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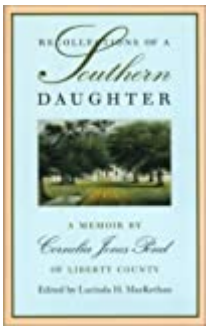

Cornelia Jones Pond. *Recollections of a Southern Daughter: A Memoir by Cornelia Jones Pond of Liberty County.* Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 1998. xlvi + 118 pp. $24.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8203-2044-1.

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A Southern Belle's Civil War

Thanks to the *Records of Antebellum Southern Plantations* series and such recent publications as *An Evening When Alone: Four Journals of Single Women in the South, 1827-67* and *The Civil War Diary of Clara Solomon: Growing Up in New Orleans, 1861-1862*, the journals and memoirs of antebellum and Civil War-era women are becoming accessible to a wider audience.[1] A recent addition to this field is the memoir of Cornelia Jones Pond of Liberty County, Georgia, edited by Lucinda MacKethan, a professor of English at North Carolina State University. Pond dictated her recollections to her daughter in 1899 in order to "give pleasure to [her] children and grandchildren" (p. 2). This is the first time the 208-sheet manuscript, housed now at the Midway Church Museum in Midway, Georgia, has been published in full.

Pond was a member of an elite Georgia planter family; her father, William Jones, owned close to one hundred slaves. After the war, he and Cornelia's brother, William Louis Jones, published the *Southern Cultivator*, one of the most respected agricultural newspapers in the South. Cornelia's husband, Thomas Pond, was a university teacher before the war; in the postwar years, he became an Episcopal clergyman.

Nela Pond, as Cornelia was called, lived in households full of women, including her mother, her sister, female slaves, and her six daughters, but men dominated her life. Nela's father, who gave her the status of a planter's daughter, had the strongest influence. According to her memoir, he was the kind, good father who indulged her wishes for luxuries in her girlhood, provided her with the household furnishings her husband's salary could not give her, and sheltered her and her children on his plantation while Thomas Pond went off to war.

Drew Faust has argued that by changing the southern social system, the Civil War challenged the foundations of personal identity. Whiteness, patriarchy, and female dependence lost some of their cultural value.[2] Pond probably experienced less change in her life than did many other southern white women, however, because the most important men in her family circle, including her husband, father, brothers, and brother-in-law, all survived the war. The family remained part of the economic and social elite, and Nela Pond stayed in a subordinate gender position within her household. Still,

Appomattox brought with it an end to the Jones family's plantation life in Liberty County, leaving Pond longing for the past. While her narrative dwells in loving detail on the antebellum period, it glosses briefly over the postwar era.

Class, race, and gender consciousness are strong but largely unspoken in Nela Pond's recollections. As MacKethan points out in her introduction, Pond adhered to the paternalistic view of slavery as a benign institution. Slaves, Pond suggested, were part of the plantation "family" and found great joy and satisfaction in caring for their "young misses" (pp. xix-xi, 20). From her viewpoint, African-American slaves did not choose freedom during the war but were "demoralized" (p. 73), or left without moral guidance, by the sudden end of slavery. No longer could Pond see these men and women as trusted servants; instead, she expressed sharp indignation that "our own Negroes" (p. 79) could aid Federal troops or take food and personal items from her family and friends. Pond, however, proved herself able to adapt to the "new regime" of paying workers for their labor in the household and on the plantation (p. 92). By 1868, she wrote, it seemed that her family had "begun life anew" (p. 94).

Throughout her recollections, Pond evinces little interest in political matters. She merely notes her horror at learning that Lincoln's election would mean war, and she later expresses mixed feelings about his assassination. Unlike the outspoken Mary Chesnut, Pond offers scant commentary on the institution of slavery either.[3] While not directly defending the institution, she does turn a blind eye to its horrors. Writing of her visit to the plantation of Roswell King, whom Fanny Kemble condemned for his cruel treatment of his slaves,[4] Pond notes only the "beautiful boatsongs" his oarsmen sang as they rowed guests from the sea islands back to the mainland (p. 22). Pond's willingness to see only what she wished to see gives credence to MacKethan's assertion that until 1864 she could not suspect she would be "at the center of a social and political revolution" (p. xxvi).

MacKethan's edition is a literal transcription of Pond's recollections. While including an introduction and an appendix identifying most of the family members mentioned in the diary, MacKethan has unfortunately declined to annotate Pond's recollections. Nor, beyond brief comparisons between Pond's memoir and a handful of other recollections of Georgia plantation life, does MacKethan attempt to place Pond's narrative in historiographical context. Finally, the edition does not provide any maps to identify for readers the location of William Jones's plantation or the towns to which the Ponds moved during Thomas Pond's careers as teacher and preacher.

As Anne Firor Scott has pointed out, for "most southern women, the domestic circle *was* the world."[5] Certainly this was true of Cornelia Jones Pond, who, as daughter, wife, and mother, was a quiet helpmeet to her family. Her narrative, told frankly without any obvious intent to criticize or defend plantation society, offers a useful firsthand perspective on the way domestic southern white women attempted to resist and adapt to the upheavals caused by the Civil War.

Notes

[1]. *Records of Ante-bellum Southern Plantations from the Revolution through the Civil War*, ed. Kenneth M. Stampp, et al. (Frederick, Md.: University Publications of America, 1985); *An Evening When Alone: Four Journals of Single Women in the South, 1827-1867*, ed. Michael O'Brien (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia for the Southern Texts Society, 1993); Clara Solomon, *The Civil War Diary of Clara Solomon: Growing Up in New Orleans, 1861-1862*, ed. Elliott Ashkenazi (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995).

[2]. Drew Gilpin Faust, *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 3-4.

[3]. Mary Chesnut, *Mary Chesnut's Civil War*, ed. C. Vann Woodward (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1981), 29, 168, 227, 246, 428.

[4]. Fanny Kemble, *Journal of a Residence on a Georgian Plantation in 1838-1839*, ed. John A. Scott (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1961), 220, 238, 273-274, 315.

[5]. Anne Firor Scott, *The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics, 1830-1930* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1970; anniversary ed., Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1995), 42.

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