

The Civil War Diary of Emma Mordecai. Edited by Dianne Ashton with Melissa R. Klapper. New York: New York University Press, 2024. Hardback, ISBN 9781479831906. \$32.00.

Preface

Directed toward this interested in Civil War, Southern History, American Jewish history, American women's history and Southern Jewish history

Not annotated—lengthy introduction—good subject index

Introduction

Diary—April 1864 to May 1865—51 years old

Family profited from whiteness, p. 4

Ties to slavery reinforced Jewish whiteness

Emma devoted to Jewish faith but “an entirely typical white, middle-class, slave-owning Southern woman with assumptions and attitudes particularly about race, that are repugnant to modern readers.” P. 4

Supports Gallagher on Mordecai's Confederate identity

Family had been in America before the revolution

Family in Richmond by the 1780s

Emma born in 1812

Family members identified with the South and owned slaves

Various members of the family married Christians, some converted

Respectable single women lived with family

Emma moved only five miles from Richmond, did not consider herself a refugee, p. 15—help her sister in law—widow of her brother—seemed chronically ill

Not a warm relationship—move was something she thought she must do

Nineteenth century women's diaries—not entirely clear why she started the diary other than her changed circumstances—offered some comfort but also recorded the final days of the Confederacy

Many women diarists in 19th century—

Comments on politics and Confederacy—new duties and courage

Emma believed in slavery

Read both English and French literature

Contracts with northern soldiers—barbarians or appeals to officers as gentlemen

Notes of how Emma was fairly close to the fighting—long summary in introduction—31-

Importance of food shortages, 36-37

Hospital donations, 39-40-----Emma's hospital work was brief

Religious world—her Judaism was for her room

Accommodated Christian beliefs at Rosewood, 43

Observed Jewish sabbath in her room

Thinks her diary became a “Jewish object,” p. 45

Confirmed her Judaism as siblings turned to Christianity, 49

Shadow of antisemitism—a general treatment of antisemitism in the era

Attacks on Jewish speculators in the Confederacy

--but not mentioned in Emma's diary!

Racism and social order of the South

Emma believed in slave loyalty—those leaving had been deceived—Emma and Rosina saw themselves as humane slaveholders
 Thought slaves played tricks to get out of work, p. 61
 Emancipation—Emma reacts to fall of Richmond and end of the war; shock of black soldiers and loss of authority as a white woman---blasphemous talk of independence by a black man
 Slaves leaving, p. 67
 Question of working—turned to orphans for servants
 She eventually sold food to Union soldiers
 Emma’s legacy—her views reflected Lost Cause values
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