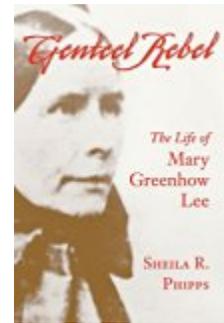


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Shelia R. Phipps. *Genteel Rebel: The Life of Mary Greenhow Lee*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004. xiv + 259 pp. \$21.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8071-2927-2; \$62.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8071-2885-5.

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Mary Lee's Visitable Connexion

In recent months there has been an exciting new wave of scholarship on women in the nineteenth-century South. Jane Turner Censer's compelling portrait of "non-dependent" postwar women, Karen Cox's examination of the United Daughters of the Confederacy, and Sarah Gardner's analysis of southern writers and Civil War memory are three examples of the recent work that has shifted the focus from the household to women's contributions to politics, benevolence, and the paid workforce.[1] *Genteel Rebel: The Life of Mary Greenhow Lee*, by Shelia R. Phipps, adds another dimension to this research by using biography to tell the story of how Mary Greenhow Lee, an elite widow, used "connexion" to frame her support for the Confederacy.

Mary Greenhow Lee was born in Richmond, Virginia, on September 9, 1819, the daughter of Mary Lorraine Charlton Greenhow and Robert Greenhow, a merchant and mayor of the city. Mary grew up in a wealthy southern family that, according to Phipps, bore the hallmarks of the American family of the early national period. Her parents had a marriage based on companionship and affection, her mother embodied the ideal of Republican motherhood, and the size of the family unit was smaller than the typical family had been in the previous century.

Mary spent her childhood in the Greenhows' two-story brick, octagonal home on Capitol Street, where she had views of the governor's mansion and regularly associated with Richmond's elite. Phipps argues that Mary's childhood socialized her in terms of her own *visitable con-*

nexion-visitabile meaning the "contemporary rubric symbolizing qualities that safeguarded gentility," and *connexion* meaning a network of kin and social equals (p. 2).

Mary's visitable connexion provided her with a compass that guided her through every stage of her life. When she visited her brother in Washington in 1837-38, Mary's connexion facilitated her genteel debut into society, where she adopted the elite traditions of visiting, going to balls, and attending parties. When her father died in 1840, she used her inheritance as a way of tying herself to connexion by loaning money. Mary also nurtured connexion through her marriage to Winchester lawyer Hugh Holmes Lee in 1843. The loss of her natal family, a sister-in-law, her mother-in-law, and her husband in the decade before the Civil War only reaffirmed to Mary that connexion—and with it, southern tradition—was deeply embedded in her understanding of self.

Phipps's fascinating exploration of Mary's life in war-torn Winchester, which changed hands numerous times, and the remarkable ways in which Lee negotiated her sense of visitable connexion around the contingencies of war, is a notable strength of *Genteel Rebel*. When Maj. Gen. Nathaniel P. Banks marched victoriously and uncontested into Winchester on March 11, 1862, Lee's outrage at seeing "the Yankee flag waving over the Court House & Hotel" made her turn to the pages of her diary for the first time in years (p. 99).

Drawing upon Lee's journal "of events, not of feelings," and other civilian accounts, Phipps vividly re-

constructs life in wartime Winchester and the development of Mary's "Secesh" identity (p. 101). Unlike Drew Gilpin Faust's Confederate women, whose faltering sense of nationalism led them to put self-interest before self-sacrifice, Mary Lee remained "constant in her belief in southern independence" (p. 100).[2] As Federal soldiers patrolled the streets and raided or occupied southern homes, Lee expanded her framework of visitable connexion as a way to draw a distinction between patriotic Confederates and Yankees—who remained *unvisitable* irrespective of their social status.

Like many southern women, Mary became a domestic patriot. This work encompassed both aid to Confederate soldiers and resistance to the enemy. Phipps notes that Mary realized that she could use her gender and class, and, most importantly, her understanding of connexion, to wage war on the Union army. The ways in which Lee was able to do this were inevitably shaped by her surroundings. In Federally controlled Winchester, Mary refused to play the "helpless female," thereby denying Union soldiers the opportunity of assuming the role of the protective male, "the designation she reserved for patriotic southern men" (p. 177). She resisted all efforts made by Federal soldiers to occupy her home, defiantly reminding them that her abode was not "a hotel, a restaurant, or a tavern" (p. 118).

In Confederate Winchester, Lee expanded her domestic work to accommodate the needs of "her soldiers." She took in sick and wounded men, worked in makeshift hospitals, and assisted in running an underground mail service. For the most part, Lee assumed a coordinating role in relief efforts and approached her "soldier work" as if she were an officer. Phipps also notes that Lee used brief windows of opportunity to claim the advantage over her captors when Winchester was under Union control. When the Union army evacuated Winchester in September 1862, Mary stole a cartload of supplies from abandoned Federal installations.

By refashioning her antebellum frame of reference, Lee successfully created a Confederate framework of resistance that allowed her to push the boundaries of elite femininity while at the same time preserving her understanding of self. Her ability to do so in the tumultuous world of occupied Winchester provides historians with yet another compelling reason why elite southern women were able to resurrect the contours of their old life in the New South.

For Mary Lee, the postwar task of rebuilding took place far away from Winchester and her Market Street home. On February 23, 1865, Major General Philip Sheri-

dan banished Lee from the city on the basis that she and her family had caused Federal troops "constant annoyance" (p. 200). After a brief stay in Richmond, Virginia, Lee made her home in Baltimore, Maryland, where she operated a successful boardinghouse and became secretary of the Baltimore Chapter of the United Daughters of the Confederacy. Her postwar life forced Mary to reassess—and renegotiate—her visitable connexion. During the war, she had used southern loyalty as the primary condition for association. After the war, Lee "transformed that allegiance into conservation of the Old South's traditions" (p. 209). Her work in this endeavor secured her a place at the very center of her own connexion.

Shelia Phipps has compiled an outstanding biography of Lee, all the more commendable because of the limited primary material available. She successfully locates Lee within the historical landscape and reminds us that within the broad historiographical brushstrokes lie the rich and complex stories of individuals. Phipps fails, however, to connect Mary Greenhow Lee's story to that of her famous sister-in-law, Confederate spy Rose O'Neal Greenhow. Perhaps there was insufficient material, but I was intrigued by the parallel between Rose's daring exploits and Mary's risky attempts to steal supplies from retreating Federal troops. Did Mary mention Rose in her diary? And did the familial connection with such a celebrated Confederate alter the ways in which occupying northern troops viewed and interacted with Mary and her family? A little more examination of this particular connexion would have been fascinating indeed. Nevertheless, Shelia Phipps is to be congratulated for producing a wonderful biography of Mary Greenhow Lee that reminds us of the different strategies that women employed to preserve their sense of self in war, defeat, and Reconstruction.

Notes

[1]. Jane Turner Censer, *The Reconstruction of White Southern Womanhood, 1865-1895* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2003); Karen L. Cox, *Dixie's Daughters: The United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Preservation of Confederate Culture* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003); and Sarah E. Gardner, *Blood and Irony: Southern White Women's Narratives of the Civil War, 1861-1937* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

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

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