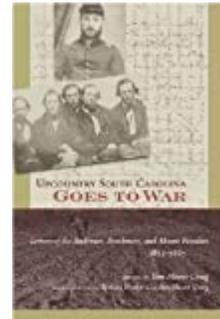




Tom Moore Craig, ed. *Upcountry South Carolina Goes to War: Letters of the Anderson, Brockman, and Moore Families, 1853-1865*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2009. 190 pp. \$29.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-57003-798-6.



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Upcountry South Carolina at War

Few relics of American history are as precious as Civil War letters. Filled with details of battles, marches, and hardships, letters from soldiers offer insight into both the banalities and horrors of war. Missives from home reveal family dramas cast against the great theater of national conflict, as well as intriguing details of home front work and morale. Well-edited collections of letters permit the reader an intimacy with the past that even the most skillfully written narrative does not provide.

The Andersons and Moores were prolific and prosperous Scots-Irish clans who settled in the South Carolina upcountry during the late colonial period. Both families amassed land and slaves, along with business interests. Though not aristocracy by low country standards, they were examples of true Southern gentry, pious, proud, and scholarly. Women of the Brockman family, a related kin group, were teachers and students at local female academies. The first letters in *Upcountry South Carolina Goes to War* deal primarily with the prewar academic and religious life of the sons. The substantial portion of the book contains letters among family members

during the Civil War, and is notable for including nearly equal amounts of letters to and from home; generally, letters to the battlefield were lost or discarded while letters from the front were carefully preserved. A final letter and a labor contract provide a quick glimpse into the new realities of life for former masters and slaves after emancipation.

Letter collections inevitably suffer from receptiveness of sentiment and the dullness of minutia about people long dead and forgotten. Civil War letters are always filled with religious platitudes, family gossip, and desperate pleas for food and clothing. What distinguishes this collection is the revelation that the letters provide about what was important to upcountry citizens. With history-making events unfolding around them, the Andersons and Moores were far more concerned with health, business deals, and the education of their offspring. There seems to have been little interest in the impending crisis. During an 1860 visit to Washington DC, a cadre of Japanese diplomats fascinated law student Andrew Charles Moore, yet he dismissed a speech by Senator

Charles Sumner as merely surprising for its depiction of Southern brutality to slaves (p. 34). Once the war commenced, Harriet Brockman Anderson pleaded with her son John to seek an interest in the Savior while sisters and aunts filled pages with cheerful sketches of parties and berry-hunting expeditions (p. 54). There is little of unique military insight in the camp letters, though one description of a soldier's walk through the abandoned battlefield of Manassas, where he saw several yankees partially rooted up by hogs, assisted by visitors to the battlefield; some of whom have actually prized the dead from beneath the shallow covering of the earth is certainly haunting (p. 52). The collection also includes a very unusual aspect, two letters written by slaves serving on the front lines to their wives back on the plantation.

Overall, the collection serves as perhaps an important corrective to the idea that all Americans were rabid partisans in the prewar era, or that all Southerners suffered terrible deprivations of foodstuffs during the war (these families complained mostly of a lack of salt). It also proves that people have not really changed much in the 150 years since the Civil War was fought: college stu-

dents beg for money or complain about exams, girls giggle over boys, and mothers worry about morality while farmers fret about the weather. Sometimes it is tempting to cast every individual in the past as a principal actor in a spectacular drama, without recalling the simplicity and nobility of everyday actions, such as making a living and caring about family; this collection is an important reminder that history is largely the story of ordinary people and everyday events.

Upcountry South Carolina Goes to War is an important addition to any South Carolina Civil War library. One could quibble that the letters might have been more thoroughly annotated; mainly individuals and places are identified in the notes. However, the clarity of the introduction, the inclusion of family genealogies, the precision of the arrangement, and the useful appendices make up for any minor flaw. Overall, this collection offers a nicely balanced look at upcountry experiences, and includes enough unusual and novel missives (especially those from the slaves, which raise difficult questions about love and loyalty) to set it apart from most similar compilations.

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