



SISTER M CAMILLA O'KEEFE



as Portrayed by Julie Decker

The Gospel of Matthew tells us, “what you do to the least for my brethren , you do also for me”. This passage forms the basis for the philosophy of the Catholic Sisters who served during the American Civil War.

The role of the Catholic Sisters is one of the vastly unknown tales of the Civil War. Over 600 religious sisters from 12 different orders answered the call to nurse the sick, wounded, and dying of both armies. One order, The Daughters of Charity, sent over 200 Sisters to aid the soldiers and no where was their presence more felt than in a small Pennsylvania town named Gettysburg.



Sister M. Camilla O’Keefe was born in the village of Killanam, Co. Cork, Ireland in May 1815. Due to poor fortune, the family was forced to immigrate to America in 1829. In 1836 Sr. Camilla became a postulant at St. Joseph’s Convent, Emmitsburg, MD; she took her final vows on December 25, 1838. During the days immediately following the battle of Gettysburg, Sister Camilla and members of St. Joseph’s convent ventured 8 miles from the peaceful valley in the Catoctin section of the Blue Ridge Mountains into a sea of misery, death, and destruction.

✿ Julie brings the love of history and her Irish heritage to the FGC as she portrays Sister Camilla O’Keefe. By the use of excerpts from the personal diary of Sister Camilla, Julie educates the public on the many experiences that faced the Catholic Sisters as they cared for the soldiers as well as the social climate and challenges that the Irish immigrant faced during the mid 19th century. Julie is a 1985 graduate of the Altoona Hospital School of Nursing, a 2007 graduate of Mount Aloysius College and currently is pursuing a Master’s Degree in Nursing from Indiana University of PA. Julie and her husband, Doug, have been reenacting for 4 years along with their children, Katherine and Greg. ✿