CAROLINE HOWARD GILMAN AND CONFEDERATE REFUGEE LIFE IN GREENVILLE

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Within the borders of the southern Confederacy even before the fighting had begun in the spring of 1861 a new social class had been created -- the refugee. And before the surrender of the Confederate armies four years later tens of thousands of persons had been uprooted from their homes and had become wanderers on the face of the earth. Most of those who refugeed were the poorer, uneducated people, but a larger percentage of the upper class fled because they had more to lose from the invading armies. The refugees were generally women and children and elderly and infirm men.[1] Across the Confederacy there were towns that were attractive and accessible to the refugees, so that gradually refugee centers grew all over the South away from the scenes of the fighting. In the South Carolina Piedmont numerous resort communities and towns attracted refugees. Among these were Limestone Springs, Spartanburg, and Greenville.[2]

Greenville had grown up in the post-revolutionary era as a trading center for nearby farmers as well as a droving town. But beginning about 1820 low country planters, looking for a healthy and cooler climate for their families in the summers, began to converge on the village of Greenville Court House. In the 1830's cotton yarn mills began to appear in the surrounding countryside. By 1850 the population had grown to 1,305, and in the following decade new developments quickened the life of the town. There were a corps of artisans, a carriage factory and a flour mill. In 1853 the Greenville and Columbia Railroad reached the "Mountain City," bringing more summer visitors and enlarging the imported culture of the low country. Furman University, the Greenville Female College, and the Southern

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[1]The standard study of Confederate refugees is Mary Elizabeth Massey, *Refugee Life in the Confederacy* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1964). This account is based on pp. 4-9, 28-29.

[2]Massey, *Refugee Life*, pp. 75, 82, 38.

Baptist Theological Seminary brought a new dimension to the frontier town.[3]

As the Federal armies threatened the South Carolina coast south of Charleston in late 1861 and eventually Charleston itself, low country residents who were accustomed to travel to Greenville in the summers began to think of the summer resort town as a safe haven from the war. Not only did they come and bring servants with them, but they brought car loads of furniture and silver plate, wine, and whatever could be moved to store it until the war was over. By late 1864, Cornelius Burckmyer wrote to his wife:

> The town is full of refugees from Charleston. Tom Smith's family, Arthur Huger (who married Miss King), Gadsden King, Julius Smith, Robert Chisolm (Lynch Bachman's husband), Dr. Whitridge. Sam Black and all the Axsons, Mrs. Gilman with her daughters, Mrs. Frank Porcher and Mrs. Jervey, Mrs. Dr. Porcher (the Dr. died a year or two ago) with her mother and sister, and some others, whom I do not now remember. These fill the place pretty full and there is not much room to spare.[4]

Certainly the most widely-known member of the refugee community from Charleston was Mrs. Caroline Howard Gilman. she was born October 8, 1794, in Boston, Massachusetts, near Old North Church, the youngest child of Samuel Howard, a shipwright, and Anna Lillie Howard, a member of a distinguished New England family. Though her father died when she was three, young Caroline grew up listening to stories of her father's participation as one of the "Indians" in the Boston Tea Party. Her father's death precipitated a number of family moves to Concord, Dedham, Watertown, and finally Cambridge. After her mother's death in 1804 she lived with a sister. At ten she began to write poetry, eventually becoming a professional writer. At sixteen she met Samuel Gilman, a recent graduate of Harvard College. He became a student at the Harvard Divinity School, and in 1819 they were married. Gilman was called to assume the pastorate of the Second Independent

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[3]Alben Neely Sanders, "Greenville and the Southern Tradition," pp. 134, 136, and Laura Smith Clough, "A Social History," p. 16, both in Alfred Sandlin Reid, ed., *The Arts in Greenville, 1800-1960, Furman Studies*, November 1960.

[4]Charlotte R. Holmes, ed., *The Burckmyer Letters, March, 1863-June 1865* (Columbia: The State Co., 1926), p. 446.

Church in Charleston, which had just embraced Unitarianism. She was to live in South Carolina for the next sixty-three years.[5]

In Charleston Caroline Gilman's seven children were born, and there she began to write more profusely. As sectionalism drove North and South apart, Mrs. Gilman was caught between loyalty to her native New England and her adopted home. Her two older daughters had married and lived in Charleston, while the two younger had married New Englanders and were living in Massachusetts. She affirmed that the true bonds of union existed within the family, not political institutions, and the moral center of the home was its women and children. In 1832 she began to publish the *Rose-Bud*, or *Youth's Gazette*, one of the earliest American children's magazines; in 1834 it became the *Southern Rose*. Later she published a series of novels, romances, short stories, and verses. Samuel Gilman was also writing. His most famous work, "Fair Harvard," was composed for the school's bicentennial in 1836. Gilman died in 1858, and his wife stayed in Charleston until 1862. She maintained her sympathies for both North and South until South Carolina seceded. Once war came, she committed herself to the Southern cause. "It seems hard to think," she wrote at the end of 1860, "that we are on the eve of a revolution . . . . But what a current is rushing in on the souls of men, not only representative men like Phillips, Cushing, and Yancy, but in all who are capable of reflection. It seems to me no time for vituperation and passion. Our destiny whatever it is has a muffled tread, but it is solemn and fixed. Sarcasm and ridicule pause. Well, dear Annie, whatever others may say and do, you and I will agree to differ and love. We may both be called recreant to our birth place, but we are both honest."[6]

For months Mrs. Gilman's life was like that of many other women in Charleston. There was apprehension over the struggle surrounding Fort Sumter. She spent hours in making clothing

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[5]Sketches of Mrs. Gilman have appeared in Allen Johnson and Dumas Malone, eds., *Dictionary of American Biography* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1935), 7:298-99; Edward T. James, ed., *Notable American Women* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1971), 2:37-39; and Mary Scott Saint-Amand, *A Balcony in Charleston* (Richmond: Garrett and Massie, 1941), pp. 1-7.

[6]Caroline Gilman to ?, n.d., Caroline Gilman Papers, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, S. C. (Cited hereafter as SCHS).

for the soldiers. When the fighting began, her anxiety increased. In the fall of 1861 the Union invasion of the South Carolina sea islands began, and an army of Confederate refugees took to the roads. In December a fire devastated much of Charleston. In February 1862, she reported to her children: "Generally speaking the sufferers have borne their losses nobly, and already the spirit of improvement is abroad. The most affecting cases are those, where individuals had to flee to the City, losing their all at the Islands, and were burnt out here at the houses of friends." Charleston Harbor was blockaded by a Union fleet, and the city was bombarded periodically from outlying batteries. "My Orange Street house was struck by a shell," she reported,"through the pantry, which entered the cellar without exploding. It is no child's play here."[7]

Even before the firing on Fort Sumter Mrs. Gilman and her daughters, Mrs. Francis Porcher and Mrs. Lewis Jervey, had planned to leave Charleston. "If Charleston is in real danger," she had written, "we shall go to Greenville, where we have a house engaged." Sometime in March 1862, within a month after the shell hit her home, Mrs. Gilman with her daughters and several grandchildren arrived in Greenville. The rented house was ample and comfortable. Mrs. Gilman commented that her bedroom was "lovely . . . all curtained and carpeted, with the clearest glass you ever saw made from rosin."[8] She found that the ladies of Greenville had already organized to assist the Confederate cause. On July 19, 1861, a group under the leadership of Mrs. Perry Duncan, met at the Female College and organized the Greenville Ladies Association in Aid of the Volunteers of the Confederate Army. Like similar groups all over the South, they proposed "firstly, to relieve the sick and wounded among the soldiers, by forwarding to them linen, underclothing, cordials, bed ticks, socks, etc., secondly, to make winter clothing for the Volunteers in the Confederate Army." By June 1862, the number of refugees had grown to the point where the Ladies Association specifically opened their ranks to "the strangers in Greenville." At a special meeting on June 8, the minutes noted

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[7]Caroline Gilman to children, February 1, 1862, SCHS.

[8]Ibid., March 12, 1862, in "Letters of A Confederate Mother: Charleston in the Sixties," *Atlantic Monthly*, 137 (April 1926): 505; Caroline Gilman to children, October 31, 1865, SCHS.

that Mrs. Gilman "joined the association." Soon she was chairing a "Committee on soliciting strangers." And a week later she "handed over to the shopping committee" her collection of $131.50. Later in the summer of 1862 she served on the Depot Committee to "go daily and carry provisions and clothing to the railroad" for soldiers who were traveling by rail. When the Association voted in August to establish a Soldiers' Rest to care for soldiers, especially the wounded, often stranded in Greenville, Mrs. Gilman helped solicit contributions, was on the "Committee for plastering and white-washing," and contributed "1 rug and piece of carpet" from the belongings she had brought from Charleston. Eventually, in January 1863, she was elected a Directress of the Association.[9]

Her days were filled with relief work. In a letter of March 27, 1863, Mrs. Gilman wrote to her children in the North that "one of the surgeons on the coast" had called "for flags and rosettes for his department, the flags to be nailed to fences and trees from a battle field to a hospital to designate the road, and the rosettes to be attached to the arms of those who are to carry the wounded. I volunteered at the Directors meeting to have twenty flags made, and [daughter] Lou gave the material. All that were required were completed and sent seaward in thirty-six hours." In case of the expected attack on Charleston "the Confederate authorities also called on us to have a hundred sheets made for a receiving hospital in Greenville for convalescent soldiers in case nearer ones should be wanted after a fight. In a week the ladies had everything ready."[10]

But all was not work in Confederate Greenville. Mrs. Gilman found time for reading, though what she read was not always to her liking. "I have just concluded Macaulay's England," she wrote to her children, "and detest History more than ever, although from my present standpoint it is more interesting than formerly. I detest it, because it is founded in crime and wrong." She could not read or write in isolation, however:

> I have been somewhat interrupted in the foregoing criticism by the children who are playing the impromptu game of Pig, which

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[9]James Welch Patton, ed., *Minutes of the Proceedings of the Greenville Ladies' Association in Aid of the Volunteers of the Confederate Army. Historical Papers of the Trinity College Historical Society.* Series XXI (Durham: Duke University Press, 1937), pp. 15, 36, 38-40, 42-45.

[10]Saint-Amaud, *Balcony*, p. 125.

> by the way, is suited to the times, bacon being in demand . . . Wilmot, the pig, who is about as thick as he is long, runs away from his owner (who wants to cut him up for bacon). Over Reedy River and several imaginary bridges, he is pursued. At length being "fat and scant of breath" he falls, upon which John (played by Louly) and Bob (Francis Younge) seize him stretch him out on the carpet and kill him with a mythical carving knife. After proper struggles he is ordered to be still, "because he is dead." This he performs admirably. He is then put in a tub of scalding water, then cut up in pieces, salted, and pickled and put in a barrel for family use, and as a finale, a string of sausages (oh that they were real!) presented to me."

The Gilmans, likewise, had time for socializing. In a letter of August 21, 1863, she tells of a visit she and her daughter, Caroline Jervey, made to repay a call from Waddy Thompson, former Congressman, Federal District solicitor, and minister to Mexico from 1842 to 1844. "Caroline and I went to Paris Mountain," she wrote, "to return a visit from General Waddy Thompson, who lives, isolated, on its summit." She marveled at the house: "His house is very interesting; apart from an external view which can scarcely be excelled in beauty, he has many valuable curiosities, collected in years residence at Mexico, where he was minister from the U.S.A. What he seems to prize most, however, is an ivory likeness of his first wife, who was very beautiful." It was this "ivory likeness" which led to a most interesting conversation. "General Thompson, you may be aware," Mrs. Gilman wrote, "is a great spiritualist. His second wife is his medium, and keeps up a constant communication with his first. He recited to us two little poems, from the Spirit world, with great tenderness of manner, purporting to be from the latter."[11]

It was the reminders of war, however, not the diversions from it, that characterized the life of the refugees in Greenville. News was carried by travelers as well as newspapers. Mrs. Gilman was always anxious to communicate with her daughters in Massachusetts, and postal delivery was not easy. To one relative she sent a letter through the lines "by Flag of Truce." Fortunately, Caroline's husband, Lewis Jervey, was in Nassau, apparently engaged in the "import-export" business, as blockade-

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[10] Caroline Gilman to children, n.d., SCHS.

[11] Caroline Gilman to children, August 21, 1863, SCHS.

running was euphemistically called. Letters went from Greenville to Charleston and were sent out on blockade runners to Nassau. From there, they eventually reached their destination. Letters from the North followed the reverse path. In October, 1864, Mrs. Gilman informed her daughters: "Three packages, containing dates through June and July, have just come to hand, completing, I fancy, your entire series. They have followed Lewis Jervey about being directed to him. Hereafter direct to me, care of the firm at Nassau." The letters were passed on, as Mrs. Gilman noted: "Frank [Porcher, her daughter Louisa's husband] who is on two weeks furlough with us, will take them to Margie, as they have considerable of Annie's writing scattered over them"[13]

News from Charleston was particularly important, especially with the beginning of the serious Federal threat in the summer of 1863. "Charleston beseiged," she wrote on August 21, 1863, "Men fighting on the islands, women nursing in the City -- singularly few casualties. Mrs. Crafts and Mrs. Miles, for instance are still on the battery. Supplies and men coming in. All willing to meet the emergency." News was unfavorable on every front, yet Mrs. Gilman's spirit never wavered: "No matter if you wish or fear that Charleston may fall. Vicksburg and [Port] Hudson have gone . . . let Charleston be annihilated (for it will never be taken) and resistance will spring up in every new form that valor and ingenuity can devise."[14]

But by Christmas Day 1864, even Mrs. Gilman's spirit was low: "I am constrained in my language . . . . If I were to indulge in strong emotion, I should soon be useless . . . . But where shall we find rest now? Savannah is gone; Charleston is in danger and though they are not the Confederacy, and there is a strong recuperative power after every blow, yet the suffering must be immense." Christmas seemed to magnify the problems of the Greenville refugees. "The children rose at daylight," she wrote, "to examine their stockings, for we sympathize with them. By a singular accident my gifts were quite belligerent, fighting cocks, made of pumpkin seeds, and worsted balls. To give you an idea of prices, Lou gave twenty dollars for an india

[13]Caroline Gilman to children, March 27, August 21, 1863; October 13, 1864, SCHS.

[14]Caroline Gilman to children, August 21, 1863, in "Letters of a Confederate Mother," p. 509.

rubber round comb for Louly, and $1.50 for a set of wire knitting needles. I paid $10 for the making of a pair of leather shoes for little Phillis, and Lou found the material. Men's coarse shoes are $90 . . . Lou had a great present from her friend Jennie Wardlaw yesterday -- sausages, cherries, hogs-cheese, butter and eggs. By the way, eggs were offered at the door at five dollars per dozen! And yet strange to say, we hear of no real want in Greenville."[13]

With spring, however, came the end. And though Mrs. Gilman could not know of Robert Edward Lee's imminent surrender, she wrote these words on April 2, 1865: "A spring morning with its freshness and beauty calls up the sad stores of memory . . . a contrast with man and nature makes everything more vivid and more sad. I grieve to tell you that nothing now seems beautiful to me. Spring flowers that were once so dear to me, music that used to smooth me, have lost their charm. The thought that man, made in the image of God, should become the butcher of his fellows, that the Gospel should be an empty sound is depressing, crushing to the heart."[14]

Federal invasion of South Carolina and eventually surrender of the Confederate armies brought more refugees to Greenville:

> We have a constant succession of Frank [Porcher]'s relatives and friends here. He is so hospitable that he will share his last with others. Not a week passes but we have an improvised bed, what the soldiers call a 'shake-down' in the parlor.
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> Willis is a paroled prisoner and came home on a walk of two hundred miles from Johnston's army. Notwithstanding the times he and Nina went to a surprise party last night and stayed until the small hours.
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> We are living in a strange way now. Isolated by the cutting off of the R.R.s we have only accidental communication with the outer world, no stores for two years open; without currency; no post-office, that is, no paid P[ost] M[aster] and a future dependent on the strangest combination of human affairs."

The war came to Greenville -- and to the Greenville refugees - in the closing weeks of the fighting. In April, 1865, Union Major-General George Stoneman, commander of the District of

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[13] Caroline Gilman to children. December 24, 1864, SCHS.

[14] Caroline Gilman to "my dear friend," April 2, 1865, SCHS.

[15] Caroline Gilman to Annie, n.d., in "Letters of A Confederate Mother," *loc. cit.*, p. 509.

East Tennessee, swept into southwestern Virginia and western North Carolina on a final raid and returned to Tennessee, leaving his calvary "on the other side of the mountains . . . to obtain forage and to intercept and disperse any bands going south, and to capture trains, etc." The last week of April Stoneman received word that Jefferson Davis, on his flight from Richmond, was heading though South Carolina toward Georgia. He ordered the cavalry to pursue Davis across the Savannah River and "to the ends of the earth" if necessary. Two brigades left Hendersonville on April 29, and marched through Jones' Gap towards Pickensville. The third brigade left Cowpens that same day and headed southwest -- through Spartanburg and Golden Grove to join the main force. In Asheville Brigadier-General Davis Tillson assembled 150 additional calvary, put them under the command of Major James Lawson, and ordered them to overtake the others. This detachment crossed the mountains and on May 2, 1865, rode into Greenville.[11]

According to Mrs. Gilmans's account, "Louisa, Caroline, the children and myself, seated ourselves at the table, with some pleasant jests on the subject of a roast pig, which Lou had provided." The mood was calm, if not happy that the fighting was over. "We had full confidence that the flag of truce would be respected." Then they heard the servants shouting: "The yankees are coming!" They rushed to the piazza in time to see "a negro man, in a cart, whipping his horse to a full gallop . . . a dozen of the enemy's cavalry came after him and fired. In an instant, almost, his horse was unharnessed and taken possession of." Caroline Jervey begged for a guard, and a Lieutenant West "called to a stolid looking man, and said, 'Shertz, guard this house strictly and watch the streets. Let none of our men disturb these ladies.' " Shertz took his stand on the piazza, and Louisa asked Albert, one of the servants, to "take the gentlemen's horse." But Albert replied: "I ain't goin to touch no Yankee horse. Let him hitch him his self." Somewhat later Albert did manage to "mease the 'Yankee horse' some corn." Mrs. Gilman returned to the dining room alone. "I saw

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[11] *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1880-1901), ser. 1, 49, pt. 2: 407; 49; pt. 1: 546, 547-48; 49, pt. 2: 555. See also, Thomas Bland Keys, "The Federal Pillage of Anderson, South Carolina: Brown's Raid," *South Carolina Historical Magazine*, 76:2 (April 1975), 80-86.

Sophy, the cat, discussing roast pig with great relish, and feeling faint I followed her laudable example. I think I was the only member of the family who dined.''[19]

Soon, soldiers were searching houses for arms and horses. "One man came on foot, while I was leaning over the rails," Mrs. Gilman wrote, "and demanded coffee. I said I had been without coffee for two months. 'I hear you have coffee,' said he, 'and if I find it so, I'll be damned if I don't burn your house down.' Shertz pointed his musket towards him and he went away."

The soldiers rode down Main Street. They opened the Commissary stores and stole $30,000 in gold belonging to the Bank of Charleston. The Ladies Association had recently moved their Soldiers' Rest to the Confederate Hospital in the Goodlett House at the corner of Main and Washington Streets. Every article belonging to the Ladies Association was pillaged. Then, the raiders began to break into empty shops where refugee property from the low country had been stored. "Everything was rifled," Mrs. Gilman wrote. "Books, costly plate, wines, pictures, bed linens thrown into the streets to be picked up by any passerby. All the afternoon we saw white and black, laden with goods, passing by the house."

Mrs. Arthur Huger reported that only one house in the village was set on fire: "Capt. Brooks' house was set on fire but not burnt." There was only one death. "A Greenville man, who was in liquor," reported Mrs. Gilman, "fired at and wounded slightly a raider. He was instantly shot. No other death occurred," though a month later a Mrs. Venning, one of the refugees, crazed with fright during the raid, died.

At twilight Lieutenant West reappeared at Mrs. Gilman's house with a United States flag he had liberated from the Confederate foundry. Then, he sat down to supper. He was joined by one of his soldiers, a Mr. Simpson who appeared in a cloak which he had stolen from the home of Professor James P. Boyce of the Southern Baptist Seminary. "Mr. Simpson evidently enjoyed his supper," said Mrs. Gilman, "his appetite

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[19] This account is based upon Caroline Gilman to Eliza, June 2, 1865, SCHS, and Mrs. Arthur Huger to Mrs. William Mason Smith, May 8, 1865, in Daniel E. Huger Smith, *et al*, ed. *Mason Smith Family Letters, 1860-1868* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1950), pp. 206-7.

probably whetted, as we afterwards learned, by his exercise in-overhauling all Mr. Boyce's drawers and trunks which occupied him and his party an hour. In going out he lighted one of Dr. Boyce's segars." Shortly thereafter the Federal cavalry evacuated the town. "So ends the history of the Greenville Raid," wrote Mrs. Gilman.

With the coming of summer communications reopened with Charleston and the North. Frank Porcher operated a store in Greenville, with goods brought by wagon from the coast. Gradually servants left their former owners, and a garrison of Federal troops occupied the former Confederate Hospital on Main Street. The refugees did not leave Greenville until November to make the long trek to the low country. The Civil War had ended, and the era of Reconstruction had begun.[20]

[20]Caroline Gilman to Eliza, July 17, August 5, [?], 10, 1865, SCHS.