

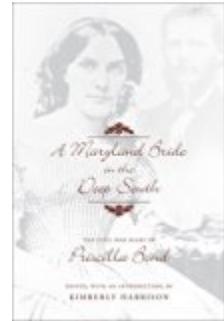
H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Priscilla Bond. *A Maryland Bride in the Deep South: The Civil War Diary of Priscilla Bond.* Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006. xvi + 384 pp. \$45.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8071-3143-5.

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Worse than Heathens: A Maryland Bride Copes with Loneliness, Illness, and the Civil War in South Louisiana

“The people here are scarcely civilized,” proclaimed Priscilla “Mittie” Munnikhuysen Bond in her diary on January 23, 1864 (p. 273). She had traveled with her husband from her home outside of Baltimore, Maryland, to south Louisiana shortly after their marriage on January 15, 1861. Leaving behind the warmth and support of a loving, extended family and community, she found herself living on the Bond family sugar plantation, Crescent Place, near Houma, Louisiana, in Terrebonne Parish.

Compared to the familiar mid-Atlantic region, south Louisiana seemed to Mittie Bond like a frontier, where slaves outnumbered whites, literacy was far from universal, men often carried guns, drunkenness was common, and Roman Catholicism was the dominant religion. Bond, an evangelical Christian who belonged to the Methodist Protestant Church, was baffled and disturbed, albeit intrigued, by the elaborate rituals of the Catholic Church. Adding to her discomfort were homesickness, the tuberculosis that had plagued her for years, and the material and emotional deprivations of the Civil War. Her husband joined the fighting, her father-in-law departed for Texas, and the Yankees burned the plantation house. Bond, along with her mother-in-law and sister-in-law, took refuge in Abbeville, where they fended for themselves for the duration of the war.

Mittie Bond recorded her activities and thoughts in two diary volumes, which cover the years 1858 to 1865. The tone and substance of the Maryland diary entries dif-

fer substantially from those written after Bond moved to Louisiana. A pretty nineteen-year-old girl from a devout and respected family, Mittie before her marriage enjoyed a life filled with social interactions. She paid or accepted visits from family and friends, enjoyed religious services and horseback rides, and read avidly from religious texts and popular novels. She pined for Howard Bond, her fiancé, who had returned to Louisiana, but experienced considerable anxiety over her fitness as a wife and the challenges that would face her if she married him and moved away from everyone she knew and loved.

Chronic illness added to Bond’s distress: frequent diary entries refer to her consumption; while the symptoms ebbed and flowed, the disease often confined her to bed. She held herself to impossibly high standards of stoicism, spirituality, family devotion, patience, and humility. The self-recriminations that followed her lapses from perfection become tiresome to the contemporary reader but are a vivid reminder of the idealized vision of the southern belle. “Oh! How weak and sinful I am. There is no good thing in me,” she wrote despairingly after having indulged in some thoughts she considered sinful (pp. 99-100).

From Bond’s diary, readers can glean considerable insight into social interactions, gender relations, courtship and marriage customs, medical practices, race relations, reading habits, and religious beliefs and practices. Only occasionally do hints of the country’s increasing turmoil

creep in, as when Bond mentions John Brown's raid on Harpers Ferry (p. 128) and when she expresses hope that the national discord will not result in a war (p. 133). Many entries reflect her ambivalence over her engagement to Howard Bond. Despite these misgivings, Mittie and Howard were married in January 1861.

After spending a few days in Baltimore, the newlyweds traveled to Louisiana by train. Bond recorded the trip in a series of very interesting entries, describing the hotels in which the couple stayed en route and the people and sights that caught her eye. After the Bonds had settled down to life at Crescent Place, Mittie began to treat new subjects in her diary, and its tone changed. In August of 1861, for example, she wrote with horror, "O, how my ears have been stressed today by the cry of the distressed! How bestial it is to whip the negro so severely.... It is indeed hard to bear to be compelled to stay where such is carried out daily" (p. 204).

The declaration of war in 1861 interrupted her life-line: the flow of mail to and from her Maryland kin. Howard was implicated in an ambush of Union soldiers during which two were killed. The Federal troops burned the Bonds' plantation buildings, including the main house, in retaliation, but Howard managed to escape and join the Confederate forces. Mittie's father-in-law, Joshua Bond, left for Texas. Political and military developments naturally become of considerable interest in the diary. The entries during this period record both historical events and the rumors that were so frequent. On January 1, 1864, Mittie wrote, "Got a New Orleans paper: old *Lincoln* got the Small Pox" (p. 267). Concerns about the increasing difficulty of obtaining and paying for food, clothing, and medicine become a constant refrain. Many entries report deaths resulting from the fighting, murder, disease, accidents, and childbirth.

Although the text of the diary is available on microfilm as part of the *Southern Women and Their Families in the Nineteenth Century: Papers and Diaries* series, this published edition is a significant contribution.[1] Editor Kimberly Harrison, associate professor of English and director of the undergraduate writing program at Florida International University, has taken a rich piece of writing and enhanced it with her outstanding scholarship. Maps of the areas in which Bond lived in Maryland and Louisiana, charts of the Munnikhuysen and Bond families, and annotated lists of frequently mentioned people

and places elucidate the text. A lengthy introduction reflecting painstaking research contextualizes the principal themes on both personal and historical levels: courtship and marriage, the war's impact on female roles, religion, slavery, intimate relationships, medicine, the fighting in south Louisiana, and literacy.

To lend the volume clarity and structure, Harrison divided the text into sections based on date ranges. Footnotes throughout the text clarify or elaborate on references to military actions, individuals, medical treatments, and other issues. The extensive bibliography facilitates further research. A series of letters included as an appendix fleshes out the diaries, especially for the periods during which Bond did not write entries. The postscript answers the reader's most burning questions, such as, "Did Mittie ever make it home to Maryland?" and "Did she survive her worsening consumption?"

Kimberly Harrison is clearly sensitive to the difference between reading a diary's transcription and handling an actual volume from the nineteenth century. With an original, the quality and condition of the paper and binding, the handwriting, the color of the ink or pencil marks, and any marginalia provide clues about the author's affluence, education, and emotional state. Harrison tries to give readers a sense of the original document by noting underlining, mentioning corrections, and describing the size of the handwriting when it varies from the norm.

A Maryland Bride in the Deep South is a valuable addition to the scholarship on women in the Civil War. Mittie Bond was an educated, perceptive, and articulate outsider in wartime Louisiana and a credible witness to the war's horrors and deprivations. The intimate personal detail of her diaries adds considerably to our knowledge of elite white women's daily lives in antebellum Maryland and wartime Louisiana. This volume will be useful to a range of researchers, from secondary school students through senior scholars.

Note

[1]. Anne Firor Scott, consulting editor, *Southern Women and Their Families in the Nineteenth Century: Papers and Diaries*, Series E, *Holdings of the Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections*, Louisiana State University Libraries (Bethesda, MD: University Publications of America, 1997).

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