primary material in these secondary writings.

One year after Sarmiento published his *Life of Pauline Cushman*, Dr. L. P. Brockett mentioned Cushman in his *The Camp, the Battle Field, and the Hospital; or Light and Shadows of the Rebellion*. This was nearly an unaltered restatement of Sarmiento's story of Pauline's early life and adventures as a scout and spy.

In 1867 two books were published that contained references to Pauline Cushman. One was Frank Moore's *Women of the War: Their Heroism and Self-Sacrifice*. It contained a very brief summary of information from Sarmiento with the added mention of her having received two wounds while in the

field. These wounds were not serious although she suffered from the effects of some unknown sickness for about a year after her experience in the field as a scout and spy in June 1863. Moore also credited James A. Garfield with conferring the “rank of and title” of major upon Pauline.

The other book was *The Pictorial Book of Anecdotes and Incidents of the War of the Rebellion, Civil, Military, Naval and Domestic . . . From the Time of the Memorable Toast of Andrew Jackson—“The Federal Union; It Must Be Preserved!” . . . To the Assassination of President Lincoln, and the End of the War with Famous Words and Deeds of Woman, Sanitary and Hospital Scenes, Prison Experiences, etc.* by Frazar Kirkland, a pseudonym of Richard Miller Devens. Here again only a brief synopsis of her adventures as told by Sarmiento was repeated.

Between 1864 and 1870 Pauline not only lectured about her adventures as a spy, but was actively involved in the theatrical community in the east, primarily in New York City and upstate New York. She also appeared in Boston, Buffalo, Indianapolis, Columbus, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh and Washington, D.C. She also appeared on stage in New Jersey and other Ohio towns. References to her New York City performances appeared in T. Allison Brown’s *History of the American Stage*. This information was supplemented in the multi-volume, epic study of the nineteenth-century New York theatrical world, *Annals of the New York Stage*, undertaken by George C. D. Odell in 1931.

An embellished tale of Pauline’s adventures in Wartrace, Tennessee (where she donned male attire while on a scout) appeared in *Deeds of Daring by Both Blue and Gray* by D. M. Kelsey. Kelsey’s book was published in 1883. The story, as Kelsey told it, was based largely on Sarmiento. It was accompanied by a drawing of Pauline based on an 1864 photograph of her in a field officer’s uniform, a reworked illustration taken also from Sarmiento of “Guerillas in Camp.” Two other 1880s-style illustrations: one of her “borrowing” the clothing of a young man who like her, was staying at a tavern in Wartrace and another of her “jumping the chasm” riding on a black horse during an escape attempt.

The final two accounts of Pauline’s adventures that were published while she was alive appeared in separate editions of *The War Library*. *The War Library* was a tabloid style newspaper on the order of the “Police Gazette” with a decidedly dime novel flavor. The author of both articles, Ward Edwards, based his account on Sarmiento and added a few new fictional details that had not been included in the primary sources or their derivatives. At the time *The War Library* editions were published (1883 and 1885)

Pauline was living in the Arizona Territory. There is no evidence that she and Ward ever communicated with each other about the details included in these stories.

Material Published before 1893 (Newspapers)

The earliest published newspaper account of Pauline Cushman as a Federal spy occurred in a Confederate newspaper, the Savannah Republican:

Crinoline Scout Shelbyville, June 18th.

Forrest's forces on Friday last [12 June 1863] went in pursuit of a woman to whom suspicion had been attached. She had reached the Yankee pickets in front of Franklin when they came in sight, but on they dashed, driving in the Yankees and capturing their "booty." She proved to be a Miss Cushman, a theater actress . . . and had upon her person plans and drawings of our fortifications, and the disposition made of the latter . . . Her fine talents are, doubtless, occupied at present time in planning an escape from Columbia, where she is under guard . . .

This item appeared while she remained in the hands of the Confederate forces and two weeks before her "rescue" by Federal troops capturing Shelbyville, Tennessee during the first days of the Tullahoma campaign.

For the next six months nothing appeared any Northern or Southern newspaper until she was presented with a riding dress with military-like trim on the dress from a group of loyal (to the Union cause) ladies in Nashville. A special permit given to Pauline by Generals Gordon Granger and James Garfield allowed her to wear a public expression of her honorary rank. This permission was utilized when on 1 December 1863.

A BEAUTIFUL PRESENT.—We saw on exhibition yesterday, a beautiful and magnificent ready-made lady's riding dress, intended as a present from the loyal ladies of this city to Miss Pauline Cushman, the daring heroine who has done so much service for the United States—a lady who occupies the warmest niche in the patriotic heart of almost every American soldier. The dress is made of the most costly material and is beautifully but modestly ornamented with national emblems.

From the time her introduction to the public at the Cincinnati sanitary fair and her appearance at Barnum's American Museum six weeks later, newspaper accounts of Pauline's lectures and theatrical appearances appeared in

regular fashion for about four years. By 1868 her theatrical popularity was in decline and she herself may have reached a low point. There were several newspaper accounts in 1868 of her arrest for being a pickpocket.

She traveled to California in 1872 and spent five years living between San Francisco and Santa Cruz. For the next ten years after that she lived in the Arizona Territory with her third husband. The final three years of her life (1890–93) were spent traveling between San Francisco, El Paso and towns in Arizona. During this entire twenty year period her activities were sporadically covered on a national level, and if an “incident” occurred, more intensely on a local level. While in Pinal County, Arizona Territory there was nearly weekly coverage of her activities in the local paper as she, still making the most of her Civil War fame, and her husband, who was a popular county sheriff, were local celebrities.

Her death in December 1893 brought a final flurry of newspaper articles in San Francisco, which in one form or another were picked up by other newspapers across the country.

Unpublished Primary Sources Before 1893

There were two significant unpublished sources that were crucial to Pauline’s life story. Both of these were compiled before 1893 and were key factors in providing details about later periods of her life. They both had newspaper connections.

One was Scrapbook No. 37 that was located in the archives of the California Historical Society (CHS). This scrapbook was thought to have been compiled by one of her admirers. Upon detailed examination I determined that it contained newspaper clippings that had been collected by Pauline herself during the period of 1864 to 1869. It may have been one of at least four scrapbooks belonging to her. The newspaper clippings found in the scrapbook provided a rough itinerary of her travels from 1864 through 1868 with her friend and fellow actor, James M. Ward. The scrapbook is in a fragile state and I was created an annotated transcription for the CHS and future researchers.

Thanks to the meticulous and regular diary notations of Alf Doten, a newspaper editor in the Virginia City and Gold Hill region during Nevada’s silver mining boom, I was able to discover details about a short, but crucial time in her life. Doten befriended Pauline during a two-week stay in Virginia City. She was scheduled to present one of her lectures and possibly perform on stage for a week, or so. It turned out to be her last “public” lecture and was one of the low points of her life. Doten continued

corresponding with her for several years and did write several newspaper articles about her when he learned of her death.

The National Archives holds Pauline's Pension papers (1890–83), a few letters related to her service as a scout and spy (1863) and miscellaneous correspondence and inquiries in regard to Pauline. I obtained microfilm copies of this information. Pension and military papers for Pauline's first husband, his brothers and Samuel L. Orr, a military doctor who was linked to her, were also obtained from the National Archives.

Material Published after 1893

Upon Pauline's death in San Francisco there was extensive coverage of her funeral and her life. She had fallen on hard times and had only recently gained a widow's pension. Her first husband, Charles Dickinson, had been a musician in the Forty-first Ohio Infantry Regiment. He died in 1862 leaving her a widow with two young children. She was also trying to maintain a relationship with the Grand Army of the Republic members and their spouses in the Women's Relief Corps. By 1893 at age sixty, Pauline had been married three times, widowed twice and separated from her third husband, lost three children (two of her own and one adopted daughter), and suffered from some medical problems. She was basically without family and depended on the friendship of her sister-like landladies on Market Street in San Francisco.

After her death there occasional newspaper remembrances—particularly around 1910 when her almost forgotten remains were moved to the military cemetery at the Presidio. A few years later in 1913 a silent movie, *Pauline Cushman, Federal Spy*, sparked renewed interest in her life.

Though the 1920s there was little of note published, but standard biographical dictionaries listed her and included references to Sarmiento's book, her pension records, and the San Francisco newspaper accounts written at the time of her death. Several reminiscences of Arizona pioneers that were published in newspapers included accounts of her life. One man, Charles Eastman, had been friend with Pauline and her third husband, Jere Fryer.

In 1934 Robert Chambers published his novel, *Secret Service Operator 13*, in which Pauline is one of the characters. This book was the basis for the movie *Operator 13* that starred Marion Davies, Gary Cooper, and Kathryn Alexander, who played Pauline. A newspaper article about the movie included an interview with Pauline's great niece and the great niece's daughter. The interview provided some clues to Pauline's family background.

During World War Two there were inquires to the War Department

about Pauline's "commission" as an officer and an occasional newspaper article about female spies of all time periods. Two articles about her grave at the Presidio appeared in newspapers in the late 1940s. In 1946 there was one issue of the *Real Heroes* comic book that featured a story about a fictional meeting with President Lincoln.

Between 1952 and 1970 Pauline was mentioned along with other spies and female soldiers in books such as *Desperate Women* by James D. Horan, *Spies For The Blue And Gray* by Harnett T. Kane, *She Rode with the Generals* by Sylvia Dannett, *The Women And The Crisis: Women of the North in the Civil War* by Agatha Young, *Spies of the Confederacy*, by John Bakeless and *Wiley Women of the West* by Grace Ernestine Ray. Using the books' bibliographies and footnotes (when they existed), I was able to expand my search for names, places and other incidents connected to Pauline.

Pauline met a teenage Irish immigrant in 1872. He was Michael M. Rice who first worked for Pauline as a bellboy and servant. By 1893 he had become a friend who was almost a brother rather than a romantic companion. His reminiscences have been collected in the Arizona Historical Society and in the spring of 1934 a four-part series of articles in the *Los Angeles Times Sunday Magazine* provided many details of his and Pauline's lives in Arizona during the 1880s. The Arizona Historical Society collections also contained reminiscences of other citizens who had met or known Pauline while she lived in Arizona.

During the twentieth century there were dozens magazine and newspaper articles, and references to Pauline in other texts. The overwhelming majority of these relied on the basic Cushman sources: Sarmiento, her pension records and Mike Rice's reminiscences. Each item was studied and the information cross referenced with documented material. My conclusion is that except for checking pension records none of these authors went back to Pauline's original pamphlet, very few examined the pension papers in the National Archives and no one cross referenced names and dates with US Census or city directory information, which I found essential to verifying the facts.

With the advent of web-based data bases in the past five years I was able to search newspapers, theatrical and military sources for names integral to Pauline's life story. With the exception of the scrapbook at the California Historical Society, no diary, memoranda or memoir in Pauline's own words has so far been discovered—this being the ultimate primary source for her story.

Pauline Cushman

SPY OF THE CUMBERLAND

PAULINE CUSHMAN WAS, ACCORDING TO historian Elizabeth Leonard, one of the “five women who became best known both during and after the Civil War” as spies. Yet, for all her renown, Cushman’s life story has remained a blend of fact and legend—until now.

To an early biographer, she was “the Heroine of the People” who combined “all the daring of the soldier with the tenderness and modesty of the woman.” By the early twentieth century, she became the stuff of fiction, both in the movies and, later, television. In the late twentieth century, some historians told a darker story, hinting at alcoholism and drug abuse.

In this book, the first full biography, William Christen sorts through the pieces of evidence to draw a more complete and accurate portrait of the woman, placing her within the social setting of the era. Much more than a book about the Civil War, we learn about mid-nineteenth century theater and gender roles in the Wild West, featuring a cast ranging from impresario P. T. Barnum to future president James Garfield.

As one reviewer says, “Christen brings the real woman to life.”

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