

## Mary Seacole Disclosures

### Author Details: Jeroen Staring

Retired Dr. mult. Jeroen Staring taught mathematics and physics/chemistry at secondary schools in The Netherlands. His 2005 Medical Sciences dissertation describes the life, work and technique of F. Matthias Alexander. In 2013, he successfully defended a second dissertation, on the early history of the NYC Bureau of Educational Experiments.

His wife Corry Staring-Derks and he were the Dutch Ambassadors of the Mary Seacole Memorial Statue Appeal (see: Gray (Ed.), 2016, p. 70).

### Abstract

*This case study lists and mentions literature on Mary Seacole and mainly quotes literature that has not previously been mentioned in Seacole literature.*

**Key Words:** Florence Nightingale (1820-1910), Mary Jane (Grant) Seacole (????-1881). William Howard Russell (1820-1907).

### Introduction: Bicentennial of Florence Nightingale

Florence Nightingale's bicentennial was celebrated on May 12, 2020 — at the time of the first worldwide peak of Covid-19 patients after the onset of the coronavirus outbreak in China, just a few months earlier in 2020. Nightingale is widely regarded as the founder of modern nursing. Commemoration ceremonies, of course, devoted particular attention to infectious diseases — although everyone knows that when the Crimean War (1853-1856) raged, numerous infections arose whilst Nightingale held sway over the nursing of wounded and sick soldiers; far too many of them died. According to Nightingale expert McDonald (2017, p. 40), “up to 40 per cent of those admitted [died] in the worst hospital in its worst month.” Using Nightingale's (1859) statistics, Nightingale expert Smith (1982, p. 35) calculated, “During the worst of the winter the death rate was to climb to about 46 per cent of all admissions.”



**Figure 1: Florence Nightingale, hand coloured carte de visite photograph, circa 1857 (Jeroen Staring Collection). Figure 2: Party of Dutch nurses on a pilgrimage to the grave of Florence Nightingale — located next to the Church of St. Margaret of Antioch, Willow, near Romsey, Hants, U.K.; August 4, 1930 (Jeroen Staring Collection).**

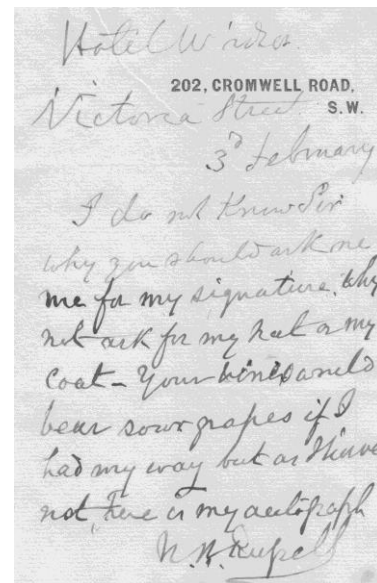
Especially the Barracks Hospital at Scutari, Istanbul (Turkey), where most injured and sick officers and soldiers were nursed, was notorious for countless infections.

Nightingale (see *Figure 1*) was not in Turkey or the Crimea before Irish war correspondent William Howard Russell (see *Figures 3, 4 and 5*) suggested in his Crimean War reports that women nurses should help wounded and sick British soldiers. His suggestion was published in *The Times* on October 9, 1854. Smith (1982) and Staring-Derks (2007) sketched the background to Nightingale's expedition to the Crimea after she had read Russell's text.

On October 21, 1854, Nightingale and a group of nurses left England. Between November 1854 and August 1856, she was first in Turkey, and later she also visited the Crimea. McDonald (2017, p. 27), retelling a romance of the Crimean War, states, "Having been seen at night going through the long corridors of the Barrack Hospital, Nightingale soon became known in the media as 'the Lady with the Lamp'." Less known today, Nightingale too often showed a bad mood. She "was not always the gentle 'Lady of the Lamp,' the 'Santa Filomena' of Longfellow's poem, but a lady with a very bad temper" (Concannon, 1950, p. 12). Evelyn Bolster (Sister M. Angela) wrote that Nightingale,

[...] made it clear that the authority vested in herself should be supreme and unquestioned. The urge towards absolute power was the keynote of her attitude all through the war. She pursued it ruthlessly, caring little for the rights or objections of others, riding rough-shod over the claims of medical officers, and not hesitating on occasion to make representations and misrepresentations to the War Office. [...] Florence Nightingale's manner of dealing with [clashes of view] was apt to become equally uncomfortable for friend and foe alike. (Bolster, 1964, p. 18).

Florence Nightingale truly managed to intrigue against, and to argue with, just about everybody she had to work with (compare: Aloysius, 1897 (see *Figure 9*); Lady Volunteer, 1857; Tooley, 1905; Williams (Ed.), 1987).



**Figure 3: William Howard Russell on carte de visite (Jeroen Staring Collection).**

**Figure 4: W. H. Russell, Woodburytype photograph (in: Cooper, 1876, annex p. 36).**

**Figure 5: W. H. Russell, his comment about a request in a hotel for his signature (Jeroen Staring Collection).**

### Mary Seacole: Who Was She in Literature?

After firmly praising Florence Nightingale, William Parker Snow (1857, p. 223) wrote in a footnote in his travel book, "Another good-hearted creature connected with the Crimean War is Mrs. Seacole." Snow did not provide any information about Seacole, other than, "I must be pardoned for thus mentioning her, inasmuch as her kindly acts to the poor soldiers have just come under my notice" (*Ibid.*).

So, who was Mary Seacole? A *New-York Daily Tribune* correspondent met her when she arrived in Balaklava, Crimea, in early 1855. He introduced her to his American readers:

We fell in with a black woman and her daughter all the way from Panama. Mrs. Seacole came to Balaklava to put up a hotel for travelers or the officers. She had just arrived and was landing her goods and chattels on the shore near *the* spring of the port and opposite a sad display of mud—the only appearance of the article which we saw anywhere during our visit. Mrs. Seacole (perhaps I should spell her name more correctly with two *a*'s, for she was quite black enough) disdained the name of Aunt Sally, and her daughter that of Cousin Lucy, and with offended dignity told me that she knew Governor this and Colonel that, beside a whole host of Majors and Captains in ordinary, all from the States, and that she liked the Americans hugely. Wishing her much success in her enterprise and promising to board with her *next year*, we pushed on to the plain beyond the harbor and thence over the heights toward the camps. (Our Own Correspondent, 1855).

Seacole literature says that Mary Seacole (see *Figures 6 and 7*) travelled to the Crimea in the company of her daughter Sarah — who in other works was called Sally, or even both Sarah and Sally (*e.g.*, Soyer, 1857, p. 435). Robinson (2004, p. 145) and Staring-Derks (2007, pp. *civi*) think that Sally / Sarah may have been a family member who was under Seacole's care. The above story from the *New-York Daily Tribune* correspondent is probably the first to claim the girl was Seacole's daughter. Also in 1855, *Times* correspondent Russell (1855, p. 360) wrote in his first book on the Crimean War:

*Inter alia*, we are to have an *hotel* at Balaklava. It is to be conducted by "Mrs. Seacole, late of Jamaica." I suppose the lady calculates on a liberal share of patronage when excursion visitors come out to see the siege in the summer.

A year later, when Seacole had opened her 'British Hotel,' voyager Edwin Galt (1856, p. 148) described his meeting with her in his book *The Camp and the Cutter*:

[...] we soon found ourselves entering the stable-yard of Mrs. Seacole's establishment, and, drenched to the skin as we were, we lost no time in placing ourselves in front of Mrs. Seacole's fire. The old West-Indian lady entertained us with her conversation and mulled port for some time; and having obtained from her a fresh horse, we started with renewed energy, turned into the Kamiesch road [...].

Also in 1856, *Times* correspondent Russell wrote in his second book on the Crimean War:

Close to the railway, half-way between the Col de Balaklava and Kadikoi, Mrs. Seacole, formerly of Kingston and of several other parts of the world, such as Panama and Chagres, has pitched her abode—an iron storehouse, with wooden sheds and outlying tributaries, and here she doctors and cures all manner of men with extraordinary success. She is always in attendance near the battle-field to aid the wounded, and has earned many a poor fellow's blessing. (Russell, 1856, pp. 187-188).

Another early tale about Seacole — printed when the Crimean War was already over and when Seacole had travelled to London — is an anonymous story written by a Military Chaplain in the British Army. It appeared seven months before Seacole published her autobiography, in August 1857 — even with a short introduction by the then enormously famous *Times* war correspondent William Howard Russell (1857; see also *Note 1*). In January 1857, *Colburn's United Service Magazine and Naval and Military Journal* published the Chaplain's Crimean War *memoirs*, including the following extended story about Seacole.

### The Iron House Near The "Col"

It is the foreign provision store of a lady—I am sure I may call her so—Mrs. Seacole to wit, of the firm Seacole and Day. Her partner is a mild, unassuming individual of the name of Day, and the wags of the camp have nicknamed the firm Day and Martin, in reference, no doubt, to the female partner's colour. Mrs. Seacole herself is a creole, a native of Jamaica, of a strong mind, and anti-slavery principles. She is a large, unwieldy-looking woman, whose bark is worse than her bite. Her voice is harsh, but her heart is soft, and she has a good deal of the milk of human kindness in her bosom. She left Jamaica, so she says, on purpose to minister to the wants of the British soldier in the Crimea, and although, no doubt, some trifling ideas of personal advantage may have entered her head, it is an undeniable fact that she performed many an act of kindness, and did much good in her own peculiar way. The medical men would have been jealous of her, had they not known how useful she was.

She held a kind of levee every morning after breakfast, when you were sure to meet with sick men of every nation, belonging to the Land Transport, whose camp was near at hand, waiting for a preventive

against cholera, fever, or the other incidental illnesses of the place. I remember she once called me on one side, in a highly mysterious manner, and told me, in the strictest confidence, that three Americans had just paid a sort of official visit to the English camp, and it was her positive opinion that they intended to hand her over bodily to the Russians at the earliest opportunity. She wished for my advice under the circumstances, and I endeavoured to disperse her fears, but she did not feel easy in her mind until they had left. She always expressed to me the utmost contempt for that nation; this was, no doubt, on account of their notions on slavery, for, having some African blood in her veins, she remembered the wrongs of her people. Americans were also in the habit of addressing her as the “yaller woman,” and though the old lady was yellow enough, she did not like to be reminded of it. It was very amusing to hear her talk of her various expeditions to the different camps. At one time she was apprehended as a Russian spy by a French sentinel, to whom she had applied the “argumentum ad hominem,” with such effect, that the son of Mars was glad enough to let her go. At the battle of the Tchernaya she was found administering creature-comforts to the wounded, utterly unmindful of the shot and shell flying about her in all directions. At another time she was paying a visit of curiosity to Sebastopol, when the Russians on the north side very cleverly deposited a shell in the middle of her cart. She was very indignant at their ungallant behaviour, but I fancy they must have found it rather difficult to discern her sex in the distance.

I shall not easily forget the first glimpse I had of her. I was sitting in the hut of an artillery officer, when I perceived a peculiar object in the distance. I took it at first for an ostrich, but on a nearer approach I observed the flutter of a veil.

“Who, in the name of Crimean incredibilities, is that? I exclaimed.

“Oh ! that is Mrs. Seacole.”

“And who is Mrs. Seacole?”

“Why, don’t you know? She is grand purveyor to the army, doctor of medicine, confectioner, and nurse—in fact, quite a Caleb Quotem in her way; and, in a word, the soldier’s friend.”

“But what induced her to come out here?”

“Oh ! she has been everywhere — in Australia, California, the West Indies; indeed, I might almost say she has been round the world.”

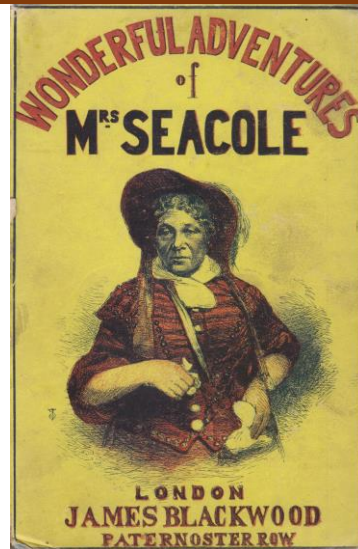
“But is she anything like a woman in her conversation and manners? Is she not rather a sort of giraffe?”

“Only to her enemies, for she has a most kind heart, and, indeed, I ought to say so, for she nursed me through an attack of the yellow fever at Jamaica, and had it not for her I should not be here now.”

I could not help thinking how singular it is that the most peculiar circumstances often develop the most extraordinary characters. Here was this strange woman, dressed in a sort of Bloomer costume, with riding-hat and veil, and looking anything but one of the softer sex, and yet possessing, as I afterwards discovered, the kindest disposition in the world.

[...]. Talking of Mrs. Seacole, as Caleb Quotem would say, reminds me of the explosion at Inkermann, for a piece of shell was hurled on that occasion against her store, which was three miles away.

[...]. To return, however, for a moment to Mrs. Seacole, I must render her sincere thanks for many acts of kindness, as well as for much good advice, and many practical hints as to campaigning. She offered me her medical services gratuitously, but I am happy to say I never required them. I understand that the kind of old dame is about to pitch her tent at Aldershot; I wish her success with all my heart. Kind reader, you may then go and visit her yourself, and I can assure you you will find her an original, more especially if she is decorated with the Crimean medal, for which she has applied, and which she certainly well deserves. (Military Chaplain, 1857, pp. 96-99).



**Figure 6: Mary Jane (née Grant) Seacole (in: Kelly, 1902, opposite p. 162).  
Figure 7: Front cover of Mary Seacole's 1857 autobiography (Seacole, 1857).**

### **Post Crimean War Period: Seacole Referenced by Doctors and Military Men**

It is not often that Florence Nightingale and Mary Seacole were mentioned on the same page of a newspaper or magazine in the 1850s. *The Spectator* is an example that it sometimes happened. In August 1856, they reported that Nightingale appeared to have sneaked into the country, that factory workers had sent her a “congratulatory address” and that she had replied.

It appears that Miss Nightingale peacefully accomplished the voyage home from Scutari under the name of “Miss Smith”: a wise precaution. She now requires “rest.” But from a recent reply to a congratulatory address sent to her by the workmen of a factory near Newcastle, it would appear that she has not yet obtained absolute repose. Her beautiful reply was expressed in the following terms.

“August 23, 1856.

“My dear Friends—I wish it were in my power to tell you what was in my heart when I received your letter. Your welcome home, your sympathy with what has been passing while I have been absent, have touched me more than I can tell in words. My dear friends, the things that are deepest in our hearts are perhaps what it is most difficult to us to express. ‘She hath done what she could,’—those words I inscribed on the tomb of one of my best helpers whom I left in the graveyard at Scutari. It has been my endeavour, in the sight of God, to do as she has done. I will not speak of reward, when permitted to do our country’s work. It is what we live for. But I may say, to receive sympathy from affectionate hearts like yours, is the greatest support, the greatest gratification, that it is possible for me to receive from man.

“I thank you all, the 1800, with grateful, tender affection. And I should have written before to do so, were not the business, which my return home has not ended, almost more than I can manage.

“Pray believe me, my dear friends, yours faithfully and gratefully,

“FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE.” (*Spectator*, 1856a, pp. 911-912; see Note 2).

On August 25, 1856, Mary Seacole, who had arrived in London earlier in August, was celebrated by soldiers who had returned from the Crimean battlefield. They were entertained at the Surrey Gardens. *The Spectator* (1856b, p. 911) reported,

The soldiers “filed off” in the best way they could from the dinner-table to the gardens, in obedience to a signal from the chairman, and passed the afternoon in the gardens. The greater part of them were shut out from the evening concert by the usurping public. After seeing the fireworks, they got together about nine o’clock, and were marched home in pretty good order. Among others present was the famous Mrs. Seacole, from Kadikoi: The soldiers chaired her round the grounds.

A few years ago, British author Helen Rappaport disputed that Mary Seacole was still well known when she died or that she remained known after her death in 1881. Rappaport even stated, “it is wishful thinking to suggest that she was still well known by 1881.” The author of this case study challenged that opinion (see *Note 3*). From the 1870s until around 1915, biographies, travel reports and books about the Crimean War regularly referred to Mary Seacole, her ‘British Hotel’ and her nursing work (see *Note 4*). For example, in 1911, Douglas Arthur Reid — during the Crimean War Assistant Surgeon 90<sup>th</sup> Light Infantry — published his *Memories of the Crimean War*. Reid’s book’s second chapter already references Mary Seacole. Reid met her on February 12, 1855.

On reaching Balaklava we were directed to the wooden landing-stage, where boats were ready to take the sick and wounded to the hospital ships. Here I made the acquaintance of a celebrated person, Mrs. Seacole, a coloured woman, who, out of the goodness of her heart at her own expense, supplied hot tea to the poor sufferers while they were waiting to be lifted into the boats. I need not say how grateful they were for the warm and comforting beverage when they were benumbed with cold and exhausted by the long and trying journey from the front. The temperature was many degrees below freezing point. [...]. A few words more about Mrs. Seacole. She did not spare herself if she could do any good to the suffering soldiers. In rain and snow, in storm and tempest, day after day she was at her self-chosen post, with her stove and kettle, in any shelter she could find, brewing tea for all who wanted it, and they were many. Sometimes more than 200 sick would be embarked in one day, but Mrs. Seacole was always equal to the occasion. The Authorities, in recognition of her benevolent services, awarded her a Crimean Medal. Some years afterwards I met her at Charing Cross. The medal first attracted my eye, and on looking up I recognized her dusky countenance. Of course I stopped her, and we had a short talk together about Crimean times. She had a store at Kadikoi, near Balaklava, for some time, where she sold all sorts of commodities, clothing and articles of food that were luxuries to us. I need not say that she was largely patronized. Her store appears as a landmark in one of the maps in [William Howard] Russel’s book on the war. It is there called “Mrs. Seacole’s Hut.” (Reid, 1911, pp. 13-14).

There are also references in works written by surgeons related to the Crimean War which have not (yet) been published. The Wellcome Institute in London holds at least two unpublished diaries that reference Mary Seacole:

**A.** The entry on Friday August 24, 1855 in the unpublished Crimean War diary of Surgeon Major William Menzies Calder (1855-1856) describes the “Canteen kept by the celebrated black lady Mrs. Seacole” (p. 114) and it describes Seacole’s nursing work (pp. 114-115). Calder also stated, “Mrs. Seacole has a daughter about 16, called Sarah, a great character” (p. 115). (See *Note 6*).

**B.** The third chapter in the typescript *memoirs* of William Daverell Cattell (n.d., p. 24) — Assistant Surgeon, 5<sup>th</sup> Dragoon Guards during the Crimean War, later Surgeon General — includes the following description of Mary Seacole (see *Note 6*).

An elderly mulatto from Jamaica, Mrs Seacole, wished to open a restaurant at the end of the Light Cavalry’s Camp, where the lower road ascends up towards the Col., but her intentions were misinterpreted, she was refused; later she established herself higher up on the mainroad in an iron store and some shanties. Here her charity soon belied her unprepossessing [*sic.*] appearance; with a taste for doctoring and nursing, she combined the business of a settler [*sic.*]. Convoys of sick halted and were cheered with warm refreshment, later she came on the field at Tchernaya with comforts for the wounded [...], she developed as a philanthropist and soon became a general favourite, and on great occasions appeared in the brightest of ribbons. Her business however did not prove lucrative, for peace — sudden and unexpected — brought bankruptcy; [...].

As late as in 1907 — 26 years after Mary Seacole’s death — Canadian “Late Lieut. H.M. 63<sup>rd</sup> or the West Suffolk Regt. [...] and Late Captain and Adjutant of the 11<sup>th</sup> Halifax Regt., of Nova Scotia Militia” Frederick Harris D. Vieth (1907, title page) recollected, apparently without having read Seacole’s 1857 autobiography,

[...] I met hastening thither in her cart, a very well-known woman. This was Mrs. Seacole, who lived near the railway below Kadakoi, and kept a sort of general store. She was a wonderful woman, a native of the West Indies and had travelled over half the world. *All the men swore by her, and in case of any malady would seek her advice and use her herbal medicines, in preference to reporting*

*themselves to their own doctors.* That she did effect some cures is beyond doubt, and her never failing presence among the wounded after a battle and assisting them made her beloved by the rank and file of the whole army. What became of her after we all sailed from the Crimea I never heard, but she carried away many a blessing with her wherever she may have gone. (Vieth, 1907, pp. 74-75; Italics, J.S.)

While it is quite incredible, there are no reports at all of military personnel dying under the care of Mary Seacole! Diary entries by surgeons like Calder and Cattell, quoted above, show that there was no animosity between the military doctors and Seacole.

During the second half of the 20th century, interest in Seacole revived in Jamaica in 1954, when the “Jamaican Nurses’ Association [...] elected to call their projected Kingston headquarters ‘Mary Seacole House’” (Alexander & Dewjee, 1984, p. 40).

In military history, revived interest in Seacole dates from the 1960s. In 1966, British Major Reginald Hargreaves (1966, p. 34) explained in *Military Review* (the “professional journal of the US Army”),

It was not until midway through 1855 that a little Jamaican woman of the name of Mary Seacole hit upon the idea of establishing a canteen-restaurant open to all ranks where the troops in their off-time hours could purchase their little luxuries and relax in a thoroughly friendly atmosphere. A long general room for the other ranks, a dining room for the officers, and an ample kitchen made up an establishment that speedily attracted a steady flow of customers.

Two years prior, Hargreaves (1964, p. 88) had written about both Seacole and Nightingale in the *Military Review*:

[...] gallant Mary Seacole set up a canteen-restaurant just out of range of the Russian guns. Back at Scutari, on the Bosphorus [Turkey; J.S.], Florence Nightingale and her band of devoted followers created a precedent for the skilled nursing of the sick and wounded which was destined to influence the treatment of war casualties for all time.

### **A Bishop, Novels and Children’s Books Reference Seacole**

In this regard, it is advisable to point out that Mary Seacole was not forgotten in the 1860s. En route to Colon, Columbia, on board the *Solent*, a religious dignitary wrote of her in his travel journal. The Bishop of Columbia (1865, pp. 9-10) reported about February 5, 1865 how he arrived at Port Royal (Jamaica) and who he met on land — at Blundell House in Kingston, Jamaica, run by Mary Seacole’s sister Louisa Grant.

#### **Arrival—Port Royal Bay—Blundell House.**

We reached Port Royal Bay, seven miles from Kingston [Jamaica; J.S.], as the sun went down. The Health Officer came off; also, men-of-war’s boats, for despatches and letters. The *Aboukir*, the *Shannon*, and the *Rosario*, lay in the bay, the flag of Commodore Crancroft floated from the former. When the various matters usual at this point had been transacted, it was too dark to go up to Kingston; the captain, however, persuaded the pilot to take us in, and lanterns being put up in certain parts to define the channel, we at length, about nine o’clock, steamed up to the wharf at Kingston. My wife and myself instantly proceeded on shore, passed through a crowd of women and men, waiting to coal the ship, and reached Blundell House, to which we had been recommended. This is kept by a respectable mulatto lady, Miss Louisa Grant. We were now comfortably arranged in a cool sitting-room, with bedroom adjoining, congratulating ourselves upon being on *terra firma*, and out of the noise and dust of coaling.

#### **Mrs. Seacole.**

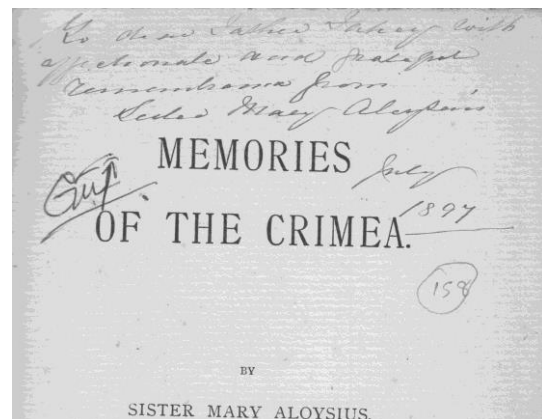
We found at this hotel the celebrated Mrs. Seacole, of Crimean fame. Kingston is her native place, and Miss Grant is her sister. She had come out from England, intending to go to British Columbia, but had stopped by the way; she is a person of about sixty. The book of her life and adventures was open on the table, edited by Mr. Russell, the Correspondent of the *Times*, who in the preface speaks of the high estimation in which Mrs. Seacole was held, and of her philanthropic and Christian labours for the sick, the wounded, and the hungry. A picture of the heroine is presented on the cover, with face and bonnet bespattered with blood, in the act of preparing a bandage on the battlefield. Mrs. Seacole is the daughter of a Scottish soldier; her mother held a similar establishment to this, and was famous as a

doctress. Mrs. Seacole herself became initiated early in the mysteries of Creole medical art. Before going to the Crimea, she had travelled in the Central States of America, and assisted her brother on the Isthmus of Panama, during the first rush of Americans to California. Mrs. Seacole is an intelligent person, and on Monday came to greet us, dressed in green silk, and decorated with the Turkish and other Crimean medals.

Literature never explained what exactly Seacole has in her hands in the portrait on the cover of her 1857 English autobiography (see *Figure 7*), or on the cover of the Dutch 1857 translation of her autobiography. It is therefore rather difficult to determine what she holds in her hands. The front cover of Robinson's (2004) *Mary Seacole: The Most Famous Black Woman of the Victorian Age* reprints the image, but Seacole's hands are not shown; that is unclear as well. Now, 163 years later, we know. The Bishop of Columbia (in his 1865 travelogue, above) gave it away after hearing it first-hand.

Mary Seacole also figures in novels. In 1891, Hawley Smart's first volume of *Beatrice and Benedick: A Romance of the Crimea* describes Seacole's 'British Hotel' in Chapter X (entitled *Mrs. Seacole's*):

[...] a large wooden building, half-store, half-restaurant, had been opened by a middle-age coloured lady, who had somehow or other obtained considerable popularity amongst military men in the West Indies. What she had done out there I don't know, but Mrs. Seacole soon became a familiar name to the Crimean army. Horse and Foot, Hussars and Artillery, Naval officers and Newspaper correspondents, all drank and dined at Mrs. Seacole's. It was a sort of high change for gossip and stories. Men from all parts brought the news of the camp thither, as a common mart for the exchange of all such commodities. Many diners came off in the snug room at the back of the front saloon, which was the general lounge: matter of no little diplomacy at times, these dinners as, unless previously ordered, the procuring of a table was impossible. (Smart, 1891, pp. 166-167).



**Figure 8: Mary Seacole Nursing an Officer or a Soldier (in: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, n.d., p. 78). Figure 9: Inscription and signature, Sister Mary Aloysius, July 1897 (in: Aloysius, 1897; Jeroen Staring Collection).**

Recently, Seacole features in Matthew Plampin's (2009) novel *The Street Philosopher*.

Children's books also paid attention to Mary Seacole (and not only to Florence Nightingale). *Nobel Deeds of the World's Heroines* by Henry Charles Moore (n.d. [1904?], pp. 133-153) has a complete chapter about Seacole entitled *Mary Seacole, the Soldiers' Friend* — as has *Everyday Heroes* by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (n.d. [1897?], pp. 78-89); the chapter is entitled: *A Crimean Heroine*. Strangely enough, this book shows Mary Seacole in an illustration with white skin tone (see *Figure 8*).

As late as 1995, a children's book about heroes and heroines appeared, mentioning Mary Seacole. Again, she received a separate chapter: in *True Stories* (Masters (Ed.), 1995, pp. 181-196) — a chapter entitled *Adventure in the Crimea. Mary Seacole (from Wonderful Adventures of Mrs Seacole)*.

### **A Dark Chapter in Seacole's Life? What Happened in Kingston in 1860?**



In July 1860, Jamaican Ann Pratt published a very disturbing pamphlet about her experiences in the Kingston (Jamaica) Lunatic Asylum: *Seven Months in the Kingston Lunatic Asylum and What I Saw There* (see Note 6). The title page of the copy of Pratt’s pamphlet in the National Archives at Kew, Richmond upon Thames, near London (England), contains some handwritten notes, stating that “Pratt’s entrance into the Asylum was in Jany 1860.” In *Official Documents on the Case of Ann Pratt, the Reputed Authoress of a Certain Pamphlet, Entitled “Seven Months in the Kingston Lunatic Asylum, and What I Saw There,”* Principal Medical Officer of Hospital and Asylum Dr. James Scott wrote that Pratt was admitted on January 21, 1860 (Scott, 1860, p. 15). She was released from the asylum on July 4, 1860.

Pratt’s (1860) descriptions of physical abuse and bullying are not only very disturbing, but in addition, importantly here, five passages in the pamphlet deal with a “Mrs. Branigan,” or a “Mrs. Branygan,” who received different treatment from the asylum staff because she allegedly was “the sister of Mrs. Seacole” (Pratt, 1860, p. 19).

Three passages mentioning Mrs. Branigan (or Branygan) will be quoted here.

After a few nights I was sent back to my old quarters and after the beating I received in April, I was as I have stated, locked up in a cell with some 10 others.

Mrs. Branigan as the sister of Mrs. Seacole was allowed a mattress on her admission, they took away her shoes and stockings also her flannel, but she soon get them back. It was too evident that the Crimean heroine influence was dreaded in this place.

The medical officers will sometimes condescend to go and visit this inmate and will sit down and converse with her; seldom are the other patients honored with like favors. When Mrs. Branigan first came in she was placed in one of the cells, but was subsequently removed to the sick house. When Mrs. Seacole visits her unfortunate sister, Mrs. Ryan [the Matron; J.S.] is vastly polite and courteous, but her back turned, the poor sufferer hears, sees, and feels enough. When Mrs. Branigan first came in Dr. Keech desired night nurse Danverson to tell myself that I must not say anything about the treatment of the people before Mrs. Branigan. Mrs. Branigan is allowed to remain in her room all day if she thinks proper, not so with the rest of us, we must not go into the cells during the day—nay we must not go under the piazza [*sic.*]—no one must be seen laying down—all are expected to receive the Drs. seated on a bench, under a hot tropical sun. I have seen persons faint in consequence soon after going in. I remonstrated against this wilful unnecessary piece of cruelty. (Pratt, 1860, pp. 19-20).

\*\*\*\*\*

The Doctor has ordered Mrs. Branigan and Kate Watson wine; but I have known Mrs. Ryan to withhold it, stating as regards Mrs. Branigan that the old man-of-war whore was drunk. (Pratt, 1860, p. 21).

\*\*\*\*\*

One Sunday, hearing that the Chaplain, Mr. Braine, was about to perform Divine Service in the Hospital, I begged Mrs. Ryan’s permission to attend, she told me no, that I only wished to go there to speculate. Two or three times I saw Mr. Braine pass, though on his way to see Mrs. Branigan, Mrs. Seacole’s sister. The Catholic Priests also passed through, no one stopped to listen to me; once I did call after Mr. Braine, but he passed into Mrs. Branygan’s apartments. (Pratt, 1860, p. 23).

During the interrogation in August 1860, following publication of Pratt’s pamphlet, Mary Donaldson (“night nurse Danverson” in Pratt’s story, quoted above) was questioned.

Three questions (left) and answers (right) relate to “Mrs. Branigan” (“Mrs. Branigan,” or “Mrs. Branygan,” in Pratt’s 1860 pamphlet; see above):

27th. Were you ever desired by any one of the Officers of the Public Hospital and Lunatic Asylum to tell Ann Pratt not to say anything about the treatment of the Lunatic Patients before Mrs. Branigan?

27th. No, Sir; I never have no talking with them at all.

28th. Are you quite sure that Dr. Keech never gave you such instruction?

28th. No, Sir; I never recollect that Doctor ever tell me anything of the sort.

29th. I hear the pamphlet read by my

29th. Are you aware that in a pamphlet, alleged to be written by Ann Pratt, such is stated to have occurred?

neighbour, but I never stop till the whole of it done.  
(*Examination*, 1860, p. 39).

Was “Mrs. Branigan,” or “Mrs. Branygan” or “Mrs. Branagan,” really Mary Seacole’s sister? Or was that person confused, had she imagined herself to be Mary Seacole’s sister, and had Ann Pratt reported it, unknowing of the fact that Seacole had only one sister — Louise Grant.

It’s important to note the following here (in connection with Pratt’s story, above): It is not certain if Mary Seacole was in Jamaica in 1860. Seacole went to the “West Indies” in November 1859 (Staring-Derks, Anionwu, & Staring, 2014). In 1862, she reportedly lived in Panama. For instance, on April 19, 1862, the Dutch newspaper *Rotterdamsche Courant* (1862) wrote,

Mrs. Mary Seacole, de bekende ziekenverpleegster van het Engelse leger in de Krim, houdt zich tegenwoordig in Panama op. [Mrs. Mary Seacole, the well-known nurse of the English army in the Crimea, is currently in Panama.]

From the Bishop of Columbia’s travelogue, quoted above, we know that Mary Seacole lived in Jamaica in 1865.

Since so little truly solid information has been reported about Mary Seacole by independent researchers, there is still much to investigate about her life and influence in the countries that we know she lived or visited during her life. Ann Pratt’s 1860 story shows that research in Jamaica is sorely needed (see *Note 5*).

## Notes

1. W. H. Russell not only wrote about Seacole during the Crimean War and did not only write his introduction to Seacole’s autobiography (Russell, 1857), but he also belonged to a group that helped Seacole avert bankruptcy: “Mrs. Seacole, of Crimean fame, had appeared before the bankrupt court in London. Her list of ‘good’ accounts include 100 generals, colonels, majors, and other officers. The press is also represented in her books. Mr. Russell, of the London Times, being set down as ‘good’ for 5s 9d. W. Knight, of the London Morning Herald, has a little bill of £260” (*Evening Bulletin*, 1857).

2. Florence Nightingale’s letter has been slightly edited by *The Spectator*. Compare also the text of Florence Nightingale’s letter of August 23, 1856 in Tooley (1905, pp. 243-244). Nightingale’s original letter to workmen of Newcastle-on-Tyne was recently discovered in a scrapbook of Edward W. Blok. A true historically relevant discovery! See: <https://www.countryjoe.com/nightingale/bok.htm>

It is therefore possible to fact check the text of the letter in both *The Spectator* and in Tooley’s book. Consult photos of the original letter:

<https://www.countryjoe.com/nightingale/workmenletter.htm>

See also: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DPpo3qi4oIQ&feature=youtu.be>

3. See: <https://virtualvictorian.blogspot.com/2013/05/mary-seacole-guest-post-by-helen.html>

4. Many travel stories, (auto-)biographies, accounts of the Crimean War and other books not yet referenced in Seacole literature mention meetings with Seacole and/or describe her ‘British Hotel,’ her character or her nursing actions. For example:

a). “We had a capital lunch on the ground, provided by an old black woman who kept a sort of eating house on the heights, and rejoiced in the appropriate and endearing title of ‘Mother Sea Coal,’ a native of Jamaica, and frightful to a degree, but a very clever ‘doctress’ *on dit*” (Astley, 1894, pp. 268-269).

b). “General Bunbury was faithfully nursed in an illness by ‘Mother Seacole,’ so honourably conspicuous a figure in the Crimea! I believe she accompanied him to England when his term had expired” (O’Conner Morris, 1892, p. 97).

c). “At Kadikeui also I made the acquaintance of good Mrs. Seacole, Jamaican by origin, who did so much for the comfort of invalids, and whom we afterwards met with lively pleasure at Panamá” (Burton, 1893, p. 229).

d). “[...] encountered no less a personage than Mrs. Seacole, of Jamaica and Balaklava fame” (Hitchman, 1887, p. 97).

e). “I formerly described the road to the *front* along the railway. The cart road is longer, to avoid the steep incline, and at the top of the hill, before entering on the plateau, is situated the hut or house of ‘Mother Seacole,’ called ‘The British Hotel’” (Buchanan, 1871, p. 177).

f). “We made our way up the hill, and our visit was to Mother Seacole. She was a character well known to all the army. A dear fat bundle of clothes with a smiling dark countenance. [...]. So highly was she esteemed by our people that a bazaar was got up in her aid by Lord Ranelagh; she had been so generous to our men that she had made no money at Sevastopol. The story goes that,

whenever there was a big fight going on, she trudged out with all the liquor and provisions she could carry and gave them to the wounded” (Jones-Parry, 1897, p. pp. 159-160).

g). “The site of *Mother Seacole’s hut*, will be distinguished close to the road by a heap of broken bottles” (Murray, 1875, p. 364). Compare Seacole’s Memorial Statue sculptor’s story: Jennings (2016, p. 18).

h). “[...], one woman must be named, whose honest and humble efforts are still well remembered—Mrs. Seacole. Her British Hotel at Balaklava, her efforts to aid the sick and wounded in camp and when being transferred from the Ambulance to the boats or ships, are all well known; and many a brave fellow owes his life to her kindness and her food” (E. M. P. & L. E. McL., 1872, pp. 340-341).

i). “So extremely rare was it for one of the other sex to be seen amongst the allied troops engaged in the siege, that the appearance of a female was something of an event. One such I saw on this day—‘Mother’ Seacole, a dark sutler from the West Indies, who kept a store at Kadi-koi two or three miles from British Headquarters, where we could on emergency obtain some kind of meal. Mounted on a horse, and conspicuous by her costume, which was bright blue in colour relieved by yellow, she had made her way to the high ground overlooking the [battle; J.S.] scene of action and, provided with a large basket of provisions and comforts, generously distributed refreshment to exhausted or wounded soldiers” (Buzzard, 1915, p. 179).

5. A good independent initiative is the digitization project of their Seacole literature collection by the National Library of Jamaica (Kingston, Jamaica).

See: <https://nlj.gov.jm/project/mary-seacole-1805-1881/>

In France, Christel Mouchard wrote about Seacole in her *Aventurières en crinoline* (Mouchard, 1987, pp. 57-94). Later she published her French translation of Seacole’s autobiography, including her introduction (Mouchard, 1994). In The Netherlands, Corry Staring-Derks published a new edition of the 1857 Dutch translation of Seacole’s book, including her introduction (Staring-Derks, 2007).

6. Thank you, Lambert van der Aalsvoort.

## Bibliography

Aloysius, Sister M. (1897). *Memories of the Crimea*. London: Burns & Oates, Limited.

Alexander, Z., & Dewjee, A. (1984). Editors’ Introduction. In Z. Alexander & A. Dewjee (Eds.), *Wonderful Adventures of Mrs. Seacole in many lands* (pp. 9-45). Bristol: Falling Wall Press.

Astley, Sir J. D. (1894). *Fifty Years of My Life in the World of Sport at Home and Abroad* (Vol. I). London: Hurst and Blackett, Limited.

Bishop of Columbia. (1865). Extracts From the Bishop of Columbia’s Journal. In *Sixth Annual Report of the Columbia Mission for the Year 1864* (pp. 4-24). London: Rivington’s.

Bolster, E. (1964). *The Sisters of Mercy in the Crimean War*. Cork: The Mercier Press.

Buchanan, G. (1871). *Camp Life As Seen By A Civilian*. Glasgow: James Maclehose.

Burton, I. (1893). *The Life of Sir Rich<sup>d</sup> F. Burton, K.C.M.G., F.R.C.S., by His Wife* (Vol. I). London: Chapman & Hall, LD.

Buzzard, T. (1915). *With the Turkish Army in the Crimea and Asia Minor: A Personal Narrative*. London: John Murray.

Calder, W. M. (1855-1856). *Crimean War diary of Surgeon Major William Menzies Calder, 1 July 1855 – 15 March 1856, starting in Scutari Barracks, moving to the camp before Sebastopol on 28 July 1855*. Shelfmark RAMC/701:Box 137. London: Wellcome Library, Wellcome Institute.

Cattell, W. D. (n.d.). *Cattell’s typescript memoirs, chapters 1 to 10*. Shelfmark RAMC/391/1/1:Box 42. London: Wellcome Library, Wellcome Institute.

Concannon, H. (1950). *The Irish Sisters of Mercy in The Crimean War*. Dublin: “Irish Messenger” Office.

Cooper, T. (1876). *Men of Mark: A Gallery of Contemporary Portraits. Men Distinguished in the Senate, the Church, in Science, Literature and Art, the Army, Navy, Law, Medicine, etc.* London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle, and Rivington.

E. M. P. & L. E. McL. (1872, February). Under the Red Cross. Chapter II. *St. James’ Magazine*, pp. 336-344.

*Evening Bulletin*. (1857, January 30). Our Varieties, p. 2.

*Examination*. (1860). Examination of Mary Donaldson. No. 4. Mary Donaldson Examined by Interrogatories. In *Official Documents on the Case of Ann Pratt, the Reputed Authoress of a Certain Pamphlet, Entitled “Seven Months in the Kingston Lunatic Asylum, and What I Saw There”* (pp. 36-42). Kingston & Spanish Town: Printed by Jordon & Osborn

Gray, J. (Ed.), *A Statue for Mary: The Seacole Legacy*. London: The Mary Seacole Memorial Statue Appeal.

Galt E. (1856). *The Camp and the Cutter; or, A Cruise to the Crimea*. London: Thomas Hodgson.

Hargreaves, R. (1964). The Intruders. *Military Review*, 44(12), pp. 83-91.

Hargreaves, R. (1966). The Idle Hours. *Military Review*, 46(12), pp. 29-35.

Hitchman, F. (1887). *Richard F. Burton, K.C.M.G.: His Early, Private and Public Life. With an Account of his Travels and Explorations* (Vol II). London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle & Rivington.

- Jennings, M. (2016). Against a Battlefield. In J. Gray (Ed.), *A Statue for Mary: The Seacole Legacy* (pp. 17-19). London: The Mary Seacole Memorial Statue Appeal.
- Jones-Parry, S. H. (1897). *An Old Soldier's Memories*. London: Hurst and Blackett, Limited.
- Kelly, Mrs. T. (1902). *From the Fleet in the Fifties: A History of the Crimean War*. London: Hurst and Blackett, Limited.
- (A) Lady Volunteer. (1857). *Eastern Hospitals and English Nurses; The Narrative of Twelve Month's Experience in the Hospitals of Koulali and Scutari* (Third Edition, Revised). London: Hurst and Blackett, Publishers, Successors to Henry Colburn.
- Masters, A. (Ed.). (1995). *True Stories*. London: Kingfisher.
- McDonald, G. (2017). *Florence Nightingale: A very brief history*. London: SPCK.
- (A) Military Chaplain. (1857, January). Reminiscences of the War in the East. *Colburn's United Service Magazine and Naval and Military Journal*, pp. 93-109.
- Moore, H. C. (n.d.). *Noble Deeds of the World's Heroines*. London: The Religious Tract Society.
- Mouchard, C. (1987). *Aventurières en crinoline; récits*. Paris, Éditions Du Seuil.
- Mouchard, C. (1994). Doctor Mary. In M. J. G. Seacole, *Je suis une mal-blachie: La vie aventureuse d'une cousine de l'Oncle Tom, 1805-1881* (pp. 9-23). Paris: Phébus
- Murray, J. (1975). *Handbook for Travellers in Russia, Poland, and Finland; including the Crimea, Caucasus, Siberia and Central Asia* (Third Edition, Revised). London: John Murray / Paris: Galignani & Co.; and Boyveau / St. Petersburg: L. Watkins / New York: Wiley.
- Nightingale, F. (1859). *A Contribution to the Sanitary History of the British Army during the Late War With Russia*. London: John W. Parker and Son.
- O'Conner Morris, M. (1892). *Memini: A Mingled Yarn*. London: Harrison and Sons.
- Our Own Correspondent. (1855, June 12). An Excursion to Sevastopol. *New-York Daily Tribune*, p. 6.
- Plampin, M. (2009). *The Street Philosopher*. London: HarperCollins Publishers, Limited.
- Pratt, A. (1860). *Seven Months in the Kingston Lunatic Asylum and What I Saw There*. Kingston: George Henderson, Savage, & Co.
- Reid, D. A. (1911). *Memories of the Crimean War January 1855 to June 1856*. London: The St. Catherine Press.
- Robinson, J. (2004). *Mary Seacole: The Most Famous Black Woman of the Victorian Age*. New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers.
- Rotterdamsche Courant*. (1862, April 19). Buitenland, p. 1.
- Russell, W. H. (1855). *The War: From the Landing at Gallipoli to the Death of Lord Raglan*. London: George Routledge & Co.
- Russell, W. H. (1856). *The War: From the Death of Lord Raglan to the Evacuation of the Crimea*. London: G. Routledge & Co.
- Russell, W. H. (1857). To The reader. In M. Seacole, *Wonderful Adventures of Mrs. Seacole in Many Lands* (pp. vii-viii). London: James Blackwood.
- Russell, W. H. (1858). *The British Expedition to the Crimea* (A Revised Edition, with numerous emendations and additions). London: G. Routledge & Co.
- Scott, J. (1860). Dr. Scott to Mr. Trench. In *Official Documents on the Case of Ann Pratt, the Reputed Authoress of a Certain Pamphlet, Entitled "Seven Months in the Kingston Lunatic Asylum, and What I Saw There"* (pp. 15-16). Kingston & Spanish Town: Printed by Jordon & Osborn.
- Seacole, M. (1857). *Wonderful Adventures of Mrs. Seacole in Many Lands*. London: James Blackwood.
- Smart, H. (1891). *Beatrice and Benedick: A Romance of the Crimea* (Vol. I). London: F. V. White & Co.
- Smith, F. B. (1982). *Florence Nightingale: Reputation and Power*. London & Canberra: Croom Helm.
- Snow, W. P. (1857). *A Two Years' Cruise off Tierra Del Fuego, The Falkland Islands, Patagonia, and in the River Plate: A Narrative of Life in the Southern Seas* (Vol. II). London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans & Roberts.
- Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge. (n.d.). *Everyday Heroes: Stories of Bravery During the Queen's Reign, 1837–1888. Compiled from public and private sources*. London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge.
- Soyer, A. (1857). Soyer's Culinary Campaign. *Being Historical reminiscences of the Late War with the Plain Art of Cookery for Military and Civil Institutions, the Army, Navy, Public, etc. etc.* London: G. Routledge & Co.
- (The) *Spectator*. (1856a, August 30). Provincial, pp. 911-912.
- (The) *Spectator*. (1856b, August 30). The Metropolis, pp. 910-911.
- Staring, J. (2020). Stories About New Avenues To Do Research, Part III. *International Journal of Case Studies*, 9(4), pp. 19.
- Staring-Derks, C. (2007). Inleiding. In M. Seacole, *Mary Seacole's Avonturen in de West en in d*

*Krim, of het belangwekkende leven eener heldin der barmhartigheid, door haar zelve verhaald* (pp. xv-ccxxxvi). Nijmegen: Integraal.

Staring-Derks, C., Anionwu, E., & Staring, J. (2014). Mary Seacole: global nurse extraordinaire. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 71(3), pp. 514-525.

Tooley, S. A. (1905). *The Life of Florence Nightingale*. New York: The MacMillan Company / London: S. H. Bousfield & Co., LTD.

Vieth, F. H. D. (1907). *Recollections of the Crimean Campaign and the Expedition to Kinburn in 1855, Including also Sporting and Dramatic Incidents in connection with Garrison Life in the Canadian Lower Provinces*. Montreal: John Lovell & Son, Limited.

Williams, J. (Ed.) (1987). *An Autobiography of Elizabeth Davis. Betsy Cadwaladyr: A Balaclava Nurse*. Cardiff: Honno.