

# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences



Tracy J. Revels. *Grander in Her Daughters: Florida's Women during the Civil War*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2004. xvi + 205 pp. \$29.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-57003-559-3.

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Published on H-Florida (December, 2005)

Between 1861 and 1865, more than fifteen thousand of Florida's sons, brothers, and fathers enlisted to fight for the Confederacy. As these citizen soldiers departed for camps scattered across the state, or the distant fronts of Tennessee and Virginia, their mothers, sisters, and wives remained at home. While for the past twenty years, the travail of Florida's soldiers in the field has been recorded, their women, who faced incredible loneliness and numerous hardships, have been generally neglected. As Tracy J. Revels writes, when historians have recognized women, they usually point to Susan Bradford Eppes, who, even though an affluent Leon County teenager during the war, has become "the female incarnation of Florida" through her memoir (p. xii).

In her work *Grander in Her Daughters*, Tracy J. Revels endeavors, through letters, diaries, and memoirs, to recount the wartime experiences of Florida women. Promising to introduce the reader to a wide segment of Florida's population, Revels examines the roles played by plantation mistresses, the wives of small farmers, slaves, and free blacks. Her profiles include not only Susan Bradford Eppes, but also Ellen Call Long, Octavia Stephens, several Unionists, and Frances Kirby Smith, the adamantly, rebellious mother of General Edmund Kirby Smith.

In 1860, there were 67,016 females in the relatively young state of Florida. This number included 36,619 whites and 30,397 slaves. Florida's white females were dispersed across a wide social spectrum, while the slaves were engaged in both agricultural and domestic positions. In spite of their differences, Revels asserts that, in the frontier-like existence of Florida, these women's lives had several commonalities. "Whether the woman was the mistress of a plantation, the wife of a yeoman farmer, or the property of a master, her life was defined by toil" (p. 3). Further, each woman possessed a love for the family which helped the Florida women persist during the conflict. The drive to protect their families and ability to work combined to create resilience as the war

caused scarcity and adversities.

The women of Florida, like those across the Confederacy, did much for the troops while supplies existed. Uniforms, shirts, and other items of clothing were produced for the soldiers, not only individually, but also through organized sewing societies. Packages were arranged for the troops and funds were raised to purchase medicine. When shortages became common during the war, both in material goods and tender, Florida women became adept at improvising for themselves, all the while attempting to support the soldiers in the field. The women substituted traditional remedies in the place of manufactured medicine and palmettos were woven to create bonnets. These strong family ties worked against the Confederacy as well, as women yearned for their men to return and often suggested desertion in their letters.

As in other areas of the Confederacy that were occupied by Union forces, the relationship between the civilians and their enemies produced an odd dynamic. In some cases this gave women of Florida's coastal towns an opportunity to defy their foes openly. As Revels notes, "Gen. Edmund Kirby Smith worried that his mother's acerbic tongue would cause her trouble and begged her to keep quiet" (p. 115).

By 1865 the women of Florida, once filled with fervor for the war and the Confederacy, prepared themselves for defeat. Major Confederate resistance east of the Mississippi had collapsed by May 1, and during the second week of that month a Federal cavalry column reasserted Union authority over Tallahassee. The Florida women entered a postwar world that was void of loved ones; family were dead on the field of battle and their slaves became free. The author argues that because of the women's close attachments to family, there was no time to mourn the past. Instead, "there were lives to be resumed, fortunes to be rebuilt, wounded kinsmen to be succored" (p. 146).

Revels writes in a flowing narrative that captures the reader's attention for the entirety of the work. She informs the reader with anecdote after anecdote, and ex-

ample following example, of the daily lives and activities of the women. There is however, little analysis across the narrative. Further, some comparison to women in other Confederate states may have been useful. The book is also weak in the chapter regarding slaves and free blacks within the state. While it cannot be helped that sources for this subject within the state are scarce, the fact that the reader receives an outside view of this topic, often from white owners and northern observers, takes away from the effectiveness.

In her research for *Grander in Her Daughters*, Revels has produced a superior bibliography of primary sources

indicating careful research in the major archives of the state. The few newspapers published in the state during the war, which remain available to researchers, are also well utilized in this work. The reader familiar with Civil War Florida and the conflict in general will discover a rich reading list in her secondary sources. Another feature the author includes in her book is a historiographic essay denoting the most useful works which focus on both Southern women in the Civil War and Civil War Florida. Overall, because *Grander in Her Daughters* is the first work to shed light on the women of Florida during the war, this book deserves a place on the bookshelves of those interested in Florida and Civil War history.

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**Citation:** Jonathan C. Sheppard. Review of Revels, Tracy J., *Grander in Her Daughters: Florida's Women during the Civil War*. H-Florida, H-Net Reviews. December, 2005.

**URL:** <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=10987>

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