

the cotton left New Orleans, so this episode, like many others in her life, must be pieced together through the documents that do exist, and the reminiscences of others. Sarah Ewing Carter (later Gaut), a neighbor and distant cousin, and Acklen's travel companion on the "cotton rescue," first reported the story to a public audience in 1902, forty years after the rescue itself, and fifteen years after Acklen's death in 1887, as part of a profile featured in Annie Somers Gilchrist's *Some Representative Women of Tennessee*.<sup>117</sup> Gaut penned her own piece for the September 1904 issue of the *Confederate Veteran*, at a time, according to Catherine Clinton, experiencing "an explosion of interest in Southern plantation lore."<sup>118</sup>

As the story goes, upon news of Joseph Acklen's death, the perilous circumstances concerning their cotton, and her dire financial situation, Adelia Acklen enlisted the company Gaut and the two traveled—possibly with a male escort, perhaps without—from Nashville to Louisiana's West Feliciana Parish to somehow bring about release of the cotton. "She [Acklen] insisted on my going down with her," Gaut wrote in the 1904 article, "thinking she could sell the cotton in New Orleans," adding this "would have been impossible, as it was in Confederate lines and being watched." Gaut reported she traveled "one hundred and fifty miles eight times, in the Confederate lines,

to Jackson and Clinton, La., and finally got permission for her [Acklen] to ship the cotton to Europe." All the while, Acklen apparently remained at her plantations, sidelined by illness or malady. "We got... a permit to take it [the cotton] to New Orleans, and she [Acklen] realized nine hundred and sixty thousand dollars. It was a tremendous undertaking." The back story revolves around an order issued by Confederate General Leonidas Polk instructing plantation owners and managers in the Red River region to burn any cotton on hand to prevent its capture by the Union Army. This order, as expected, was objected to, and generally ignored, by growers hoping to someday profit from the cotton. "Through the intercession of Col. Dillon... I secured the General's permission for Mrs. Acklin to store her cotton 'at some safe place on the river' until it could be exported,"<sup>119</sup> Gaut concluded, and thus was born the story of Adelia Acklen and the Great Cotton Rescue of 1864.

It does appear Gaut served as Acklen's "legs" and messenger in this endeavor, but Acklen clearly conducted negotiations for release and transport of the cotton herself, as evidenced in correspondence directed, and referring, to her and it by members of both armies. A letter from Confederate Lieutenant and Assistant Adjutant General Joseph C. Robert, dated January 31, 1864,

In early 1864, Adelia Acklen enlisted the help of her cousin Sarah Carter to rescue the Acklens' cotton in Louisiana. The women convinced both Confederate and Union officers to help them. Several hundred bales made it to Liverpool for sale. (Sarah Ewing Carter, Belmont Mansion Association)

