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Grander in Her Daughters: Florida's Women During the Civil War

by TRACY J. REVELS

“**T**he citizens of the Flowery are determined to maintain their just rights at all hazards; and the fair daughters of Florida are prompt to encourage and cheer their bold defenders,” the *Philadelphia Inquirer* reported on February 2, 1861.¹ The newspaper not only relayed the latest happenings in the secession movement but prophetically established the trend for the historical view of women's lives during the Civil War.

Florida has received only slight consideration in the vast historical refighting of the war, and if the female “citizens of the Flowery” are mentioned at all, they are portrayed in the traditional roles of motherly matrons and beautiful belles, sending their men off to the front, tending their wounds, and mourning their deaths. A reconsideration of this stereotype is long overdue, for the daughters of Florida were not merely handkerchief-waving supporters of “The Cause.” They were Confederates, but they were also Unionists, collaborationists, and neutral observers. They were slave owners and slaves, refugees and rebels. While historians are increasingly examining women's contributions to the Civil War, they often focus only on Confederate women or those who managed large plantations, missing the vast diversity of female experiences on the home front. As a small state, but one that endured a wide range of wartime events, Florida lends itself to the study of women's roles in the conflict. Heroines, cowards, and those who merely wished to be left alone mingled in a state that witnessed virtually every aspect of war, including invasion, occupation, and deprivation.

Florida was a small state in terms of inhabitants. The 1860 census tallied 41,128 white males and 36,619 white females, with a slave population of 31,348 males and 30,397 females. The free black population was minuscule, only 454 males and 478 females. Though

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1. *Philadelphia Inquirer*, February 2, 1861.

these figures reflected remarkable growth during the prosperous years of the 1850s, the northern press tagged Florida as “the smallest tadpole in the dirty pool of secession.”² The population was clustered in the crescent known as Middle Florida. This region curved from the Panhandle to Ocala and represented the plantation belt of the state. Most Floridians resided on small farms, but the state’s coastal towns were growing with diverse populations, including Yankee entrepreneurs and invalids. Women within the state lived in a variety of conditions, from frontier isolation to small town friendliness, and even the pretension of cosmopolitan sophistication.³

The move towards secession drew female support. Many undoubtedly echoed the politics of their menfolk, but they gave their thoughts unique expression. Helen, Maria, Margaret, and Florida Broward, daughters of Colonel John Broward of Duval County, sent a states’ rights manifesto to the *Jacksonville Standard* on November 6, 1860. After apologizing for daring to speak publicly on political issues, the women took the “Submissionists” to task, asking whether Floridians would “still remain in the Union and trust the tender mercies of the Yankees and protect us by smoky resolutions and compromise, or will they avail themselves of the means given them by God and nature and defend themselves?” Pledging to imitate the Revolutionary matrons if war came, the Broward women urged secession and threatened to send their crinolines to timid politicians.⁴ Other women attended public assemblies on the subject and took to wearing palmetto cockades in their hats as a symbol of support for South Carolina. In Pensacola, the many raucous secession meetings led a naval officer to conclude that “men, women, and children seemed to have gone mad.”⁵

2. Joe M. Richardson, *The Negro in the Reconstruction of Florida, 1865-1877* (Tampa, 1973), 1.

3. Canter Brown Jr., “The Civil War, 1861-1865,” in Michael Gannon, ed., *The New History of Florida* (Gainesville, 1996), 231-33.

4. Samuel Proctor, ed., “The Call To Arms: Secession From a Feminine Point of View,” *Florida Historical Quarterly* 35 (January 1957), 266-70. Unfortunately, no copies of the *Jacksonville Standard* for this period exist, and it is not known whether this remarkable letter was ever published.

5. Karl H. Grismer, *Tampa: A History of the City of Tampa and the Tampa Bay Region of Florida* (St. Petersburg, 1950), 137; Caroline Mays Brevard, *A History of Florida From the Treaty of 1763 to Our Own Times*, vol. 2 (DeLand, 1925), 51; Brian R. Rucker, “Blackwater and Yellow Pine: The Development of Santa Rosa County, 1821-1865,” vol. 2, (Ph.D. diss., Florida State University, 1990), 631.

When the secession convention assembled in Tallahassee on January 3, 1861, women packed the galleries and cheered the speakers. The vote for secession on January 10 met with feminine cheers. A day later, the first cannon salute to the new Republic of Florida was fired by Princess Achille Murat, widow of one of Napoleon's nephews and Tallahassee's most prominent socialite. Members of the convention entrusted the Ordinance of Secession to Elizabeth M. Eppes, a female descendant of Thomas Jefferson, who decorated the revered document with blue ribbon.⁶ Women enjoyed the celebratory band concerts and fireworks displays held in Tampa and other cities. In the small town of Madison, Mrs. Enoch J. Vann hurrahed as fire-eaters with South Carolina pedigrees promised to drink all the blood spilled in the war.⁷

Not all Florida women, however, favored secession. Among those who attended the public meetings in Tampa was Catherine S. Hart, the wife of prominent judge and future governor Ossian Hart, who bemoaned the lack of a "Washington, Webster, or Clay" to cool tempers. In letters to relatives, she defended slavery but hoped disunion could be avoided. Octavia Stephens, a Boston native married to Florida planter Winston J. T. Stephens, shuddered to see militia troops drilling at the Duval County courthouse, declaring in a letter to her husband how grateful she was that he would never be in any military company. By the time her letter reached him, Winston had volunteered with the St. Johns Rangers and been elected first lieutenant. Ellen Call Long, prominent in Tallahassee society as befitted the daughter of former governor Richard Keith Call, disapproved of the antics of the women attending the secession convention. A number of Tallahassee's Unionist women held a wake for their nation at Lake Jackson Church, learning of the vote for secession just as their meeting was being called to order. Some mothers vowed to prevent their sons from enlisting. Women of all political persuasions worried about their families' safety. The thoughts of slave women were not

6. Ellen Call Long, *Florida Breezes: or, Florida, New and Old* (1883; facsimile, Gainesville, 1962), 306; Susan Bradford Eppes, *Through Some Eventful Years* (1926; facsimile, Gainesville, 1968), 142; "Notes on Secession in Tallahassee and Leon County," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 4 (October 1925), 63-64.

7. *Jacksonville St. Johns Mirror*, July 17, 1861; William H. Trimmer in Florida Division, United Daughters of the Confederacy Scrapbooks, vol. 1, (hereafter UDC Scrapbooks) Florida State Archives, Tallahassee (hereafter FSA).

recorded, but certainly they watched and waited, knowing that the outcome of the unfolding events would change their lives forever.⁸

The first actions of Florida's women were mainly symbolic, fitting within the nineteenth-century ideals of chivalry and honor. Women served as reminders to the men that they were fighting for more than cotton and states' rights. On April 2, 1861, the Gadsden Young Guards were treated to a supper organized by the women of Quincy. Each soldier was served by a young woman "as if she were his sister." The troop's commander promised, "Every man who was at the supper will consider that it is his duty to *fight and die*, if necessary, in defense of our country's rights and the honor of the ladies of Quincy." Along with farewell suppers, Confederate women graced podiums and platforms, presenting battle flags with designs restrained only by their creativity. The Young Guards carried a blue silk flag embroidered with a globe and eagle, and the state motto, "let us alone."⁹ The St. Augustine Independent Blues displayed a banner with a palmetto and eagle, created by the ladies of the oldest city. The Franklin Rifles never carried their white flag into battle, perhaps because the seamstresses of Apalachicola had forgotten that white was the color of surrender. As soldiers departed, women surrounded them, often listening to or presenting maudlin speeches. They expressed, as young schoolmistress Sallie Partridge did in a speech to Captain Bradford's Madison volunteers, many "elegant, chaste and appropriate sentiments."¹⁰

With men marching away, women began to organize "thimble brigades," sewing circles that gave them both a patriotic and social outlet. Long after the war, a lady who identified herself only as Mrs. L. Thompson recalled the excitement among the women of Middleburg, who organized sewing, knitting, "and all other types of societies to relieve and lighten the burden of the brave men . . ."¹¹ Women established soldiers' aid societies, spending evenings pre-

8. Catherine S. Hart to Charlotte Campbell, November 30, 1860, Dena E. Snodgrass Collection, P. K. Yonge Library of Florida History, University of Florida, Gainesville (hereafter PKY); Octavia Stephens to Winston Stephens, September 7, 1861, Stephens Family Collection, PKY; Long, *Florida Breezes*, 306.

9. *Quincy Republic*, April 6, 1861.

10. Thomas Graham, *The Awakening of St. Augustine: The Anderson Family and the Oldest City, 1821-1924* (St. Augustine, 1978), 84; William H. Trimmer, untitled article, UDC Scrapbooks, vol. 1; T. C. Vann, "Captain Bradford's Company," UDC Scrapbooks, vol. 1.

11. L. Thompson, "Reminiscences of the War," UDC Scrapbooks, vol. 1.



Ellen Call Long, daughter of Governor Richard Keith Call and author of *Florida Breezes*, shown here c. 1880s. Photograph courtesy of the Florida State Archives, Tallahassee.

paring bandages, lint, and flannel bags for cartridges. This work received official sanction and praise from the state government. The legislature appropriated \$10,000 in 1861 and \$75,000 in 1863 for uniform materials, turning much of the cloth over to the ladies' military societies for manufacture into apparel. During 1862 and

1863 female societies produced 3,735 pairs of cotton drawers, 2,765 cotton shirts, 169 wool jackets, 809 pairs of wool pants, and 1,000 pairs of cotton socks. Governor John Milton expressed his thanks for the women's "generous, patriotic, and untiring efforts," but late in the war he called for a change in policy, leaving uniform distribution to the Confederate quartermaster. While Florida's Confederate women worked willingly, their products were not standardized, a common problem and concern in the ranks. Women continued to sew, especially for loved ones or local boys in the army.¹² Writing to Jesse Shaw Smith, his sister and personal tailor, Roderick Gospero Shaw of the Fourth Florida Infantry included patterns and descriptions of suits he desired, reflecting the Confederate propensity to design one's own uniform.¹³

Ladies' societies rarely coordinated their efforts, but Florida's women showed intriguing creativity in supporting "The Cause," especially when it came to fund raising. Tallahassee's ladies opened a special fund that soon included cash, jewelry, napkin rings, forks, spoons, and silver tongs in its treasury. Unmarried women organized a "Misses' Fair and Festival" to sell flowers, handicrafts, and a dinner advertised as "sufficient to tempt the appetite of a king." The event, a "perfect success," raised \$1,450.¹⁴ Bazaars, musical evenings, and amateur theatricals became common in Tallahassee and surrounding counties, providing an opportunity not only to raise money but to boost morale on the home front. A troupe of lady thespians from Jefferson, Madison, and Leon Counties performed adaptations of *King Lear*, the burlesque *Bombastes Furiosos*, and the melodrama *Tampa* to large crowds in the capitol building. Youthful performers, such as a young Tallahassee woman who gave a recitation "in cog" as Miss Nora Marshall, perhaps relished their moment on the stage. Children also contributed to musical evenings, which naturally drew rave reviews, no matter how talented the musicians.

12. John E. Johns, *Florida During the Civil War* (Gainesville, 1963), 171-72; Dorothy Dodd, "Florida in the War, 1861-1865," in Allen Morris, ed., *The Florida Handbook, 1961-62* (Tallahassee, 1961), 47-48; Bell Irvin Wiley, *The Life of Johnny Reb: The Common Soldier of the Confederacy* (Indianapolis, 1943), 108-109.

13. Roderick Gospero Shaw to Jesse Shaw Smith, April 16, 1964, R. K. Shaw Papers, Special Collections, Robert Manning Strozier Library, Florida State University, Tallahassee (hereafter FSU).

14. Mary W. Keen, "Some Phases of Life in Leon County During the Civil War," *Tallahassee Historical Society Annual* 4 (1939), 26; *Tallahassee Sentinel*, April 28, 1863, May 6, 1863.

More importantly, every form of entertainment raised money for worthy causes: refugees, hospitals, and uniforms.”

Florida's Confederate women also responded immediately to the provisioning of hospitals. Newspapers in the first months of the war carried open letters of thanks to women like Mrs. Daniel Ladd, wife of a prominent Leon County businessman, who had donated articles for the Tallahassee Guards' hospital. Ladies' hospital societies were organized, drawing up lists that resembled the one made by the Marianna Society, calling for linens, towels, and even a precise number of dippers, spittoons, and bedpans. Sue M. Archer remembered the transformation of the Planter's Hotel in Tallahassee, how the “corps of ladies” under the direction of Mrs. Delceda Pearce turned an unoccupied structure into “a comfortable and cheery place for the soldiers.” Women also established wayside hotels or homes near depots to provide food and homelike comforts to traveling soldiers.¹⁶

During the war, many women served as amateur nurses, though not always with distinction. Common anecdotes poked fun at unattractive spinsters who tried too hard to imitate Florence Nightingale, only to cause more suffering to their charges. Most women seemed content to deliver food and clothing to hospitals, or nurse their own wounded at home. One woman, Mary Martha Reid, widow of territorial governor Robert R. Reid, won fame as the matron of the Florida hospital in Richmond. Since each state was responsible for its own facility, Reid worked tirelessly to make people aware of the hospital's needs. Known as “the mother of the Florida boys,” Reid lost her own son, Raymond, in the Battle of the Wilderness near the end of the war.¹⁷

Support for the Confederacy centered in Middle Florida. Other regions, such as West Florida, Jacksonville and St. Augustine, held large Unionist populations. These people were unfortunate in their neighbors, for during the war many atrocities occurred. In

15. *Tallahassee Floridian and Journal*, May 26, 1863, June 9, 1863; Samuel Proctor, ed., *Florida A Hundred Years Ago* (Tallahassee, 1963), n.p.; *Quincy Dispatch*, April 21, 1863.

16. *Tallahassee Florida Sentinel*, August 26, 1862; J. Randall Stanley, *History of Jackson County* (Marianna, 1950), 179-83; Sue M. Archer, “The Soldiers Hospital,” UDC Scrapbooks, vol. 5; *Tallahassee Florida Sentinel*, November 17, 1862.

17. Johns, *Florida During the Civil War*, 172-73; Newspaper extracts, circa 1863, UDC Scrapbooks, vol. 6; Mary Martha Reid, “What I Know of the Travers Family” (Florida Historical Records Survey, 1937), 14; C. W. Maxwell, “The 2nd Florida Regiment at Williamsburg and Seven Pines,” UDC Scrapbooks, vol. 4.

Walton County, a Union officer reported that one woman had been brutally assaulted by Confederates demanding to know where her husband was hiding. When she refused to reveal his whereabouts, her tormentors unleashed their dogs on her and killed her two children. Other Unionist families found themselves under fire as they tried to reach Federal gunboats. In August 1862, a Union commander rescued four families on the Blackwater River, reporting that the “people were delighted to escape the tyranny of their oppressors, and now, for the first time in months, felt safe.”¹⁸

In an amazing incident late in the war, the Confederate government dispatched Lieutenant Colonel Henry D. Capers to capture a band of Confederate deserters and Unionists who were hiding out in the Taylor and Lafayette County swamps. Unable to locate the men, Capers rousted their wives and children from their homes, burned the dwellings, then marched his prisoners back to Tallahassee. Held in hastily constructed stockades near Tallahassee, these unfortunate dependents quickly became a “nine days wonder” to local teenager Susan Bradford Eppes and other Confederate bystanders. After initial confrontations filled with threats of retribution, the women grew disheartened and accepted offers of food from concerned citizens. Outraged at Capers’ action, Governor John Milton fired off notes protesting the idea of making war on women and children. The women also submitted a petition, arguing that they did not all agree with their husbands’ choices, but as wives and daughters they were bound to obey the decisions of their men. On July 19, 1864, the families were transported to a Union blockading vessel off St. Marks.¹⁹

Many of Florida’s important cities fell to Federal troops early in the war: St. Augustine, Key West, Pensacola, and Fernandina became Yankee strongholds and recreation areas during the conflict. For women of Unionist or collaborationist persuasion, the presence of Federal troops represented security and new opportunities. “There are about twenty five ladies in town, who have openly espoused the Union cause throughout the troubles,” the Unionist St. Augustine *Examiner* reported on May 1, 1862, “and they deserve great credit for their courage and fidelity, sustained under the most perilous and trying circumstances.” In the state’s oldest city, Clar-

18. Rucker, “Blackwater and Yellow Pine,” vol. 2, 694-96.

19. Johns, *Florida During the Civil War*, 165-67; Eppes, *Through Some Eventful Years*, 223-24.



Susan Bradford Eppes, author of *Through Some Eventful Years*, shown here 1864. Photograph courtesy of the Florida State Archives, Tallahassee.

issa Anderson opened her plantation home, Markland, to Union officers. A northerner by birth, the attractive widow established “a charming atmosphere of culture and refinement,” while her black cook became known as a seller of orange pies. Elite women like Anderson were able to serve as mediators between the troops and

townspeople, easing tensions during the occupation. Some young Minorcan women found romance with their guards, and less genteel relationships were established on a cash basis.²⁰ In occupied areas, the female population grew with the arrival of officers' wives, schoolteachers, and philanthropists, many of whom left observations— not always flattering— of the state and its natives.²¹

While the Confederate command did not fret about the taking of Florida's port cities, many of the female residents did, and they made their concerns known. The Federals who occupied St. Augustine encountered a constant barrage from the female "fire-eaters," often led by Mrs. Frances Kirby Smith, the mother of Confederate general Edmund Kirby Smith. Working within social structures that permitted them to engage in activities for which men would have been arrested, Confederate dames chopped down flagpoles, enacted public mourning for Confederate memorials, and challenged Union officers directly. Shortly after receiving the surrender of the city from Mayor Cristobal Bravo, Commander C. R. P. Rodgers found himself under attack by a virago. Informing him that the men of the city had acted like cowards, the woman declared that there were stouter hearts in other bosoms, striking her own for dramatic effect. Though Union officers dismissed these actions as women's "theatrical desires to portray themselves as heroines," such activities annoyed the Union leaders. When coupled with the suspicion that women were passing messages and aid to Confederates beyond the lines, the pantomimes became intolerable. Confederate families in Key West were nearly deported, and a number of women and children were forcibly removed from St. Augustine in February 1863. Many of these dislocated families later fled to Lake City and Madison.²²

20. *St. Augustine Examiner*, May 1, 1862; Thomas Graham, "The Home Front: Civil War Times in St. Augustine," in Jacqueline Fretwell, ed., *Civil War Times in St. Augustine* (St. Augustine, 1986), 34-35; James M. Nichols, *Perry's Saints, or The Fighting Parson's Regiment in the War of the Rebellion* (Boston, 1886), 180; Diary of Elias A. Bryant, 56-57, Lewis Schmidt Collection, FSA.

21. See Gerald Schwartz, ed., *A Woman Doctor's Civil War: Esther Hill Hawks' Diary* (Columbia, 1984) and Frances Beecher Perkins, "Two Years With a Colored Regiment: A Woman's Experience," *New England Magazine*, September 1897-February 1898.

22. *Philadelphia Inquirer*, March 20, 1862; *St. Augustine Examiner*, May 1, 1862; Graham, "The Home Front," 26-34, Omega G. East, "St. Augustine During the Civil War," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 31 (October 1952), 82; Jefferson B. Browne, *Key West: The Old and the New* (St. Augustine, 1912), 92-95.

The war came home for Florida's women by degrees, as prices inevitably rose and household management became a greater burden. During the conflict, "making do" became a theme of life. Florida's women encountered daily challenges to their flexibility and ingenuity. Women living in frontier conditions were probably better prepared for the rigors of deprivations than were their kinswomen who had become accustomed to stores and mills. Amanda Comerford's experience was typical. Her husband James E. Comerford enlisted in the 6th Florida Infantry in 1862, leaving Amanda on their Jackson County farm with a year's provisions, four small children, and a set of twins on the way. "It is difficult to describe my struggles to provide food and clothing for this large family," Comerford wrote. "I had to work on the farm during the day, go a long distance to milk, and a large part of the night was spent spinning and weaving to make cloth for wearing apparel. But somehow I managed to struggle through as did many other women during these trying times."²³ Some, like Mattie English Branch of Liberty County, helped look after "delicate" neighbors. Branch recalled making a circuit of her community, planting corn, potatoes, rice, peas, and pumpkins, because she "was young, healthy, and strong, and felt that [she] must do something for the general good."²⁴ But for every woman who set up a loom or managed a successful farm, there were others who lacked the education, skills, or aplomb to succeed.

Small luxuries and necessities long taken for granted were early casualties of the war. The price of calico cloth skyrocketed, and medicine became impossible to obtain. Women coped by repairing old dresses, "turning them out" until they resembled something different, if not exactly something new. Almost any food item could be substituted. When coffee grew scarce, Florida housewives brewed dried okra, acorns, or pumpkin seeds instead. Floridians were fortunate in the natural bounty of their land, so their diets were generally better than elsewhere in the Confederacy. Women in occupied areas were often forced to swallow their pride and trade with the Yankees for provisions. Holidays grew more dismal, leading some women to tell their slaves and children that Santa Claus had been shot by the Yankees. Schools closed and churches

23. "Experiences of Mrs. Amanda Comerford," UDC Scrapbooks, vol. 1.

24. Mattie English Branch, "Story of Two Lovers," UDC Scrapbooks, vol 1.

lost ministers, disrupting the facets of life women considered sacred.²⁵

A myriad of letters bear witness to the trauma of the war on the homefront. Naturally, most surviving letters are from soldier husbands or fathers providing general advice or responding to what must have been direct questions. Edmund Lee, a Tampa chaplain in the CSA, sent dozens of messages home to his wife, Electra, who apparently had little business experience. Many of the letters concern the sale of roof tiles, and Lee urged his wife not to allow herself to be cheated.²⁶ Farm men wrote of feeding and plowing schedules, and demanded to know what salt and pork were bringing on the market. Fathers prescribed for childhood ailments, one even telling his wife to inform their son that “he must not swallow any more tacks.”²⁷ What have you done with my watch and your silver, don’t buy a horse until you have to, talk to my sister who has “long experience” in making do-all were instructions from one absent husband in 1863.²⁸ Perhaps most perplexing to sheltered women were the complex financial arrangements, the seemingly endless lists of bonds, notes, and IOUs to be collected before the taxes could be paid.²⁹

Wives and dependents of soldiers turned to the state for relief but found little. Midway through the war, Governor Milton ordered county officials to compile lists of soldiers’ families in need of aid, a figure which leapt from 11,673 individuals in 1863 to over 13,000 by 1864. Efforts to secure corn, syrup, and other basic foodstuffs for these dependants were largely unsuccessful, and conditions worsened as the conflict progressed. Though the state spent \$458,000 to aid families of men in the Confederate service-supporting approximately one noncombatant for every man it put in

25. Mary Louise Ellis and William Warren Rogers, *Favored Land Tallahassee: A History of Tallahassee and Leon County* (Norfolk, 1988), 68; Graham, “The Homefront,” 30; Eppes, *Through Some Eventful Years*, 253; Johns, *Florida During the Civil War*, 175-89.

26. Edmund C. Lee, *Civil War Letters* (Florida State Historical Records Survey, 1937), 13, 28-30.

27. Michael O. Raysor to Sallie Raysor, February 5, 1863, Michael O. Raysor Letters, PKY; Washington Waters to “Dear Wife,” December 23, 1863, Washington Waters Papers, FSA; Samuel Augustus Palmer to Mary Rebecca Palmer, circa 1863, Palmer Family Letters, FSA.

28. Samuel Augustus Palmer to Mary Rebecca Palmer, circa 1863, Palmer Family Letters.

29. Hugh Black to Mary Ann Black, May 24, 1863, Captain Hugh Black Letters, Special Collections, FSU.

the field-letters and newspaper editorials constantly complained about the plight of the poor soldier's family. Other government efforts to provide assistance, such as distributing some \$35,000 worth of cotton and wool cards, also met with criticism for the poor quality of the materials. By April 1864, Major C. C. Yonge, chief Confederate Quartermaster for Florida, warned Governor Milton that many families in the state were "perilously near starvation."³⁰ The condition of soldiers' families and lower-class whites in general was shocking even to invaders. In February 1864, a reporter for the *New York Herald* found the women near Baldwin to be dirty, gaunt, "wolfish and unwomanly." Soldiers shared his evaluation. "The Whites who are living here still are wretchedly poor," Lieutenant Charles Duren of the 54th Massachusetts Regiment wrote. "They are women and children—hardly enough clothing to cover their backs— and food I can not tell you what they live on. It is a pitiful sight."³¹

For many women, the greatest burden was simply the absence of a loved one. The dozens of letters between Julia and William Stockton of Quincy reveal a passion that was not dimmed by the war. "Dear Will, come home Darling," Julia urged in 1862, when it seemed likely that her husband, an officer in the 1st Florida Cavalry, would have a brief furlough. "Two or three weeks will be ages. I told you in my last letter how 'good' I would be."³² As wives longed for physical contact, mothers worried about more than just their sons' health and survival. Sarah Ann Fletcher delivered numerous sermons to her two sons, Malcolm and John, noting in one letter, "let me beg of you to watch and pray lest you fall into bad practices, let me urge you then to seek religion there is no safety without it." The men were not oblivious to their womenfolk's fears, and they likewise worried for the health and safety of those left at home. While serving in the 3rd Florida Infantry, Michael Raysor of Jefferson County pleaded with his wife Sallie to look after her health, "for it is you that I live for." Thomas Clark, a soldier in the 5th Florida Infantry, shared a love of poetry with his wife Martha, and they

30. John F. Reiger, "Deprivation, Disaffection, and Desertion in Confederate Florida," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 48 (January 1970), 282-83; Dodd, "Florida in the Civil War," 48; Johns, *Florida During the Civil War*, 110-11.

31. *New York Herald*, February 20, 1864; Charles M. Duren to "Mother," February 15, 1864, Charles M. Duren Letters, PKY

32. Julia Stockton to William Stockton, February 12, 1862, Stockton Family Papers, FSA.

exchanged verses as well as letters. In one poem Clark empathized with his spouse's fears, taking the voice of a woman pleading with her husband not to become a soldier:

An sentinel you'll be wounded
 In the Battlefield be slane
 My hart will Brake like thounder
 If I never see you a gain.

Exhausted from her labors on the farm, Sallie Raysor confessed plainly to her absent husband that "nothing but your presence could make me lively now."³³

Bereavement stripped away the illusions of rapid, heroic triumphs. Learning that her fiance had been killed, Susan Bradford's cousin locked herself away in a room, staring forelornly at her trousseau. When Lieutenant Joel C. Blake of the Florida Brigade met a violent end at Gettysburg, his widow was shocked that she could not bring his body home for burial. Unidentified remains and unknown graves tormented many grieving families. Mourning clothes were increasingly in short supply, and newspapers began to criticize the ritual attire as wasteful. Women comforted each other, urging widows and orphans to accept death as the will of God. "Think of your husband as a rejoicing angel," Sallie Raysor's sister-in-law wrote, reminding her that "you dear Sallie had the satisfaction of nursing him, and doing all you could to smoothe his dying pillow."³⁴

Not all women lived up to the favorite Confederate image of the stoic matron. Men did not have a monopoly on cowardice, avarice, or unpatriotic behavior. While sojourning in Madison during her exile from St. Augustine, Frances Kirby Smith reported that the local women were pretentious snobs, interested only in comparing themselves to others and parading in finery purchased from blockade runners. The *Tallahassee Floridian and Journal* scolded widows

33. See Stockton Papers; S.A. Fletcher to "Dear Sons," May 6, 1861, Zabud Fletcher Family Papers, FSA; Thomas J. Clark to Martha Ann Law Clark, circa 1862, Thomas J. Clark Letters, FSA, Sallie Raysor to Michael O. Raysor, December 26, 1861, and Michael O. Raysor to Sallie Raysor, January 17, 1863, Raysor Family Papers.

34. Eppes, *Through Some Eventful Years*, 159-60, 168; J. Russell Reaver Jr., ed., "Letters of Joel C. Blake," *Apalachee* 5 (1957-1962), 8-9; Letter to Sallie Raysor, n.d., Raysor Family Papers.

who were planting cotton rather than corn. "Let not widows think to shield themselves in the manner under the plea of their helplessness," the writer warned, "a rich widow is by no means helpless" Another warning came from the Gainesville *Cotton States*, following a story of a deserter's execution. The man claimed he had been lured away from duty by his wife's pleading. "Soldiers' wives can not be too cautious in their letters to their husbands," the *Cotton States* argued. "They should not make them believe they are suffering when really they are not."³⁵

The Civil War also had an immediate effect upon Florida's slave and free black populations. Approximately one-third of Florida's families owned slaves, and the majority of slaves were clustered in the "black arc" that extended from Gadsden eastward and southward to Alachua and Marion counties. How a slave reacted to the war depended upon temperament, conditions of enslavement, and knowledge of events. Many owners worked to keep their bondsmen ignorant of the war or told them exaggerated stories to instill fear of "devilish" Yankees, but few if any slaves were fooled by these fables. The war placed new burdens and expectations on female slaves. However, it also gave them new opportunities for rebellion and retribution, and ultimately freedom.³⁶

Slave women retained valuable skills that plantation mistresses had forgotten, and Susan Bradford Eppes recalled black women instructing their mistresses in spinning and sewing, as well as sharing their herb lore for dyes and medicines. Like many southerners, Eppes remembered the slave women on her father's plantation as faithful servants who dutifully performed their tasks, but it does not take much imagination to wonder if the smile a slave woman wore while stirring black dye for her mistress's mourning dress was not exactly a sweet expression of sympathy.³⁷ Many female slaves discovered they were disposable property, as families unwilling to sacrifice prime field hands often sold women and children to pay

35. Joseph Howard Parks, *General Edmund Kirby Smith, C.S.A.* (Baton Rouge, 1954), 329; Tallahassee *Floridian and Journal*, April 4, 1863; Gainesville *Cotton States*, April 16, 1864.

36. Kenneth M. Stampp, *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Ante-Bellum South* (New York, 1956), 30; Edwin L. Williams Jr., "Negro Slavery in Florida: Part II," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 28 (January 1950), 187; Joshua Hoyet Frier Memoirs, transcript, 13, Joshua Hoyet Frier Papers, FSA.

37. Susan Bradford Eppes, *The Negro of the Old South: A Bit of Period History* (Chicago, 1925), 109-11.

wartime debts. All females were expected to work harder than ever to support the cause that kept them enslaved, a fact noted sourly by a woman belonging to the Watkins family of Bartow. Loaned to another family to do laundry, on her return she commented to her young mistress, "Missis L. say your father he sending us to wash to help her husband fight to keep us slaves."³⁸

With the war came new expressions of slave surliness and demonstrations of power. Flora and Jane, two teenaged maids at Sylvania, Governor John Milton's Jackson County plantation, exasperated Sarah Jones, the English governess who had come to teach the large Milton brood. Flora would allow the baby to scatter his toys, while Jane purposefully failed at simple assignments. Encouraged by Mrs. Milton to cuff them for disobedience, the young teacher was foiled when Flora simply ignored the blows and Jane turned on her with a gruff, "underground" voice, frightening her almost to tears.³⁹ The female house servants at Rose Cottage, the Stephens' farm, objected when Octavia Stephens' mother-in-law took up residence during the war. They complained constantly about having "two bosses" and extra work. Octavia Stephens' threat to beat them drew a tart response: one slave replied that she would rather be beat to death than worked to death. Numerous letters filled with sage advice from absent husbands indicate that white mistresses faced new challenges in slave management within the plantation household as well as in the fields.⁴⁰

Slave women further violated white codes of civility by refusing to show sympathy for the Confederate cause. Sarah Brown, a Tampa slave who had experienced much brutal treatment, had no patience with her dewy-eyed mistress. When she found her weeping in fear for her husband, Brown took the opportunity to remind her how many times she had been beaten for similar behavior, and that crying "would not do her any good." Revenge was a common urge, even among the young, as Dr. Esther Hills Hawks, a Union physician with the troops during the 1864 occupation of Jackson-

38. *Tallahassee Florida Sentinel*, December 9, 1862; March 2 and 13, 1863; *Pensacola Weekly Observer*, June 9, 1861; Margaret Watkins Gibbs, "Memory Diary of Mrs. George Gibbs," n.d., St. Augustine Historical Society Library, St. Augustine.

39. Catherine Cooper Hopley (pseud. Sarah E. Jones), *Life in the South*, vol. 2 (London, 1863), 279-85.

40. Ellen Hodges Patterson, "The Stephens Family in East Florida: A Profile of Plantation Life Along the St. Johns River, 1859-1864" (master's thesis, University of Florida, 1979), 51.

ville, soon learned. Sarah, one of Dr. Hawks' contraband charges, openly fantasized about rebuking her former mistress, whom she claimed had never given her enough to eat. Begging to be taught to write, Sarah admitted her chief desire was to pen a letter to her owner, describing all the good food behind Yankee lines. Freed slaves could not resist the opportunity to mock their former masters. In Key West, one female slave enjoyed leaning on a fence, watching her one-time mistress labor in her garden, then asking "how she liked it."⁴¹

Free blacks, though a minuscule portion of the state's population, also lived under oppressive conditions. During the war, at least in Confederate areas, free blacks had to remain circumspect. An 1861 law required them to register with a probate judge, pay a fee, and maintain a white guardian.⁴² Free blacks in areas such as Pensacola and St. Augustine fared better, often finding jobs as cooks and domestics for Union troops. They were also eligible to receive rations from Union commissaries. Aunt Eliza, a former slave and cook at Ft. Jefferson, soon became a familiar figure, known as much for her odorous pipe, her missing teeth, and her much younger but terribly lazy lover, as for her turtle soup.⁴³

Wartime confusion made the ultimate resistance to slavery—escape—easier. Like their male counterparts, many female slaves took advantage of the crisis to make their bid for freedom, frequently as family units with young children in tow. They often disappeared from refugee convoys and were not missed for several days. Occasionally they slipped across rivers and inlets on boats, making their way to Union occupied territories. Others were liberated by advancing Federal troops. Dr. Hawks interviewed contraband women in Jacksonville and came to the conclusion that they were "intelligent and active—many of them have picked up a little book learning. It is not uncommon to find a fair reader among those who have been slaves." An educated member of any escape party was an asset. The slave women who could read or

41. "One-Time Slave Sheds Light on Life in Tampa," *Tampa Tribune*, June 5, 1988; Schwartz, *A Woman Doctor's Civil War*, 69-70; Emily Holder, "At the Dry Tortugas During the War: A Lady's Journal," *The Californian Illustrated*, February 1892, 103.

42. Julia Floyd Smith, *Slavery and Plantation Development in Antebellum Florida, 1821-1860* (Gainesville, 1973), 111-12, 121.

43. *Fernandina Peninsula*, August 13, 1863; "At The Dry Tortugas," 87-89.

forge passes were unsung heroines of Florida. Once free behind Union lines, women assumed domestic duties while their men were drafted for manual labor. Though some commanders sniffed at the squalor of contraband camps, others noted the determination, especially among the women, to see that their children received medical care and educational opportunities.⁴⁴

Those who found freedom celebrated it vibrantly. In St. Augustine, black women marched with their children and spouses in the 1864 Emancipation Day parades. Mimicking white society, black matrons founded committees to oversee decorations and refreshments for various events. The *Peninsula* of Fernandina noted that two separate committees had been organized to plan the 1863 Independence Day celebration, and that all members were married ladies known to be excellent cooks and caterers. "The affair," the paper predicted, "promises to be a complete success."⁴⁵

While slaves struggled for freedom, white women were introduced to the grisly realities of war when the battles came home. Chivalry broke down as the war progressed, and while most Union officers would not tolerate the molestation of women and children, they sanctioned raids on henhouses, larders, and barns. On occasion, a woman's pleading or perhaps her efforts to shame an overzealous commander saved a family from becoming homeless.⁴⁶ Black troops were frequently accused of insulting or harassing white women. In 1864, Dr. Esther Hawks witnessed the execution of three black soldiers condemned for committing an "outrage" on a white woman. She later confided to her diary that similar conduct, quite common among white soldiers, went unnoted and unpunished.⁴⁷

Women witnessed battles, skirmishes, and bombardments. Maria Louisa Daegenhard of Tampa, a child during the war, frequently fled with her family when the city was shelled, and from

44. Mrs. L. Thompson, "Reminiscences of the War," UDC Scrapbooks, vol. 1; Brian E. Michaels, *The River Flows North: A History of Putnam County, Florida* (Palatka, 1976), 99; Schwartz, ed., *A Woman Doctor's Civil War*, 77, 82.

45. William Watson Davis, *The Civil War and Reconstruction in Florida* (1913; facsimile edition, Gainesville, 1964), 237; *Fernandina Peninsula*, July 2, 1863.

46. Lillie B. McDuffee, *The Lures of Manatee: A True Story of South Florida's Glamorous Past*, 2d ed. (Atlanta, 1961), 142-43; Mary Cray Weller, *Reminiscences of the Old South From 1834 to 1866* (Pensacola, 1984), 13-14.

47. Kyle S. VanLandingham, ed., "'My National Troubles': The Civil War Papers of William McCullough," *The Sunland Tribune: Journal of the Tampa Historical Society* 20 (November 1994), 63-66; Schwartz, *A Woman Doctor's Civil War*, 61.

their refuge they watched the burning of the *Scottish Chief*, a famous blockade runner. Women listened to the guns of Olustee and quickly mobilized to provide food and medical supplies for the survivors, both Confederate and Federal. Afterwards, women wandered the battlefield, staring at the grim remains and questioning what purpose the conflict served. Natural Bridge, the concluding skirmish of the war in Florida, brought out morbid tourists, including women who asked to see the Federal bodies floating in the river.⁴⁸

Whether the threat of death was real or imagined, many women fled from coastal areas, joining the mass exodus of humanity that created chaos for the Confederacy. Often these flights were rushed and desperate. Maria C. Murphy was caught in the frenzied Confederate retreat from Jacksonville in 1862, trying to calm three children, pack up her husband's medical library, and sell their furniture in a matter of hours. When she shifted her brood to a neighbor's home, she found the house filled with soldiers, and Murphy soon had the extra duty of baking biscuits for the departing troops. Equally heart-rending was the evacuation of Unionist families when Federal troops departed Jacksonville later that year. "None of these [families] had more than ten hours to make preparations for leaving homes they had occupied for years," the *New York Herald* reported. "It was sad to see them hurrying down to the wharf, each carrying some article too precious to forsake."⁴⁹ Inland towns such as Madison were inundated with refugees, and relations were occasionally strained when coastal sophisticates, such as Frances Kirby Smith, found provincial accommodations somewhat less than adequate for their refined sensibilities. Military husbands advised wives to evacuate at the first sign of danger, warnings that were sometimes ignored. The extreme to which evacuation could be planned was evident in Major George W. Scott's 1864 letter to his wife Rebekah, who lived near Tallahassee. Fearful of a Federal raid on the coast in retribution for the Confederate victory at Olustee, Scott penned a 2,200-word commentary on "how to escape the Yankees," giving Rebekah directions for packing, travel, and slave manage-

48. Maria Louisa Dagenhardt, transcript, Snodgrass Collection; "Recollections of Service," unpublished manuscript, nd., 88-89, Schmidt Collection, FSA; Mrs. Deliah Kelly, "My Experience," UDC Scrapbooks, vol. 1; Johns, *Florida During the Civil War*, 205.

49. *Philadelphia Inquirer*, April 22, 1862; Mary E. Baker, untitled article, UDC Scrapbooks, vol. 5; Maria C. Murphy, "The First Day of the Evacuation of Jacksonville," UDC Scrapbooks, vol. 4; *New York Herald*, April 22, 1862.

ment. He even included a sketch showing the proper construction of a tent.⁵⁰

The spring of 1865 brought the battle of Natural Bridge, which saved Tallahassee from Union occupation and took on heroic proportions in the minds of Confederate Floridians, but the southern cause was already lost. In Tallahassee, Robert E. Lee's surrender coincided with yet another female-supported musical entertainment, a concert held in the house of representatives' chambers to raise money for soldiers' families. The news from Appomattox soon silenced the choruses of *Dixie* and *The Southern Marseillaise*.⁵¹

"To be a conquered people is a novel experience, and we have daily both amusing and mortifying incidents in our unadaptedness to the change," Ellen Call Long observed from her home in the state's occupied capitol soon after the surrender. "The women," Long reported, "are especially cantankerous, but General Vogdes . . . thinks a few fashionable bonnets will subdue them."⁵² Many women feared for the safety of their sons, especially those who had worn the gray. Sarah Ann Fletcher took a decidedly dismal view, writing to her son, "if we are to be subjugated the negroes will be free and we will lose our land and everything else . . . do not tell that you killed a Yankee for they might want to kill you for it." Reprisals were surprisingly few, and most Floridians began the process of recovery and reconstruction. However, according to 1866 reports of the Freedmen's Bureau, Florida's women remained more hostile and bitter than the men, especially the "old women and silly girls."⁵³

The end of the war meant freedom for the slaves and new opportunities for education and employment, as well as new perils from racism. Schools in Jacksonville and Fernandina continued to flourish, often under the leadership of Yankee women who would make Florida their new home. Most women, no matter their race or class, simply got on with the business of living, often taking up new burdens due to the loss of men or changes in family fortunes.⁵⁴

50. Parks, *General Edmund Kirby Smith, C.S.A.*, 346; Clifton Paisley, ed., "How to Escape The Yankees: Major Scott's Letter to His Wife at Tallahassee, March, 1864," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 50 (July 1971), 53-59.

51. Proctor, *Florida A Hundred Years Ago*, n.p.; Eppes, *Through Some Eventful Years*, 265-67.

52. Long, *Florida Breezes*, 381.

53. S.A. Fletcher to "Dear Son," April 29, 1865, Zabud Fletcher Family Papers, FSA, Richardson, *The Negro in the Reconstruction of Florida*, 5-6.

54. Sarah Whitmore Foster and John T. Foster Jr., "Chloe Merrick Reed: Freedom's First Lady," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 71 (January 1993), 279-99.

As soon as the flags were furled, Florida's women began a new task, that of keeping the memory of the "gallant dead" alive and saving such treasures as Confederate banners and swords to be handed down along with the embellished legends of J. J. Dickison as "Florida's Swamp Fox" and the Home Guard and seminary cadets' "Cradle and Grave" defense of Natural Bridge. As early as June 1865, a group of Tallahassee ladies organized a Memorial Association to perpetuate the memory of the Confederate dead.⁵⁵ They did their job well, but in the process of honoring their menfolk, they diminished their own roles as providers, supporters, and survivors.

Neglected for decades, the women of the Confederacy re-emerged in the twentieth century. Numerous articles and books now examine the lives of famous women, and journals and diaries, such as those of Mary Chesnut or Sarah Morgan, have become familiar to the general public as well as to scholars. Recently, historians Catherine Clinton and Drew Faust have debated the role of southern women in the war effort and its effect on them afterwards. Unfortunately, Florida's women remain obscure and rarely considered in general historical works. They are beginning to receive consideration in state histories but are rarely incorporated into the overall fabric of the Confederacy. Much work remains to be done in this area, to find similarities and differences to the life experiences of women in other states. While Florida's women certainly had many common bonds with their Confederate sisters, the high proportion of Unionists, the frontier nature of the state, and the occupation of key cities demand special consideration.⁵⁶

55. Long, *Florida Breezes*, 385.

56. For general biographical studies of southern women during the Civil War, see Francis Butler Simkins and James Welch Patton, *Women of the Confederacy* (Richmond, 1936) and Bell Irwin Wiley, *Confederate Women* (Westport, 1975). Two of the most famous diaries of southern women are C. Vann Woodward, ed., *Mary Chesnut's Civil War* (New Haven, 1981), and Charles Frost, ed., *The Civil War Diary of Sarah Morgan* (Athens, 1991). Recent works that consider women's roles and the war's impact on women include George C. Rable, *Civil Wars: Women and the Crisis of Southern Nationalism* (Urbana, 1989), Catherine Clinton and Nina Silber, eds., *Divided Houses: Gender and the Civil War* (New York, 1992), and Drew Gilpin Faust, *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South and the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill, 1996). Florida's women receive attention in two book chapters: Canter Brown Jr., "The Civil War, 1861-1865," in Gannon, ed., *New History of Florida* and Mary Ann Cleveland, "Florida Women During the Civil War," in James J. Horgan and Lewis N. Wynne, eds., *Florida Decades: A Sesquicentennial History, 1845-1995* (St. Leo, Florida, 1995).

Mrs. Enoch Vann, a United Daughters of the Confederacy historian, lived through the Civil War in Florida. As the years passed, she often bemoaned the lack of women in its story. She urged readers of her UDC letters to remember their own experiences during the conflict. "As grand as the South was in her sons," Mrs. Vann declared, "she was grander in her daughters."⁵⁷

57. Mrs. Enoch J. Vann, "Reminiscences of the Battle of Olustee," UDC Scrapbooks, vol. 1.