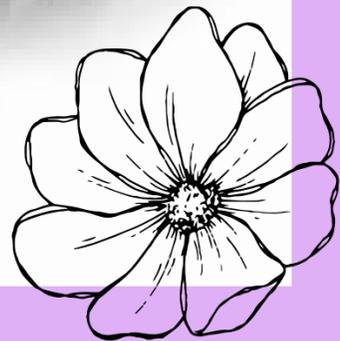
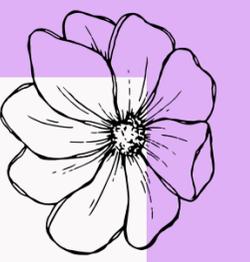




Malinda Pritchard Blalock





Childhood



Sarah Malinda Pritchard was born in Alexander County, North Carolina to Alfred and Elizabeth Pritchard on March 10, 1839. She was the sixth of nine children and spent her childhood in Watauga County. Malinda Pritchard attended a one-room schoolhouse in which she met William Keith Blalock, who was ten years older than her. Despite a 150-year feud between the Blalocks and the Pritchards, the two developed a close friendship. In the politically turbulent year of 1861, at the age of 19, Malinda married William.

Civil War



At the outbreak of the conflict, people in rural communities in western North Carolina were divided in their political views. Originally, Malinda expressed sympathy for the right of secession. On the opposite political side, Keith and his stepfather Austin Coffey were Unionist radicals and had planned to defect to the Union at some point. The opposite views, however, did not affect their marriage.

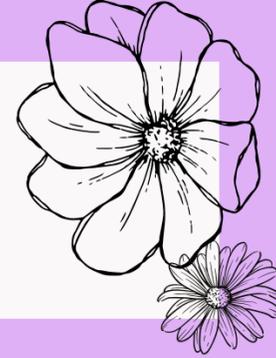
When William went to war, Malinda decided to go with him and enlist. She cut her hair short and wore men's clothes.

Malinda was officially registered on 20 March 1862 in Lenoir, North Carolina, as Samuel "Sammy" Blalock, as Keith's 20-year-old younger brother. This document and her discharge papers have survived as one of the few surviving records of female soldiers in North Carolina.





Military life



Under her false identity, Malinda was a good soldier. She did the work of a soldier like any other member of the company, and was very adept at learning the manual and drill.

Keith kept the secret by sharing with her the rough military life. Later, he became a respected commissioned sergeant and ordered Malinda to "stay close to him". They fought together in three battles.



In April 1862, Keith's squadron was ordered to reach the Neuse River area to detect any enemy. After regrouping, "Samuel" was missing. Keith quickly returned to the battlefield. He found Malinda bleeding with a bullet lodged in her left shoulder.

Keith carried Malinda to the nurse's tent where she was attended by his surgeon, Thomas Boykin. The bullet was successfully removed, but the true gender of "Samuel" came to light.

Desperate, Keith went into the woods, to a nearby field of poison ivy. He stripped off his clothes and wallowed in it for nearly half an hour.



In the morning, he was feverish and his skin was inflamed. The doctors quickly discharged Keith from the regiment and confined him to his tent.

Malinda would remain in camp because her wound was not considered very serious. She decided to confront Colonel Vance by volunteering to help Sergeant Keith return to Watauga. Vance's answer was a clear no.

Malinda decided to confess the truth. His first reaction was not to believe it so he called the surgeon. The surgeon corroborated the seriousness of Malinda's statement. Immediately, Vance discharged "Samuel" and demanded restitution of "his" \$50 enlistment reward.





Malinda and her husband returned to Watauga. Keith was called by local Confederate forces, which required him to re-enlist. So Malinda and Keith went again, to Grandfather Mountain. They stayed with the deserters until the Confederate army hurt Keith in the arm. Then, they moved to Tennessee.

War then began to haunt Watauga County. Keith's stepfather and one of his brothers were killed. During the war, some of Malinda and Keith's actions included two raids on the Moore family farm in Caldwell County in late 1863.

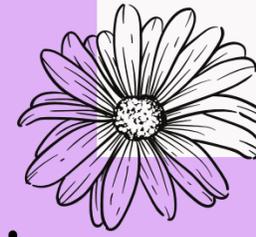
During the raids, Keith also lost the use of one hand. He also killed one of his uncles who had joined the Confederacy.





After the war, Malinda and Keith returned to Watauga, to live out the rest of their lives as farmers with their four children. They joined the Republican Party in 1870.

Sarah Malinda Pritchard Blalock died of natural causes in 1901, aged 59, in her sleep.



later life

