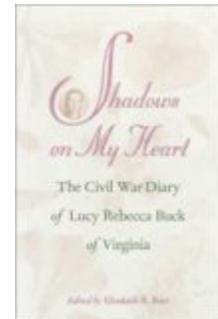


H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Elizabeth R. Baer, ed. *Shadows on My Heart: The Civil War Diary of Lucy Rebecca Buck of Virginia*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1997. xxxviii + 355 pp. \$50.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8203-1852-3.

Reviewed by Leah Berkowitz (Dearborn, Michigan)
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Like many other southern young women, Lucy Rebecca Buck of Front Royal, Virginia, recorded the events that occurred in her neighborhood from 1861-1865 in meticulous detail. Front Royal was located in a strategic area of the Shenandoah Valley, and control of the town changed frequently throughout the war, so young Lucy had a “front-row seat” for the action. Belle Boyd, the famous Confederate spy, was her neighbor, and Robert E. Lee ate in her dining room.

In spite of the hotly contested actions going on literally in her front yard, Lucy and her family emerged from the war virtually unscathed. Daily routines continued as normal throughout the war, with Lucy starting each day’s entry with a description of the weather that day. The most significant change in the family’s routine occurred in the middle of 1863, when the household slaves packed up and left during the night, and Lucy and her sisters suddenly had to deal with household chores for the first time. Faithful servants from neighboring households came to help them through this ordeal. Other than that, however, the Buck family did not appear to suffer from the fortunes of war. Thus, we learn the titles of all the popular novels Lucy read during the period and all the parlor games the young people played for an evening’s entertainment. Sometimes the guests in the family parlor wore the blue—on those occasions Lucy sulked in her room.

Shadows on My Heart is the third version of Lucy Buck’s diary to appear in print. Editor Elizabeth J. Baer wisely chose not to try fitting this diary into the “big picture” of history, but rather to focus on the microcosm of day-to-day existence. However, Baer’s thesis—that the war significantly impacted Lucy’s concept of herself and caused her to question women’s place in society—is simply not borne out by reading Lucy’s journal. Lucy is certainly a very bright and articulate young woman, and there is little evidence to suggest that the opinions she expresses throughout her journal came about as a result of the war around her and were not her own thoughts from the very beginning.

Shadows on My Heart is of some limited value for scholars particularly interested in the impact of the Civil War in Front Royal, Virginia. But as a study of how the war caused southern women to reevaluate their self-image, Lucy Buck’s journal is far less dramatic than Mary Chesnut’s, Sarah Morgan Dawson’s, or the overlooked Belle Edmondson. Conclusion: it is hard to understand why this rather tedious journal has been published three times.

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