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Book Review for "Incidents of the War: The Civil War Journal of Mary Jane Chadick" by Nancy M. Rohr

Huntsville-Madison County Historical Society

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This much anticipated book, a diary of Mary Jane Chadick’s memoirs of Huntsville’s occupation during the Civil War, will not disappoint those of us who have been harrassing author Nancy Rohr to finish her work. Thanks to Huntsville resident Mary Jane Chadick, we are left with the telling of events from the point of view of the every day citizen. Although military official reports can be dry and newspaper reports were oftentimes sensationalized, Mrs. Chadick was a level-headed woman, not in the least bit overly dramatic. We can overlook the fact that her husband was fighting for the Confederacy at the time and she was quite consumed with worry about him. Mrs. Chadick, a Northerner by birth, met with and knew the leaders of the occupying Union army as well.

Nancy Rohr deserves kudos for her research and exhaustive annotation. Her ability to “translate” Mrs. Chadick’s remarks in a way we understand, 140 years later, makes this book so much more valuable to historians, history buffs, and more importantly, people who appreciate excellent writing. Nancy researched the people and events casually mentioned by Mrs. Chadick, and because of her excellent interpretation, the reader is able to be right there with Mrs. Chadick as she wrote her words, and feel the same anticipation the people of Huntsville felt. Nancy expertly described tactical information in a way we can all understand. She also helped the reader understand some of the gossip Mrs. Chadick supplied. As the wife of a minister, she would never have engaged in idle gossip, but the rumors can be excused in the context of recording history.

Mrs. Chadick was among the early visitors who went to see U.S. General Ormsby Mitchel about helping the wounded and hungry Confederate soldiers captured at the Huntsville Depot. She described their reaction to his statement that he had expected a reception in his honor: “I had it in my heart to let him know ‘we had one grand reception prepared for him at Corinth,’ but considering ‘discretion was the better part of valor,’ kept silent.”

Although the reader doesn’t necessarily come to adore Mrs. Chadick throughout the course of this book, perhaps that part of her personality was
not, in her mind, necessary for future readers, if in fact that ever crossed
her mind. It is certainly clear to the reader that Mrs. Chadick loved her
family, her friends and neighbors, and Huntsville. But more than that, she
despised the war.

As one reads the entries in Mrs. Chadick’s diary, it is natural to wonder
why she kept this record of events. Was it to show it to her husband when,
and if, he returned from fighting? Was it because she anticipated that a
historic record would someday be needed? Her first and dramatic last en­
tries lead us to believe that it wasn’t her habit to keep a diary. As terrible as
the War was, as much as the pain and suffering devastated the entire coun­
try, the reader will finish this book wishing that at least the writing would
going on.

"Incidents of the War, the Civil War Journal of Mary Jane Chadick" is
priced at $16.95. It can be ordered by sending a check or money order for
$20 made out to the Huntsville-Madison County Historical Society at P.O.
Box 666, Huntsville, Alabama 35804. Proceeds from the sale of this out­
standing book will be used to continue to preserve local history. For more
information, call (256) 883-1933 or e-mail rohrs@att.net.