

The Years Of Challenge—The War, 1861-1865

With their Southern ties, social class, and wealth tied to a plantation economy, it is not surprising that the Acklens identified themselves with the Confederate States of America. Acklen took an oath of allegiance to the Confederacy and, according to his son, William, contributed \$30,000 to the Southern cause. Adelia with other ladies, including Mrs. James K. Polk, became a member of the Ladies' Soldiers Friend Society in support of Confederate soldiers.

The war began in April, 1861, and the advance of the Union forces in the following year seriously affected the Acklens and their property in both Tennessee and Louisiana. On the day Fort Donelson fell, February 16, 1862, thereby threatening Nashville, Adelia urged her husband to leave, feeling he was needed in Louisiana and that she would be safer without him. Acklen fled that evening. On February 25th, Federal troops occupied the city and remained for the rest of the war. Adelia was left in a most unenviable position.

The Federal authorities, viewing Nashville as a center of secessionist intrigue and fortifying it strongly against any possible Confederate recapture, imposed a strict military regime with a system of passes for entry and departure and inspection of the mails. In a letter to her brother Oliver, Adelia wrote, "The 'screws' tighten every day. . . . Hal says don't come down now. [B]e careful. Dr. Bass was shot & killed instantly by the pickets[;] he was buried today." In a postscript in another letter to Oliver, Adelia wrote, "Wont you be down in a few days [?] I have something to say I cannot write." Adelia's oldest son, Joseph, related many years after the war to his daughter, Mrs. Jeannette Noel, that he had received a pass to take food with his Shetland pony to a black man but at the same time took the opportunity to memorize messages for the Confederates which he delivered to a black man posted to receive them. The federal guards grew suspicious, even on one occasion stripping him, but, of course, found no evidence. Finally, a Union soldier shot the pony, which broke the boy's heart.

It is not surprising that Union officials viewed prominent members of society, known for their Confederate sympathies, with suspicion and hostility. The Police Record of the Army of the Cumberland referred to the now departed Acklen as "a hearty secessionist" and Adelia as one who "well fills his place . . . so far as rebellion sympathies and hate can extend." Even Belmont was described with some contempt.

... Acklin's (sic) premises . . . are rather a speciality in the way of extravagance. . . . His buildings are gothic-ified and starched and bedizened to perfection. Serpentine walks, shrubbery, and all of that sort of thing, abound in great quantity and

profusion. A tower, one hundred and five feet high, is built near a spring a fourth of a mile distant from the buildings, and a steam-engine within its base forces water to its top, whence it is piped in every direction over the grounds. The improvements upon this place, such as the buildings, statuary, walls, &c., cost over a quarter of a million of dollars. Looking over upon it from adjacent high grounds, the white marble fountains, emblems, and statues cause the place to resemble somewhat a fashionable first-class cemetery.

If conditions were difficult for Adelia in Nashville, Joseph found himself in an almost untenable situation in Louisiana. Not long after his arrival Union forces occupied in May, 1862, New Orleans and Baton Rouge. Union ships had even earlier begun to penetrate the Mississippi River by his plantations. Acklen was not only threatened from the river by the Federals but also from the land by the Confederates. The latter demanded that his cotton be destroyed to keep it from falling into the hands of the enemy, a policy he strongly opposed. Acklen no doubt felt trapped. In April in a conversation with Lieutenant R. B. Lowry of the U. S. Navy who stopped with his steam sloop, *Brooklyn*, Acklen, who was very agitated by just having received a threat from a Confederate band to burn his cotton, declared that he had not actively supported the Rebel cause and had been residing on his plantations for an entire year, separated from his family. He also denounced the Confederate leadership and claimed to regret his oath of allegiance to the Confederacy. On the other hand, Acklen refused Federal protection on the grounds that it would only invite retaliation from the other side. Official Federal records indicate that on occasion Acklen gave information to Federal officials on naval operations near his plantations.

Acklen's true feelings will never be known on the war for he died on September 11, 1863, before it ended. Years later William, his son, recorded in his memoirs that his father died of malaria. Mrs. Noel, quoting Pauline, Acklen's daughter, has stated that because of a ditch in the road Acklen was thrown into the water from his buggy and, after walking home wet, died of pneumonia.

Not long after the death of her husband, Adelia engaged in probably the most daring exploit of her life. Upon her insistence, Mrs. Sarah Ewing Sims Carter (later Mrs. Sarah Gaut), a cousin, who had been twice a widow as had Adelia, accompanied her to the Louisiana plantations to save the cotton from being burned by either army. They traveled by boat from New Orleans to the plantations, possibly arriving near the beginning of 1864. They came at a rather auspicious time. The lines in Louisiana were fluid between the opposing forces with territory often controlled only by

THREE VIEWS OF THE SALE OF THE COTTON

1. The View of the Cousin Franklin, July 25th, 1907.

Col. Smith,

Dear Friend:

I send you an account of my work in getting out Mrs. Addie Acklen's cotton during the war. Think you will be interested in it, as it is the work of a southern woman.

Early in the fall of 1863, my cousin, Mrs. Adelia Acklen, received news of her husband, Col. Joseph H. Acklen's death, and was told to go immediately to her plantations in Louisiana as there was a very large amount of cotton which was in confederate lines, and was in danger of being burned by either army, as the federals held the river and the cotton a few miles back. By the earnest solicitations of my cousin, I consented to accompany her, she thinking it would only take about six weeks to get the cotton out and sold. But two weeks after we reached the plantation Gen. Polk issued orders to burn all cotton in the bush. Mrs. Acklen not being strong enough to make the trip out into the confederacy, she insisted that I go to headquarters and see Gen. Polk and try and get the order rescinded, which I did, accompanied by an old friend. We drove a carriage, drawn by two mules over dirt roads, a distance of 150 miles and when within 12 miles of Gen. Polk's headquarters, we were stopped and turned back on account of Gen. Sherman's army advancing so rapidly. We went to Brook Haven, and there I met Mr. Godfrey Fogg, of Nashville who informed me that Col. Dillin, a nephew of Gen. R. E. Lee, was stationed at Clinton, Miss. I then went 50 miles out of the way to him to get him to use his influence with Gen. Polk to get the order to burn Mrs. Acklen's cotton revoked. Col. Dillin sent me to a most elegant southern home to spend the night. There I met two charming southern girls, who were invited by Col. Dillin to dine with me at his headquarters the next day. There I had a long conference with him, and went back to the plantation with temporary injunctions from him not to burn the cotton until he could communicate with Gen. Polk.

To make a long story short, I made seven arduous trips out into the confederacy and at last succeeded (sic) in getting a permit for Mrs. Acklen to remove her cotton to the river. I had confederate guards to guard the cotton. She pledged herself to send it to Europe to sell. Admiral Porter was on an inspecting tour of the gunboats at the time and was at the boats near the plantation, and gave Mrs. Acklen permission to hire wagons to haul her cotton to the river, her teams having been taken by the southern army. The cotton was shipped to New Orleans and from there to Liverpool and sold for 75 cents per pound, from which she realized nine hundred and sixty thousand dollars.

My young cousin, J. Addison Hayes, then a youth in his teens, was my constant companion in my rides and drives around the plantation. After becoming a man, he married Miss Margaret Davis, eldest daughter of President Jefferson Davis. He was a noble boy. Our stay in Louisiana was eight months instead of six weeks. Returning home, we came by sea. Was out eight days. Landed in New York, August, 1864.

I write this to let you know what a southern woman can do under trying circumstances for a friend.

Always your friend,

Mrs. Sarah A. Gaut.

Franklin, Tenn.

From: *Nashville American*, "Our Women in the War" supplement, September 13, 1907, p. 16.

2. A Confederate View

CAMP, Near Clinton, La., May 11, 1864.

Lieut. Col. Jones S. Hamilton,

Provost-Marshal-General:

COLONEL: You ask me to make a statement in relation to circumstances connected with the affair of Mrs. A. Ackland. I was at the time encamped with my command at Whitaker Springs, twenty-five miles from Mrs. Ackland's plantation. Information was brought me the Yankees were hauling Mrs.

A.'s cotton. I immediately sent Sergeant Doherty and twenty men to ascertain if the cotton was really being carried off, and instructed him to burn all the cotton in case an attempt was made to move it. Sergeant Doherty reported back that on his arrival at Mrs. Ackland's he found one of Brigadier-General Taylor's staff officers, a Captain Cammack, superintending the shipment of Mrs. Ackland's cotton, and that Captain Cammack showed him an order as if coming from General Polk, countersigned by Colonel Dillon and Brigadier-General Taylor, to the effect that Mrs. A. Ackland was permitted to move her cotton, 2,000 bales or more, to some point on the Mississippi River, preparatory to shipping it to Europe, and that no Confederate officer or soldier should in any manner molest Mrs. Ackland's cotton. Colonel Dillon and General Taylor told me they had an order to sell cotton for munitions of war, and a Confederate officer being at Mrs. Ackland's place with ten or fifteen men guarding the cotton. I thought it was a Government contract, and did not take further action on the matter, but communicated with General Taylor, asking him if Captain Cammack was acting under his orders superintending the shipment of the cotton. He replied Captain Cammack was not acting under his orders. I then ordered Captain Terry, of my regiment, with a squadron of cavalry, to go to Mrs. Ackland's plantation and arrest Captain Cammack and all others concerned. I also instructed him to seize the teams and wagons on the place, as I had information they belonged to a Yankee house in New Orleans, and the cotton was being shipped to the same house. I told him if Mrs. A. did not produce the proper papers he should immediately set fire to her cotton.

The whole matter being wrapped in mystery and for fear an injustice should be done Mrs. A. I followed Captain Terry. He had Captain Cammack under guard and on his way to my camp. Captain Cammack showed me a copy of Mrs. A.'s orders and I released him from guard and ordered him to report to General Taylor under arrest. I then saw Mrs. Ackland's orders, which enjoined on every Confederate officer and soldier not to molest Mrs. Ackland's cotton. She had at this time shipped some 2,000 bales; some 500 bales in bags, and some not ginned was not on the place. The teams were engaged in hauling this at the time. I seized on twelve wagons and city drays, four making their escape under cover of the gun-boat, holding them subject to General Taylor. I saw General Taylor myself the day after and communicated to him a report from my spy Soper that the cotton was being shipped to a Northern house in New Orleans, and the teams and wagons belonged to the same. Mrs. Ackland saw General Taylor next day and brought an order for the return of her mules and wagons; that he had received an order from General Lee to return all wagons captured carrying cotton to the enemy.

I am, colonel, your obedient servant,

FRANK POWERS

Colonel, C. S. Army.

From: *War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, series 1, LII, part 2, 703-4.

3. A Union View

Mississippi Squadron, U. S. Ship Black Hawk, Mouth of Black River, April 22, 1864.

... It is my opinion that Mrs. Acklin has been playing a very deep game and that she is thoroughly secesh. She had all the time her cotton was being removed, a company of rebels under a captain guarding it, and had our army wagons hauling it, and after the rebs found out they belonged to United States they gobbled them all up and Mrs. Acklin posted off after them, and I heard just as I was leaving that she had got them back—new wagons, harness, etc. This is the talk at Red River. Mark and Marshall say a great deal more, which convinces me Mrs. Acklin is still a good rebel.

From: *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion*, series 1, XXVI, 260-1.