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A BLOCKADED FAMILY: LIFE IN SOUTHERN ALABAMA DURING THE CIVIL WAR

By Parthenia Antoinette Hague

(Bedford, Massachusetts: Applewood Books, 1995. Pp. 176.)

In 1888, Parthenia Hague authored *A Blockaded Family*, an account of her experiences on the southern Alabama homefront during the Civil War. Hague's experience of the war, and therefore her account of it, differed dramatically from the accounts of soldiers and others on the front lines; hers was the story of the isolation and innovation caused by the Union blockade. She summarized her purpose concisely when she wrote, "There is one thing I am proud of, and that is, the advantages we took of our resources and our own independence. I can hardly see how such a people could be conquered." (p. 109) At its deepest level, *A Blockaded Family* was Hague's attempt to explain and justify the Southern cause and to restore wounded pride.

Hague apparently served as a governess for a wealthy plantation family near Eufaula, Alabama. Her own family lived in Alabama, but distance and the lack of adequate transportation in the state allowed her to visit them only twice during the four-year war. The first hints—and not very subtle ones—of Hague's underlying theme of racial harmony appeared in the first chapter. She described the idyllic wedding of two slaves on the plantation and the devoted participation and sacrificial giving by the master's family. Later in the chapter, she described the eager acceptance of a slave preacher by a racially mixed congregation when the regular minister was unavailable. However, as the story unfolded, her descriptions became less flattering. Toward the end, she extolled the virtues of her employer, because he never uttered a harsh word against the northern army, though it caused him to lose over \$100,000 in slave property.

At the more obvious level, Hague's memoir told the story of the resourcefulness of blockaded Southerners. She described

in vivid detail the lengths to which they went to keep deprivation at bay. Her account serves as an excellent supplement to Leah Rawls Atkins' descriptions of the Alabama Civil War homefront in *Alabama: The History of a Deep South State* (1994). Both Atkins and Hague placed a solid emphasis on the homefront participation in the production of clothing. Hague mentioned her involvement in making clothes and accessories for soldiers, but concentrated most of her attention on the making of clothes for herself. She and her employer's daughters went to great lengths to be fashionable and noticeable, regardless of the lack of manufactured goods. She described the various methods used by people in the area to tan leather, weave their own cloth, and make their own shoes.

Hague's obvious intelligence and literary skill make *The Blockaded Family* a pleasure to read. Her vivid descriptions bring to life long-gone places, times, and people. More importantly, her subtextual material reveals the Southern point of view prevalent in the 1880s. Though the words "Lost Cause" are never mentioned, her casual references throughout the volume leave little doubt that Hague viewed the South as the righteous cause defeated by overwhelming numbers. She closed by describing the graciousness with which Southerners were accepting the role of a conquered people.

Hague's experience of the war can hardly be called "representative" of most Southerners on the Alabama homefront. She lived in luxury, served by slave labor. Her account gives no indication that she ever lacked food, basic clothing, shelter, or any other necessity of life. Also, she does not appear to have lost any close relatives or friends in battle. For that matter, she never mentioned any contact whatsoever with soldiers. But, her memoir serves as one small, yet very interesting, aspect of the much larger questions of homefront activities and post-war Southern attitudes.

A question remains, regarding the decision by Applewood Books to republish Hague's book. Applewood erred by failing to

do what modern industry labels "value-added reselling;" they should have offered readers something more than the earlier version contained. For example, readers would like to know who Hague actually was, what happened to her after the war, and what happened to the family who employed her. Skillful editing could have made *A Blockaded Family* a much more valuable educational tool. Still, Applewood has made a relatively inaccessible book available to a much larger public; for that they should be applauded.

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