



Diary of Miss Emma Holmes, 1861--1866 (Library of Southern Civilization)

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Two months before the Civil War broke out, Emma Holmes made the first entry in a diary that would eventually hold vivid firsthand accounts of several major historical events. Born into an elite South Carolina family, Holmes was in her twenties during the war years. She lived in Charleston during April, 1861, bombardment of Fort Sumter and was visiting there during the 1863 Union shelling of the city. Her description of the Charleston fire of December, 1861, which destroyed her family home and leveled much of the city, is one of the most powerful passages in the diary.

Holmes also spent extended periods of time on plantations and visited army camps, which she described in detail. Because of the Charleston fire, her family was uprooted to Camden, South Carolina, where she came face-to-face with Union forces: first Sherman's army, then black troops, and finally the small Reconstruction garrison. In presenting her picture of the wartime South, Holmes discussed numerous northern and southern military figures, the role of women in the war effort, the religious and social life of the day, and the heavy toll that fighting and disease took on the military and civilian population.

John F. Marszalek has eliminated extraneous details in order to highlight Holmes's individual insight, the vital heart of the volumn. His new Forward considers this valuable contribution to social history in the context of the current growing popularity of the Civil War and the relatively recent interest in that conflict among women's studies scholars.

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