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ATTITUDES IN NORTH ALABAMA TO THE CONFEDERACY

By Angela Ferguson

The Civil War witnessed the virtual consumption of North Alabama's Southern men by the Confederate cause and war machine. Those persons who stayed at home were usually women and black slaves, or, among the white males, Union sympathizers and leaders. Within this Southern civilian population during the war there existed divisions in sentiment, manifested in diverse ways, toward the Confederacy.

Walter Lynwood Fleming, author of Civil War and Reconstruction in Alabama, asserts that in an account of life on the plantations and farms in the South during the war the white men may almost be left out.¹ While their sons and husbands fought in the army, the Southern women fell heir to the responsibility of managing the family affairs on the plantations or small dirt farms. Plantation women had the added responsibility of the black slaves who were in turn charged by their masters with the obligation of protecting and obeying their mistresses.

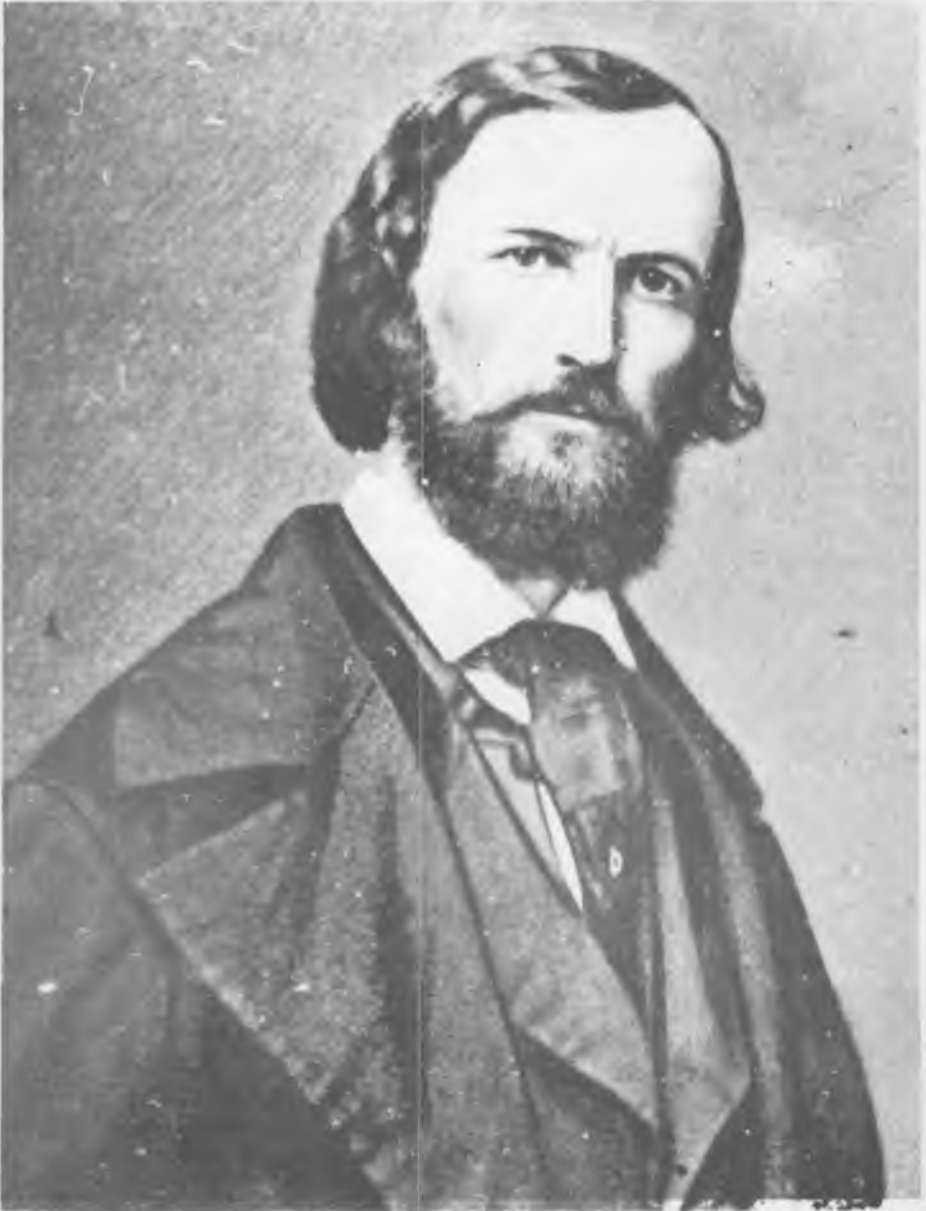
The women constituted the largest pro-Confederate element in North Alabama. Before the war actually broke out, the women sewed banners and cockades for secessionists to wear. Once war began, the women displayed their approval of the cause by supporting the soldiers in as many ways as they could. In addition, through acts of Confederate patriotism during the occupation of North Alabama, the women revealed a strong sentiment to the Southern cause.

Aside from the duties in managing the business affairs of their families, the women took on the task of providing as much clothing, blankets and edibles to the soldiers as was possible. They formed themselves into societies to sew materials for the army's use. "Spinning, weaving, sewing and knitting military apparel of every description" occupied much of the Alabama woman's spare time.² Not only did the women provide clothing for the army, but they also made flags and standards to lead the men into battle. Precious scraps of material were donated to the making of a flag. One woman even donated her wedding dress.³

One form of support lavished freely on the soldiers, especially officers, was the admiration of the women. Bordering on "hero" worship, the women greatly admired Confederate leaders. Totally dedicated to the Confederate cause, Mrs. William D. Chadick, of Huntsville, remained in the city throughout Federal occupation. She reported in her diary that, during Yankee occupation in 1862, wounded and imprisoned Confederate soldiers shipped to Huntsville, "...received great attention from the ladies..." This caused discontent among the ignored Union officers who thought military victory should open the Huntsville social circle to them.⁴ In a demonstration of love and devotion, a Rebel Captain, Frank Gurley, was crowned with a laurel wreath on the square of Huntsville, August 31, 1862, by the citizens, predominantly women.⁵ Gurley, known as a guerilla fighter by the Union, was considered a type of folk hero by many Huntsville women.

Generally, the sentiment of Alabama women to "Northerners" was one of intense hatred. However, a few Union soldiers were able to establish some rapport with the women. Mrs. Chadick reported becoming a warm friend with a Yankee soldier; she even admitted feeding him.⁶

Confederate women remained faithful not only to the army and its leaders but to prominent leaders' wives as



Clement Claiborne Clay of Huntsville served in both the United States and Confederate States Senates.

well. During the 1862 occupation of Huntsville, when Union General Oms by McKnight Mitchell was in command, he moved his family into the city, confiscating for them what they desired. One of his daughters came into possession of a mare and riding habit owned by Mrs. Virginia Clay, the wife of the prominent former Congressman, Clement C. Clay, Jr. While riding the mare, Miss Mitchell was verbally assailed by Alice Spence, demanding that she "Git off Ginie Clay's mare! Git-off-Ginie Clay's ma-are!" For her outburst of loyalty to Mrs. Clay, Alice's brother was arrested to insure her good conduct thereafter.⁷

At least two young Huntsvillians were not afraid to admit to General Mitchell that they were Rebels. Miss Lallie Matthews and Miss Rowe Webster attached Confederate flags to their grace hoops and toyed with them as Yankee soldiers passed by. The young women were arrested and taken to Mitchell for an interview. When asked if they were Rebels, Miss Matthews replied "over and above board."⁸

There were other instances of blatant defiances by women of Union demands. Mrs. Chadick noted conversations in which she refused to give up supplies or open her home to the occupation forces. Mrs. Septimus D. Cabaniss asserted herself by keeping her front gate locked. Though the fence had been burned by Yankees and the yard was used as a camp ground, the family "...was required to use the key to open and close the gate as they went to and from the house."⁹

North Alabama women held not only Yankees in contempt, but also the few white men who had not gone to war. Before hostilities broke out, the women had been instrumental in encouraging sons, husbands and sweethearts to fill the army ranks. Those who did not comply faced social ostracization.¹⁰ After the war began, Mrs. Chadick commented on some army holdouts: "It must be so humiliating to the men--reckon some of them wish

they had gone to the war and saved their reputations."

Slave owners in North Alabama who complied with the females' demands to join the army, and those who joined of their own volition, often left their families, plantations and farms largely to the care of their blacks. The slaves generally proved faithful to the trust placed in them, though some realized freedom would be a result of a Union victory. Fleming felt that the blacks were faithful because they were trained to be obedient. Insurrection was almost impossible among the slaves because they lacked organization and leadership. Religious beliefs, encouraged by his white master and his ministers of both races, compelled the slave to do his duty.¹² An historian who was born a slave but raised a free man,¹³ John W. Beverly, concluded that in recorded history there is "...no case where any (black man) proved false to the trust."¹⁴

Legends exist in the South about slaves who risked their own lives to protect members of the white family from the Union soldiers. Mrs. Bessie King Russell, a long time Huntsville resident, relates a family tale of her grandmother's slave. "Aunt Tesh", so the story goes, was talking to a Yankee soldier, telling how she wished his army would hurry and free the slaves. The soldier and several others were searching the premise of Mrs. Russell's grandmother's home for a Confederate soldier believed to be hiding there. The mistress, overhearing Tesh's declarations, was upset because she thought the slave was happy over the prospects of being set free. After the soldiers left, the mistress asked Tesh what she had meant. Tesh replied, "Well, I had to," and, lifting her skirts she revealed the feet of the young Rebel soldier protruding out from under the porch. Tesh had set herself up as a decoy to protect a member of the white family which owned her.¹⁵

Black male slaves sometimes accompanied their masters to the battle ground as body servants. Reports exist that each servant courageously stood by his master, searching for him after encounters with the enemy,

nursing his wounds, burying him if he was dead, if possible carrying his body home for burial and even firing into the northern lines when a gun was available.¹⁶

Yankee forces impressed black labor to build fortifications. In Huntsville, slaves were gathered and sent to Nashville. Those who were made to work in Huntsville were drilled everyday before beginning their work. Some of the blacks were willing to work for the Yankees, while others would run and hide.¹⁷

During the first occupation of Huntsville in 1862 by the Union Army, Mrs. Chadick reported in her diary that servants were giving information to Northern officers on all concealed arms and soldiers. From time to time, she mentioned slaves that had run away to join the other side. One in particular, Corinna, left the Chadick home, returned, and left again. By May 12, 1864, only Uncle Tom, an aged slave, remained with the Chadicks. Technically, Tom only resided with her because he had been impressed to build the Huntsville fortress.¹⁸

Black slaves were not allowed to enlist, though many were willing to serve in the Confederate Army. Free Southern blacks, however, were "...nearly all...engaged in some way in the Confederate service..." as cooks, teamsters or artisans. They paid their taxes and made contributions to the cause. Although it is estimated that there were three regiments of blacks who joined the Union Army in North Alabama,²⁰ most remained faithful to the established system of slave and master until the final defeat of the South.

North Alabama, it should be noted, was not a solid Confederate bloc. From the beginning of the war, there were outposts of Union sympathizers and Tories, persons hostile to the Confederacy. In some areas, in fact, Unionists vastly outnumbered Secessionists. One estimate claims Unionists outnumbered Confederates three to one in Morgan, Blount, Winston, Marion, Walker, Fayette and Jefferson counties. Winston County was re-

ferred to as the "Free State of Winston" due to its preponderance of Unionists.²¹

Alabamians who were favorable to the Federals wanted a small force of Yankees to which they could attach themselves for protection and assist in suppressing the rebellion.²² Colonel Abel D. Streight in July, 1862, asked permission to organize the willing Unionists into regiments to fight the Rebels. He argued that they needed, and deserved, to be able to protect themselves as a reward for their loyalty despite a one year lapse of communication. Concerning North Alabama Unionists, Streight remarked that he had never "...witnessed such an outpouring of devoted and determined patriotism..."²³

Unionists became quite active and outspoken when Huntsville was placed under Federal occupation. Prominent sympathizers supplied names of loyal Confederates to General Mitchell so he could send the Rebels to Northern prisons. Two of these prominent Unionists were General Jeremiah Clemens and Judge George W. Lane, both of Madison County.²⁴ Jeremiah Clemens, a former United States Senator from Huntsville, began the war on the Secessionist side, despite the fact that he favored cooperation as a delegate to the Secessionist Convention in 1860. He briefly held the rank of Major-General of the Alabama militia. But in 1862, Clemens changed his mind and crossed behind Federal lines, residing in Nashville and Philadelphia. Before the war was over, Clemens, a life long Democrat was actively supporting Lincoln's reelection.²⁵ Lane was probably the Alabamian most loyal to the Union. He never recognized the political existence of the Confederate States of America. Appointed as a Federal judge by President Lincoln, Lane flew the American flag in Huntsville until his death, in 1864.²⁶

In the countryside, Tories and Confederate Army deserters expressed their sentiment in violent terms of plunder, murder and theft. Several people were mur-

dered in cold blood and at least one was burned to death. Bands of Unionists dubbed themselves with such titles as "Destroying Angels" and "Prowling Brigades". At first, their violence was aimed at Confederate sympathizers. However, as the war dragged on, they roamed indiscriminately over North Alabama.²⁷

Strangely, the Confederate government and the Alabama state government neglected to act decisively in moving against the violent Unionist minorities. This lack of action, combined with a conflict between the two governments, weakened both and encouraged open defiance on the part of the disaffected toward the loyal citizens.²⁸

After the Confederate military reverses of 1863 at Gettysburg and Vicksburg, the elusive dream of Southern independence lost some of its initial glamour. It was increasingly clear that the war would not be a short, romantic triumph of the South over the Northern invader. Alabama women finally settled into the real world of a war which took its toll on their menfolk. Their responsibility remained in maintaining farms and plantations and sending supply packages to the needy Confederate Army. The freed or runaway blacks eventually tended to follow the Federal soldiers who they considered to be their liberators.

The formation of secret societies which were dedicated to peace was one sign of "formidable discontent."²⁹ As anti-war sentiment grew, the people became increasingly anxious to accept peace on the terms offered them by the Union. It is quite possible that had the war continued through the August, 1865 elections, a state administration would have been elected on a platform against further support to the Confederacy. This was particularly true in North Alabama, plagued as the section was the Unionists marauders, and Federal military power. One may, therefore, be hard pressed to find a definable attitude in North Alabama toward the Confederacy, as her political fortunes ebbed and flowed into history.

Ferguson: Attitudes in North Alabama to the Confederacy

¹Walter Lynwood Fleming, Civil War and Reconstruction in Alabama. Micro Offset Book (New York: Peter Smith, 1949), 239.

²H. E. Sterkx, Partners in Rebellion: Alabama Women in the Civil War. (Canbury, N. J.: Associated University Presses, Inc., 1970), 94.

³Ibid., 37-9.

⁴Mrs. William D. Chadick, "Civil War Days in Huntsville," the Huntsville Times, 1934, entry for May 12, 1862.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid., entry for June 30, 1862.

⁷Malcolm Cook McMillan, The Alabama Confederate Reader. (University, Al.: University of Alabama Press, 1963), 178-9.

⁸Chadick, entry for June 20, 1862.

⁹Huntsville Branch of the American Association of University Women, Glimpses Into Ante-Bellum Homes of Historic Huntsville, Alabama, Revised (Huntsville, Al.: By the Organization, 1968), 23.

¹⁰Sterkx, Chapter 2.

¹¹Chadick, entry for April 21, 1862.

¹²Fleming, 209-11.

¹³Henry S. Marks, Who Was Who in Alabama. (Huntsville, Al.: Strode Publishers, 1972), 28.

¹⁴John W. Beverly, History Of Alabama, (Montgomery, Al.: By the Author, 1901), 201-2.

¹⁵Bessie King Russell, interview at the home of Frank Gurley Hall, July 25, 1974.

¹⁶Beverly, 200 and Fleming, 207.

¹⁷Chadick, entries for August 4 and 11, 1862.

¹⁸Ibid., facts gleaned throughout.

¹⁹Fleming, 207-8.

²⁰Beverly, 200.

²¹McMillan, 172-75.

²²Georgia Lee Tatum, Disloyalty in the Confederacy. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1934), 54-5.

²³McMillan, 175-6.

²⁴Tatum, 56.

²⁵Fleming, 125.

²⁶Fleming, Clemens is regarded as one of the most brilliant men in Alabama politics. He was also an author of some note and performed bravely in the Mexican War. But he was overly ambitious, vacillating, and unreliable to his colleagues and constituents. It is suspected that his interest in Lincoln's re-election was motivated by his personal desire to be military Governor of Alabama when the war was over. Interestingly, Clemens once wrote Confederate Secretary of War Leroy Pope Walker that Lane's acceptance of a Federal Judgeship was treason and that "North Alabama men would gladly hang him." 125-6.

²⁷Fleming, 119-120.

²⁸Tatum, 59.

²⁹Fleming, 137.