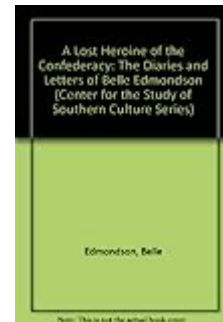




William Galbraith, Loretta Galbraith, eds. *A Lost Heroine of the Confederacy: The Diaries and Letters of Belle Edmondson*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1990. 239 pp. \$22.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-87805-462-6.



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Lost Heroine

Sometimes in life our value is appreciated, and we can claim true, affectionate friends meet with lofty generous souls, whose very beings thrill with instinctive love for the whole human race, but mostly we are not understood until the flowers and shadowy, green grass bloom and fade above us and we lie mute below. Such is my life, how long it must be, no matter (111).

Belle Edmondson forecast her place in history with her Sunday, June 10, 1864, diary entry. Belle Edmondson would be only another name on a Memphis Elmwood Cemetery gravestone had it not been for the discovery by William and Loretta Galbraith of Belle's diary during their efforts to document the history of Mississippi's Waverly plantation. What the Galbraiths discovered was the poignant first-person account of one woman's sacrifice and dedication to the Confederacy.

Edmondson escaped arrest by Union authorities for spying by fleeing to Waverly Plantation. The diary she kept during her Waverly months was the key which the Galbraiths used to unlock and recover a forgotten part of the story of the war between the states. This story is personal and the diary reveals a mid-nineteenth century

world and culture that people of this last decade of the twentieth century can only imagine.

Miss Edmondson lived on a farm then several miles outside the Memphis city limits now the property of the Memphis International Airport. She was a Confederate spy or, as spies were called then, "scout." She made frequent trips from her farm into the city to acquire contraband she smuggled to her farm. The farm, located between the Union and Confederate lines, was an ideal transfer point for contraband. Belle made the most of it. With the inside of her wide skirt loaded with sundries, uniform parts, and medical supplies, she passed through the Union lines during the day. At night the contraband was delivered to the rebels who came across from the Confederate lines.

Her words, her descriptions, her memories of a southern woman's world during the war reveal what life was then and demonstrate how much we've changed in the century and a quarter since Belle kept her diary.

I wish the editors had given more information about Belle's life after the war. Early in the book the authors

observe that Belle was unknown to history at least partially because of the influence of Jefferson Davis. Davis apparently believed strongly that nothing should be revealed of the spy-corps or "scouts." He held to the view long after the war. Davis was especially of the opinion, apparently, that the roles women played as scouts should remain an untold story.

A caption on the Jefferson Davis photograph included in the book indicates Davis gave his likeness to "Miss Belle" in May of 1870, two years before her death. Few details were given about the friendship between Davis and Edmondson. Frankly, I'd like to know more.

Perhaps, the editors believed this particular book

should end with the end of the diary and letters. The last entry is dated August 14, 1864. Belle died eight years later. The authors share with us virtually nothing of those eight years. That's a weakness. Certainly the weakness is not fatal. It's strongly offset by the strength of the work's first person, genuinely personal account of one young woman's heroic efforts to support the cause of the Confederacy and to survive the social and cultural upheaval created by revolution.

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