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The History of Virginia Literature

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Keenly aware they were living through a momentous period in the nation’s history, many literate southern whites of the Civil War era began keeping private diaries, recording daily happenings and key events as the drama of secession, war, and defeat unfolded. Whether kept with regular enthusiasm or sporadically, then abandoned in moments of despair, keepers of wartime diaries reveal not only the difficulties and demands that four long, hard years of war visited upon them, but also their own sense of themselves as historical observers and actors grappling with continuity and change in their experience and their understanding of themselves. Diaries both reveal and conceal much about writers’ selves and silences -- and their ability to remake themselves -- as the factual and the reflective are mixed together to create a purposeful narrative.

Civil War soldier diaries like Randolph H. McKim’s *A Soldier’s Recollections: Leaves from the Diary of a Young Confederate* (1910), for example, begin and end with the war, thus inscribing the import and centrality of national events onto one’s own lived experience and ways of being and seeing. Born in 1842 in Baltimore, Maryland, McKim served the duration of the war with the Army of Northern Virginia, first as a private, then as a
staff officer, and finally as a chaplain with the 2nd Virginia Cavalry, a journey from raw recruit to experienced veteran. Inspired by what he saw, heard, and did while in camp, on the march, and on the battlefields of Virginia and elsewhere, McKim’s diary entries, which the author reworked and revised, are revealing not only for descriptions of battles and prominent officers but also for the writer’s allusions and ambitions in such seemingly “spontaneous” writing.¹ Scrutinizing the rhetorical practices and strategies employed by approximately one hundred Confederate women in their wartime diaries, Kimberly Harrison has argued for the importance of what southern women’s words meant to themselves in the context of their own lives and circumstances and as a wider reflection of Confederate patriotism and nationalist sentiment, crediting these diaries and journals, as forums for elite white women to exert their rhetorical power, with a significant role in shaping identities, values, relationships, and faith. Whether caught up in the war directly as nurses, or chafing under wartime occupation and oppressive conditions on the home front, or forced into exile to live the life of a refugee and rely on the kindness of friends and family, Confederate women were forced to step beyond traditional antebellum feminine conventions to enter a world of wartime responsibility and political conversation. Confederate women’s diaries became important spaces to express
support for the Confederacy or contempt for the Union, not least its soldiers and officers for whom they reserved particularly venomous invective.²

A number of Virginia women have produced some of the most important, candid, and moving journals and diaries chronicling civilian life and home front activity in the state during the Civil War. The best known female diarists from Virginia include Judith W. Brokenbrough McGuire, Sallie Brock Putnam, Cornelia Peake McDonald, Lucy Rebecca Buck, and Ida Powell Dulany.

Intended as “a private record” for “friends and kindred,” the publication of Judith McGuire’s wartime journal in 1867 afforded the Richmond-born author an opportunity to present “a true record” of “wonderful scenes” and “points of great interest” relating to the “War of Secession.” Diary of a Southern Refugee During the War (1867), among the first of wartime diaries published after the war, details McGuire’s flight from Alexandria, her home city where her husband, the Reverend John P. McGuire, was principal of the Episcopal High School, to various towns across Virginia where friends and relatives provided shelter before she and other family members settled in Richmond, where they were living when the city fell and where McGuire obtained work with the Commissary Department and volunteered in the city’s hospitals. A knowledgeable, well-read, and a passionate advocate of the Confederate cause, McGuire reveals the
destitution, desolation, and despair of those caught up in war-torn Richmond.³

Fellow Virginian Sallie Brock Putnam, writing under the pseudonym “A Richmond Lady,” also published an eyewitness account, Richmond During the War: Four Years of Personal Observation (1867). Living with her well-to-do parents in the Confederate capital at the outbreak of war, Putnam offers a detailed account of everyday civilian life in Richmond during wartime, covering “The Gala Days of War” and “The Gathering of the Troops” through “Sufferings of the Wounded -- Lack of Supplies” and “Trouble with the Negroes” to “Evacuation of Richmond -- Burning of the City.” By turns comprehensive and anecdotal, Putnam’s account is less a traditional diary and more an extended historical narrative embracing aspects of memoir and retrospective observation. A final chapter, “Life in the Old Land Yet,” suggests Richmond, the City of Seven Hills, will rise phoenix-like from the flames of war with the rebuilding of shattered infrastructure. Pleading with the “rising generation” to “forget not” her homeland’s “ancient prestige,” Putnam confidently predicted the resurrection of her beloved Virginia.⁴

Away from the Confederate capital and its war-weary denizens, a large number of Confederate women’s diaries have contoured the effects of the war on Virginia’s other towns, cities, plantations, and farms, revealing the economic and social
upheavals of war on families and communities across the Old Dominion. Cornelia Peake McDonald’s wartime diary of unhappy events in the besieged town of Winchester, supplemented by reminiscences added at a later date, remains a classic of the type. First published in 1935, McDonald’s diary, which covers March 1862 to August 1863 (other parts of which were lost or destroyed during the writer’s years as a refugee), was kept at the insistence of her husband, Colonel Angus William McDonald, who left Winchester on the eve of its evacuation to find employment with the Confederate War Department in Richmond. Recording facts and incidents of Winchester’s occupation and subsequent counter-occupations, and of Lexington, where she lived as a refugee until the early 1870s, McDonald’s Civil War was one of hardship, worry, and uncertainty. She offers a firsthand account of the burning of the Virginia Military Institute and Virginia Governor John Letcher’s home by Union soldiers, recounting the assistance she rendered to the governor’s wife and small children. At war’s end, McDonald’s husband, stepson, and baby daughter were all dead, the family’s estate, Hawthorn, stripped of its resources, and she and her young family were in penury.\(^5\)

Located twenty miles south of Winchester, Front Royal, the home town of another well-known female southern diarist, Lucy Rebecca Buck, was also the site of many skirmishes and battles
between Union and Confederate forces during the Civil War. In her late teens when war came to Bel Air, her father’s successful plantation, Lucy began her diary on Christmas morning 1861 and continued to record her thoughts and opinions on wartime events through April 1865. Sensitive to her altered surroundings and the changed circumstances of the household, she eagerly anticipated news from the front lines where her two brothers, Alvin and Irving, served in the Confederate ranks. “We were so rejoiced at getting a letter from them that I would not long harbor the thought of danger to them,” she confessed to her diary in March 1862. Like many other Confederate diarists, Lucy suddenly discontinued her writing efforts as the war neared its end.  

Begun to escape wartime boredom, young Lucy Breckinridge of Grove Hill plantation in Botetourt County, Virginia, abandoned her diary on Christmas Day 1864 and intended to destroy it prior to her marriage to a young Confederate officer. Given to blunt, pessimistic introspection, Breckinridge was frustrated by the patriarchal norms of southern plantation living and mightily depressed by the twin prospect of marriage and frequent childbirth. Less concerned with the military or political climate of the day, Breckinridge’s diary reveals a plantation belle in fear of a future of submissiveness that would suppress her own talents and interests. However, any inability, or unwillingness, on the part of Virginia’s Confederate citizenry to elaborate
further on postwar prospects, not least the consequences of military reversal and collapse, was not universal. From her farmhouse in Fairfax, Virginia, Anne Frobel kept a diary from 1861 extending through the Reconstruction era and beyond to 1879. As Union forces moved onto the family lands, taking over their farmhouse, destroying crops, and killing livestock, Frobel’s diary entries increasingly bemoan the rude intrusion into her domestic world.8

Ida Powell Dulany, like countless other diarists, found her world completely transformed by the turmoil of the Civil War, the crumbling of slavery, and the innumerable trials of the postwar world, a world without slaves. Dulany’s diary, published as In the Shadow of the Enemy (2009), is a gracefully written chronicle of a young Virginia Piedmont woman’s daily struggles to protect her plantation home and family in one of the war’s most hotly contested regions. When Hal, her husband, joined the Confederate army shortly after the outbreak of war, Ida assumed responsibility for running Oakley, their sprawling plantation estate in Upperville, Fauquier County and home to over sixty slaves. In addition to managing the labor force, an increasingly difficult task for many middle- and upper-class plantation households given the exigencies of war, Dulany worked hard to provide for and educate her three young children, maintain relationships with her neighbors, and satisfy social obligations.
in the wider community. As Union forces gathered near Oakley, many of the Dulany’s more restless slaves fled. While some remained with the family and others returned shortly after their initial flight, the promise of emancipation and freedom gradually expedited enslaved blacks from across the South to Union army lines, where some found employment or were entered into military service.  
Daniel W. Cobb, a cotton farmer of modest means in Southampton County, also lost his slaves to the Emancipation Proclamation. Cobb was a regular diary keeper, and his writings provide a useful ingress into the often overlooked small farmers, or “plain folk,” of the rural South in the nineteenth century. Kept from 1842 to his death in 1872, Cobb’s writings, like many other male farmer-diarists of antebellum southern society, cover the inclemency of the weather, seasonal rhythms on the farm, and his slave workforce, particularly their health. Conn also provides more intimate comments on his unhappy marriage, his Methodist faith, and the difficulties of maintaining race and class relations in the Cotton Belt. Cobb, who lost his oldest son during the Appomattox campaign, struggled to farm successfully in a postwar world shorn of the system of forced labor upon which the region’s economy had rested. If, even after emancipation, southern agricultural routines remained relatively unchanged, labor relationships and incentives to subsist on the region’s
farms and plantations became decidedly more composite, with the advent of share-cropping and tenant farming. Reflecting these changes to planting and harvesting arrangements and organization, Cobb’s diaries narrate his unhappy transition into the post-emancipation world.¹⁰

Edmund Ruffin, agricultural reformer, states’ rights advocate, militant secessionist, and renowned planter and slave-owner of Prince George County, recoiled at the prospect of Yankee dominion and the transition to free labor, so much so that at war’s end he shot himself through the head. Ruffin’s diary, a comprehensive chronicle, covers Fort Sumter in Charleston Harbor (where Ruffin purportedly fired the first shot of the Civil War), Union campaigns in Virginia, the Emancipation Proclamation, and the enlistment of black soldiers in the Union army. It is a crucially important eye witness account of the South during the Civil War.¹¹

A large number of journals and diaries by Confederate soldiers and civilians in government positions have also captured the drama of advancing Union armies, battles and their aftermaths, occupation, the deprivations of city living and camp life, and gnawing uncertainty of what the following months and years would bring, from the trivial to the consequential, in towns and cities across Virginia. Spanning civilian and military worlds, the diaries written by administrators from behind their
government desks provide valuable insight into the Confederate War Department. Regularly consulted for its assessments on the inner workings of the Confederate government in Richmond, the diary of war clerk John B. Jones, which was published in two volumes in 1866, remains something of a classic, providing a day-to-day record of the South’s war effort as well as judgments on Confederate bureaucrats: the war secretaries he worked under, high-ranking officers, and prominent politicians. Of comparable value on civil affairs in the government offices of the Confederate capital, the irregular diary of devoted Virginian R.G.H. Kean offers discerning analysis on the internal goings-on in the Confederate Bureau of War, of which he was Head, and all manner of Confederate military and political matters which fell under his purview. Kean, like Jones, wrote colorfully -- and, at times, critically -- on some of the Confederacy’s leading actors. General Joseph E. Johnson, commander of Confederate forces in the west, is summarily dismissed as “a very little man, has achieved nothing, full of himself . . . eaten up with morbid jealousy of Lee and of all his superiors in position, rank, and glory.”

Among the scores of soldier-diarists who fought in the Army of Northern Virginia under General Lee, two of the best known are John Dooley and Jedediah Hotchkiss. John Dooley, Confederate Soldier (1945) is an articulate account of campaigns, camps, and confinement. Son of an Irish-born Richmond businessman, Dooley
left his studies at Georgetown College in 1862 and enlisted as a private in the First Virginia Infantry. He saw action at Second Manassas, Antietam, Fredericksburg, and Gettysburg, where he was seriously wounded in both legs. Dooley was subsequently taken prisoner and detained for many months before his release in February 1865.\footnote{14}

An edited version of Hotchkiss’s diary, Make Me a Map of the Valley, appeared in 1973. Born in New York, Hotchkiss moved to Virginia in the late 1840s. He entered into service with the Confederate army shortly after the outbreak of the war and soon, despite any formal training, gained assignment as a topographical engineer, beginning his diary shortly thereafter. In March 1862 Stonewall Jackson, preparing for the Valley Campaign, instructed Hotchkiss to reconnoiter the geography of the Shenandoah Valley from Harpers Ferry to Lexington with a view to producing a detailed and accurate map of the region. Supporting operational planning and strategy in the Virginia theater, Hotchkiss’s maps, carefully drawn with colored pencils to better illustrate the terrain, were an important boon to Jackson’s -- and his successors -- achievements in the field. A significant primary source for those interested in Civil War mapmaking, Hotchkiss’s diary yields import information on topographic and cartographic survey during the Civil War, as well as the military operations he produced maps for and the prominent officers he served under.
After the war, Hotchkiss remained in engineering, working hard to promote his adopted state’s mining and timber resources. He also composed the Virginia volume of *Confederate Military History* (1899), a vast compendium of battles, campaigns, and biographical sketches of officers drawn from the memories of participants and protagonists.¹⁵

After-the-fact reminiscences of the Civil War, whether from soldiers or civilians, trace how memory infiltrates, shapes, and transforms history and how it portrays individual and collective identity. Their economic and social system of slavery in tatters, with the fall of the Confederacy and the onset of Reconstruction, many white southerners struggled to work through the emotional defeat and unnerving political uncertainty that followed. Writing memoirs and reminiscences to reflect upon their own life and times, usually published many years after events described have passed, southerners recorded their wartime memories in first person accounts, embracing both soldier and civilian perspectives. Memorial groups encouraged efforts to preserve and document memories of wartime sacrifice and heroism. The United Daughters of the Confederacy, for one, promoted the “truth” of southern history in schools and universities across the region, even going as far as to amend, edit, or censor “biased” classroom textbooks.

After the Civil War, many of Virginia’s high-ranking
Confederate officers and soldiers, alongside other individuals who had simply experienced the war in the state, committed their personal narratives to print, taking aim at former enemies and, on occasion, each other, as well as mitigating their war record and the justness of the cause. Prominent among them were many of Lee’s Virginia born or raised generals who had served inside Virginia and the eastern theatre, or in the west, over the duration of the war. James Longstreet, Joseph E. Johnson, Jubal A. Early, Sterling Price, Dabney Herndon Maury, Richard S. Ewell, and George E. Pickett all published their memoirs and reminiscences of the war in the decades after Appomattox. Stonewall Jackson and J.E.B. Stuart, dead heroes of the battlefield, were denied the chance to compose their memoirs of life and career, yet did not want for admiring nineteenth-century biographers and essayists keen to exploit their name and fame.

One of the most compelling and critically acclaimed post-Civil War reminiscences by a Confederate officer is Edward Porter Alexander’s *Military Memoirs of a Confederate: A Critical Narrative* (1907), which offers a descriptive account of his Civil War career from First Manassas to Appomattox, latterly as Longstreet’s chief of artillery in the First Corps of the Army of Northern Virginia. An earlier and more personal memoir written and compiled before *Military Memoirs* and intended for family members and friends, was edited by Gary Gallagher and published
in 1989 under its original title Fighting for the Confederacy: The Personal Recollections of General Edward Porter Alexander. Alexander’s narrative is notable for its forthright yet respectful criticism of leading Confederate officers, including Lee and Jackson. Lee’s decision to take on General George McClellan at Antietam was, according to Alexander, his “greatest military blunder.”

Another eminently readable memoir from one of the most famous and celebrated officers in the Confederate army is The Memoirs of Colonel John S. Mosby, published posthumously in 1917. Born in 1833 in Virginia and raised on his parent’s farm in Albemarle County, John Singleton Mosby was educated at the University of Virginia and was a member of the bar at the outbreak of war in 1861. Lukewarm on secession, Mosby nevertheless entered the ranks of the Confederate army as a private with the First Virginia Cavalry. Given his own command, the 43rd Battalion of Virginia Cavalry, Mosby’s partisan unit wreaked havoc on Union supply trains and lines of communication with their daring covert raids into enemy-held territory in the counties of northwest Virginia, providing valuable reconnaissance reports for J.E.B. Stuart, whom he admired greatly, and useful intelligence for Robert E. Lee at Confederate Headquarters. Mosby’s volume of reminiscences, though dubious in places, draws on his writings, newspaper articles, letters to his wife,
Pauline, and official correspondences to capture these exploits
and actions, as well as muse on operational tactics and command
decisions made by the Confederate hierarchy. After the war, the
unorthodox Mosby became a southern scalawag, a sympathetic
Republican, and supporter of President Ulysses S. Grant.  

As wives and daughters of planters, politicians, and
lawyers, elite white southern women’s autobiographical forays
into memoir and reminiscence are especially revealing for the
Civil War period in Virginia, demonstrating how public and
private worlds of privilege and prosperity dovetail in the
historical imagination. Born in Halifax County, Virginia in 1830,
Sara Rice Pryor, whose lawyer husband Roger A. Pryor was a member
of Congress and colonel in the Confederate army, composed two
memoirs at the turn of the twentieth century, *Reminiscences of
Peace and War* (1904) and *My Day: Reminiscences of a Long Life*
(1909). Both delight in memories of happy race relations and a
charming antebellum Virginia upbringing at Cedar Grove and
Shrubbery Hill plantations, as well as high society in
Charlottesville, where her aunt and uncle had a house. Residing
in Washington in 1861 where, prior to the outbreak of
hostilities, she had mixed in social circles with presidents
Fillmore, Pierce, and Buchanan, Sara’s memoirs record the rising
sectional tensions and enmity in the nation’s capital among
politicians and diplomats who looked on with either calm or
fright as news filtered through of South Carolina’s secession from the Union. By 1865, after a spell of wartime nursing in Richmond, Sara relocated to Petersburg and witnessed its fall. After the war, she and her husband settled in New York, where he resumed his career as a lawyer then as a judge. Sara devoted her final years to entertaining, charitable work, and writing.¹⁸

Louise Wigfall Wright, the daughter of influential Texas politician Louis T. Wigfall, gathered together her “sad and happy memories” of the Civil War era in *A Southern Girl in ’61: The War-Time Memories of a Confederate Senator’s Daughter*, which was published in 1905. Including numerous extracts from family letters, Wright’s reminiscences suggest that the war, when viewed through memory’s mirror, was not that bad after all. She remembered struggling to pay attention to lessons in Mrs. Pegram’s school in Richmond when “such ‘beaux soldats’ were marching, with drums beating, and banners flying, by our very doors”; singing and dancing at a Culpepper ball to which “flocked all the Virginia belles of the country side” and the “flower of the chivalry of the Army of Northern Virginia”; and picnics in Charlottesville “that infused a spirit of gaiety to the little town.” Regardless of disheartening news from the battlefield and crippling scarcities of supplies and resources, Wright claimed that “defeat was not contemplated, nor discussed as a possibility.”¹⁹
Constance Cary Harrison, a descendant of Thomas Jefferson and the wife of Burton Norvell Harrison, private secretary to Jefferson Davis during the Civil War, recalled her childhood in Alexandria, Virginia and the war years in Recollections Grave and Gay (1911). Like Pryor’s and Wright’s reminiscences, the distinguishing tone of Harrison’s memoir is one of nostalgia for a world consigned to memory. She describes working alongside her mother as a nurse to wounded Confederate soldiers in Richmond after the Battle of Seven Pines, the destruction of their plantation home, and, with the close of the war, the harrowing wait for news on the whereabouts of her brother, Clarence, a midshipman in the Confederate States Navy.

Two memoirs from nurses who served opposing armies in Virginia provide insight into medical services and hospital experiences during the Civil War. Born into a prominent Jewish family of Charleston, South Carolina, Phoebe Yates Pember recorded her duties as Chief Matron of a division at the Chimborazo military hospital in Richmond, where she remained until the end of the war, in A Southern Woman’s Story (1879). With thousands of patients under her care during the war, Pember narrates a myriad of stories relating to her onerous supervisory responsibilities in the hospital. Amid much opposition from doctors and surgeons who did not yet recognize the importance of women nurses, Pember’s account of courage and nerve and privation
and want in the care of sick and wounded Confederate soldiers, which intermingle in a conversational and anecdotal style, is among the most important sources for the study of the medical history of the Civil War.\textsuperscript{21}

Jane Stuart Woolsey, an experienced wartime nurse and administrator in the North, relocated to Virginia in 1863 to serve as Superintendent of Nurses at the Fairfax Seminary Hospital, a Union medical facility, where she continued to work until August 1865. \textit{Hospital Days} (1868), her memoir of her experiences and responsibilities there, describes the importance of cleanliness, good diet, and strong management on the hospital wards, as well as the letters she and her colleagues wrote for hospitalized soldiers, thus maintaining their mental and emotional equilibrium in often distressing circumstances: a crucial aspect of wartime nursing.\textsuperscript{22}

Medical activities in the beleaguered city of Petersburg are covered by John Herbert Claiborne’s memoir \textit{Seventy-Five Years in Old Virginia} (1904), which provides much of interest about civilian life amid the chaos and confusion of the city’s bombardment and eventual evacuation. During the war, Claiborne, a military surgeon on the medical staff of the Confederate army, was tasked with establishing a hospital in Petersburg to recuperate sick and wounded Confederate soldiers. Displaying an aptitude for Confederate hospital administration, he soon found
himself in charge of all military hospitals in the city. Born to
a wealthy plantation-owning family and raised in “The Red Oak
Neighborhood” of Brunswick County, a locality known for its
“culture, refinement, and hospitality,” Claiborne insisted on the
importance of the Commonwealth to the history of the nation, a
nation “founded on principals enunciated by Virginia statesmen
and established by the prowess of Virginia soldiers.” He
positions Virginians as natural born leaders in society,
politics, and war. 23

Plantation reminiscences, a body of autobiographical
life-writing to which Claiborne’s volume belongs, were an
important Gilded Age and Progressive Era genre. Though little is
known today about the authors of these works, of which many were
Virginians, across the late nineteenth and early twentieth
centuries scores of sentimental volumes were published. In their
celebration of the benevolent paternalism of the antebellum
plantation and gentile Old South civilization, most plantation
reminiscences chart a narrative course through southern history
signposting themes of prewar plenty through wartime privation to
postwar ruin, rarely deviating from formulaic plotlines across
memoirists and publishing houses.

Memorials of a Southern Planter, published in 1887 by Susan
Dabney Smedes as a glowing encomium to her late father, Thomas
Smith Gregory Dabney, may be the most widely known narrative of
the genre. Smedes’s volume details her father’s remarkable lineage, his early years at the family’s ancestral Tidewater estate, Elmington, the family’s relocation to Burleigh, a large cotton plantation in Mississippi, plantation life there during the 1840s and 1850s, along with their trials and tribulations during the Civil War and Reconstruction. Thomas’s life at Elmington was, according to his daughter, “the ideal life of a Virginia gentleman.” The plantation house, “red brick, quaint and old fashioned in design,” was built near the water’s edge. The plantation grew corn, wheat, rye and tobacco; cedar, oak, walnut and pine trees dotted the land. Gloucester County ‘had been settled by the best class of English people” who “brought to their homes in the New World the customs and manners of the Old.” Everybody there “kept open house,” and “entertaining was a matter of course, anything and everything was made the occasion of a dinner-party.”

Memorials of a Southern Planter is, for the most part, authentic, faithful, and devoted though anachronistically sentimental in its portrayal of southern plantation life.

Like many post-Civil War veteran memoirs, the opening pages in most plantation reminiscences, perhaps in recognition of the artifice of the genre, insist on the accuracy and veracity of what follows. H. H. Farmer, born in Lunenburg County, Virginia, in 1825, and educated at Jefferson Medical College, endeavored to present a fair and true account of his life in Virginia before
and During the War (1892). Opposed to secession in 1861, Farmer hoped readers would “form a truer estimate of the state of society and of opinions in the South and especially in Virginia, than usually prevails.” Myrta Lockett Avary’s A Virginia Girl in the Civil War (1903) marks outs and stakes a claim for the ability of memoirs to bring readers “close to the human soul.” By entering the personal world of how “people thought, felt, and lived” in a “vital and formative period in American history,” Avary hoped her volume would capture “what history can never show us” and “what fiction can unfold . . . only in part.” Though Avery lauds the “veracity” of her narrative, she actually uses aliases to hide her identity, and that of her husband, as they travel across the South during wartime.

Plantation reminiscences often establish an ancestry that gives their authors a fresh sense of themselves and a historical understanding of their state. Marion Harland claimed in her autobiography to be a “remote ancestor” of Godfrey of Bouillon, leader of the First Crusade against Jerusalem. Aware of her own proximity to important history, Harland turns to discuss Richmond before the outbreak of hostilities and how the war affected family and friends. Other Virginia memoirists narrated in detail familial pedigrees and legends with a generous joie de vivre, an invitation to a sentimentally heroic viewing of their ancestral traces and a glowing pride in the achievements --
accurate or otherwise -- of distant relations. Sallie Alexander Moore of Lexington, Virginia, traced her ancestry to Scottish earls in Stirling and reckoned she was a descendant of Robert the Bruce. Stories were told, legends weaved, history embroidered.

Many plantation memoirists, often writing for their children and grandchildren and adopting a didactic tone, dwell on memories of their own childhoods in antebellum Virginia. Some, like Andrew J. Andrews’s *A Sketch of Boyhood Days* (1905), Alexander S. Paxton’s, *Memory Days in which the Shenandoah Valley is seen in Retrospection* (1908), and P.A.L. Smith’s *Boyhood Days of Fauquier* (1926), as their titles suggest, are almost entirely given over to recollections of childhood adventures remembered in old age in memories that seem as vivid as yesterday. The aptly titled *The End of an Era* (1899) by John S. Wise, a lieutenant in the Confederate army who spent time in the trenches at Petersburg and fought in the Battle of the Crater, laments the passing of his blissful childhood, “days belonging to a phase of civilization and a manner of life which are as extinct as if they had never existed.”

The nostalgic cast in many plantation reminiscences was enhanced greatly with the repeated use of a “memorialist,” usually the author who wrote in the alleged “voice” of an erstwhile slave in dialect reminiscent of the melodramatic local color stories innovated by writers such as Joel Chandler Harris
and Virginians Thomas Nelson Page and George William Bagby; the
former butler or maid now a “commemorator” for “the lost pieties
and sanctions” of plantation life. Sallie May Dooley’s Dem Good
Ole Times (1906), written as a conversation between a young girl
and her grandfather, a former slave, in the local color dialect
that the author had known as a child on her grandparent’s tobacco
plantation in Lunenburg County, provides a requiem for departed
days. “I ruther live one yur in dem times den five in dese,”
confirmed the old-timer, in a comment that symbolized an unhappy
transition from slavery to freedom.

The veneration shown to devoted and indispensable black
servants, especially “Mammy,” a figure epitomizing the faithful
slave and a powerful political and cultural symbol in
twentieth-century America, particularly in advertising and film,
served to maintain a notion of white privilege and harmonious
race relations while masking hardening social boundaries with the
implementation of racial difference and ideology through Jim
Crow. Even during wartime, when “old Virginia was one great
camping ground, hospital, and battlefield,” the region’s slaves
shunned emancipation and freedom and “remained faithful” to their
erstwhile owners, “manifesting kindness, and in many instances
protecting the white families and plantations during their
masters’ absence,” according to Letitia M. Burwell’s 1895 memoir
A Girl’s Life in Virginia before the War. Given the late
nineteenth-century fascination with Old South plantation life in novels, dramatic plays, minstrel shows, and popular songs, it is hardly surprising that Virginia authors turned sympathetically to the plantation in praise of antebellum southern society.

The written accounts of those soldiers and civilians who experienced the Civil War in Virginia have enduring value. Their diaries and evocative reminiscences, which grew and multiplied in number in the decades following Lee’s surrender at Appomattox, help reveal what life was like for participants in and witnesses to one of history’s great struggles, one that would fundamentally transform the structure of southern and, by extension, American society. The protagonists themselves understood the import of their historical role, however large or small, as evidenced in how they read, recorded, and remembered the great drama into which their lives were cast.


6. Lucy Rebecca Buck, *Sad Earth, Sweet Heaven: The Diary of Lucy Rebecca Buck*, ed. William P. Buck (Birmingham, AL: Cornerstone,
1973), 32.


23. John Herbert Claiborne, *Seventy-Five Years in Old Virginia: With Some Account of the Life of the Author and Some History of the People Amongst Whom His Lot Was Cast* (New York: Neale, 1904),
18, 20.
32. Sallie May Dooley, *Dem Good Ole Times* (New York: Doubleday,
Page, 1906), 119-120.