

Lowcountry Women in the Civil War

By Caroline Wallace Kennedy

"You dare not make war on cotton. No power on earth dares make war on it. "Cotton is King."

— Senator James H. Hammond of South Carolina.

Huge crowds of refined tall-hatted men and elegantly bonneted women braved the cold in Savannah when the church bells rang to signal news of alarming importance. The state's secession was announced, nearly one year to the date after South Carolina had voted to secede from the Union (January 19, 1861) on the steps of the Cotton Exchange. The crowd in Georgia's largest city and principal seaport went wild, with the women wiping tears from their eyes as the news from the Georgia capital of Milledgeville was read. Which forecasted that Georgia would become one of the states of the Confederacy? (Georgia had been the first Southern state to ratify the U.S. Constitution after American independence in 1788.)

The shady cobblestone lanes above the Savannah River, lined with massive live oaks festooned with Spanish moss were clogged with women slaves and free people of color. They were carrying laundry to customers, food to market, and hawking their products as the large crowd gathered. The tightly packed sandy streets forced the elite and poor white women, with their fashionable hoopskirts, to squeeze through the multitudes as they dashed about to spread the news of secession.

Southerners believed once Abraham Lincoln was elected the president on November 6, 1860 that he would abolish slavery, which would threaten their slave labor-based economy. In 1860, there were 33 states in the union — no women voted, neither did slaves (38 percent lived in the Confederacy). The electorate was comprised almost entirely of white males who had paid taxes or served in the military.

"King Cotton" reigned supreme as the most valuable raw material that Southerners produced and that the Northerners and the other industrial nations bought to manufacture into finished goods.

General James Oglethorpe, a representative of King George, founded the river port town in 1733. Savannah had been the depot for all the products of the interior, shipped down rivers, roads, canals, and railways. The 22,000 citizens felt invincible, after surviving fires, yellow fever and hurricane. Naturally they did not want to lose their grand lifestyle, made possible from the sale of cotton, rice, indigo, tobacco and lumber from the rich Southern lands shipped to seaports in England, and France. (Savannah, was America's first planned city, and shipped more cotton than any other port on the Atlantic and was second in the world.)

The ladies dressed in the latest fashions used skilled dressmakers to copy the clothes featured on the covers of *Godey's Magazine and Lady's Book* published in Philadelphia. Often copied, was Queen Victoria's white wedding dress, she wore for her marriage to Prince Albert in 1840, in London. Formerly brides wore fashionable colors of the day — dark dresses with tight bodices, yokes dropping off the shoulders, with full and flowing skirts and lace berthas (shawls). In those days, trousseaus were moderate, with two bonnets, and a second dress — one dressier than the other, to be worn the day after her wedding.

Fort Pulaski, 15 miles downriver from Savannah, was seized by the state of Georgia on January 3, 1861, 18 days after secession was announced without firing a shot. By April 19, 1861 President Lincoln proclaimed a Union Blockade of all Southern ports, and a year later, the Union navy blockaded the entire coast. Union cannons overtook Fort Pulaski, after 30 hours of bombing, and the troops raised the "Stars and Stripes" over the fort warning people of the Lowcountry that they were *now* in charge. Initially, the blockade had little effect on Savannah, but after the fall of the fortress it cut off the port city of Savannah. The embargo, severely reduced cotton exports, on which the Confederates depended on for hard currency.

Preparations for war were taken seriously up the broad swath of the coastal Lowcountry and its Sea Islands to the historic town of Beaufort, with over 300 cotton plantations in Beaufort County, and onward to Charleston. Beaufort, on Port Royal Island, was the second oldest city in South Carolina, next to Charleston, and first on the list of naval targets prepared by President Lincoln in early October 1861.

Women of the Lowcountry

The emotional period of the War was particularly well recorded because women thought they were living through events of outstanding significance. Many women wrote letters that were used for long distance communication, handwritten diaries and journals for their children and grandchildren, or to record the sacrifices and heroism they had witnessed.

Mary Boykin Miller was a famous Lowcountry resident who was known for being wise and witty. Mary was born of privilege to Confederate parents at her maternal grandparents' (Mary and Stephen Miller) plantation named Mount Pleasant. When she was 15, she met James Chestnut, Jr., who was eight years older, and a recent graduate of Princeton, who was studying law. Her parents did not approve of the early marriage, but they continued to court. When her father died in 1838, Mary returned home from school in Charleston. Reluctantly Mary's mother let her marry James in 1840 settled on Mulberry, his family's plantation.

James went into politics and became a U.S. Senator from South Carolina in 1858, so they moved to Washington, D.C. In the fall of 1861 Chestnut, after the election of "Honest Old Abe," became the first Southern senator to resign his office before the Secession Convention defending slavery. (Seven states had announced their secession from the Union at the time that Lincoln was inaugurated.)

Although Mary had firmly held Southern sympathies, she also had Revolutionary War descendants in her family and had mixed feelings about Secession. She quickly became a prominent hostess known for her delightful and pleasing entertainment conducting her own salon with influential men and women. Through her husband and friend's she knew virtually everyone of importance in Richmond. She loved her husband but had trouble dealing with his opinions that sometimes did not reflect her own.

She began her journal on February 18, 1861, two months before the War erupted in Charleston Harbor, and ended it on June 26, 1865 (*A Diary from Dixie*.) She was considered the ideal diarist, with relatives, friends, and political and military leaders all over the Confederacy. Dealing with a division in their families caused extreme anxiety for her, as did the problems of married women and attitudes toward women and slavery by the men in power.

Mary's husband served as an aide to General P. G. T. Beauregard, a member of the Provisional Confederate Congress. Chestnut and two other aides conferred and decided to open fire on Fort Sumter on Friday, April 12, 1861, at 4:30 a.m. and continued firing for 34 hours. (U.S. Major Robert Anderson, a West Point graduate, and commander of Fort Sumter had taught General Beauregard artillery at West Point, only to have the guns of his former student turned upon him at Fort Sumter.) The tide turned after the Union forces began using red-hot shot, designed to set the fort on fire. The Confederate troops surrendered on Saturday, April 13, and the Civil War began. North was pitted against South — brother against brother — fathers against sons. Soon her husband became an aide to Confederate President Jeff Davis and promoted to Brigadier General. Mary wrote about Charleston residents sitting on their balconies on "The Battery" toasting to the start of the War. She was heartbroken and faced months of weary frustration.

There were over 30 plantations just on Edisto Island in Charleston County. Mary questioned the wisdom of slavery. She wrote about separate church services for blacks and whites and asked why all "Christians" did not talk to one another. In her diary, she often wondered whether it was a sin for a Southern white woman to oppose slavery. She had become disgusted with the treatment many slaves received.

In the 1860s, the Sea Islands had enormous rice and cotton plantations with the owners overseeing hundreds and as many as 20,000 acres of prime cotton land. The cotton grown on the Sea Islands drew high prices and recognized on the international market as the finest American cotton. It was longer-than-usual, with silky fibers that could only be grown in the intense sunlight and moisture found on the islands. With cotton and rice came slavery because of the labor-intensive crops.

The plantation owners lived lavishly with an abundance of butlers, maids and cooks to wait on them hand and foot. The pleasure-loving people of the Lowcountry loved entertaining and often hosted luxurious house parties, fancy cotillions, fox hunts, horse races and oyster roasts.

Honey Horn Plantation is the only wealthy plantation house built on Hilton Head Island that still stands today. It was originally part of Bayley's Barony. The name was possibly a corruption of the owner's surname — Han-a-han. Planter John Hanahan of Edisto Island began acquiring property on Hilton Head Island in 1789 by buying a 445-acre plantation. He added 403 acres owned by the late Charleston native Benjamin Guerard. In 1792, he bought the 270-acre Garden's Plantation, which was afterward known as Honey Horn.

In 1863, Freeman Dodd bought 1,000 acres of Honey Horn for \$200 and sold it just three months later for \$10,000 to Ramon de Rivas. (Rivas was possibly from Puerto Rico via Spain.) The property was sold during the War. Who was Dodd and what did he do with his profits? Rivas quickly flipped one-half the land for its purchase price. A year later he sold the remaining 500 acres for a profit of \$4,725 to Ana and Robustrand Hergues. (Possibly the couple was from Spain via Cuba since this was near the end of the War.) Later they paid nearly twice as much for the other half of Honey Horn.

There were more than 20 working plantations on Hilton Head Island before 1861 and more than 46 off-island rice and indigo plantations. One was Bluff Plantation — one of the plantations owned by Thomas Heyward, Jr. Heyward who filled the vacancy of John Rutledge as a Delegate to the Second Continental Congress in 1776, and was a signer of the Declaration of Independence.

At the beginning of the War, the tranquil island was abandoned and eventually was occupied by Union soldiers. Over the next four years, thousands of C.S.A. troops flooded into the area, to await orders. Rumors ran rampant through the Georgia and South Carolina coastal Lowcountry plantations, the elegant houses of Savannah and Beaufort, and the shantytowns.

Bluffton was built in the Devil's Elbow Barony, who grew cotton, corn and indigo. Wealthy Savannah merchants and Sea Island plantation owners seeking the high ground and the May River breezes constructed the first homes during the early 1800s. They needed an escape for their families from the "sickly" streams, marshes, swamps and floodwaters that surrounded Lowcountry rice and cotton plantations in the summers. The planters did not know that mosquitoes caused the "summer fevers" which struck the plantations.

Within one year of the bitter capture of Fort Sumter, Bluffton became a haven for residents fleeing Union occupation of the Sea Islands. The town became the headquarters for 11th S.C. Infantry, who rotated back and forth between Hardeeville. On June 4, 1863, two years after the battle at Fort Sumter, Union forces stationed on Hilton Head Island steamed up the May River and fired on the town scattering the C.S.A. troops. Two days later, more Union troops burned about two-thirds of the best houses in town, leaving two churches and 14 homes.

Palmetto Bluff, on the southern side of the May River, was home to several plantations during the antebellum era. James T. Theus bought about 1,000 acres in 1830 and raised cotton. General Thomas F. Drayton owned another plantation. During the Battle of Port Royal, General Drayton was commander of the Confederate troops at Fort Walker on Hilton Head and faced his brother, Captain Percival Drayton, commander of a Union gunboat. The Union navy defeated the Confederates and

General Drayton ordered a retreat. After the War, Drayton could not maintain the property and was forced to sell to Colonel J. H. Estill, owner of the *Savannah Morning News*, who developed a turpentine and timber industry.

Rose Hill Plantation was built on land granted by England's King Charles II granted to Sir John Colleton, one of the original Lords Proprietors of Carolina in 1718. After the death of Sir John's daughter, Louisa, in 1828, James Kirk purchased 800 acres from the Colleton estate and created Rose Hill, considered the most beautiful plantation house in the Lowcountry. Construction began on the mansion in 1858; its building was halted by the War. The Kirks moved to Grahamville, S.C. for the duration of the War, and the house and grounds were occupied by Union troops. Caroline Kirk died in 1864, but Dr. Kirk and one son returned to the property, where Dr. Kirk died in 1868.

Most Southern secessionist slaveholding families tried to endure on the domestic front. The women clung to the ideals that they had upheld in marriage and motherhood and the racial order that afforded them material privileges. They wanted to preserve the status quo and threw their support behind the movement. Many Southern women shamed their husbands to enlist by appealing to their manhood and always reminding them of their sense of honor to fight for the Southern cause. They treated the men who shirked their duty with scorn and often shamed them into service. The War brought women into new careers: at home, in public and in courtship when their men were gone for years. Often single women would only date or marry men who volunteered to serve in the C.S.A. Army.

Beginning in July 1861, Fort Walker/Fort Wells was built by the C.S.A. on Hilton Head Island at the entrance to Port Royal Sound to protect the port from Union attacks. Nearly 13,000 Union troops attacked the fort in the Battle of Port Royal and Fort Beauregard on Phillip's Island on the opposite side of the sound on November 7. Hilton Head's population was over 40,000 by 1862 with Union troops, storekeepers, missionaries, prisoners of war, and slaves seeking refuge. Nearly 13,000 troops poured into the island after the battle. (Hilton Head Island was also referred to as Port Royal, because of the Port Royal military installation there.)

The Civil War era in the North and the South was very different during the War. It forced women to play a different role when left alone to raise small children, managing homes, farms or large plantations with hundreds of slaves and even businesses. Women in the Confederacy — many from the upper crust — usually the mistress of the household was often a widow, mother or daughters that came of age. They had to take on new roles to support their family. Even the most sheltered plantation mistresses, many who called themselves "birds trapped in a gilded cage," were forced to think about political issues and slavery. They carried on providing for the troops with food and clothing. Southern daughters showed their strong moral upbringing inherited by their English, Welch, Scots, and Swiss, German, and Italian ancestors. Their culture had expected them to be nurturers within the home and refuse public and political activity. Many turned their thoughts outside the home making Confederate uniforms and nursing at the army camp hospitals.

Clara Barton in the Lowcountry

Nurse Clara Barton, from North Oxford, Mass., performed many services for Union soldiers that would later be carried out by The American Red Cross that she founded in 1881. Known as the "Angel of the Battlefield" she arrived at Hilton Head with supplies and bedding for the men anticipating the bombardment of Charleston in April 1863. She was reunited with her brother Captain David Barton who had been appointed quartermaster, and her fifteen-year-old nephew, Stephen E. Barton, who was a Union, telegraph operator.

She met and fell in love with Colonel John J. Elwell, a doctor from Cleveland, Ohio, who was married. What started as a sincere friendship turned into a passionate love affair. They read poetry to one another and took care of each other when ill. They were in love but never spoke of a future together.

In May, Miss Barton met Miss Frances D. Gage from Ohio, who was in charge of the plantation on Port Royal, and assisted in the care and education of freedmen. She developed an interest in the growing cause for equal rights for women and freedmen. She enjoyed teaching them to read, and helped them to learn a new way of life. Clara took the steamer Fulton on December 1863 to Washington to collect supplies and recuperate and sailed away from Elwell forever.

Sea Island people of color began descending on the island within two days, of the Union victory and were housed in over-crowded conditions. One Union soldier said: "Negro slaves came flocking into our camp by the hundreds escaping from their masters when they knew of the landing of "Linkum sojers," as they called the Union troops . . . Many of them with no other clothing than gunny sacks."

In 1862, General Ormsby Mitchel set up the town of Mitchelville to house the islands' first freedman's village near Drayton Plantation to allow them more comfort and freedom. The freedmen were able to build their own houses, elected their own leaders, and pass their own laws. The first compulsory education laws in the state were passed, and every child between six and 15 years was required to attend. Many of the freedmen worked for the Union Army while others worked, for wages, on the plantations they had abandoned as slaves, earning \$4 to \$12 per month.

Lowcountry women were not content to stay and keep the home fires burning and threw themselves into the War — many becoming Confederate soldiers, and even spies determined to serve their nation in the time of crisis. If they were slave owners, they handled provisions and attended to the health of a community, and business.

The plantation owners were dependent on slaves for nearly everything, not for just working in the cotton and rice fields. Slave women did all household chores, chopped the wood to heat their homes, and nursed them when they were ill. The nannies, referred to as mammies, were in charge of managing the household, and responsible for the children. They saw they were well fed, went to the plantation school until they reached a certain age, and were well behaved. They punished them when they did not — the only time a slave was allowed to touch a white person. The girls had governesses to

teach them music, art, and elite lady ways.

Many plantations were hit hard as the War progressed. The owners had little purchasing power with their worthless Confederate notes. The formerly prosperous planters found them scrimping to survive, and make do with locally grown ingredients and even learn from the slaves how to treat a myriad of ailments. (It took 60 to 70 Confederate dollars to equal one gold dollar.) With new demands on their society, white and slave women had more work due to the loss of their husbands, fathers, and brothers and slaves since the C.S.A. Army frequently called *all* men to the War. They struggled to provide daily comforts and were forced to become self-sufficient as they adjusted to new domestic duties, and economic hardships.

Working class white Southern women were broken under the pressures of the War, having to provide for their families by themselves and were more vulnerable to the devastation than women who owned slaves. A soldier's pay was only \$11 per month and did not provide everything that was needed for the family. Women took jobs in local industries providing C.S.A. troops with food, uniforms, and other necessities.

"A Southerner never sells what he can eat, and a Northerner never eats what he can sell." — A phrase often recited in the South.

The homes had kitchens in separate small buildings that housed huge cooking fireplaces. One Southern story says a woman made the servants whistle while they carried the food, to ensure they were not eating it en route. Most farms provided chickens, eggs, and extensive gardens for vegetables. On some Lowcountry plantations eels, tobacco, molasses, and sugar were used as barter. Oysters were found in abundance and shrimp and grits were often the only food on the table. Tiny fresh creek shrimp were cooked in bacon grease or butter and served over hominy grits, flavored with salt and pepper. The dish was known as "breakfast shrimp" and was served during shrimp season from May through December.

Often their only subsistence was light bread, rice, corn, grain and milk if they had a cow, and occasionally bacon from a pig. Most plantation owners allotted a small piece of land for their slaves to farm and paid them a small wage. Confederate soldiers in the trenches would have gladly eaten the food left by families, meaning that often servants ate far better than the soldiers, who suffered from severe malnutrition.

White plantation mistresses and female slaves worked together to provide food, clothing, and medicines to the plantation community. They were joined by common experiences and behavior and interacted with one another very differently than men. Plantation women learned how to grow their own rice, corn and potatoes; to make their own syrup, and raise and cure their own meat. Since most houses had a smokehouse, country ham and country sausage was a delicacy. Black-eyed peas and "roasting ears" were as popular as fried chicken.

Flour sold at the inflated price of \$20 a barrel, and only a woman who was "well off" could purchase it. Coffee prices escalated to over a \$1 per pound so substitutions such as parched grits, rice, rye, chicory, acorns, cane stalks, wheat, sorghum, English peas, peanuts, and beans. There was even coffee made from dried and ground sweet potatoes and okra seeds. Combining some of the ingredients was often done to try and fool one's friends. Sweet potato coffee was said to be an excellent cleaning agent for carpets, drapes and other household goods. Coffee was the most important foodstuff to soldiers. Soldiers said coffee should be as thick as the Missouri River, and able to dissolve a horseshoe or make a jackrabbit spit in a rattlesnake's eye.

Tea was priced at \$10 per pound. A barrel of salt cost \$200 and was often hidden. Sugar was sold in loaves and was very costly, so honey and molasses were used for sweetening. The food was dried in the sun. Vegetables were preserved. Wild game was prepared, including goose, raccoon, opossum, groundhog, rabbits and squirrel. "Poke Salet," a green, was an important vegetable.

Mrs. H.W. (Nancy Bostick) De Saussure, the wife of a doctor and a Lowcountry resident wrote: "When the Union fleet captured Hilton Head and established their base, Beaufort people fled to Robertville." After the fall of Savannah, five thousand Southern troops were quartered on her father's plantation, and entire whole steers, hogs and sheep were required to feed them.

She wrote about an average day in her diary *Old Plantation Days*: "It began, with family prayers: after breakfast, the head nurse reported to the mistress of the plantation any sickness among the slaves. The mistress then had the invalids brought to the 'sick house' a large building containing many cots for them, and the younger children were pressed into service for carrying their food. Then, the lady distributed the slaves' provisions, a portion to each family, consisting of corn meal, salt pork, sweet potatoes, field peas, sirup, rice, and fruit. Next the mistress visited the vegetable gardens, walking upon graveled paths bordered with bright flowers and made a trip to the poultry yards where they were 500 chickens, 100 geese, 100 turkeys and 100 ducks. Sixty cows were milked on the plantations. After the midday meal, the mistress supervised the spinning and weaving of cloth by the slaves and oversaw the cutting of garments by nine seamstresses who made the clothing for Negroes. Small wonder that it has been said: 'Emancipation of the slaves also brought freedom to the overburdened mistress of large plantations!'"

Rebel deserter's wives were denied money or any type of relief. Many women had fewer resources but still cooked for the Confederate troops and provided uniforms, blankets, and other supplies often for entire regiments. Women were required to plow, plant and harvest crops, slaughter livestock and cure meat, while keeping households and raising children, and weaving their cloth. Savannah women were hired to be "needlewomen" — to sew uniforms and tents until the shutdown by the Union blockade.

The ultimate test came when, Georgia and South Carolina towns became battlefields. The women worked as untrained nurses. They set up hospitals in their homes, churches and even streets caring for wounded soldiers, all the while caring for their families. Widespread looting of stores and raids on warehouses by groups of destitute white women was not unusual.

Young women bridged the cultural gap between the antebellum and postbellum periods. The transitional nature of wartime had an effect on the Southern women's self-perceptions and aspirations. Teenage daughters made a significant contribution to the new woman in the New South a difficult place to find themselves as ladies.

A woman who faced a change in her life and household was Eleanor (Nellie) Kinzie Gordon, who had married William Washington (Willie) Gordon II in 1857. Nellie's father had made his fortune in Chicago, and Gordon's father was the founder of the Central of Georgia Railroad. (Twenty-eight percent of railroads in the country in 1860 lay in Confederate territory.) There was a bond between Willie and Nellie that saw past differences that would normally curb other relationships. Nellie was a vigorous foe of slavery. Willie, a Georgian by birth remained loyal to his state and fought with the Georgia Hussars as a cavalry officer during what Nellie referred to as the "Confederate War."

Nellie tried to suppress her Northern loyalties, even as her uncle — a Union general led the forces that captured Fort Pulaski on Tybee Island in 1862. The attack on Fort Sumter that had started the hostilities had placed the Gordon and Kinzie families on opposite sides. Her brothers, John, George and Arthur were in the Union army. John was killed in Arkansas, and the other two were taken as prisoners of war but later released when Nellie's father wrote C.S.A. President Jefferson Davis, and pleaded for a prisoner exchange.

True to her self-reliant nature, Nellie solicited the help of Robert E. Lee and William T. Sherman, whom she knew intimately to help her find her husband. Robert e. Lee gave her a general location that she might be able to see him with other southern soldiers. Impulsively, she traveled with the children to see her husband, in Virginia to find him, and she stood by a road for days and was finally reunited with Willie.

Aghast, Gordon sent her home to get her out of harm's way. He knew her strong Northern roots would make her an easy target. (Many women followed their husbands and lovers into battle, often in male disguise and remained undiscovered until they were wounded or gave birth.) She returned with the girls to Savannah to their English Regency style mansion to wait out the War.

For some well-to-do white women, the march and the havoc the Union troops wrought made their hearts burn with hatred and fueled their dedication to the Southern cause even more. They increased their support for the Confederacy, continuing to send items to their soldiers on the front lines.

Black women escaping from bondage, tried to protect their children, and reunite with their family when possible. So many slave women fled to Union lines that Sherman complained about, "helpless women and children" who followed them and ate their rations.

Even the best treated slave still dreamed of freedom. "Glory be to God; we are free!" The famished slaves would shout the phrase as they ran through the streets and from house to house, seizing

stores of stored food: rice, flour, sugar and molasses when possible.

The Union Navy attacked Charleston by the sea on April 7, 1863 to take advantage of spring tides and a full moon. President Lincoln applied pressure to his field commanders and the navy department since the war was not going well. A fleet of nine Union ironclad warships attacked Fort Sumter but had little impact on the C.S.A. defenses of the harbor. The Union infantry did not land, and the operation was abandoned.

Josephine Clay Habersham, whose family dated to the Colonial period in Savannah, wrote a diary in 1863. After the War, it was edited and published as **Ebb Tide** by Spencer King. "October 31, 1863: Went to the shops, frightened at the prices of things — disgusted. Anna King takes it more quietly, being used to it — \$195 for a dress I could have gotten two years ago for just \$9, and \$195 for a dress for Anna, for they would not cut ten yards for her. Sixty dollars for a straw bonnet for me — untrimmed!"

Sherman Nears Savannah

"I can make this march, and I will make Georgia howl!"

— General W. T. Sherman in a telegram to General Ulysses S. Grant.

In most cases, Sherman's barbarous destruction of Atlanta and Georgia did not deter Georgia women from their dedication to the Southern cause. Instead, the invasion served some women to increase their support of the Confederacy. For other women, Sherman's march merely intensified the plea for their men to abandon the military and return home.

One of the wives of a Confederate captain said: "Take everything we have. I can live on pine straw the rest of my days. You can kill us, but you can't conquer us."

General Sherman sent a letter on December 17 to C.S.A. General William J. Hardee, who was inside Savannah with his 10,000 troops. Sherman stated that with his 65,000 men surrounding the city, they made Hardee's situation hopeless, and he demanded the surrender of his troops.

Hardee refused, secretly planning to evacuate the city. He knew he could not have lasted long in a siege of Savannah, and took his only choice to go to South Carolina and save the city. He thought he and General Joseph E. Johnston would stop Sherman's destructive march through South Carolina. They did not fight again until the Battle of Averasborough, N.C.

Meanwhile, having received General Hardee's refusal to surrender, Sherman assumed he would have to invade Savannah. Admiral John A. Dahlgren escorted Sherman on the *USS Harvest Moon* to

Hilton Head. He wanted to confer with General John Foster to seek additional support from his troops stationed there. Before leaving, he ordered Slocum and Howard to ". . . make all possible preparations . . ." for an attack during the two or three days he would be absent. Sherman told Foster to use General John P. Hatch's division to block the Union Causeway near Bluffton to prevent Hardee from escaping to the South Carolina side of the river.

Instead of surrendering his force, on the night of December 20, General Hardee wishing, to prevent the ruinous bombardment of the city, slipped out in the night, with his troops. They built makeshift pontoon bridges using 80 feet long rice-field flats, car wheels for anchors, flooring from the planks from the city wharves. Then they strung them across the Savannah River to Hutchinson Island and another to South Carolina. To deaden the sound, rice straw was spread thickly over the flats to muffle the noise. The evacuation was complete by three o'clock in the morning. C.S.A. engineering troops detached the flats, cut holes in them and set them adrift. (The island was once a favorite site for dueling South Carolina gentlemen in the 19th century. A man was sensitive to a blow aimed at his honor; duels were of frequent occurrence.)

Sherman departed Port Royal to return to Savannah as bad weather delayed his ship. He changed to a smaller boat and spent the night of December 21 at King's Point.

In the early hours of December 21, Savannah Mayor Richard D. Arnold, a group of Aldermen and Noble A. Hardee, a merchant and the brother of retreating General Hardee rode out to meet with Union General John W. Geary. They pleaded for a peaceful surrender, to avoid any destruction of property. Just before dawn, Geary and his soldiers enter the city unopposed.

Sherman entered Savannah on the cold and windy morning of December 22 and had reason to believe that General Hardee was on his way to Charleston to make preparations for what they supposed would be his next step. Thousands of escaped slaves had followed him to Savannah.

He went first to Pulaski House, the hotel where he had stayed when he was on duty there many years before. Soon, Englishman Charles Green arrived. He was hoping to protect his home, and his cotton from destruction by offering him use of his Gothic Revival mansion on Madison Square. Later Sherman climbed to the top of the customhouse to view Savannah in the cold weather, and then he and his officers dined on a splendid oyster supper.

Green, originally from England, had made his fortune as a cotton merchant and ship owner. A Confederate sympathizer, he was in Europe in 1861 when the War began. He returned to the U.S. through Canada and was arrested and charged with spying in Detroit. He was sent to Fort Warren prison in Boston Harbor for three months and released after the British Consul intervened on his behalf; he returned to Savannah.

Sherman accepted Green's offer and occupied the house during his stay making it his headquarters. Green, a widow, only reserved a few rooms above the dining room for his personal use. Soon Savannahians came to pay their respects to Sherman. When the *New York Herald* edition of

December 22 was delivered by steamboat, Sherman read his six-month-old son, Charles had died on December 4. He had never seen the child. He wrote his wife Julia: "I should like to have seen the baby of which all spoke so well, but I seem destined to pass my life away so that even my children will be strangers."

Sherman celebrated Christmas dinner in the Green mansion with his officers. Soldiers tied twigs to the heads of the mules, converting them to reindeer.

"I beg to present you as a Christmas-gift the city of Savannah, with one hundred and fifty heavy guns and plenty of ammunition, also about twenty-five thousand bales of cotton."

— The telegram Sherman wrote to President Lincoln.

"Christmas is here again . . . A season of sadness and gloomy retrospection for us of the South, one of joy and gayety to the people of the North. This is the saddest Christmas that I have ever spent and my only pleasure during the day has been in looking forward to spending my next Christmas in the Confederacy."

— Wrote Fanny Yates Cohen, a 24-year-old Savannah matron.

General Sherman visited Nellie Gordon's home during Christmas week and brought letters from her father Union Colonel John Kinzie, whom he knew from Chicago. He paid several calls on her and her three children. He said later that he enjoyed sitting around the fireside and being with the children since he missed his own children so much. During his visits, he offered many intriguing accounts of his close calls on his march to Savannah.

Another old friend, General William Strong was an intimate friend of Nellie's brother in Chicago called on Mrs. Gordon. He asked if he could bring General Howard to see the children as the General had four little girls he was longing to see. When General Howard arrived, he brought the girls close to him. Their second child, five-year-old daughter Juliette Kinzie Gordon nicknamed "Daisy" climbed up on Howard's knee and said: "You have only got one arm!" "Yes, little girl. Are you not sorry for me? It was shot off in battle," said the General. "Oh, did the Yankees shoot it off?" asked Daisy. "No, my dear. The Rebels shot it off." Daisy said: "Did they! Well, I shouldn't wonder if my papa did it," she continued. "He has shot lots of Yankees." Juliette (Daisy) would go on to found the Girl Scouts of America.

When Captain Gordon received the letter from his wife telling about hosting Sherman, he had a return letter slipped through to Savannah. "The fact of your being in the Union lines is, of course, difficult to bear, but I accept that as the fate of war and will endure it as I would any sacrifice that may be called for. What really galls me is that you should associate with my enemies upon any terms than those politeness demands from every lady." Soon Mrs. Gordon and her children left the safety of Savannah and sailed under a truce flag to Charleston."

Savannah was never attacked or bombarded during the War and only experienced two Civil War battles — sieges of Fort Pulaski and Fort McAllister. When Sherman took Savannah from the Confederates, many thought it proved that he wished the port of Savannah more than he wanted to destroy the C.S.A. Army. Savannah's only military installation was its port, so the city was not destroyed like Atlanta. The city was saved from a siege, and no civilians were killed by the bombardment.

History has been good to Sherman's stay in Savannah. It was so impressed by Savannah's elegant and enchanting scene that he did not destroy it. Probably Nellie Gordon herself was no small part of the attraction for she was a charming young matron.

One of the women of Savannah meeting with Major General Frank Blair snapped: "This war won't be terminated until you kill all the men, and then we women will fight you, and if you kill all of us, it won't be ended then, of we'll come back as ghosts to haunt you."

The general said: "If such be the case, I think you might as well die of starvation, as then your ghosts may be too weak to come back and haunt us." He turned and shredded the commissary order for the women. After the anger abated, the women did receive food, but Sherman had families of men in the Confederate army that wanted to follow their husbands and fathers, sent by steamboat to Charleston with a flag of truce.

There were very scarce supplies left in Savannah, but rations were running out. Sherman distributed what reserve rations he had to people with a generous hand. Rice was the only provision in immense quantities, so people were suffering from a deplorable scarcity of provisions. Knowing they could not subsist entirely on rice, Sherman sent Colonel Julian Allen to New York to barter Lowcountry rice for food. He ordered 50 barrels bacon, 100 barrels pork, 50 barrels lard, 20 barrels brown sugar, 500 barrels "good" Irish potatoes, 500 barrels dried cornmeal 25 barrels white beans, and 300 barrels hard bread.

"I am tired and sick of war. Its glory is all moonshine; even success the most brilliant is over dead and mangled bodies, with the anguish and lamentations of distant families, appealing to me for sons, husbands, and fathers . . . it is only those. It is only those who have neither fired a shot nor heard the shrieks and groans of the wounded that cry aloud for blood, for vengeance, for desolation. War is hell!

— General W. T. Sherman

Mrs. Cohn wrote that women had searched in their closets for their oldest and black garments to wear while the Yankees occupied the city. One day she went to her bedroom ". . . and darned my stockings." Her maid was sick and knew when she was well she could get her freedom. "It was the first time I had ever done such a thing in my life. I suppose when she leaves me, I shall always have to do so. I had better begin at once."

In a letter written to his sister in Illinois, Captain Charles Wills said: "I found the sweetest girl here that ever man looked at — with large very deep brown eyes, almost black that sparkle like stars. I swear I was never so bewitched before." Years later, the sister, while editing the letter for publication, removed the lines.

While resting his troops in Savannah and accumulating enough provisions to fill the wagons, General Sherman called "The Butcher" declared: "When I go through South Carolina, it will be one of the most horrible things in the history of the world. The devil himself couldn't restrain my men in that state." Soon he turned his army north out of Savannah through the Carolinas, ready to confront South Carolina traitors that he felt were responsible for the War over the past four years.

General Sherman's cavalry commander was Union Brigadier General Hugh Judson Kilpatrick was considered obnoxious, boastful and a notorious womanizer. His nickname was "Kill Cavalry" which came from his recklessness in battle when he disregarded the safety of his soldiers. He was considered vain, conceited and egotistical. He reportedly spent \$5,000 in Savannah for matches for his corps — his goal — the destruction of the enemy in South Carolina at any cost. He had no difficulty attracting women and was renowned for his deadly habit of having prostitutes in camp. Sherman was always receiving information about Kilpatrick being shacked up with women.

While, in Savannah, Kilpatrick told his troops: "In after years when travelers passing through South Carolina shall see chimney stacks without houses, and the country desolate, and shall ask who did this? Some Yankee will answer: Kilpatrick's Cavalry!"

Prostitution was a way of life all along the path of the Union army. Many women chose prostitution when they were faced with starvation. The wealthy often forced their factory works and domestic help to be unpaid sexual slaves, so why not get paid for their services? Prostitutes, many illiterate women, and some mulattos earned \$20 to \$50 for their sexual trysts. (Remember Belle Watling who owned a house of ill fame in *Gone With the Wind*, a friend of Rhett Butlers?) Many cities designated an area for "public women" to practice their trade. The venereal disease soon spread, and Union and Confederate doctors had to treat "private diseases." Some cities issued each prostitute, a license and were visited each week to examine him or her in their bordellos. If caught without a license the women were sent to the workhouse for 30 days.

Kilpatrick, as a notorious ladies' man, had frequented prostitutes throughout the war — in every state he fought in even though he was married and with a child. After his wife's death in 1863, he became even more of a womanizer, drinking, and boozing. In Columbia, S.C. he was seen with a beautiful woman named Marie Boozer — known as his mistress.

After the war, Kilpatrick married a wealthy Chilean woman; he met while serving as U.S. Minister to Chile (1865-1870). The couple had two daughters, one of whom was the grandmother of the artist and designer Gloria Vanderbilt, who was married to writer Wyatt E. Cooper. Their son is TV star Anderson Cooper making Cooper the great great grandson of General Judson Kilpatrick.

"I know that Kilpatrick is a damn fool, but I want just that sort of man to command my cavalry on this expedition."

— Sherman said about ignoring Kilpatrick's moral shortcomings as he had to rein in his reckless actions.

On January 18, General Sherman ordered General Slocum to turn over Savannah to Major General Foster. General Sherman gave the order to move the troops into South Carolina, and he left Savannah by steamer in bad weather.

The heavy winter rains had begun early, and the roads were nearly useless. The Savannah River was so swollen that it filled its channels and overflowed into rice fields that lay on the east bank. By February 1, 1865, Sherman's troops started their march through the Carolinas. The troops pulled up the railroad tracks and used the rail beds for their wagons and marching. Many soldiers returned to Savannah in the heavy rain coming down in torrents and left many wagons stuck in the mud on Hutchinson Island.

The conduct of his troops — or, a part of them, was disgraceful. They had ravaged all of Georgia that lay in their path, but their manner of working lacked the precision, which came from experience. When they left Savannah, their experience in Georgia was evident. Their knowledge as house wreckers, chicken roost robbers, cattle stealers, and thieves was remarkable as they passed through and burned such plantations as Fife, Myrtle Grove, Rotterdam, and Hamburg.

Nancy De Saussure wrote about the ruin and aftermath after Sherman passed through Robertville. "When we heard that Sherman's army had crossed the Savannah River, family after family joined the long, tragic procession to Columbia and Darlington, where we stayed six months. Later, after ten days of traveling back we arrived home to find the house in ashes, the barns also, and the steam mill, the blacksmith shop, and the carpenter room. Families were forced to move into storerooms and laundries into shacks in the rest. The Negroes were all scattered. We were saved from starvation by the men who cut timbers to sell and by the women who baked pies for the colored troops. When our family was down to its last pint of corn meal, a steamboat arrived loaded with provisions sent by a Northern friend who had heard of our plight. Later, the government returned 25 horses and mules to this plantation so that crops could be planted.

"Sherman's hordes destroyed everything in Robertville including the noted churches. It is said that nothing was left standing in the village, but a brick well curb. In the same manner, the surrounding plantation homes succumbed to the blast of total war. The "palatial residence" where 25 house servants had been employed became a memory and a legend." They even slaughtered pigs and threw them into the plantation wells to pollute the drinking water.

"Half of General Sherman's troops under the direction of Major General Howard and Sherman's

second-in-command had been shipped to Beaufort by boat from Savannah. They began marching, apparently, towards Charleston."

During his march through South Carolina, Sherman's army destroyed houses, farms, livestock, and food supplies. He frightened white and black women as their children stood helplessly while the Union soldiers stole their horses and mules. They did not just destroy military facilities in their path. Some officers were thieves themselves and took gold watches, jewelry, and silver. However, the evidence shows that many of Sherman's officers tried to put a stop to the depredations of the rank and file.

A skirmish at the Huguenin plantation on Bees Creek had an ironic twist of fate. Colonel Abram Huguenin, the Yankee officer who was in charge learned as the flames were consuming the house that it belonged to a relative when he discovered the Huguenin coat-of-arms. He had drawn the line at destroying relatives' property, so he executed an order for his men to extinguish the flames — it was too late. He managed to save some priceless artifacts, and took them with him for safekeeping and at the close of the War, returned silver, portraits, and furniture to their owners.

Gillisonville, in Jasper County, was once a thriving summer resort named for Derry Gillison, Coosawhatchie shoe manufacturer of the early 1800s. The wealthy rice plantation owners chose the locality for their summer residences. The fires of Sherman's army leveled the village square in Gillisonville (St. Luke's Parrish now Jasper County), including all surrounding buildings, and all residences except one — the home of Lieutenant James W. Moore of Hampton's Legion.

Two Union officers were camped in the dank greenness of the woodland near the village and entered the home one cold night. The grandmother ignored the intruders' conversation with other members of the family and continued her rocking and knitting. One of the officers admired a finished sock, and said it must be very warm. "Would you like a pair?" the old lady asked. "Indeed I would," the man replied promptly. When he returned in a day or two, a pair was ready for him — they did not burn the home.

There were over 55 plantations in St. Luke's Parrish before the War. James Hobard received a grant for 100 acres for services rendered to King George III in 1770. He sold it to Stephen McDonald, and then eventually ended up in the ownership of John Cheney, who christened the property The Oaks in 1815. Cheney's daughter Evelina married lawyer Richard James Davant in 1828. Upon his father-in-law's death, Davant purchased the estate and changed its name to Davant Plantation. The Greek Revival home was burned by Sherman's troops in 1865.

Around 1854, William J. Graham, son of Captain John Graham and Anne Barton Hogg of Strawberry Hill Plantation in St. Luke's Parish, married Anne Barnwell Stoney. Anne's father had owned the plantation since 1805. The Grahams built a one-story frame farm house, in the 1860s. The house is still standing

Plantations owners faced the anger of the Union forces as they marched through South Carolina; many saw the Southern plantations, and their wealthy owners, as the reason for the War. Sherman's army got almost wholly out of hand during his march through Georgia and the Carolinas, in spite of his statements to the contrary. They lacked the tightening up of discipline, which comes from the presence of a powerful enemy. There was no fighting worth mentioning; only a few weak detachments of the Confederate army stood in their way on their way to North Carolina.

Union forces vandalized and burn homes to the ground. They destroyed farms, livestock, and food supplies, and terrified white and black women as their children stood by helplessly, stole personal belongings, set free the slaves, and harassed or attacked the owners as they seized their horses and mules.

The weather was Sherman's chief obstacle. The Carolina lowlands were flooded requiring pontoon bridges, which were washed away, requiring the troops to march through knee-deep mud. The Confederates were astounded that the Union forces continued their advance. Confederate General Joseph E. Johnson later said: "Sherman has the greatest army since the days of Julius Caesar." Sherman tried to keep the Confederate army guessing about his destination — Augusta or Charleston while he was actually planning to take control of Columbia, S.C.

Sherman's bummers (the name given to Sherman's stragglers who lived off the land) held a special hatred for the Palmetto State, because of the first shots fired at Fort Sumter. They could turn a large house inside out in 30 minutes. Everything of value that was not too heavy was hidden in wagons or knapsacks. Then the more massive objects were destroyed. Pianos were smashed for kindling wood, paintings were cut to ribbons, and furniture was used for bonfires. Pages of valuable books were ripped out by the handful. Women's closets were robbed of their lingerie and sent North for the sweethearts of the soldiers. (Imagine men who would steal women's underwear, or women who wear it!)

General Hardee had been instructed to stop Sherman at South Carolina's broad rivers. The Rebels were to defend Charleston but to abandon it if necessary and then protect Columbia. The Union troops reached Charleston on February 17, 1865 and forced the Confederates to evacuate and abandon Fort Sumter.

Horror and chaos came to Charleston on the night of February 17-18. More women were in the city than usual as plantation women fled to the city to get away from Sherman's raiders. Cotton had been piled high in the public squares — ready to be burned so the Union troops could not confiscate it. With evacuation, a certainty, it was set on fire, along with thousands of bushels of rice, casting a ghostly light over the city.

The city was on fire from the river to river with gunpowder blowing up around the railroad depot that was filled with foodstuffs. Another explosion was caused by the Confederate gunboat *Palmetto State* blowing up at the wharf. The boat had been built by funds garnered by the women of the state selling their jewelry. Those who saw the explosion said that the smoke formed a Palmetto tree! To stop looting, a special order was issued the next day forbidding soldiers to enter the city without a

pass from his commanding officer, except soldiers of the 21st U.S. Colored Troops. Apparently, the commanding officers did not know that the night before the 21st U.S. Colored Troops had broken into homes and helped them to whatever they wanted.

Since there was no communication with the interior of the state, General Sherman, did not learn of the evacuation of Charleston for ten days. General Order Number Eight was issued on February 28 calling all the citizens of Charleston to take the Oath of Allegiance to the United States. The Union government took Fort Sumter back on February 22, 1865 with the raising of the flag.

The Union forces that had traveled from Savannah gathered together outside of Columbia on February 17 when Columbia surrendered to Sherman after burning three-fourths of the city. "The truth is last night our men got beyond our control," said Union General Howard. Amidst the controversy surrounding the burning of the city, General Sherman called the demons in the "accident of war," due to "cotton, whiskey, and the wind." They left a trail of ashes and destruction behind them before crossing into North Carolina.

Poverty would mark the state for generations to come.

On April 9, 1865, just 51 days after the burning of Columbia, Lee surrendered to Grant at Appomattox Courthouse in Va.

Later Miss Barton was at the flag-raising ceremony of Andersonville prison after U.S. General Grant's decision to stop exchanging prisoners. (There were approximately 45,000 Union prisoners incarcerated during the camp's 14-month existence, of which 28 percent died.) Miss. Barton tried to prevent Union authorities from hanging commandant Henry Wirz as the only "war criminal" of the War. Low food rations in the Southland and the blockade of medicines imported from North of the Mason-Dixon Line, was out of his control. Wirz was hung on November 10, 1865. Many historians refer to Wirz as a "scapegoat." (Nearly 3,000 Confederates died at the Federal prison in Elmira, N.Y. Approximately 23,000 Federal prisoners of war were estimated to have died in captivity with more than 26,000 Confederates.)

While most Southerners accepted their fate after the War, a colony of former Confederate slave owners established themselves in Sao Paulo, Brazil. During 1865- 1886, almost 20,000 white Americans sailed to Brazil. Dom Pedro II, the Emperor of Brazil, recruited cotton farmers for his nation because of the high prices cotton commanded. General Robert E. Lee advised Southerners not to flee to South America, but many ignored his advice because they had lost their land during the War. They became known as Confederados.

The plantation economy collapsed, and the South was economically devastated taking a long time to recover, and carpetbaggers flooded into the Southern states. Economic arrangements of tenancy and sharecropping kept most Southern freedmen in a state of economic dependence and poverty. Some freedmen remained on plantations as hired help after the War.

War experiences had expanded many women's' definitions of "womanhood" — lifestyles were torn apart — touching every aspect of their life. The War and emancipation had transformed the lives of women of color. All women fought to learn their proper place after the War. Whereas household formerly united them, after the War they were more bound in sisterhood. Southern women were not as attracted as their Northern sisters in seeking the right to vote.

To many in Georgia and South Carolina, it is as if the Civil War occurred just a few years ago as they are always reminded of the monuments in their towns and tales passed down by their ancestors.

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