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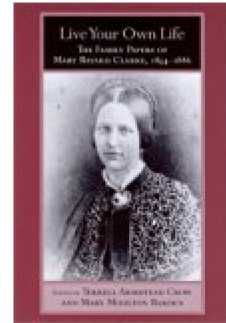
Terrell Armistead Crow, Mary Moulton Barden, eds. *Live Your Own Life: The Family Papers of Mary Bayard Clarke, 1854-1886.* Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2003. lxii + 466 pp. $49.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-57003-473-2.



Reviewed by Jon Wells (Johnson & Wales University)
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The Rediscovery of a Southern Woman Writer

In an age of increasingly limited university travel budgets, historians and literary scholars can be thankful that many volumes of southern women's public and private writings have been published in recent years. The collected writings of little-known but historically significant southern women authors, such as the letters of journalist Sarah Morgan and the novels penned by Augusta Jane Evans, have appeared, ably edited and handsomely presented.[1] *Live Your Own Life* adds significantly to the growing body of works by previously forgotten women authors.

Undoubtedly, the pages of many nineteenth-century southern periodicals, from the prominent *Southern Literary Messenger* to the more obscure *Southern Field and Fireside*, published thousands of ill-conceived poems, unoriginal novels, and historical scraps that offer little to attract the notice of modern scholars. What is more, when women writers did venture into writing substantive essays and editorials, few directly criticized the culture in which they lived. The rare white southern woman who entered the masculine world of political commentary, such as the South Carolinian Louisa McCord, usually did so to defend the region and its institutions, including slavery and women's place in society.[2]

Such criticism of women authors, however, fails to account for the breadth and scope of the dozens of southern women who became novelists, editors, and journalists in the nineteenth century as part of a broader intellectual world that included the North and Europe. Thanks to the scholarship of Michael O'Brien, many lost southern authors have received scholarly attention.[3] Women like North Carolina's Mary Bayard Clarke deserve the notice of modern observers because, although such women seldom attacked gender inequality explicitly, they became important symbols of women's ability to move into the public sphere and transgress traditional gender boundaries.

Mary Bayard Devereux hailed from a wealthy North Carolina planter family that was known for its staunch support of the Whig party and the Union. Her father, Thomas Devereux, was one of the wealthiest landowners and largest slaveowners in the state. Widowed shortly after Mary's birth, he ensured that his daughter received a more substantial education than that offered most women of the period. In particular, Mary learned to write well.

Mary must have possessed a rebellious streak, for in 1848 she married William J. Clarke, a man decidedly different from her father. A veteran of the Mexican War, Clarke was not only loyal to the Democratic party, but also dedicated to pursuing a life in business after growing up in a merchant family. Mary's marriage shaped her literary endeavors, as the couple's itinerancy created ample material for poetry and fiction. She also retained her strong independent streak, often raising the eyebrows of friends and family alike. In fact, she maintained lifelong friendships with many men, which, however innocuous, became the subject of scorn.

Mary and her husband moved to Cuba in 1854, and from this unusual vantage point she wrote numerous essays for the *Southern Literary Messenger.* In her early publications, Clarke used the pen name Tenella, in part to please her father, who did not approve of her literary endeavors. Under this pseudonym she published *Wood-Notes* (1854), a collection of poetry by North Carolinians that also included many of her own poems.

In 1855, the young couple ventured to San Antonio and the years spent there proved to be hard indeed. Mary complained that "we have had everything to discourage us and disgust us, for the living is so expensive that we cannot afford to keep any thing like the table we did at home" (p. 24). She even single-handedly confronted a burglar who had entered the home while William was away. The region provided fodder for the essays she published as a correspondent for the *New York Herald.*

The Civil War brought even greater hardship to the Clarke family. William eagerly joined the Confederate Army and the two became vigorous supporters of secession and the Confederacy. In fact, Mary returned to Raleigh and (like many white southern women) lent her literary talents to the cause, contributing numerous pro-South poems and songs to southern periodicals such as the *Southern Illustrated News.* She had a difficult time finding the energy and materials to write as the war continued, and by 1863 she complained bitterly to editor George Bagby that she was sick of the war and the poetry associated with it.

William was badly injured in 1864 and then captured in Virginia in February 1865. Despite such adversity, Mary maintained her independent streak. She spoke often on friendly terms with soldiers from Union General William T. Sherman's army, and admitted that she very much enjoyed these conversations (p. 179). This rebellious strain became more political after the war, and as Mary continued her work in fiction and poetry she also became increasingly open to women's equality. She even worked as a journalist in Chicago in the 1870s, penning essays that praised women's heightened political awareness.

As a correspondent, Mary Clarke was open and opinionated, always a good combination for researchers. As a writer, she was talented and prolific, but her place among southern authors of the nineteenth century is somewhat limited by her unquestioning approach to her native region. Over the course of her life she grew intellectually; after the war, she more clearly saw injustice in her region and in the nation, particularly with regard to women's rights.

The modern scholar can trace the intellectual evolution of one southern woman through the correspondence included in *Live Your Own Life*, and in the superb editorial work accomplished by Terrell Crow and Mary Barden. With an informative and comprehensive introduction, helpful editorial comments throughout, and a useful index, Crow and Barden have made available to scholars a rich collection of letters and papers by a North Carolina woman who deserves more attention than her region has yet provided.

Notes

[1]. Giselle Roberts, ed., *The Correspondence of Sarah Morgan and Francis Warrington Dawson, with Selected Editorials Written by Sarah Morgan for the Charleston News and Courier* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004); Augusta Jane Evans, *Beulah*, edited by Elizabeth Fox-Genovese (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992), and *Macaria, or, Altars of Sacrifice*, edited by Drew Gilpin Faust (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992).

[2]. Richard Lounsbury, ed., *Louisa S. McCord: Poems, Drama, Biography, Letters* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1996), and *Louisa S. McCord: Political and Social Essays* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1995); Leigh Fought, *Southern Womanhood and Slavery: A Biography of Louisa S. McCord, 1810-1879* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2003).

[3]. Michael O' Brien, *Conjectures of Order: Intellectual Life and the American South, 1810-1860* (University of North Carolina Press, 2004), pp. 17-18.

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