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Sallie McNeill. *The Uncompromising Diary of Sallie McNeill, 1858-1867.* Edited by Ginny McNeill Raska and Mary Lynne Gasaway Hill. College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2009. xvi + 195 pp. $32.50 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-60344-087-5.

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A Tale of Dependence before and after the Civil War

Historians of the Civil War and Reconstruction will find *The Uncompromising Diary of Sallie McNeill, 1858-1867* tantalizing but limited in its treatment of the war and its effects on plantation society in Texas. Vivid in its descriptions of secession, the early war, and the immediate postwar years, the diary contains few entries for the 1863-65 period. Young Sallie McNeill's account is most useful for its recreation of the ennui that sometimes characterized the privileged lives of young, unmarried women within the nineteenth-century domestic patriarchy that spanned the antebellum and postbellum years. Similar in its intensely personal nature, and its often despairing tone, to the wartime letters of Texas plantation mistress Lizzie Neblett (*A Rebel Wife in Texas: The Diary and Letters of Elizabeth Scott Neblett, 1852-1864*, edited by Erika L. Murr [2001]), Sallie's chronicle as a single woman without responsibilities recounts a strikingly different wartime experience and imparts a sense of continuity rather than change.

The eldest of seven children, Sarah "Sallie" McNeill (1840-67) was the daughter of Emily Jordan and James McNeill. She spent her early years on the adjoining plantations of her parents and maternal grandparents along the Louisiana-Arkansas border before both families moved to the fertile bottomlands of Brazoria County, Texas, in 1848. Sallie's father died in 1854, and her grandfather, Levi Jordan, was unquestionably the head of the household for the rest of Sallie's life. By 1860, Jordan had become one of the wealthiest planters in Texas, owning 134 slaves who engaged primarily in sugar and cotton production. He continued aggressively purchasing land and slaves at least late into the first year of the war.

Sallie's manuscript diary, which is contained within seven booklets, was transcribed by her great-grandniece, Ginny McNeill Raska, a librarian. Raska and Mary Lynne Gasaway Hill edited the diary for publication; Hill had used Sallie's diary extensively in her master's thesis and participated in archaeological digs at the Jordan plantation. In their preface, the editors carefully explain their editorial method and describe the condition of Sallie's original record, which survived several natural disasters stored in a lard can.

In the introduction, Raska and Hill provide contextual details about the history of the Jordan-McNeill family, the settlement of Texas, and the early years of Baylor University (which Sallie attended), which was originally located in Independence. The editors highlight three qualities of Sallie's life that set her apart from her contemporaries. First, she wrote her diary simply for herself and did not betray any intention of sharing it with others. Second, she received an education in a state where educational opportunities were extremely limited, especially for women. Third, and most significantly in the view of the editors, she chose not to marry. Sallie made this choice not because the Civil War killed so many young men but because she refused to marry unless she fell in love.

The editors perhaps overemphasize Sallie's decision about marriage, for in the diary she does not rule out marriage completely, she simply states that she will not marry anyone whom she does not love and respect. She had her ideals and planned to stick to them regardless of external pressure. This quality of Sallie's personality no doubt inspired the description of her diary as "uncompromising" in the title of the book. Raska and Hill make the very good point that Sallie would not have been able to uphold her decision about the importance of love to marriage had her grandfather refused to continue to support her and insisted that she marry. The editors might profitably have analyzed more deeply Sallie's relationship with her grandfather and the challenges she experienced living in a three-generation household; Sallie's di-

ary entries in which she chafes under her grandfather's rule (especially his tight control over family spending) and bemoans her mother's inability to stand up to him are some of the most interesting.

The introduction is followed by a useful section, strangely not placed in an appendix, that includes a genealogical chart, details about neighboring plantation families, and identification of some of Sallie's Baylor connections. A helpful map of eastern Texas is included, although the inset of Brazoria County showing the Jordan plantation and its neighbors is somewhat difficult to read.

The editors present the manuscript diary in four sections: Sallie's last year at Baylor in 1858, her years on the plantation from 1859 to 1860, her reactions to secession and the Civil War from 1860 to 1865, and her experiences from 1865 to 1867. While studying at Baylor, Sallie formed close friendships and underwent a conversion experience during a revival a few months before she graduated from the Female Department. She received permission from home to be baptized into the Independence Baptist Church.

Returning to the plantation, Sallie took charge of the education of her younger siblings, an endeavor that she found frustrating and unfulfilling. Her entry as she began this role is characteristic of this section of the diary: "How little good have I done in the world.... Kept at school all my life, and treated as a child, with nothing but books to employ my thoughts, it is not strange that I should be indolent and idle" (p. 43). Despite her teaching duties, Sallie regularly lamented her ability to fulfill the Christian ideal of a useful life and described herself as "indolent" far more often than she accused the family's slaves of this shortcoming.

Slavery is at the forefront of Sallie's discussion of secession late in 1860. Distressed by the possibility of civil war, Sallie placed slavery at the crux of the disagreement between North and South: "It is terrible the thought of fighting against one's own, for we are one people. I earnestly hope the North, will not as a body, hold to Black Republican principles. Southerners will not allow interference with their peculiar institutions!" (pp. 89-90). Like most of her contemporaries, she asserted that slaves were content and blacks inferior as a race. Sallie did concede that Texas's legal system needed to be improved to protect slaves from cruel owners, and she later expressed deep reservations about the institution in general, admitting that she "sometimes felt like crying out against slavery" (p. 113).

At the time of Abraham Lincoln's inauguration in March 1861, Sallie still held out hope for a peaceful solution, claiming, "there is no use in war" (pp. 97-98). Decidedly unromantic about war, she continued to express reservations about the potential effects of a bloody conflict, stating in April that "a heavy responsibilitie rests on the authors of this civil war!" and praying in May that "one battle will be decisive" (p. 102). While Sallie and her oldest sister pledged to wear mourning until the local men who had enlisted returned safely, she surprisingly did not record in her diary doing any sewing on behalf of the soldiers, although she did make one reference to some "things" she had gathered for them (p. 114). Unlike other elite Southern women of the period, she apparently did not find in the war a welcome opportunity to become more industrious and contribute to a larger cause. As Raska and Hill point out, the wartime section of the diary depicts a significant degree of continuity within the everyday life of the plantation, which was broken most distressingly during the first year of the war by the deaths of Sallie's two youngest sisters within six months of each other.

As the war progressed, Sallie became firmer in her support for the Confederate cause but still lamented in September 1862 "this terrible strife among a people, who should be friends" (p. 118). She recorded in her diary the illness and death that befell soldiers she knew, described the fall and recapture of Galveston in 1862-63, and provided details about the local fighting that took place at the Cedar Lake Salt Works in December 1862. Want of paper apparently limited her journaling during the later years of the war.

When Sallie resumed her diary in November 1865, she described her despair and resignation following the Confederacy's defeat. Like many others, she placed her faith in God. Raska and Hill emphasize the hardening of Sallie's attitude toward former slaves on the plantation, and while this is certainly apparent in her complaints about freed workers and her concerns over the instability of the free labor system, she did not express as harsh condemnations of African Americans as some white women did after the war. In 1867, Sallie taught her youngest brother and an orphan adopted informally by her mother, but in general, she continued to live in a state of profound lassitude. She recorded an intriguing comment about her "peculiar views of women's organizations" but did not expound further (p. 144).

Sallie's diary ends one month before her death of unknown causes in October 1867. The final days that she recorded poignantly epitomized the dependence and isolation that she experienced throughout her adult life.

Stranded at the seashore with her sister's family and a few servants and bereft of provisions as her male relatives tended to matters at the plantation, Sallie longed to go home but defiantly refused to ask to be sent for. In her view, she was at the mercy of the men in her family, just as Texas and the other former Confederate states had to accept the clemency of the North.

The epilogue to Sallie's diary is fascinating. The editors outline the family's subsequent history, which included legal battles among Sallie's siblings' descendents over the Jordan land. Ironically, the family came together in the late 1980s to learn about the important archaeological findings related to the lives of the enslaved workers, and later tenants, on the plantation. This work, begun by Kenneth Brown of the University of Houston, brought to light a treasure trove of artifacts related to African Americans from 1848 until the end of the nineteenth century. The former slave quarters were apparently suddenly abandoned in about 1891, leaving behind a remarkably intact legacy. Descendants of both planters and slaves formed an extraordinary biracial historical society, and the Levi Jordan Plantation is now a Texas state historic site. Combining information from *The Uncompromising Diary of Sallie McNeill* and the archaeological dig will give interpreters a captivating story to tell.

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