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CHLOE MERRICK REED:
FREEDOM'S FIRST LADY

by SARAH WHITMER FOSTER AND JOHN T. FOSTER, JR.

DURING the past three decades Florida's Civil War and Reconstruction-era history has been the subject of careful reconsideration. Beginning with the 1963 publication of John E. Johns's *Florida During the Civil War* and continuing with Joe M. Richardson's *The Negro in the Reconstruction of Florida, 1865-1877* and Jerrell H. Shofner's *Nor Is It Over Yet: Florida in the Era of Reconstruction, 1863-1877*, the complexities of the period have been vividly revealed.¹ New and far more positive perspectives upon the lives and careers of black leaders, carpetbaggers, and southern loyalists can be credited among the results of this revisionist scholarship.²

While our understanding of the state's past has been enhanced by recent work, the contributions of women to our ex-

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1. John E. Johns, *Florida During the Civil War* (Gainesville, 1963; reprint ed., Macclenny, 1989); Joe M. Richardson, *The Negro in the Reconstruction of Florida, 1865-1877* (Tallahassee, 1965; reprint ed., Tampa, 1973); Jerrell H. Shofner, *Nor Is It Over Yet, Florida in the Era of Reconstruction, 1863-1877* (Gainesville, 1974).
2. See, for example, James C. Clark, "John Wallace and the Writing of Reconstruction History," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 67 (April 1989), 409-27; Canter Brown, Jr., "Where are now the hopes I cherished? The Life and Times of Robert Meacham," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 69 (July 1990), 1-36; Richard Nelson Current, *Those Terrible Carpetbaggers* (New York, 1988), 24-29, 84-90, 148-52, 236-40, 389-91; John T. Foster, Jr., and Sarah Whitmer Foster, "The Last Shall Be First: Northern Methodists in Reconstruction Jacksonville," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 70 (January 1992), 265-80; David Coles, "Floridians in Blue: Militant Unionism in Florida During the Civil War" (unpublished paper presented at Florida Historical Society annual meeting, Gainesville, 1989); Canter Brown, Jr., "Justice Ossian Bingley Hart," *Florida Supreme Court Historical Society Review* (publication forthcoming).

perience unfortunately have been neglected. As a result, little is known about numerous individuals who significantly affected the course of Florida's history and whose work touched the lives of countless of the state's residents. Among the most prominent and most important of these remarkable women was teacher, missionary, administrator, suffragist, and First Lady Chloe Merrick Reed.

Chloe Merrick was born April 18, 1832, to Sylvanus and Achsah Pollard Merrick. The family lived near Syracuse, New York, and at Chloe's birth also included older brothers Montgomery, aged twenty, and Charles, aged seventeen, and a sister, Emma, aged three. Her mother, Achsah, died during Chloe's early childhood, and about 1837 the family moved into Syracuse.³

The Merrick clan prospered in their new urban home. Commerce along the Erie Canal propelled Syracuse's growth, and opportunities abounded. Aside from Achsah, the family members were rugged in body, and, having a disposition for independent thought, they could see and were not loathe to seize opportunities. Montgomery chose a career as brick mason and contractor; Charles became a brick maker; and, eventually, Emma followed a career as teacher.⁴

Along with economic opportunity, the Erie Canal also brought to Syracuse new ideas and new residents who espoused them. By the early 1840s, for example, a small community of abolitionists had coalesced in the town, and its membership included the Merricks. During the period abolitionists throughout New England and the middle west demanded that Methodist Episcopal churches reject slavery in line with the teachings of founder John Wesley. In 1843 Montgomery and Charles joined seven other men to confront the local Methodist congregation, and, when their efforts failed, they helped organize a separate "Wesleyan" church.⁵

The breakaway Wesleyan congregation based its creed upon "no slavery" and "no rum."⁶ In line with this commitment, the church became a center for abolitionist agitation in Syracuse

3. Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, August 6, 1897; Syracuse *Daily Standard*, April 19, 1884, December 28, 1891, April 27, 1895.

4. Syracuse *Daily Standard*, December 28, 1891, April 27, 1895.

5. Syracuse *Post Standard*, June 16, 1957, August 23, 1967.

6. *Syracuse Journal*, August 2, 1856.



Chloe Merrick Reed. *Photograph courtesy of the Iconographic Collections, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison.*

and a stopover point on the “underground railroad” that assisted runaway slaves to freedom. While espousing freedom for black slaves, members also found that freedom could and should be promoted in other fields, most prominently in the area of women’s rights. In 1852 Susan B. Anthony visited the church and “[demanded] for her sex all of the rights enjoyed by men,

even to the ballot box.⁷ Two years later its pastor ordained a woman, Antoinette L. Brown, as minister and encouraged the enunciation of her controversial views.⁸

The Wesleyan church was not alone in offering Syracuse's residents access to new ideas. The city enjoyed a good public school system, and its men and women attended public lectures by individuals such as Gerrit Smith, William Garrison, Frederick Douglass, and Horace Mann. Chloe is known to have attended at least one speech by Mann and likely listened to many other of the period's leading intellectuals. Particularly important to Chloe was the influence of the Reverend Samuel J. May, an uncle of Louisa May Alcott. May not only championed abolitionism, but he also preached women's rights and a ban on capital punishment.⁹

Chloe thus was raised in an environment that encouraged controversial opinions and critical debate, as well as one that equated action with conviction. That her closest relations continued to embrace activism is clear. In October 1851, for instance, Sylvanus, Montgomery, and Charles were key figures in the escape of a black man arrested for fleeing slavery. When the man was recaptured, they joined with an antislavery crowd that smashed windows, chopped up casings, and battered down the jail's door. Although marshals fired into the mob, its members persevered and liberated the fugitive. As a result, the Fugitive Slave Law had been successfully defied. Since the mob included women, Chloe not only may have witnessed the action but may have helped to instigate it. Sylvanus and Montgomery later were indicted for their part, and Chloe's father was forced to flee "[to] Illinois until the excitement blew over."¹⁰

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7. Miriam Gurko, *The Ladies of Seneca Falls: The Birth of the Women's Rights Movement* (New York, 1974), 100; *Syracuse Daily Standard*, September 6, 1852.
 8. Luther Lee, *Woman's Right to Preach the Gospel* (Syracuse, NY, 1853); *Syracuse Daily Standard*, July 11, 1854.
 9. *Syracuse Daily Standard*, April 17, 1851, January 12, 1863, December 8, 1864; James M. Smith, "The 'Separate But Equal' Doctrine: An Abolitionist Discusses Racial Segregation and Educational Policy During the Civil War," *Journal of Negro History* 41 (April 1956), 138-47; *New York Tribune*, July 25, 1851.
 10. *New York Tribune*, July 25, October 4, 1851; Earl E. Sperry, *The Jerry Rescue* (Syracuse, NY, 1924), 22-28; *Syracuse Journal*, November 17, 1893; *Syracuse Daily Standard*, April 19, 1884.

By the time of the fugitive slave episode Chloe was nearing adulthood and was about to launch herself upon a career. She was considered beautiful, and, like so many other young women in Syracuse, she easily could have chosen marriage. Instead, she elected to become a teacher, setting a pattern of independent thought that was to follow her through life. At the time, she was living with her sister Emma and Emma's husband, Ansel Eddy Kinne, a local educator and school principal. Kinne, who was known for the "keen interest" he took in students' welfare and for showing them a "deeper sympathy" than other teachers of his generation, enhanced Chloe's interest in ideas and books, increased her knowledge of pedagogy, and guided her career.¹¹

Emma and Ansel Kinne's interest in Chloe's career presaged a continuing professional interrelationship between the three teachers. As did Ansel, Chloe taught in Syracuse's public schools during 1854-1856 and 1860-1862. When Ansel served during the early 1860s as principal of the Prescott School, Chloe worked as one of his teachers. In Florida after the Civil War their relationship continued to be close. Ansel became superintendent of the state's Freedmen's Bureau schools, and Emma taught in Fernandina. By then, of course, Chloe also was very involved in Florida affairs.¹²

Chloe's path to Florida began in South Carolina's Sea Islands. The Union army had seized the area early in the Civil War, leaving United States authorities in control of fertile lands but with responsibility for thousands of slaves who had fled to Union lines. As Federal forces extended their gains down the coast into northeast Florida, Brigadier General Rufus Saxton, commander of the region, was faced with the increasingly enormous task of fighting hunger, malnutrition, and disease among blacks coming within his jurisdiction. With few resources at hand, he asked Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton for assistance. Stanton, in turn, appealed to northern abolitionists including Samuel J. May. In the fall of 1862 May organized a "Freedmen's Relief Association" in Syracuse and secured funding to

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11. Jonathan Daniels, *Prince of Carpetbaggers* (New York, 1958), 83; *Syracuse Herald*, November 19, 1922.
 12. Edward Smith, *A History of the Schools of Syracuse From Its Early Settlement to January, 1, 1893* (Syracuse, NY, 1893), 282; *Syracuse Journal City Directory for 1862-63* (Syracuse, NY, 1862), 38.

support two teachers in Fernandina and to pay them a small salary. Chloe, along with Cornelia Smith, volunteered for service. By early November "these heroic ladies [had] packed their wardrobes" and "quietly" left for Port Royal, South Carolina.¹³

The trip south, though a difficult one, provided important lessons for the two teachers. After a stormy sea journey they landed at Hilton Head and moved on to Beaufort. There they visited freedmen's schools. "Yesterday, had some visitors in school— Miss T. and her brother and Miss Merrick from Syracuse," reported teacher Charlotte Forten, later the wife of Francis Grimké. "I liked the latter's face," she continued. "She looks like an earnest worker."¹⁴ At Beaufort, Chloe heard reports that confirmed the "great success" that many missionary teachers were having with blacks. "Most of them . . .," one account read, "speak of the earnestness and aptitude of the people in acquiring knowledge."¹⁵ The point was clearly made. Success was possible in spite of the disadvantages under which both teachers and students labored.

When Chloe and Cornelia arrived at Fernandina several weeks later, they found "twelve hundred" black and "two hundred white people" living on Amelia Island. Of the black population, about 200 men had joined United States service and "left their families here to be provided for." An account noted as well, "Two hundred and fifty women and four hundred and sixteen children were receiving rations." It added that another forty men were "aged and infirm, wholly dependent on the government." The remainder of the island's population either fished or found work at the Union-occupied fort.¹⁶

Room for a school was provided in Fernandina's Episcopal church, and, by December 18, Chloe had been teaching there for two weeks. Some educational opportunities had been available for blacks in the town for five months, but the first teacher, Union soldier Leander Cram, had been reassigned to active duty. One successor, freedwoman Susan, had been poorly prepared, and another, the Reverend Shields, a Presbyterian minis-

13. Johns, *Florida During the Civil War*, 61-69; *Syracuse Daily Standard*, December 23, 1862.

14. *Boston Liberator*, December 12, 1862.

15. *Syracuse Daily Standard*, January 12, 1863.

16. *Ibid.*, January 12, March 4, 1863.

ter, had shown little interest.¹⁷ Despite the unsettled conditions, Chloe found that “about seventy or eighty pupils [of all ages] had learned the alphabet, and some were able to read quite understandingly.”¹⁸

Merrick and Smith organized their school by dividing hold-over students into three groups based upon their abilities. About thirteen of them “read well in the Bible Reader,” another fifteen or sixteen “read easy sentences,” and the remainder “read words of three or four letters.” A fourth group, of new students, comprised eighty or so pupils who were just starting to learn their alphabet. To encourage parental support, the two teachers visited black homes and also held a meeting of mothers once each week. They learned firsthand of the tragedies and the resentments of slavery, but they found as well a spirit of determination and cooperation.¹⁹ “While many are . . . destitute . . .,” the teachers noted, “they cling to each other by bonds of heart-sympathy, making the worst ills endurable.”²⁰ Further, they discovered that the educational process was reciprocal. “[We are] teaching them various things,” one report observed, “and having them teach us, as they can do, some things that will be very useful to us.”²¹

Determination and cooperation of parents provided strong support for Merrick and Smith, but problems of environment and black poverty constantly commanded their attention. Particularly, the availability of proper clothing posed immediate problems. “In calling among the people,” Chloe recorded, “we find many suffering from colds, rheumatism and fevers, consequences of these changes in temperature and [inadequate] clothing.” Each morning their schoolroom was crowded with “shivering bare-footed children.” The teachers quickly distributed the limited supplies of clothing available, and Chloe appealed to Syracuse residents for “articles that can be made useful.”²²

17. *Ibid.*, March 4, 1863. “Susan” may have been Susie King Taylor. As the young wife of a Union soldier, she taught other blacks to read and write. Her travels as a nurse and “laundress” brought her to Florida not later than 1863. See Susie King Taylor, *Reminiscences of My Life in Camp with the 33rd U.S. Colored Troops, Late 1st South Carolina Volunteers* (New York, 1988).

18. *Syracuse Daily Standard*, March 4, 1863.

19. *Ibid.*

20. *Syracuse Journal*, April 15, 1864.

21. *Ibid.*, April 1, 1863.

22. *Syracuse Daily Standard*, January 12, 1863.

The talents of the teachers and the eagerness of the pupils soon began to show results. "One hundred and seven . . . have mastered the alphabet and are now reading," Chloe observed in March 1863. She optimistically concluded from the progress, "[The] colored children are capable of improvement equally with white children."²³ Their success attracted new pupils, resulting in the formation of two separate schools. Merrick taught one with 130 students, and Smith supervised 200, of whom approximately 125 attended in any one day. The two women also were able to share their burdens with new assistants—Miss Harris who aided Cornelia and Lizzie Smith who worked with Chloe.²⁴

The freedmen's schools celebrated the end of their terms in May, and a graduation ceremony was held for sixteen children "for the encouragement of the rest of the school." Each graduate received a book and a slate as rewards for performance, as well as the congratulations of local civilians, Federal army officials, and United States government agents. One member of the audience, United States Tax Commissioner Harrison Reed, especially was impressed with the occasion. He later was quoted as describing the schools as "the best . . . in all of the military district."²⁵

The poverty that had so affected the students soon prompted Chloe to venture beyond teaching and into the general care of needy children. During travels around Amelia Island she was struck by the numbers of "utterly destitute, parentless, orphans" of both races.²⁶ Once, she found a group of three white children, aged ten, twelve, and fourteen, living with an older sister and suffering from the lingering effects of smallpox. "In a jail-like place . . .," Merrick informed residents of Syracuse, "they had spent the winter." She added sadly, "More destitution this side of nakedness and starvation one could not find." On another occasion she discovered an orphaned black child being used as a slave by an elderly freedwoman who looked upon orphans "as having a market value." To Chloe, the woman was as "spiritually low as her [former] masters and mistresses." The mistreatment

23. *Syracuse Journal*, May 20, 1863.

24. *Ibid.*; *Syracuse Daily Standard*, July 22, 1863.

25. *Syracuse Journal*, May 20, July 14, 1863; *Syracuse Daily Standard*, July 22, 1863.

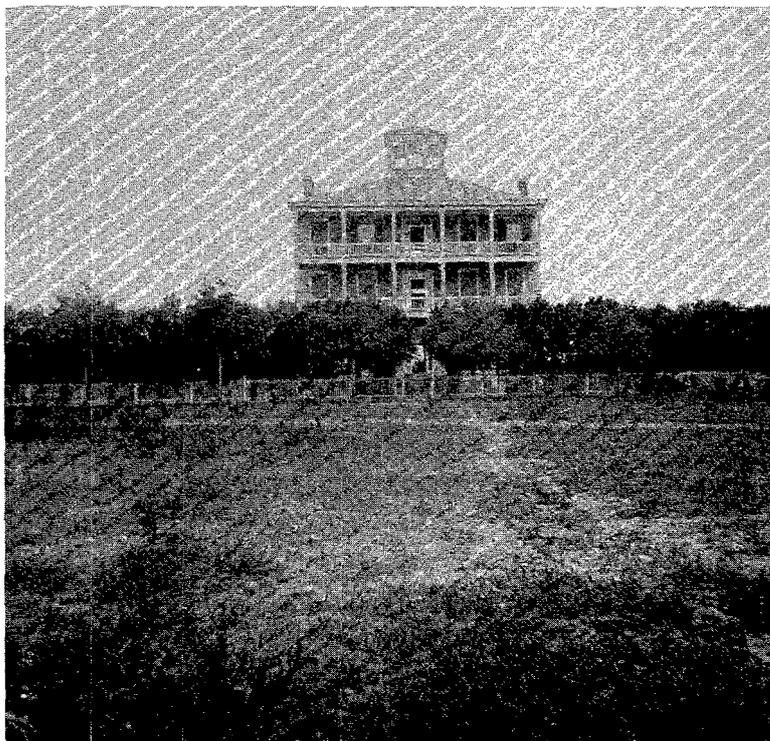
26. *Syracuse Journal*, September 4, 1863.



Governor Harrison M. Reed. *Photograph courtesy of the Iconographic Collections State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison.*

of these and all other children, white and black, southern and northern, offended her. "There have to be laws," she asserted, "to govern . . . unreasonable parents in their treatment of their own children."²⁷

27. *Ibid.*, April 15, 1864.



General Joseph Finegan's House. *Photograph courtesy of the Massachusetts Commandery Military Order of the Loyal Legion and the United States Army Military History Institute.*

The immediate solution to the needs of Amelia Island's parentless children was the opening of an orphanage, and by September 1863 Merrick had proposed a plan to General Saxton. In June, Harrison Reed had helped her to purchase at a tax sale the Fernandina home of Confederate General Joseph Finegan, and, with financial assistance from Samuel May, she intended to use the property to provide shelter for the children. Saxton approved, and Chloe set out to ensure the orphanage's success.²⁸ According to Harrison Reed's description, the house stood in a grove at the center of eighteen acres of land. "It is about sixty feet square, three stories high, containing four large rooms and

28. *Ibid.*, September 4, 1863; Current, *Those Terrible Carpetbaggers*, 26-27.

a wide hall on each floor; a large attic and observatory; and a fine kitchen and out buildings."²⁹

Assuring sufficient financial support for her project was Chloe's principal concern. Both May and Reed solicited aid in letters to Syracuse newspapers, thus permitting her not to appear "too conspicuous before the public."³⁰ Discussing the plan, though, Reed expressed his admiration by noting that "Miss Merrick of your city . . . first suggested the idea" and insisted that her "executive and administrative ability" would "guarantee its success."³¹

A few letters to newspapers, however laudatory, did not attract sufficient funds for the project, and Chloe was forced to place herself at the forefront of the campaign, traveling to Syracuse by way of Beaufort and New York City. At Beaufort she appealed personally to Saxton who provided \$300 in cash, "sixty pairs of shoes, thirty blankets and clothing," as well as "axes, rakes, hoes, hatchets, saws, hammers and other useful articles."³² When she arrived at Syracuse, she spoke to public and private gatherings organized by May and also sought, with his help, an endorsement and support from the National Freedmen's Relief Association of New York. A highlight of the visit involved a dinner excursion for 300 people to Fulton, New York. As diners feasted under a large tent, they listened while Chloe and Ansel Kinne described the dire needs of Florida's blacks and orphans. "Miss Merrick's remarks were of an interesting character," a correspondent related, "giving an account of her labors among the refugees in Florida."³³

The fundraising efforts proved successful, and Merrick returned through Port Royal to Fernandina in late October. With her came goods for the orphanage and new teachers to work in the freedmen's schools. By the following spring she was collecting needy children while supervising preparation of the Finegan home. The large structure, standing in a grove at the center of eighteen acres of land, required substantial time and effort to repair and maintain.³⁴ The magnitude of her work served only

29. Syracuse *Daily Standard*, July 14, 1863.

30. *Ibid.*, September 16, 1863.

31. *Ibid.*; *Syracuse Journal*, September 4, 1863.

32. *Syracuse Journal*, November 12, 1863.

33. *Ibid.*, August 28, September 4, 1863.

34. *Syracuse Daily Standard*, July 14, 1863.

to reinforce Chloe's commitment to the cause. "Mr. May," she wrote in April 1864, "I am satisfied that the mission upon which I have entered with your benediction . . . is more important than I had even at first supposed." The task was so great, though, that she felt compelled to depend upon the worldly support of others and her own faith. Her letter to Samuel May continued: "I am not sufficient, alone, to meet and bring order out of the chaotic elements surrounding me. I need the earnest sympathy, aid, wise council and prayers of all those whose hearts are with me in this. It seems to me that a kind Providence had led hitherto, and I assure you I still earnestly desire to have this work so directed that it shall meet the approval of our Common Father."³⁵

Though Merrick at times questioned whether she could meet the enormous responsibilities placed upon her, she persevered, and, just as had been the case with her school, she succeeded. Numerous references, appearing in publications such as the *National Freedman* and in letters, diaries, and reminiscences, document the work of the orphanage and the well-being of the children placed there. "I found the boys and girls in excellent condition," one man recorded, "and a more healthy and happy lot of children I have rarely seen."³⁶ Similarly, medical doctor Esther Hill Hawks found the orphanage a "beehive" of activity near Christmas 1864. "The house is comfortably furnished," she noted, "and now has 18 little orphan children residents—they all looked neatly dressed and contented."³⁷

Success did not come for Chloe without added burdens. As months passed the number of children in her care gradually increased. In February 1865 there were twenty-six; thirty were present the following July; and a total of fifty were boarded one year later. The larger the number of children, however, the greater the need for food and shelter. In both these areas the problems, at times, became critical. Sufficient food presented immediate concerns. The children planted gardens, but the orphanage remained dependent upon military rations. When that source temporarily was suspended in February 1865, the fortuitous arrival of a small grant forestalled disaster. "I must tell you

35. *Ibid.*, April 15, 1864.

36. *National Freedman*, June 1866, 173.

37. Gerald Schwartz, *A Woman Doctor's Civil War: Esther Hill Hawk's Diary* (Columbia, SC, 1984), 173.

how opportune your appropriation of forty dollars for the Asylum provision came," Merrick informed the donor organization. She continued, "An order has just been received that no more rations be issued to the destitute; this, of course, cut off the orphan children's supplies on which we had depended mainly, but we have about twenty bushels of corn left which was raised on the place and forty dollars to go on with." Her sense of relief was expressed as she added, "*Did it not seem providential?*"³⁸

The added demands of her responsibilities placed Chloe's health at increased risk. She was accustomed to spending at least some of the summer—the malaria season—outside the state, but running the orphanage kept her in Florida. The threat of disease was not an idle one. Sarah Slocum, a colleague from Syracuse, died at Fernandina in the fall of 1864. After Emma and Ansel Kinne came to the town, Emma, who taught at the orphanage, "had a long and dangerous illness."³⁹ In the summer of 1866 Chloe followed her sister with a malady that required her to leave Florida.⁴⁰

Illness and hunger were not the only threats to Merrick and her orphans. Persistent questions arose about the legality of the tax sales that had permitted Chloe's purchase of the Finegan house. After the Civil War's end, the former Confederate general himself initiated proceedings to recover his property. Also with war's end, Confederate loyalists returned to coastal communities, and some subjected northern teachers, including Chloe, to abuse that ranged from ostracism to profanity. More alarming were the goals these individuals had in mind for freed blacks. The former slaves were told that they "[would] still be slaves in some way."⁴¹ To frustrated teachers such as Chloe, the actions proved that many Southerners had not really changed. As she put it, "Slavery is not yet dead."⁴²

Even the supposed protectors of the freedmen—Union military men—sometimes constituted more of a problem than a part

38. *National Freedman*, April 1, 1865, 98, June 1866, 173.

39. *Syracuse Journal*, April 22, 1865; *National Freedman*, January 1866, 4.

40. *American Freedman*, May 1867; John Swaim diary, January 4, 1867, collection of the authors. The nature of Chloe's illness is not described.

41. George W. Smith, "Carpetbag Imperialism in Florida, 1862-68," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 27 (January 1949), 269-71; *National Freedman*, June 15, 1865, 182.

42. *National Freedman*, June 15, 1865, 182.

of the solution. Soldiers seduced young black women and abandoned them after they became pregnant. "Sarah, a young ebony girl, formerly a pupil in our schools, but now the mother of a white infant, whose Anglo-Saxon father has left for the North, comes to us for aid," Merrick reported in June 1865. "[A]s one of the many instances of this kind," she continued, "the mother [was] left to bear alone the burden of caring for the off-spring whose natural guardians have left the South, and these helpless ones to wear away a weary life, looking in vain for their seducer's promised return. We help such— and the class is not small— with the 'Go and sin no more' upon our lips, while indignation, pity, and all the emotions such outrages awaken, rankle in our hearts, and we cry out from the depths of our soul, 'God, what lessons art thou teaching the nation in this scourge thou art permitting thus to visit this oppressed people?'"⁴³

As southern hostility and other problems mounted, support for the orphanage from northern sources waned. Of critical importance, the National Freedmen's Relief Association (NFRA), which had provided much-needed funds, experienced an institutional decline. During the war it had switched its affiliations from religious to secular organizations, and, as aid organizations competed for funds, secular groups lost the struggle for membership and funding. The decline came at the same time as the Florida head of the Freedmen's Bureau, Thomas W. Osborn, pushed for return of tax sale property to former Confederate owners. A weakened NFRA could not sway Osborn's determination, despite a personal appeal from President Francis G. Shaw. On July 6, 1866, the Bureau ordered the orphanage moved to Magnolia, on the St. Johns River south of Jacksonville. In the fall of the following year the NFRA terminated its funding, and by December military authorities recommended that it be closed. The children were to be apprenticed or sent to orphanages in the Carolinas. "To all observers," Chloe wrote of her work, "[my children] have shown great capability for improvement. Whatever be the future of this enterprise, one thing has been proven; that these products of slavery's degradation . . . have quickened into a new life."⁴⁴

43. *Ibid.*, 181.

44. Francis G. Shaw to O. O. Howard, April 18, 1866, and Thomas W. Osborn to Chloe Merrick, July 6, 1866, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, Florida, record group 105, National Archives, Washington, DC; *National Freedman*, March 1866, 115.

Merrick supervised relocation of the orphanage, but soon thereafter she was taken ill. By January 1867 she had recovered enough to travel and returned to Syracuse. Once her recuperation was complete, she was reassigned to schools at Columbia, South Carolina, and then New Bern, North Carolina. Despite the trials through which she had suffered, she remained as determined as ever. In that spirit she wrote the old abolitionist Gerrit Smith in November 1868. "The time has not come for the old heroes of the anti-slavery revolution to lay their armor by," she declared. "The longer I remain in the South . . . the more I see remains to be done."⁴⁵

The service work that was so important to Chloe occupied her attentions to the apparent exclusion of a social life. One historian has suggested, "There is a possibility that Chloe was more concerned with her mission than with men."⁴⁶ While Merrick may not have paid much romantic attention to men, she had her male admirers, and she used their attention to the benefit of her work. On one occasion, for instance, she capitalized on the friendly dispositions of the gunboat *Mohawk's* officers to collect \$10 for her school and to secure a promise of protection "in case of an attack upon Fernandina."⁴⁷ Union General Milton Littlefield likewise was impressed when Chloe presented him with "[a] fine flag upon which 'Liberty' was emblazoned."⁴⁸

The most ardent of Merrick's admirers was not a soldier. Rather, when Harrison Reed and Chloe met in early 1863 he was a widowed fifty-year-old former Wisconsin newspaper editor then serving in Florida as United States tax commissioner.⁴⁹ Described by one critic as a "fussy old granny," Reed apparently was smitten by Merrick's charms. When later that year he was forced to resign his position in a dispute with fellow commissioners, Reed pleaded for an opportunity to return to Florida in words that suggest a desire to remain close to her. "I have embarked in schemes for the benefit of the freedmen," he declared, "& I want to live in Florida to assist in bringing it in as a free state & in regenerating the slavery cursed territory."

45. Merrick to Gerrit Smith, November 20, 1868, Gerrit Smith Papers, Syracuse University Library, Syracuse, NY.

46. Daniels, *Prince of Carpetbaggers*, 84.

47. *Syracuse Journal*, April 1, 1863.

48. Daniels, *Prince of Carpetbaggers*, 236.

49. Reed's first wife, Anna Louisa Turner, died September 1862. They had two sons, Edwin R. and Henry Wadsworth, and one daughter, Georgiana.

Thanks to the intercession of old Wisconsin acquaintances, he eventually was designated President Andrew Johnson's postal agent for the state of Florida.⁵⁰

Little evidence can be found that Chloe's interest in Reed during and just after the Civil War was other than professional. Once back in Florida he increasingly allied himself with President Johnson's conservative policies, as well as those of Provisional Governor William Marvin of Key West and his popularly elected successor David S. Walker of Tallahassee. Presumably, these actions disappointed Chloe, who retained her "anti-slavery revolution" zeal. The matter was mooted, in any event, when Chloe left the state in January 1867.⁵¹

Two months after Merrick's departure the political world was turned upside down by passage of the First and Second Reconstruction acts, and from their implementation Chloe's life again was set upon a path for Florida. These laws ushered in military Reconstruction and paved the way for black suffrage, new constitutions, and Republican rule in the South. Reed emerged from the political revolution in June 1868 as the state's first Republican governor, at about the same time that Chloe in New Bern, North Carolina, was seeking a way to complete all that remained to be done of her life's work.⁵²

The nature of continuing contacts between Reed and Merrick once she was away from Florida is uncertain. One biographer has argued that only "the dignity of the governorship" finally emboldened Reed to propose marriage.⁵³ First, though, he established a personal relationship within her family by employing Chloe's nephew Charles Kinne as his personal secretary. He also encouraged a friendship with Chloe's Civil War admirer Milton Littlefield. The former Union general, who by then was a North Carolina and Florida railroad speculator, seems to have maintained his own close acquaintance with Merrick, and perhaps Reed believed that Littlefield might exert positive influence on the governor's behalf.⁵⁴

While Reed's interest in ties with Chloe seems apparent, her attitudes are not so clear. Arguably, Reed's affection had en-

50. Current, *Those Terrible Carpetbaggers*, 27.

51. *Ibid.*, 27-29; *Tallahassee Sentinel*, June 18, 1868.

52. Shofner, *Nor Is It Over Yet*, 157-94.

53. Current, *Those Terrible Carpetbaggers*, 90.

54. Daniels, *Prince of Carpetbaggers*, 236.

deared the much older man to her. More probably, however, while she appreciated his attentions, she was as conscious of the possibilities for extending her social agenda through his influence as governor. When Reed did propose marriage in 1869, her acceptance may well have been based upon an understanding that she would be meaningfully involved in educational and social issues in the state, just as she earlier had been in Fernandina.

Whatever the basis of their agreement, Chloe and Harrison Reed were married at Ansel Kinne's Syracuse home on August 10, 1869. "The ceremony," a local newspaper reported, "was performed in the pleasant grove on Mr. Kinne's premises, by the Rev. Samuel J. May, in the presence of a small party of the friends and family of the bride."⁵⁵ Suffragists of the time modified traditional marriage vows by dropping promises by wives to "obey" their husbands, and Chloe likely did so as well. After a short honeymoon, the couple returned to Florida.⁵⁶

Once in Tallahassee, Chloe Merrick Reed's influence with her new husband quickly was apparent. Where the governor prior to his marriage had catered to conservative social beliefs, he soon proposed or supported far-reaching legislation to address social problems, particularly in the fields of education and relief for the poor. The state's public school system had been created by the legislature only months before the marriage, but by 1871 he urged a system that "would reach every portion of the state," as well as a home or farm for the infirm and dependent in every county.⁵⁷ A year later he sought a "State University" to teach both the classics and "mechanics, modern languages, the physical sciences and practical agriculture."⁵⁸ The initiatives met with real success. Between 1870 and September 1872 the number of public schools grew from 250 to 444, and enrollment jumped from 7,500 to 16,258. By the latter year, the state superintendent of public instruction believed that schools were reaching 25 percent of all school-age youth and that, if the

55. *Syracuse Journal*, August 11, 1869.

56. *Ibid.*

57. *Florida House Journal* (1871), 27.

58. *Ibid.*, (1872), 43. In 1870 Florida had received 90,000 acres of federal land to be used to promote the teaching of agriculture and the vocational arts.

rate of increase could be maintained, in twenty years Florida would have "enrolled every child in the state."⁵⁹

Reed's initiatives, which one student of the subject referred to as "the good works Chloe planned in the state over which her husband ruled," represented how personal experiences had caused a substantial change in her thinking.⁶⁰ With the decline of the NFRA and the subsequent closing of her orphanage, she no longer believed that philanthropy alone could answer the needs of blacks. As Reed later put it, philanthropy was "inadequate as a permanent system." Even as a "temporary expedient," charity harmed blacks when it treated them "as dependent children." Ultimately, they were not "wards" but citizens—citizens with both "rights" and "responsibilities."⁶¹

During their residence in Tallahassee, the Reeds lived in a "very pleasant house across the street from the capital." Chloe presided over the household with "dignity," keeping it with "Yankee neatness." It was noted that she "endeared herself to many who visited her home."⁶²

Chloe's presence in the governor's life and her influence with him became sources of strength for Reed as his administration grew increasingly tumultuous. Repeated attempts to remove him from office were beaten back with the votes of black legislators who knew of Chloe's unchanging goodwill toward their race. Even when many black leaders finally abandoned Reed in 1872, Chloe's commitment remained unchanged. "I learned in the beginning," she once said, "never to compromise with those whose true interest in the cause is not fully known."⁶³

In 1873, following expiration of the governor's term of office, the Reeds and their small son, Harrison Merrick, moved to Jacksonville. They settled on a farm in an area that would become South Jacksonville, living—many believed—in a very reduced financial state. One account insisted that the governor

59. "Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction of the State of Florida," *Florida House Journal*, Appendix (1871), 56-61, and *Florida House Journal*, Appendix (1872), 15-17.

60. Daniels, *Prince of Carpetbaggers*, 252.

61. *Jacksonville Semi-Tropical*, August 1877.

62. Daniels, *Prince of Carpetbaggers*, 240-41; *Jacksonville Florida Times-Union*, August 6, 1897.

63. Wallace, *Carpetbag Rule in Florida*, 88, 99, 124, 210; *National Freedman*, April 1, 1865, 98.

had been duped of his savings by their old friend Milton Littlefield.⁶⁴ Subsequently, Reed involved himself in several business ventures, including an orange grove and as editor of the monthly magazine *Semi-Tropical*, without major success. He and Chloe remained prominent among the city's residents and were active in civic and social affairs. Reed later represented Duval County in the 1879 state legislature. Together, they helped organize for their neighborhood a northern Methodist church.⁶⁵

Although his business ventures did not prosper, Reed retained hopes for financial security through his family connections, and these efforts eventually placed Chloe in a compromising situation. The relation was Harrison's sister, Martha Reed Mitchell, wife of wealthy railway financier Alexander Mitchell of Wisconsin. She had begun spending the winter season at Jacksonville in the early 1870s and built a palatial estate a short distance from the Reeds. Mitchell shared Chloe's concerns for the destitute and focused her energies upon the condition of poor Northerners who had moved to Jacksonville to recover their health. In 1873 she joined local women to organize St. Luke's Hospital Association. The organization and its hospital grew in spite of the "primitive state of medical care in Florida" and "developed along modern lines," becoming "one of the oldest" hospitals in the nation.⁶⁶ Likely with Mitchell's encouragement, Chloe joined the association in 1882 and served it in a number of capacities. During 1882-1884 she acted as vice president and, from 1885 to 1886, as treasurer.⁶⁷

64. According to an article in the *Syracuse Courier*, one of Harrison Reed's older sons had mismanaged the post office in Jacksonville, losing perhaps \$10,000. Neither the son nor Reed could make up the deficit. Littlefield offered to pay the shortage for protection from the state of North Carolina. Once Littlefield got some type of guaranty from Florida, he asked Reed for a personal note for the money advanced for the governor's son. Then, without Reed's knowledge, Littlefield went to the state treasurer and seized Reed's salary. "As a result," the article noted. "Governor Reed is today a poor man." *Syracuse Courier*, March 30, 1875.

65. Current, *Those Terrible Carpetbaggers*, 390-91; *Jacksonville Journal*, September 23, 1876. From 1889 to 1893 Reed was postmaster at Tallahassee.

66. "Villa Alexandria," *Papers of the Jacksonville Historical Society* 3 (1954), 68-73; Webster Merritt, *A Century of Medicine in Jacksonville and Duval County* (Gainesville, 1949), 94.

67. Merritt, *Century of Medicine*, 94, 236.

The problems that developed for Chloe out of her husband's financial needs and the proximity of his sister's wealth arose in 1888, soon after the death of Martha's husband. Martha was very ill, but not so incapacitated that she could not shut off funding for a failed business deal. Without making Martha aware, Reed wrote to her son, United States Senator John L. Mitchell, urging him in light of his mother's illness to place her care in Chloe's hands and to entrust Martha's affairs to himself. Reed mentioned nothing of the failed business arrangement. When Martha unexpectedly recovered her health, Reed's duplicity became evident, and Chloe appeared to have been helping her husband take advantage of a sick relative.⁶⁸

Reed finally confessed his actions in a series of letters to John Mitchell, and he admitted that Chloe had not been told the entire truth. "I do not even now," he declared, "let my good wife know all of the necessities of this dreadful case."⁶⁹ A furious and unforgiving Martha nonetheless terminated any interaction between herself and the Reeds, except through her attorney. Given the strife, Chloe felt she had no alternative but to leave the hospital association. As Reed informed Senator Mitchell, "She has been compelled to resign to protect its interests."⁷⁰ Some years later, perhaps as an act of compassion, Chloe was appointed one of St. Luke's "Honorary Directors."⁷¹

The Reeds' depressing finances were bolstered somewhat in 1889 when the former governor was appointed Tallahassee's postmaster for the duration of Benjamin Harrison's administration. As the years passed, however, sad news far outstripped the good. In 1890 Ansel Kinne died. Montgomery Merrick followed the next year, as did brother Charles in 1895. On August 5, 1897, Chloe Merrick Reed joined them. She died at St. Luke's Hospital in Jacksonville after a long illness resulting from a stroke. Services were conducted at Grace Methodist Episcopal

68. Richard N. Current, *Three Carpetbag Governors* (Baton Rouge, 1967), 53; Harrison Reed to John L. Mitchell, November 13, 1888, Mitchell Papers, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison (hereinafter, Mitchell Papers).

69. Reed to Mitchell, April 7, 1889, Mitchell Papers.

70. *Ibid.*, May 17, 24, 1889.

71. Merritt, *Century of Medicine*, 236.

church in South Jacksonville. Her remains were buried in nearby St. Nicholas Cemetery.⁷²

The difficulties of Chloe Merrick Reed's later years in no way diminish her lifetime of accomplishment and sacrifice. Her achievements remain a standard by which the lives of all nineteenth-century Floridians—men and women—can be measured. When hundreds of children needed education, she gave of herself; when needy orphans required care, she offered relief against great odds; and, by planning many of the good works of her husband's administration, she helped create the foundation of the state's public schools and social services. Her courage and her contributions can be celebrated in any age.

72. *The National Cyclopaedia of American Biography* (New York, 1921), XI, 380; *Syracuse Daily Standard*, January 17, 1890, December 28, 1891, April 27, 1895; *Jacksonville Florida Times-Union*, August 6, 1897. Harrison Reed lived until May 25, 1899. *Jacksonville Florida Times-Union*, May 26, 1899. Martha Reed Mitchell died February 14, 1902. She was one of the founders of the Ladies Association, which acquired and restored Mt. Vernon, the home of George Washington. Her son, Senator John L. Mitchell, was the father of army general, William "Billy" Mitchell. Mitchell earned fame in World War I as an Air Corp commander. See "Villa Alexandria," 68-73.