
12-1-1998

Rose Cottage Chronicles: Civil War Letters of the Bryant-Stephens Families of North Florida. Edited by Arch Fredric Blakey, Ann Smith Lainhart, and Winston Bryant Stephens, Jr.

Sheila B. Cohen

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarcommons.usf.edu/tampabayhistory>

Recommended Citation

Cohen, Sheila B. (1998) "Rose Cottage Chronicles: Civil War Letters of the Bryant-Stephens Families of North Florida. Edited by Arch Fredric Blakey, Ann Smith Lainhart, and Winston Bryant Stephens, Jr.," *Tampa Bay History*. Vol. 20 : Iss. 2 , Article 8.

Available at: <https://scholarcommons.usf.edu/tampabayhistory/vol20/iss2/8>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Open Access Journals at Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Tampa Bay History by an authorized editor of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact scholarcommons@usf.edu.

BOOK REVIEWS

Rose Cottage Chronicles: Civil War Letters of the Bryant-Stephens Families of North Florida. Edited by Arch Fredric Blakey, Ann Smith Lainhart, and Winston Bryant Stephens, Jr. Gainesville, 1998. University Press of Florida. x, 389 pp. Illustrations. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Cloth – \$34.95.

Private letters and journals have long captured the attention of Civil War historians. The dozens of Confederate women's diaries and family letters published in the last decade provide evidence of the continued value of such personal collections to Civil War studies, but they also reflect a rapidly developing interest in southern family relations during that conflict. These publications have greatly expanded our understanding of the diversity of personal experiences during the war. The Bryant-Stephens letters are a valuable addition to this growing collection, providing a significant contribution not only to Civil War history, or even Florida history, but to the larger social history of the South.

A rich collection of family letters and journals, *Rose Cottage Chronicles* will hopefully remedy the absence of Florida planter families from larger regional studies of the late antebellum South. The Bryant-Stephens families may have been unique in their particular experiences, but their letters are often remarkably similar to those of families from Louisiana to Virginia. It is a poignant drama of a people caught up in events they can neither control nor entirely understand. The book contains letters from several family members, but it is the correspondence between Octavia (Tivie) Bryant Stephens and her husband, Winston Stephens, upon which the book focuses. Married shortly before the war and separated for much of it, the couple used their correspondence, with remarkable candor, to reveal their romantic love and occasional marital conflict.

The introduction provides useful information on Bryant-Stephens family history and plantation life in antebellum Florida. The footnotes are excellent sources of information on military personnel and engagements mentioned in the letters. Unfortunately, the book lacks any feminine context. Many of the letters are written by or to Tivie and her mother, Rebecca, yet there is no information provided on planter women or marriage. This could make it difficult for readers to understand how the Bryant-Stephens women may fit within what is known about southern women in the late antebellum. Considering the amount of information currently available on women in the Civil War, this is troubling. Tivie's letters reflect a remarkable, strong-willed woman, willing to submit to her husband's authority, but not afraid to criticize him. This is noteworthy because of her young age and the twelve-year age difference between herself and Winston. Yet the editors introduce her as aloof with a negative self-image. With no yardstick of historical information with which one can measure Tivie, this analysis seems strangely out of place.

The Bryant-Stephens family letters are about much more than women on the homefront or marital affection and conflict. The letters describe how parents and children related, how mundane matters of plantation operation were transmitted between husbands and wives during

long separations, how men and women coped with death and fear and divided political loyalties. It is a compelling dialogue on family and gender relations during the Civil War. More importantly, *Rose Cottage Chronicles* brings this significant collection to a wider audience.

Sheila B. Cohen

The Search for Thomas F. Ward, Teacher of Frederick Delius. By Don C. Gillespie. Gainesville, Florida, 1996. University Press of Florida. xvi, 180 pp. Illustrations. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Cloth – \$29.95.

The youth who trains, or runs a race,
Must bear privations with unruffled face
Be called to labour when he thinks to dine,
And, harder still, leave wenching, and his wine.

These lines from Byron's "Hints from Horace" symbolize the work ethic instilled in the pupil Frederick Delius, who later became a musical master. Delius learned these lines from his teacher, Thomas F. Ward, a Brooklyn-educated music instructor. Delius subsequently recalled that Ward's tutelage during several months in Florida provided "the only lessons from which I ever derived any benefit." Years later a music student, Don Gillespie of the University of Georgia, stumbled upon a recording of Delius's most famous work, "Appalachia: Variations on an Old Slave Song," which evoked images of South Georgia and North Florida. Gillespie's professor urged his student to explore Ward's fundamental influence on Delius's early musical experiences. Thus began an insatiable curiosity which shaped the writing of this book, and the result is a kind of first-person narration of the author's search for Ward.

Gillespie traces Ward's steps from his childhood in a Catholic orphanage in Brooklyn, New York, to his early interest in music and his training as a organist and choirmaster. In 1883 Ward contracted tuberculosis, and his doctors recommended that he relocate to Florida. Leaving Brooklyn for Jacksonville, Ward took a job as an organist at the Church of the Immaculate Conception. Within weeks Professor Ward was supplementing his income by offering piano lessons, through which he met Frederick Delius. Private lessons at Delius's orange grove on the St. Johns River followed and, according to Gillespie, provided the young aspiring musician a spiritual revelation in idyllic physical surroundings. And it was there that Delius made steady musical progress under the guidance of a strong intellect and sympathetic comrade.

In 1887 Ward moved to St. Augustine, where he found the town's Catholic heritage much to his liking. However, after a fire destroyed the cathedral, he moved on, first to Palatka, and then finally to St. Leo College, which offered him a teaching position in 1894. Located in West Central Florida, thirty-five miles north of Tampa, the four-year-old college combined a military regimen with a three-year curriculum of commercial and liberal arts courses. While at St. Leo, Ward made the decision to prepare for the priesthood. But during his training, he reached a spiritual crisis, sparked by serious doubts about his own fitness for the priesthood. He also harbored nagging questions regarding the circumstances of his birth. Gillespie is convinced that Ward knew, or at least suspected, that he was the illegitimate son of a priest, and thus needed a