

clarified the burning order and advised Acklen that Colonel Dillon's "intention is not to burn the cotton until it is in imminent danger of being taken by the enemy."¹²⁰ Events moved quickly, and by late March, Acklen's cotton was no longer in danger of being burned by the Confederates, but under their protection, according to an order attributed to General Polk himself, a fellow Tennessean and close Acklen family friend, which stated, "a safe guard is hereby granted to the cotton of Mrs Acklen which lies on or near the Mississippi River. All Confederate officers & men are hereby ordered to respect the same."¹²¹ Within days, authorization issued from the Headquarters of Southwest Mississippi and Eastern Louisiana at Camp Dick Garnett stated, "in anticipation of authority to sell her cotton to foreigners (under a guarantee of protection by the Confederate Authorities) Mrs Ada Acklen of Angola Plantation is authorized move her cotton (two thousand bales or more) to some point on the Miss River, there to remain unmolested by any Confederate Officer or soldier."¹²²

In mid-April, less than three months after Acklen's first communication, and likely negotiation, with the Confederate Army, the first five hundred and eighty bales of Acklen cotton left Confederate protection and shipped to New Orleans for delivery to Acklen's cotton agents, per an order approved by the ship's commanding officer, Acting Volunteer Lieutenant Cyrenius Dorning, U.S.N.¹²³ How Acklen managed this transfer of cotton from one army to

the other remains uncertain. It is apparent, however, that a great deal of confusion surrounded the Acklen cotton matter. Two days after Lieutenant Dorning's confirmation of shipment, Lieutenant Roberts wrote Colonel Frank Powers, commanding the Fourteenth Arkansas Infantry and on duty near the Acklen property: "The Genl [Gen. Thomas H. Taylor] is considerably surprised at that part of your letter of the 14th inst which relates to Capt Cammack shipping Mrs Acklen's cotton. No such authority has been given him by me."¹²⁴ The captain, most likely Captain R.C. Cammack of the First Louisiana Artillery,¹²⁵ oversaw the transfer of Acklen's cotton, and armed with the various orders previously referenced here, for all intents and purposes, at least to the casual observer, he simply carried out orders. The response by Brigadier General Taylor, adds to the confusion. Did Cammack receive some sort of monetary enticement from Acklen to release the cotton for transport, or was he taken in by fraudulent orders? Were the "no-burn" and authorization for transport orders properly issued by Generals Polk and Taylor, or was there impropriety there? A July 1864 report from George Hodge, Assistant Inspector General to Confederate President Jefferson Davis gives a bit of credence, albeit just a bit, to the latter. In his report concerning "the abuses alleged to have characterized the administration of military affairs" in several Louisiana and Mississippi counties, including West Feliciana, General Hodge commented on the shipment of Acklen cotton

and remarked, "the details of the transaction point with... unpleasant suggestiveness to officers at one time high in command in this district."¹²⁶ It is difficult to argue with the prevailing school of thought that Acklen received Confederate assistance—authorized or not—in the release of her cotton.

Nashville Civil War stories and legends suggest Acklen also made deals with the Union army, though evidence shows those accusations may be unfounded. On May 13, 1864, Lieutenant Commander K.R. Breese, U.S.N., issued a notification to Union ships in the Red River region of his authorization allowing shipment of twenty-eight bales of cotton and six hundred bags of cotton in seed from the Acklen plantations to New Orleans. Within the document is a single line that makes complete sense of the Union navy's role in the cotton rescue. "She [Acklen] has taken the Amnesty Oath," Breese noted.¹²⁷ With the oath, and Acklen's stated loyalty to the Union, the United States Navy found no irregularity in transporting the Acklen cotton to New Orleans for eventual shipment and sale in Britain.

The cotton rescue accomplished, Acklen and Gaut traveled from New Orleans to New York aboard the steamer *Evening Star*,¹²⁸ and returned to Middle Tennessee in mid-1864, in time to witness the Battle of Nashville. William Ackland remembered that on his mother's return to Belmont, she found Union General Thomas J. Wood had appropriated her Nashville home as his headquarters, and quartered his troops

on its lawns. "We drove out daily from the city to Belmont and it was distressing to see the country denuded of trees and the magnificent forests around Belmont felled to furnish necessary firewood to the Federal soldiers," he recalled. Concerned soldiers having the run of Belmont would result in extensive damage to her possessions, Acklen removed much of her artwork, silver, and other valuables to the home of Sarah Childress Polk, widow of former President James K. Polk, for safe keeping. On December 15, 1864, the Battle of Nashville played out between Wood's Union soldiers and John Bell Hood's Confederate army on the Belmont property and countless others throughout the city. Nashville lore suggests Acklen and the children watched and listened to the battle from the relative safety of Polk Place, though in Ackland's reminiscence he reported he "saw from the roof of Belmont the Battle of Nashville in the distance."¹²⁹ In either case, for Acklen the night was likely long and sleepless, filled with dread of the condition in which she might find her beloved Belmont in the morning. Amazingly, the house survived unscathed, and as December 16 dawned, Hood's army retreated from Nashville with Wood's in pursuit,¹³⁰ and Nashville fell back into its now strangely-familiar state of occupation.

Four months later the war was effectively over, and within weeks of Robert E. Lee's April, 1865, surrender to U.S. Grant at Appomattox, Acklen packed up her four children, and perhaps some of the family's servants, and sailed out of New York for an