

# THE “NEED OF MEANS ADDITIONAL”: WALT WHITMAN’S CIVIL WAR FUNDRAISING

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WHITMAN’S WORK volunteering in the hospitals during the Civil War was financially costly: the poet distributed fruit, paper, money, and other gifts to the patients, and all of his giving required significant resources. By the time he settled in Washington, D.C., in early 1863 to help comfort the wounded soldiers in the hospitals, the U.S. Sanitary Commission (USSC) and other aid agencies had already developed sophisticated fundraising machines to support their endeavors, and even these were struggling. The competition for dollars, and for oversight of them, was fierce. Whitman, who opposed what he saw as the bureaucratic callousness of the Sanitary Commission agents, signed on with the USSC’s primary competitor, the U.S. Christian Commission, shortly after arriving in Washington, D.C. He does not seem to have made public use of his affiliation in trying to raise money, however, and there are no surviving letters in which the poet speaks directly to his commission. While he was more sympathetic with the Christian Commission’s approach to working with soldiers, his lack of church sponsorship—one of the key requirements for delegates, who were mostly Evangelical ministers—may have kept him from making his participation public.<sup>1</sup>

Even more puzzling is the fact that the *Annals of the Christian Commission*, the official history of the organization published in 1868, contains no record of Whitman’s service, although there is a list of all registered delegates year by year, with the declaration:

The Commission refers confidently to the subjoined list of their Delegates. It includes the names of men from all denominations of Christians and from every section of the loyal States. In connection with the results of the work itself, this catalog of names is the most satisfactory evidence which the Commission can present to those whose benefactions it dispensed, that their great trust was faithfully and wisely administered.<sup>2</sup>

Given public controversy over the poet’s writing, Lemuel Moss, the Commission’s Secretary, may have deliberately removed Whitman from the record after the war. It is also possible that, in spite of the surviving paperwork to the contrary, Whitman was never officially recognized as a delegate. The first Annual Report, delivered in January 1863, noted,

“there is much worthy of especial mention, of which no record has been kept. For example, a large number of Christian men and women have been associated as helpers with our Delegates and committees in their work in hospitals and camps” (Moss 133). While Whitman obtained a signed Delegate’s commission on January 20, 1863,<sup>3</sup> he may have acted more as a contingent volunteer, granted papers in the aftermath of a fierce battle so that he could move freely, but never officially registered with the central office. In light of his celebrity, however, his complete absence from the recorded lists of delegates, and from subsequent histories, is peculiar.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, the standard term for delegates was “not less than six weeks,” so, given this relatively short duration, it is highly unlikely that Whitman would have been able to keep his commission for the entire span of his volunteer service (Moss 543).

Whatever the truth may be behind the nature of the poet’s affiliation with the Christian Commission,<sup>5</sup> his surviving correspondence demonstrates that he constantly faced the pressing need to raise money. To meet that need, Whitman, with considerable assistance from his brother Thomas Jefferson Whitman (Jeff), eventually undertook what fundraising professionals today would recognize as an early form of a social-media campaign, using carefully crafted letters that were shared and passed from one person to another in order to reach out to donors.<sup>6</sup> The rhetorical strategies that Whitman adopted in these letters, largely at Jeff’s suggestion, are not only those still considered the most effective in fundraising, but they also demonstrate one of the ways that Whitman developed his approach to writing about his hospital experience. The moving descriptions of soldiers, the particular catalogs of patients and distributions that inform his prose, are present in his letters, as well, for the practical reason that these kinds of details moved readers to give. In short, the poet’s solicitation letters collapse the distinction between his volunteer work and his writing, for the letters to donors that Whitman produced at Jeff’s urging did not simply describe the aid that he offered the injured soldiers; in encouraging continued donations, the writing itself became fundamental to the poet’s ability to continue providing assistance at all. A close analysis of how Whitman negotiated fundraising in support of his efforts, therefore, is crucial to our understanding of the poet’s service in the hospital during the war.<sup>7</sup>

The Civil War marked a sea-change in large-scale philanthropic activity. Benevolent societies had long engaged in fundraising and social relief efforts in the United States, even holding the kind of “fairs” that would be reproduced with much fanfare and on a large scale by the USSC.<sup>8</sup> With the outbreak of the war, however, the need for raising a tremendous amount of resources and dispersing them effectively and efficiently was immediately apparent. Marjorie Greenbie provides a

vivid narrative describing the formation of the Soldier's Aid Society of Lowell, Massachusetts, one of several forerunners to the USSC, in 1861:

[T]he postman handed [the mayor] a letter from Judge Crosby. Opening it, he found a check for \$100 and a letter from the judge. . . . Wouldn't it be a good idea to put some extra money in the hands of the paymaster of the [Massachusetts Sixth] regiment, to be used for food, clothing, comforts, camp facilities, or medicines as needed? And wouldn't it be a good idea, too, to form a society at home to keep in touch with the men as to fill their needs as they arose? To set the ball rolling, he was enclosing his own check for \$100.

...The gentlemen of the City Council said that it was an excellent idea, and wrote out checks, themselves, to the total of \$500. They now had money for the boys, but where was the Society?<sup>9</sup>

Scenes like these were repeated across the North, with soldier's aid agencies springing up with a frequency that rivaled that of the formation of regiments. In New York, several of the leading women of society were particularly ambitious and forward thinking, forming the Women's Central Relief Association (WCRA) in an effort to organize and coordinate the charitable efforts on the homefront. A member of its governing board, Frederick Law Olmstead, moved rapidly with others to go even further, seeking to organize efforts nationwide and to ensure that appropriate aid was administered as effectively as possible.<sup>10</sup> Soon the work of the WCRA was subsumed by the new organization, the USSC, which subsequently made great efforts to become *the* conduit for assisting the soldiers and the wounded during the war.

The Commission's efforts to encourage financial and material support took many forms. From the outset, popular periodicals had published appeals for charity: "Editors of popular women's magazines such as *The Sibyl*, *Arthur's Home Magazine*, and *Leslie's Monthly* exhorted women to become active and productive participants in the Union cause."<sup>11</sup> Olmsted, himself a literary man in addition to his supervisory work in designing New York's Central Park, took up his pen in cooperation with the WCRA and the White House to write a circular on behalf of the newly formed Sanitary Commission, addressed to the "Loyal Women of America" in October 1861 (91). It included an endorsement of the USSC by Abraham Lincoln that read, in part, "There is no agency through which voluntary offerings of patriotism can be more effectively made," and began with this direct appeal: "You are called upon to help take care of our sick and wounded soldiers and sailors."<sup>12</sup>

Even more importantly, however, the circular offered a rationale for the Commission's existence and argued for its primacy as recipient and delivery agent of charitable aid:

Whatever aid is to be given from without, must still be administered systematically, and in perfect subordination to the general system of administration of the government. To hold its agents in any degree responsible for the duties with which they are charged, government must protect them from the interference of irresponsible persons.

Hence, an intermediate agency becomes necessary, which, without taking any of the duties of the regular agents of government out of their hands, can, nevertheless, offer to them means of administering to the wants of the sick and wounded much beyond what could be obtained within the arbitrary limits of supply established by government, and in strict accordance with the regulations necessary for maintaining a proper accountability to it.

The Sanitary Commission, a volunteer and unpaid bureau of the War Department of the government, constitutes such an agency. ("To the Loyal Women")

In spite of both its official imprimatur and its continual public efforts to place itself at the center of charitable efforts during the war, undirected donations would continue to pour in, and the USSC would find itself competing with other organizations, including most importantly the Christian Commission, founded by the YMCA a short time later and devoted to both the spiritual and physical well-being of the soldiers (Roper 214).

Even in the face of such competition, the USSC raised enormous amounts of money over the course of the war through a variety of means. In addition to direct appeals through its publications, a variety of local auxiliaries and industrious women organized large "Sanitary Fairs," multi-day affairs which sold and auctioned items and featured elaborate displays. In December 1863, a group of women in Baltimore began planning such a fair, intended to benefit both the USSC and the Christian Commission.<sup>13</sup> Public lectures and performances were held to support the enterprise. One of the highlights of the Fair, which was held in April 1864, was the sale of a special volume of facsimile handwritten manuscripts by a number of prominent American authors, *Autographed Leaves of Our Country's Authors*. It is most famous now for being the occasion for the creation of one of only five existing handwritten copies of the Gettysburg Address, solicited by the famed American historian George Bancroft.<sup>14</sup>

While events of this scale would occur more frequently later in the war, the Sanitary Commission had already made great strides in organizing philanthropic energy and publicizing its efforts by the time Whitman arrived in D.C. in December 1862 and decided to volunteer in the hospitals. As this brief history of Civil War philanthropy suggests, as an independent agent the poet consequently faced significant challenges in putting his own charitable impulse into action. While the poet's affiliation with the Christian Commission should have provided him with resources to distribute to soldiers, and there is one reference

to the poet securing “first-rate brandy from the Christian commission rooms,”<sup>15</sup> the poet consistently presented himself as working independently. Historians and scholars have long recognized the skepticism and even scorn Whitman faced from nurses in the hospitals.<sup>16</sup> This was occasioned not only by some suspicion regarding his motives and the nature of his interactions with the wounded, but also by the USSC’s efforts to standardize care and supervise the nurses working in the hospitals. What have gone largely unnoticed, however, are the unique and real challenges Whitman faced in raising the funds necessary to support his work at all. As we have seen, the USSC was actively seeking to secure its place as the sole avenue for charitable giving and action, even as it faced competition from the Christian Commission.

At the same time, there was a growing suspicion of charitable appeals generally, with accusations of fraud and waste, coupled with tightened financial circumstances on the homefront and donor fatigue. Even as the Baltimore Fair was gearing up, it faced competition from two other large fairs in New York City and Philadelphia. Wrote one donor, a transplanted Marylander then in Philadelphia, “Touching the matter of subscription...here, for *your* fair—I don’t think you will succeed very well; for they are getting one up [here]...the beggars are out in all directions, and men are buttonholed and made to listen to speeches so long, that the donations come as a sort of ‘ransom money’ for being let go” (Qtd. in Schoeberlein 474). Although Whitman was not without his own connections and resources, as evidenced by the letters of reference from Ralph Waldo Emerson written in support of his pursuit of Federal employment,<sup>17</sup> there is no denying that the poet was ill-equipped for the challenging fundraising landscape that he was entering.

Fortunately, he benefitted from considerable fundraising expertise from an unexpected source. Whitman’s correspondence from the period demonstrates that, in large part because of his brother Jeff’s advice, his abilities as a fundraiser improved significantly as the war continued. This was despite the fact that Whitman’s letters also indicate that he was at best a reluctant fundraiser, seeking almost any means of raising money other than actually asking for it directly. In the poet’s defense, we have seen already how the Sanitary Commission was working actively not only to dissuade individual agents like Whitman, but also to position itself as the primary conduit through which donations should flow. At the same time, with published appeals like Olmsted’s in mass circulation, the poet can be forgiven for thinking that he had only to publicize his work and the gifts would follow. It would take time for Whitman, as well as others, to learn the importance of direct solicitation and social networks in large-scale fundraising.

Jeff, however, seems to have instinctively understood a great deal about effective fundraising, long before it became professionalized. For example, current best practices for fundraising communication highlight the importance of describing the need being addressed, specifying the use of the funds given, and thanking the donor. In January 1863, shortly after beginning his volunteer efforts, Whitman received a letter from his brother advising him regarding exactly these elements:

[...] I wish you would take either Lane's or Probasco[']s money and keep an exact account of what it does and send them the particulars of just the good it does. I think it would assist them (and the rest of us) in collecting more. You can understand what an effect twould have, twould give us an opportunity to show what an immense good a few shillings even will do when rightly applied besides twould please the person sending the money hugely twould bring his good deeds under his nose. (*Corr.*, 66n)

This letter demonstrates not only the network supporting Whitman's volunteerism, but also some fundamental techniques of fundraising. Whitman wrote his brother a reply three days later suggesting that he had gotten the message: "I shall, either by letter giving specific names, hospitals, No. of the particular beds, and dates, or more likely by a letter in print in newspaper, for I am going to print a sort of hospital journal in some paper, send you and Mr. Lane and Probasco, a pretty plain schedule of the manner of my outlays of the sums sent by them to the hospital soldiers through me—as it would interest you all, as you say." At the same time, however, the poet shows some unease with the entire fundraising enterprise. He continues, "Meantime, dear brother, do not crowd the thing in the least—do not ask any one when it becomes unpleasant—let it be understood by our engineer friends &c. that I have mentioned the subscription affair as forwarded, to be left entirely to their sense of what they wish to do, and what they think it would be discreet for them to do" (67). While many may identify with Whitman's reluctance to push acquaintances for donations, such reticence does not often aid fundraising efforts, and the poet would continually have to overcome his hesitation. Jeff would serve as an almost constant spur in this regard.

In suggesting that he would instead provide donors information in a newspaper publication, the poet was attempting to raise money while at the same time avoiding writing exactly the kind of direct reply that his brother had requested. Whitman did in fact publish the article that he described: as Ted Genoways has noted, the poet completed his article "The Great Army of the Sick" on February 23, 1863. The anecdotes in the piece, Genoways writes, "are clearly meant not only as journalism but as tools of fundraising. The message was simple: even a small donation might save a young man's life."<sup>18</sup> Even here, however, Whitman's

public letter lacks the one thing most required: a direct solicitation. The closest the poet gets to an appeal for support is in his acknowledgment that he is working on his own, without the funding of a larger institution like the Sanitary Commission: "Upon a few of these hospitals I have been almost daily calling as a missionary, on my own account, for the sustenance and consolation of some of the most needy cases of sick and dying men, for the last two months. One has much to learn in order to do good in these places. Great tact is required. These are not like other hospitals."<sup>19</sup> Whitman's description of his work, emphasizing that he is there "on his own account," nevertheless also dovetails in many ways with the work of the by-then well-established Christian Commission, which emphasized "Personal Distribution with Personal Ministrations" as one of its core eight principles (Henry 69). The poet's description of himself as a "missionary" only heightens this similarity, although, again, it is puzzling that Whitman did not publically announce his affiliation with the Christian Commission. Perhaps he feared that such a declaration would have made individual donors less likely to give. Instead, he simply hints at a possible connection. The final result is an article that Whitman may have thought met the clear requirements that his brother had set forth for a letter that would help him raise money to support his volunteering, but may have actually confused the issue by even suggesting he was a delegate for the Christian Commission. While delegates were volunteers like Whitman, they had a larger organization behind them offering support and supplies, and they typically raised funds from their home congregations, as well. There is no indication that Whitman had this kind of backing.

Less than a month later, Whitman published a similar letter in the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, "to satisfy that compound of benevolence and generosity which marks Brooklyn," in which he again described himself as a "self-appointed missionary to these thousands and tens of thousands of wounded and sick young men here." Here, however, he is much more specific about his role, denying any official affiliation whatsoever: "I am not connected with any society, but go on my own individual account."<sup>20</sup> It may be that distancing himself from the Christian Commission was a necessary step, or perhaps his commission had already expired. Whatever the case, although it is difficult to connect Whitman's published articles directly with donations, this particular piece seems to have borne at least some fruit. Approximately three weeks after its publication, Jeff sent his brother a ten-dollar gift from the publisher of the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*.

In spite of this small marker of success, Jeff was still intent on raising money for Whitman through personal networks. In the letter that included the publisher's donation, Jeff wrote:

I am in hopes to be able to have a small some [sic] of money sent you every week hereafter in this way I will ask Lane to see how many names of those around in and abt. the W.W. [Water Works] will consent to give \$1 per month regularly to be sent to you for Hospital purposes. I have no doubt but that some 25 or 30 names could be had and if we could send you \$6 or \$7 weekly would be quite a big thing. We think then that we shall call you "The B. Watr Works soldiers Aid society" with power. Seriously, I think twould be a good thing and that I can come [by] it. I sent you \$5 last week, did you get it. Twas from Mr Lane.<sup>21</sup>

Although Whitman had already told his brother "not to crowd the thing" with his co-workers, Jeff clearly felt that the Water Works offered a ready source of funding and that Whitman could become the agent for his colleagues' benevolence.

That is, he could do so if he managed to acknowledge the gifts that he had received and provide an account of how they were employed, something he was clearly still failing to do. Although it would take the poet some time to act on his brother's advice, Jeff had in fact recognized a truth about fundraising that the leadership of the WCRA had discovered in the early years of the war. One of the organization's founders, Eliza L. Schuyler, had learned that there was no substitute for a direct appeal, and she attempted to convey the effectiveness of such personal correspondence to Frederick Law Olmsted when the Sanitary Commission took control of the WCRA's operation. As Jean Attie explains:

Eliza Schuyler believed that only personal missives generated the trust essential for stimulating voluntary labor, and routinely searched the names of potential participants in order to write to each one individually. After the USSC assumed the authority once exercised by the WCRA, Mrs. Schuyler offered Olmsted the benefit of her experience. Recalling the success of her method in fulfilling a particular supply order, she noted that she made "the bitter request for *more help*" in all her personal correspondence. Analyzing the efficacy of private communications, she surmised that "public appeals, through newspapers, are worth very little—we should have secured the 300 bed ticks much sooner, by writing fifty letters." (Attie 113)

As we have already noted, Olmsted, like Whitman, preferred working through published appeals. In addition to his original circular addressed to the "Young Ladies," almost exactly a year later he published another, "What They Have to Do Who Stay at Home" (Attie 109). In addition to seeking contributions to the Sanitary Commission, Olmsted's rhetoric again runs almost precisely counter to the type of aid for which Whitman was seeking financial support:

[P]laced in the hands of men instructed and trained how best to use it, each gift received a value which it might not have had in the hands of the contributor. It will be seen,



then, that in proportion as the principle of Union is adhered to, in the bestowment of these gifts, their value is increased, and that in every departure from this principle there is a waste of that which may otherwise be to the saving of life.

The impulse may be a natural one which seeks to know even the individual person upon whom our gifts are bestowed, and to give them by the hands of some friend or neighbor; but it must be obvious that it is, to say the least, a higher form of benevolence and of patriotism which asks only to have a reasonable assurance that the soldiers of the Union will be helped by our offerings, when and where they most need our help....<sup>22</sup>

As with his previous publication, Olmsted attempts to accomplish several goals at once in this document. In addition to raising money, he again tries to make the case for why centralized donations are a more efficient, even more patriotic, choice than direct gifts to individual actors, such as Whitman would become only three months later. While donors might appreciate the kind of close connection that they might feel when a gift is directly provided to a soldier through a trusted friend, such a feeling, Olmsted argues, pales beside the “higher form of benevolence” of giving to the Sanitary Commission.<sup>23</sup> This general reluctance to engage donors as individuals may account for why Olmsted does not appear to have followed Schuyler’s advice about direct mail fundraising.

Fortunately for Whitman, even as Jeff used personal appeals to rally the employees of the Water Works in support of Whitman’s one-man aid society, others also sought to encourage their friends to support the poet, although sometimes with mixed success. Most notable of these was publisher James Redpath. Months before Whitman would approach him about producing a volume of his hospital writing (more than “mere hospital sketches,” as he famously opined of Louisa May Alcott’s *Hospital Sketches*, which Redpath had published earlier), Redpath began reaching out to acquaintances to raise funds for the poet (*Corr.*, 171). As he told Whitman in March, 1863, “I wrote to Mr. Emerson to get him to interest some of his friends (he has several rich ones who give away large sums to various good causes) in your Christian Commission Agency. I trust that the result will be what I hoped.” Redpath’s reference to the poet’s “Christian Commission Agency” suggests either his awareness of Whitman’s delegate status, or, since we have no surviving correspondence from Whitman referring to his affiliation, Redpath’s recognition that the poet was acting in a similar capacity. The fact that he addressed the letter “Dear Evangelist,” however, also suggests a degree of irony in his reference to Whitman’s “Christian Commission Agency.”<sup>24</sup>

The publisher’s optimism regarding raising money for the poet was likely fueled by the letter he had received in reply from Emerson two weeks earlier:

On my return, a few days since, from a long Western journey, I found your note respecting Mr. Whitman. The bad feature of the affair to me is that it requires prompt action, which I cannot use. . . . Not to do nothing I have just written a note to Mr. F.N. Knapp at Washington, who, I am told, ought to know what you tell me, and may know how to employ Mr. Whitman's beneficial agency in some official way in the hospitals.

As soon as I return home, I shall make some trial whether I can find any direct friends and abettors for him and his beneficiaries, the soldiers. I gladly hear all that you say of him.<sup>25</sup>

Of course, in reaching out to Frederick Newman Knapp, an administrator in the Sanitary Commission who in October of that same year would become the Associate Secretary when Olmsted resigned,<sup>26</sup> Emerson would hardly have been securing Whitman the kind of support the poet desired. As we have seen, he always appeared reluctant, at least publically, to serve "in some official way in the hospitals," and Emerson's suggestion that he do so demonstrates the degree to which the Commission's message discouraging "free agents" was getting a hearing. The same is true of Emerson's remark that he had been told the secretary "ought to know" about Whitman's service.

As for Emerson's promise to seek aid from his friends, those rich prospects that made Redpath so optimistic, he appears to have achieved very little. In another oft-quoted letter, Redpath ascribes the lack of donations to a Puritanical disapproval of Whitman's poetry: "I have heard since that Emerson tried to have something done about you, but failed. . . . There is a prejudice agst you here among the 'fine' ladies & gentlemen of the transcendental School. It is believed that you are not ashamed of your reproductive organs, and, somehow, it wd seem to be the result of their logic—that eunuchs only are fit for nurses."<sup>27</sup> Ted Genoways has noted that this reluctance to support the poet is "puzzling" given Whitman's connections to Redpath's circle ("Memoranda"). While the publisher's explanation might be accurate, another likely explanation for Emerson's failure is the close link between the New England Unitarian church and the Sanitary Commission. Knapp himself had been a Unitarian minister before the war, and, again, Olmsted and others had actively been campaigning to become the sole organ for Union philanthropy (Maxwell 336). In many ways, Whitman's free-agent benevolence was precisely the kind of philanthropy that the Sanitary Commission sought to supplant, so it is at least just as likely that Emerson failed to raise funds from his friends in the "transcendental School" on philosophical grounds regarding how Civil War philanthropy should be conducted, as on moral and literary ones. Given the competition between the Sanitary Commission and the Christian Commission, any suggestion of the poet's affiliation with the latter may also have contributed to a reluctance to support him.

Redpath did more than simply solicit his friends, however. Perhaps in an effort to soften the blow of the bad news he was delivering to Whitman, the editor appended a note, writing, “Did you see the paragraph I wrote in *The Commonwealth* about you? If not, I’ll send another copy” (“May 5”). The “paragraph,” published April 10, 1863, does more than any article the poet himself wrote to account for his activities in the hospital, making a case for what made his service unique, and linking Whitman’s voluntarism directly to his poetic ethos. In particular, Redpath disentangles Whitman’s activities from those of the Christian Commission and offers only a subtle critique of the powerful Sanitary Commission. Even more importantly, Redpath does not shirk from addressing the poet’s pressing need for funds:

One of the most beloved and tender hearted of the visitors at the hospitals in Washington, is Walt. Whitman, author of *Leaves of Grass*. However his “barbaric yawp” may sound over other roofs, it sends sweet music into the sick wards of the Capital. A gentleman who accompanied him on several of his visits, relates that his coming was greeted by the soldiers with unvarying pleasure, and that he soothed the homesick boys so often seen there, with a tenderness that no woman could excel.... Dying of homesickness is no figure of speech, but a reality of weekly occurrence in our army. To such invalids the religious tract, or the mechanical consolations of theology, give no relief; not musty manna from the church wilderness, but living waters of sympathy from the warm heart of man who loves them is what they need to save them. And this they get from the rough singer of Brooklyn. Walt. like other poets is not excessively rich, and therefore may not stay in Washington much longer; but as long as he can afford to remain he means to keep at his self-elected and unpaid post, doing good to the sick and wounded. What a pity that when so many thousands of dollars are spent to but little purpose for this work that a hundred or two could not be devoted to retain this efficient volunteer.<sup>28</sup>

Redpath’s column offers a striking example of Civil War fundraising rhetoric. The editor highlights Whitman’s authorship of *Leaves of Grass* as well as its dominant poetic persona—Whitman is the “rough singer of Brooklyn,” a clear allusion to the speaker of “*Song of Myself*” who is “one of the roughs”—while at the same time distancing the poet’s volunteer activities from that persona: “However his ‘barbaric yawp’ may sound over other roofs, it sends sweet music into the sick wards.” Similarly, by contrasting Whitman’s “warm heart” with the “mechanical consolations of theology,” Redpath distinguishes the poet from similar volunteers acting on behalf of the Christian Commission, an intriguing move if the publisher in fact knew of the poet’s (largely unspoken) affiliation.<sup>29</sup> Finally, by ending with an affirmation of the wisdom in investing in this “efficient volunteer,” Redpath directly addresses the Sanitary Commission’s primary objection to individual volunteerism, namely that it is an inefficient way to deploy contributions.

In spite of efforts like this one, it is apparent in reviewing the public appeals of Whitman and his supporters that close associates and their networks were the primary source of his funds. To take advantage of these sources, Whitman would have to learn to follow Jeff's practical advice, crafting personal letters describing how he used donations and acknowledging the receipt of these gifts in a timely fashion; in short, he would need to learn to deploy the methods of fundraising that are now standard. It would take some time for Whitman to adopt such a strategy, and Jeff raised his early deficiencies in responding to gifts in a letter he wrote during the early months of the poet's work in the hospitals:

I mailed a letter to you either last Friday or Saturday, containing \$11. 10 from Hill & Newman and \$1. from Henry Carlow On Tuesday I again wrote you, sending you \$4...\$2 from Theo. A. Drake and 2 from "Cash" through John D. Martin The enclosed \$5 is from our friend Mr. E. Rae. He gave it to me last night I left him a couple of letters to read and I want you to write him one of the same kind of letters asking him to show it to some of his friends and if they have anything to devote to the purpose for him to send it directly to you or through me. Walt, I know Rae is a liberal hearted man and through his friends he could do a great deal and I am confident that he could be more earnestly interested in the matter if you write him directly. Please acknowledge the receipt of this and the others (if received) so that I may be positive that the money is reaching you.<sup>30</sup>

Whitman's tardiness in even acknowledging that he received the money sent to him, let alone in writing a meaningful thanks in response to the gifts, is clearly a vexing problem for Jeff. Once again, the poet's brother explicitly connects his ability to raise more funds to the poet's willingness to reach out to donors with personal descriptions of his work and the good that gifts do. While Jeff does not have the modern language at his disposal, his description of "Rae" indicates that he is what would today be classified as a "good prospect," a promising donor, and it will take the poet's personal involvement to make the most of the opportunity.

Only a few weeks later, Jeff again emphasized the point in a short note to Whitman. Apparently responding to a letter from his brother that has been lost, Jeff writes, "I am sorry that you omitted to put in Probasco's name in the list of those that sent money, could it be easily corrected."<sup>31</sup> Such a list does not appear in the articles or reports Whitman published during this period, most notably his letter "The Great Washington Hospital: Life Among Fifty Thousand Soldiers," published the same day that Jeff wrote the poet. This suggests, particularly in light of his brother's tardiness in acknowledging receipt of donations, that Jeff was referring to a private letter that he wished to circulate, something he did often.

The poet's reluctance to write these kinds of private letters is surprising, particularly because they so often bore fruit. When Jeff sent his brother the twenty-one dollars mentioned above, he specifically told Whitman, "Mr Lane thinks your last letter to me was a clincher. Newman, of the above firm was in the office and upon finding out what we were doing promised to give \$10. Mr Lane, thinking perhaps that by sending the money immediately might save a life or at least help to do it, advanced the money and wished me to write you to-day."<sup>32</sup> While Whitman's letter has not been found, it is clear that when he roused himself to write personal letters describing his work, even to his brother, such missives could move donors to provide significant funds outside of the established channels of the USSC.

Over time, and in certain cases, Whitman does seem to have responded in the ways that Jeff urged. This is particularly true with Moses Lane, Jeff's superior at work and one of the poet's most consistent benefactors.<sup>33</sup> The following passage from a letter Whitman wrote Lane in May demonstrates how the poet could bring himself to engage with his donors:

Most heartily do I thank you, dear friend, for your kind exertions—& those gentlemen above named—it is a work of God's charity, never cases more deserving of aid, never more heart-rending cases, than these now coming up in one long bloody string from Chancellorsville and Fredericksburgh [sic] battles, six or seven hundred every day without intermission. [...] Yesterday I spent nearly all day at Armory Square Hospital. This forenoon I take an intermission, & go again at dusk.

[...] Jeff writes me about your boy Horace Tarr, 20<sup>th</sup> Connecticut. I will endeavor to make immediate inquiry about him—there are some of the 20<sup>th</sup> Conn. here in hospital—will write you forthwith, if I get any information.

I have written to Nicholas Wyckoff, to your care, a hospital &c. letter.

Love & thanks to you, dear friend, & to those who are aiding my boys. (*Corr.*, 98-99)

Here the poet emphasizes the deserving nature of his charges, the soldiers, and reassures the donor of the value of his gift, referring to Lane's "kind exertions" as themselves "a work of God's charity," including Lane in the effort. He also provides the kind of direct connection that Jeff had called for, one further reinforced by the poet's commitment to help Lane locate his missing nephew. In short, Whitman forms the kind of relationship that fundraising experts assert is essential in development activities.<sup>34</sup> All the same, Whitman's closing line indicates that this was not simply a perfunctory task; as scholars have long recognized, the poet truly did see the injured soldiers as "his boys," and the familiarity of his tone is consistent with both his public and personal writing. Whitman is not simply being calculating in his efforts to ensure a connection with his donor. It can be easy to be cynical about fundraising, but, as

Whitman's letters make clear, it is impossible to separate it from the work it supports.

While necessary, such letters were not easy for the poet to write, and this may account for why he more often turned to journalism or the efforts of sympathetic allies: a week before his detailed letter to Lane, Whitman wrote to his mother, "I have written to Mr. Lane, asking him to get his friends to forward me what they think proper—but somehow I feel delicate about sending such requests, after all. I have almost made up my mind to do what I can personally, & not seek assistance from others" (*Corr.*, 98). Similarly, rather than make these kinds of appeals, Whitman suggested in a later letter to his mother that he might begin doing lectures and readings to raise funds (Genoways, "Memoranda"). He abandoned this effort after both Jeff and Lane advised against it,<sup>35</sup> and he gradually overcame his reluctance to solicit funds on his own behalf, carefully crafting his donor correspondence.

One of the most striking examples of his increased willingness to write such solicitations—and their effectiveness—is the draft of a letter that Whitman likely wrote to Redpath in August 1863. The letter's direct appeal for aid, its recognition that friends and associates are the most likely source of that aid, the specific details regarding how the money will be used, the deserving nature of the recipients, and the important role that Whitman himself plays in the hospital, all make this the writer's strongest example of direct fundraising:

I am going to write you to ask any friends you may be in communication with for aid for my soldiers. I remain here in Washington still occupied among the hospitals—I have now been engaged in this over seven months.... I seldom miss a day or evening. Out of the six or seven hundred in this Hosp[ital] I try to give a word or a trifle to every one without exception.... I give all kinds of sustenance, blackberries, peaches, lemons & sugar, wines, all kinds of preserves, pickles, brandy, milk, shirts & all articles of underclothing, tobacco, tea, handkerchiefs, &c &c &c. I always give paper, envelopes, stamps, &c. I want a supply for this purpose. To many I give (when I have it) small sums of money—half of the soldiers in hospital have not a cent. [...]

I wish you would ask any body you know who is likely to contribute—It is a good holy cause, surely nothing nobler—I desire you if possible could raise for me, forthwith, for application to these wounded & sick here, (they are from Massachusetts & all the New England states, there is not a day but I am with some Yankee boys, & doing some trifle for them)—a sum—if possible \$50—if not, then less—\$30—or indeed any am't—

I am at present curiously almost alone here, as visitor & consolatory to Hospitals—the work of the different Reliefs & Commissions is nearly all off in the field—& as to private visitors, *there are few or none*—I wish you or some of your friends could just make a round with me, for an hour or so, at some of my hospitals or camps—I go among all our own dear soldiers, hospital camps & army, our teamsters' hospitals, among sick & dying, the rebels, the contrabands, &c &c. What I reach is necessarily

but a drop in the bucket but it is done in good faith, & with now some experience & I hope with good heart. (*Corr.*, 121-123)

In spite of the strange displacement of future tense in the letter's opening phrase, Whitman is otherwise strikingly direct in his fundraising here. In particular, his repeated request that Redpath solicit friends and "any body you know" is quite different from his earlier comment to his brother Jeff "not to crowd the thing" in asking his co-workers for money, as is his identification of a particular monetary goal. Although he quickly qualified the rather large request—\$50—his willingness to ask for such a high figure is another departure from his earlier resolution simply to see what he could do on his own. Finally, he wisely invites his readers to get even more actively involved in his efforts, to "make a round" with him "for an hour or so." Clearly the poet recognizes the effectiveness of bringing people into the hospitals to see his work; if this couldn't be done literally, then his letters could help to substitute for the immediate experience.

Perhaps what makes this appeal most remarkable is that, like the letters to Jeff that his brother shared with his friends and associates, we know that this one got results. In fact, over time this letter appears to have raised at least three times as much as the poet hoped. Six weeks after writing Redpath, Whitman received the following from a Boston doctor named Le Baron Russell, a friend of the publisher:

I have been much interested in a letter from you to Mr. Redpath, written some weeks ago, which I have lately seen, & I am very glad to send you the inclosed check to be used for the benefit of our noble "boys" in the hospitals, at your discretion. I have seen much of the hospitals myself, & I know how much good your friendly sympathy must do them, & also that even a slight pecuniary aid is sometimes very acceptable to them in their forlorn condition.

Of the enclosed check, ten dollars of the amount is contributed by my sister, Mrs. G.W. Briggs of Salem, to whom I read your letter, & ten dollars by my friend Edward Atkinson. The balance I give to the boys with great pleasure, & I will very gladly give more hereafter, when I hear from you of the receipt of this & find that more is needed.

As your letter is not of a very late date, I do not feel certain that your address may be the same as at the time you wrote. Please inform me how this is, as I hope to be able to send you more from other friends.

I hope that you will continue in your good work, as I am sure from your letter, & from what my friend, Mr. Emerson, says of his own acquaintance with you, that your visits must give great comfort to our poor suffering men.<sup>36</sup>

Unfortunately, there is no way to determine the precise amount the doctor sent, but, unlike his occasional delay in responding to the gifts that Jeff forwarded him, Whitman apparently replied quickly to Russell, who acknowledged Whitman's letter, promised more aid and, even more

significantly, let the poet know that he had forwarded Whitman's letter to a friend "who will read it to some of her friends."<sup>37</sup> The results were dramatic: if one traces the correspondence from Russell and his friends in the weeks and months that followed, then Whitman's appeal to Redpath for aid brought in at least \$185, and this is a conservative estimate based only upon stated dollar amounts in surviving correspondence. It does not include additional money that may have been enclosed after the letter was composed.<sup>38</sup> Whitman recognized this remarkable outpouring when he wrote again to Redpath in October 1863, after the gifts began pouring in: "The generosity of Dr. Russell, Mrs. Curtis, and other friends, I will briefly say, tells daily & nightly & shall tell to the best of my power, upon my dear boys here, in hospital" (*Corr.*, 164). After the war, the poet wrote, "I bestowed, as almoner for others, many, many thousands of dollars. I learned one thing conclusively—that beneath the ostensible greed and heartlessness of our times there is no end to the generous benevolence of men and women in the United States, when once sure of their object" (*PW* 1:82). Whitman's correspondence was essential to providing the necessary certainty.

Perhaps in response to the success of his direct appeal, the poet's letters to his donors—unlike some of his letters to Jeff—show a great deal of care in the final months of 1863 and in 1864. This crafting is evident in a draft of a later letter he apparently wrote to Lane in March 1864. Although Whitman could still be undisciplined in recognizing gifts promptly, the letter is noteworthy for the way in which the poet is clearly conscious of what he chooses to include in the correspondence:

I rec'd this morning your additional contribution of \$5 for the wounded & sick. The same am't from you was also duly & thankfully received last month. It is some time since I have written you. . . . I am writing this in hospital as I am watching here to-night over a bad case.

(Describe scene.)

With me here things are about the same. I have first-rate health & strength. My hospital ministrations are fascinating with all of their sadness. The wounded & sick get incredibly near to one. Poor young men, they respond so affectionately to kindness & magnetism.

[...]

Dear friend, the sick are coming in here now from front pretty freely. I have need of means additional—The new sick & wounded generally come in without a cent. I give aid of all kinds, sometimes little sums of money. You have been generous & regular in your aid, & I cannot call on you for any thing more than you are doing, but I would like you to cast around among your friends, show them this note, & tell them the case—see if you could raise among them some 20 or \$25 the ensuing week, if possible, for it is a sacred object. (*Corr.*, 201-202)



Whitman's reminder to himself to include a description of the scene at the hospital indicates his awareness of the kind of material he needed to be sure to feature, and it suggests the possibility that he might have begun producing descriptions that could be inserted into multiple letters. The similarities in this and other letters also indicate the poet's willingness to recycle material.<sup>39</sup> As with his previous letters to Lane, the poet makes a point of commenting on the good that the donor has been doing through his gifts, and, even without the graphic description, he is careful to describe both the physical suffering of the soldiers and his proximity to it. His account of his actions confirms once again that he is the donor's agent working on his behalf, and it also conveniently provides a rationale for why he has been delayed in acknowledging Lane's gift the previous month. At the same time, Whitman confirms his personal connection to Lane, making a point of describing his own health. This was important since Lane had specifically earmarked a gift to be used for Whitman's own benefit.

Finally, the direct appeal with which the poet closes is particularly remarkable when we recall the great reluctance he expressed earlier in the war when it came to asking for contributions. Even here his language remains cautious, of course, but this letter is the clearest indication yet that, after many months laboring in the hospitals, and following his success with Redpath and others, the poet had adopted an impressively proto-modern approach to fundraising, even though he remained rather slow in producing the kind of acknowledgments of gifts that his brother desired.

Indeed, even this letter may have been more a product of Jeff's prodding than Whitman's own initiative. In a letter Jeff wrote to his brother at nearly this same time, he enclosed \$5 from Lane "for the wounded men," and wrote, "I wish you would write me a letter to show Mr W. E. Worthen of New York. I think I could raise you some \$20 or \$25 per month out of him. He is the man I went down to Springfield to work for.—he spoke of it himself—said that he thought he could do something out of his friends,—although poor himself."<sup>40</sup> Particularly when we consider that Whitman's letter to Lane, likely written shortly after he received this from Jeff, contained a direction to "describe scene," it seems quite possible that the poet's letter to Lane was part of his response to Jeff's persistent request for more fundraising material to share with prospects. And, in fact, Worthen did send the poet twenty dollars that he raised for the poet's "Sanitary distribution."<sup>41</sup>

Regardless of the impetus, Whitman at last seems to have learned his lesson. In response to a \$75 gift sent by Russell's sister, who had raised money from among her friends after hearing of the poet's work, he wrote in closing:

My friend, you must accept the men's thanks, through me. I shall remain here among the soldiers in hospital through the summer, with short excursions down in field, & what help you can send me for the wounded & sick I need hardly say how gladly I shall receive it & apply it personally to them.<sup>42</sup>

Given the poet's earlier reluctance to engage in direct fundraising, Whitman's final appeal for more funds for the soldiers, along with the promise that should they be sent, he will "apply it personally to them,"<sup>43</sup> shows how far he had come in his willingness to seek and obtain support.

By modern standards, Whitman acted with an astonishing lack of accountability: he did not provide donors with detailed information about how their gifts were employed, nor was there any way for them to learn more beyond the general descriptions he provided.<sup>44</sup> Instead of such reports, in both his public and private correspondence, Whitman attempts to personalize the exchange, emphasizing the suffering of the soldiers and rendering himself in turn a surrogate for the donor, a surrogate for the soldier, and an intermediary between the two. When he speaks of himself, it is ordinarily to comment on how the hospital scenes move him and how they make him feel. In other words, he offers the donor the opportunity to empathize with both the soldier and the attendant. As a result, Whitman's fundraising letters are a complex intermingling of the personal and the impersonal. On the one hand, the poet tries to bring his correspondents into the hospital, to give them an idea of what conditions are like; on the other hand, particularly in the letters following Jeff's advice, he is also prepared to reinsert himself to either provide a cue for emotional response or to allude to how he can stand in for either the donor or the soldier in the charitable exchange. The results of his appeals demonstrate their effectiveness, and the emotional power he could bring to bear was necessary to compete with the Sanitary Commission's frequent arguments for the greater patriotism and efficiency of gifts given through its organization. What Jeff understood—and what Whitman learned—was that, in the end, the poet's words were most effective when they resembled the aid that he tirelessly provided to the soldiers in the hospitals, gestures of personal and immediate gratitude and heartfelt care, passed from one soul to another.

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## NOTES

1 In at least one case, Whitman appears to have concealed his affiliation from the soldiers, as well. Lewis K. Brown, a wounded soldier whom Whitman met in February 1863, just weeks after gaining his commission, wrote a letter to the poet a few months later recording his disappointment in obtaining a new shirt from the Christian Commission. He remarks, “the Relief association may be a verry nice thing, but I cant see it, for I never get any thing from them yet—you have give me more than all of the rest put together. . so you are the relief association that I (as well as all the rest of the boys) like best” (Lewis K. Brown to Walt Whitman, November 5, 1863. Available on the *Walt Whitman Archive* [whitmanarchive.org]). Brown does not seem to have any idea that Whitman was a Christian Commission delegate when he met him.

2 Rev. Lemuel Moss, *Annals of the United States Christian Commission* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott and Co., 1868), 601.

3 “Proclamation appointing Walt Whitman as a delegate on behalf of the United States Christian Commission,” University of Minnesota Libraries, Kautz Family YMCA Archives. Web. The poet also briefly used a notebook with “CHRISTIAN COMMISSION” embossed on the front cover and within which he wrote, “Walt Whitman’s Soldier’s Missionary to Hospital, Camp, & Battle Ground.” See Walt Whitman, *Notebooks and Unpublished Prose Manuscripts*, ed. Edward F. Grier, 6 vols. (New York: New York University Press, 1984), 2:602. There is an intriguing undated listing in his notebook from around this time that reads simply “Young Men’s Christian Association Penn. Ave. nearly opposite Mr Shears or Sheeren Brown’s hotel” (521). This may be a reminder to inquire about a commission, and the Christian Commission notebook he carried contains a Pennsylvania Avenue address inside the front cover (602).

4 In addition to the *Annals*, two dissertations have been written on the Christian Commission. (There is as yet no published history.) Neither of them refers to Whitman’s affiliation with the Commission, although James O. Henry quotes a reference to Whitman’s journalism from George Templeton Strong (167); see Henry, *History of the United States Christian Commission*, Diss. University of Maryland, 1959, and Theresa R. McDevitt, *Fighting for the Soul of America: A History of the United States Christian Commission*, Diss. Kent State University, 1997.

5 There are many unanswered questions about Whitman’s commission. In the *Annals*, Moss notes, “Each delegate was expected to furnish the Commission with a full report of his work” (580). In addition to the absence of Whitman’s name from the list of delegates, there is no indication that Whitman ever completed this report. Delegates were also under the supervision of local agents, and, again, Whitman never mentions anything like this in any of his published writings or private correspondence. Given the requirements for delegates—particularly the emphasis on church membership—how did Whitman obtain his commission? Exactly how long was he a delegate? Why is there no record of his service as a delegate in the official history of the Christian Commission? His Delegate Commission lists him as “No. 158,” but this number is missing from the official history, as are listings for delegates numbered 156, 157 and 159 (Moss 602-603). Were the records simply lost? Why didn’t Whitman mention his commission in his letters home or in his public writings? The complete story of Whitman’s affiliation with the Christian Commission has yet to be written, but it is important to note that whatever association he may have had with the organization did not seem to reduce his need to raise money on his own behalf.

6 Over the past thirty years, the number of works on effective fundraising has skyrocketed as the task has become professionalized. Some prominent recent works include Tom Ahern's *Seeing through a Donor's Eyes: How to Make a Persuasive Case for Everything from your Annual Drive to your Planned Giving Program to your Capital Campaign* (Medfield, MA: Emerson and Church, 2009), and Mal Warwick's *How to Write Successful Fundraising Letters: Sample Letters, Style Tips, Useful Hints, Real-World Examples* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001). I am grateful to Andrea Proulx Buinicki, CEO of the philanthropic advising firm Giving Focus, for her insights on charitable best-practices.

7 Whitman scholars and biographers have long recognized the importance of charitable contributions to the poet's volunteer efforts, but Whitman's role in soliciting these funds is often overlooked or understated. Gay Wilson Allen, for example, briefly mentions the contributions of friends and associates, and the "indirect appeal for funds" in some of Whitman's writing, but concentrates more on the insufficiency of these gifts and the poet's search for better employment in Washington (*The Solitary Singer* [New York: Macmillan, 1955], 290-291). David S. Reynolds notes that the gifts Whitman distributed were often "contributed by Brooklyn or Washington friends" but does not discuss the work it took to raise them (*Walt Whitman's America* [New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996], 424-425). In Jerome Loving's thorough and invaluable biography of Whitman, for example, the author notes that "throughout the war [Whitman's brother Jeff] forwarded contributions collected from his friends and fellow engineers at the Brooklyn Water Works," but he concentrates on the poet's service in the hospitals themselves and not the constant correspondence between the two brothers needed to secure these donations (*Walt Whitman: The Song of Himself* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999], 18). Ted Genoways has offered the most sustained discussion of Whitman's fundraising, but largely in connection with the poet's turn to journalism in 1863; see "Memoranda of a Year (1863): Whitman in Washington, D.C.," *Mickle Street Review* 17/18 (2005), [micklestreet.rutgers.edu](http://micklestreet.rutgers.edu). Hereafter, "Memoranda."

8 See Beverly Gordan's *Bazaar and Fair Ladies: The History of the American Fundraising Fair* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1998) for a thorough overview of this most well-known fundraising practice.

9 Marjorie Barstow Greenbie, *Lincoln's Daughters of Mercy* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1944), 39.

10 Laura Wood Roper, *FLO: A Biography of Frederick Law Olmsted* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), 158.

11 Jeanie Attie, *Patriotic Toil: Northern Women and the American Civil War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 36.

12 U.S. Sanitary Commission, "To the Loyal Women of America," [Archive.org](http://Archive.org). Hereafter, "To the Loyal Women."

13 In his history of the fair, Robert W. Schoeberlein points out that the fair was originally intended to benefit only the USSC, but its scope was expanded in the planning stages, surely a vexing development for the Commission. See Robert W. Schoeberlein, "A Fair to Remember: Maryland Women in Aid of the Union," *Maryland Historical Society Magazine* 90 (Winter 1995), 466-488. Hereafter, "A Fair to Remember."

- 14 The volume has also drawn attention from literary scholars due to the inclusion of a poem by Herman Melville, "Inscription for the Slain at Shiloh," not included in his collection *Battle-Pieces*. See Hershel Parker, *Herman Melville, A Biography*, Vol. 2 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 562.
- 15 Walt Whitman, *Prose Works*, ed. Floyd Stovall (New York: New York University Press, 1963-1964), 2:83. Henceforth, *PW*.
- 16 See, for example, Martin G. Murray, "Traveling with the Wounded: Walt Whitman and Washington's Civil War Hospitals," *Washington History: Magazine of the Historical Society of Washington, D.C.* 8 (Fall/Winter 1996-1997), 58-73, 92-93. Available on the *Walt Whitman Archive* ([whitmanarchive.org](http://whitmanarchive.org)).
- 17 Ralph Waldo Emerson to Salmon P. Chase, January 10, 1863, and Emerson to William H. Seward, January 10, 1863. *Collected Writings of Walt Whitman: The Correspondence*, ed. Edwin Haviland Miller, Vol. 1: 1842-1867 (New York University Press, 1961), 64-66. Hereafter, *Corr*.
- 18 Genoways, "Memoranda."
- 19 Walt Whitman, "The Great Army of the Sick," *New York Times* (February 26, 1863), 2. Available on the *Walt Whitman Archive* ([whitmanarchive.org](http://whitmanarchive.org)).
- 20 Walt Whitman, "Life Among the Fifty Thousand," *Complete Writings of Walt Whitman*, ed. Richard Maurice Bucke, Thomas B Harned, and Horace L. Traubel, Vol. 7 (New York: Putnam's Sons, 1902; rpt. Grosse Point, MI: Scholarly Press), 91-92.
- 21 Thomas Jefferson Whitman to Walt Whitman, April 6, 1863. Available on the *Walt Whitman Archive* ([whitmanarchive.org](http://whitmanarchive.org)).
- 22 Frederick Law Olmsted, "What They Have to Do Who Stay at Home," *Sanitary Commission* No. 50 (October 21, 1862), 6.
- 23 Olmsted notes, "In order to carry out this more generous and efficient method, hospital supplies *must* be accumulated at certain points where they can be instantly commanded, and from which they can be transferred in large and assorted quantities wherever the most urgent calls are made for them. For this purpose, most persons should become simply contributors to societies, which have the duty to send forward what they collect to such convenient points, for assortment, storage, and transhipment, as may be established by the Commission" (7). Had all donors respected Olmsted and the Commission in this matter, then Whitman would never have been able to raise the funds he needed to support his hospital work.
- 24 James Redpath to Walt Whitman, March 10, 1863. Available on the *Walt Whitman Archive* ([whitmanarchive.org](http://whitmanarchive.org)).
- 25 *Ibid*.
- 26 William Quentin Maxwell, *Lincoln's Fifth Wheel: The Political History of the United States Sanitary Commission* (New York: Longmans, Green and Company, 1956), 221.
- 27 Redpath to Whitman, May 5, 1863. Available on the *Walt Whitman Archive* ([whitmanarchive.org](http://whitmanarchive.org)). Hereafter, May 5.
- 28 Redpath, *Commonwealth* (April 10, 1863); in Redpath, May 5, n2.
- 29 Redpath's language here also heightens the likelihood that his reference to Whitman as an "evangelist" in his earlier letter was written with tongue in cheek.

30 Thomas Jefferson Whitman to Walt Whitman, February 12, 1863. Available on the *Walt Whitman Archive* ([whitmanarchive.org](http://whitmanarchive.org)).

31 Thomas Jefferson Whitman to Walt Whitman, March 19, 1863. Available on the *Walt Whitman Archive* ([whitmanarchive.org](http://whitmanarchive.org)).

32 Thomas Jefferson Whitman to Walt Whitman, February 6, 1863. Available on the *Walt Whitman Archive* ([whitmanarchive.org](http://whitmanarchive.org)).

33 Indeed, in April of 1863 Lane sent money specifically for Whitman to spend on himself (*Corr.* 67n).

34 Whitman never became truly consistent in writing these kinds of replies, however. The most striking example is his failure to thank the children who gave money through Moses Lane in 1863. Jeff wrote to his brother on June 4, 1865: “If it wouldnt be too much trouble I wish you would write a letter to the young ones that sent you the money through Lane—they are all awfully disappointed—they are all little girls of 8 and 12 years old (some even younger) and have been speculating what they should do with the letter—which one it would be directed to &c—at last they settled it by agreeing that each one should have the letter for a week at a time in regular order—they have called to see Mr Lane several times to see if it had been received. . . . [T]hey of course are too young to know that the great point was to give it and of course look for the praise that is usually bestowed. Did Lane explain to you that they were the children of the people that sent you money last winter a year ago... they remembered hearing your letters read to their fathers and mothers, and heard a great deal of talk about the great good you could do with even a few dollars. This fair they got up entirely among themselves and resolved in solumn conclave (after voting down resolutions to give to the Sanitary Com. Christian Com, &c &c) to send the money to you to be spent &c” ([whitmanarchive.org](http://whitmanarchive.org)). The degree of detail that Jeff goes into in this letter, cajoling his brother to send a thank-you letter for a gift given more than a year before, demonstrates how important it was to him that the poet acknowledge this gift. Regrettably, no such recognition from the poet has been found.

35 After discussing Whitman’s idea, Jeff and Lane decided that it would be better if Whitman became part of a volunteer organization: “[Mr Lane and I] came to the conclusion that it would be much better if you could be appointed dispensing agent, or something of that kind, for some of the numerous aid societies, and he said that he would go and see Storrs and some other of the big guns of those societies in this city and see if it could not be done” (June 13, 1863, [whitmanarchive.org](http://whitmanarchive.org)). Given how long and energetically these two men had supported Whitman’s independent actions, their suggestion that he now affiliate himself with an aid society is surprising. While their stated reason for opposing the lecture plan was that they feared the poet would not raise the money he hoped, it could also be that they did not want to see him leave the hospitals for the time necessary to write and present lectures. In either case, Whitman would have none of it, and the suggestion appears to have provoked his oft-quoted denunciation of formal aid societies, although the denunciation was delivered in a letter addressed to his mother, and not to his chief benefactors: “As to the Sanitary Commissions & the like, I am sick of them all, & would not accept any of their berths—you ought to see the way the men as they lie helpless in bed turn away their faces from the sight of these Agents, Chaplains, &c. (*hivelings* as Elias Hicks would call them—they seem to me always a set of foxes and wolves)—they get well paid, & are always incompetent & disagreeable—As I told you before the only good fellows I have met are the Christian Commissioners—they go everywhere & receive no pay—” (*Corr.*, 110-11). As we have already seen, Whitman described his own service

as a form of “missionary” work, but it is odd that he does not allude here to his own relationship with the Christian Commission; indeed, his language explicitly distinguishes his efforts from theirs. In raising the issue of pay for service, he touched on a debate surrounding the USSC and the Christian Commission, one that both sides watched keenly. See Frederick Law Olmsted, *The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted: Defending the Union, 1861-1863*, Vol. 4, ed. Jane Turner Censer (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1986), 53.

36 Dr. Le Baron Russell to Walt Whitman, September 21, 1863. Available on the *Walt Whitman Archive* (whitmanarchive.org).

37 Russell to Whitman, October 4, 1863. Available on the *Walt Whitman Archive* (whitmanarchive.org).

38 In addition to further donations and letters sent by Russell, see Margaret S. Curtis to Whitman, October 1, 1863; Hannah E. Stevenson to Whitman, October 6, 1863; and Lucia Jane Russell Briggs to Whitman, April 21, 1864. Available on the *Walt Whitman Archive* (whitmanarchive.org).

39 In reading many of Whitman’s replies, for example, one finds very similar descriptions of the kinds of services he provides. In reply to a fifty dollar donation, Whitman writes about the “haversack” that he always carries, and notes, “Frequently I give small sums of money—shall do so with your brother’s contribution—the wounded are very frequently brought & lay here a long while without a cent” (Whitman to William S. Davis, October 1, 1863), a phrase quite similar to that found in his letter to Redpath: “To many I give (when I have it) small sums of money—half of the soldiers in hospital have not a cent.” Similar language also appears in William O’Connor’s defense of Whitman, *The Good Gray Poet* (see Loving, *Walt Whitman: The Song of Himself*, 264-265).

40 Thomas Jefferson Whitman to Walt Whitman, March 11, 1864. Available on the *Walt Whitman Archive* (whitmanarchive.org).

41 W. E. Worthen to Walt Whitman, May 23, 1864. Available on the *Walt Whitman Archive* (whitmanarchive.org).

42 Walt Whitman to Lucia Jane Russell Briggs, April 26, 1864. Available on the *Walt Whitman Archive* (whitmanarchive.org).

43 Similarly, in May 1864, the poet wrote to John Townsend Trowbridge to thank him for a donation, and closed by adding, “Should you find any you know who are able & who feel to aid the wounded, through me, it would come *very acceptable now*” (*Corr.*, 224). Although Jeff had been systematically reaching out to friends and associates to raise money, the poet seems to have truly embraced such efforts following his success with Redpath and Russell.

44 The same was true of Jeff. On December 28, 1863, he wrote to Whitman, “In the early part of this month Mr Kirkwood sent me \$5 to send you but I have been pretty hard up and had to use it. I will get some money as soon as I get back to Brooklyn again and will send it to you then” (whitmanarchive.org). While Jeff did send his brother the five dollars in January, specifically referencing this earlier letter, Kirkwood likely had no idea that he was giving Jeff an interest-free loan, and Jeff’s actions would today likely put him in legal jeopardy.