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Review

A CONFEDERATE DAME

Cornelia Jones Pond's reminiscence captures a vanished grandeur

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MacKethan, Lucinda H. *Recollections of a Southern Daughter: A Memoir by Cornelia Jones Pond of Liberty County.* University of Georgia Press, ISBN 820320447

In the recent past, an excellent variety of biographies, diaries, and memoirs have been published about women during the Civil War period. Among those have been accounts of nurses, spies, and extraordinary women. Others recount the lives of ordinary women living in extraordinary times. In the latter lie some of the more interesting stories. One is that of Cornelia Jones Pond (1834-1902).

Pond's memoir spans most of her life. She begins by describing her childhood at Tekoah plantation in Liberty County, Georgia. Born into an educated and affluent family, she lived an idealized life in antebellum society. The daughter of a rice planter, Cornelia was raised 30 miles south of Savannah in a rural and isolated plantation society. Her formal education began at the unusually early age of five. Pond attended a local academy where she learned mathematics, algebra, Latin, and geometry. She continued her formal education in the local school until her father sent her to Macon in 1849 to a private girl's school, and later to the Methodist Female College in Madison, Georgia. Though her education comprised the ordinary training of the day, including art and music for ladies, it stands out for its progressiveness.

Much of Pond's childhood memoir is filled with stories of tea parties, dances, descriptions of fashions, and her various travels with family to visit relatives throughout Georgia. Though mundane, these vignettes of the period lend detail and texture to what was a pleasant and quickly passing period of antebellum life.

Pond also notes in detail her experiences in attending the Congregational Church. Though she is repeatedly observant of her religious activities, she never speaks of her religious views or her spirituality. This is a recurring theme through the memoir as Pond rarely reveals her emotions or interprets her responses to life around her. She merely and dutifully reflects what she sees, allowing the reader (her intended audience being her immediate family) to interpret her experiences for themselves.

She met her future husband, a mathematics professor, in 1851. Cornelia married Thomas Goulding Pond in July 1853. He would pursue teaching, engineering, and ministry in his life, providing Pond with an affluent lifestyle, a large family of daughters, and a close-knit extended family. Upon the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861, Pond's domestic life quickly unraveled. Thomas was in a local militia, later joined the engineering corps, and spent a brief period in the Confederate artillery. The extent of the war years would take him away from home for months at a time, leaving Pond to look after her children and her extended family.

In 1861 she lost a daughter to scarlet fever, vacated her house, and had a husband at war. But her memoir reveals a quiet and reflective woman who took the changes in stride and focused on family life. Some of the few passages in the memoir that really reflect pride are those in which she explains the substitutes that she and her family devised to survive (weaving palmetto hats, making dye from bark and berries, making opium from poppies, etc.) She also speaks fondly of the details of a relative's wedding, and of her relationships with family slaves.

The stress of war is more accurately reflected in the later passages in which Pond describes the absence of communication between her husband and herself from December 1864 to April 1865, due to the effects of Sherman's March to the Sea. She relates the loss of silver, horses, food, and jewelry to Federal soldiers, and the family's fear of constant raids on their home.

The memoir ends with the years immediately following the war in which Cornelia and Thomas settled into a new home, and reestablished their lives. Thomas would eventually take orders as an Episcopalian minister, and the family lived relatively well.

Pond's memoir is a short account in itself. MacKethan has done an admirable task in presenting an introduction to the memoir, and in doing so,

creating a basis for understanding Pond's place in antebellum Georgia. It was intertwined by blood with the LeContes of Georgia (*When the World Ended: The Diary of Emma LeConte*, 1957), and paralleled the lives of another regional family, the Charles Colcock Jones family (*The Children of Pride*, 1972).

Unlike more prominent diarists such as Sarah Morgan, Mary Chesnut, or Pauline Heyward, Pond's story is simple but gripping, and lacks the literary passages or reflective examination of the soul so often exhibited by Victorian women writers of the period. She was rather a simple woman, laying out her story for her family. MacKethan has included an afterword on Pond's last years and biographical descriptions of her immediate family and neighbors noted in the memoir. Unfortunately, the book lacks maps, illustrations, or an index, which would have added to the research value of this newly published source. But Cornelia Jones Pond is still a life worth reading.

Karen R Mehaffey is an academic library director in Detroit. She has published and spoken extensively on women and the Civil War for 13 years.