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Madam Belle: Sex, Money and Influence in a Southern Brothel

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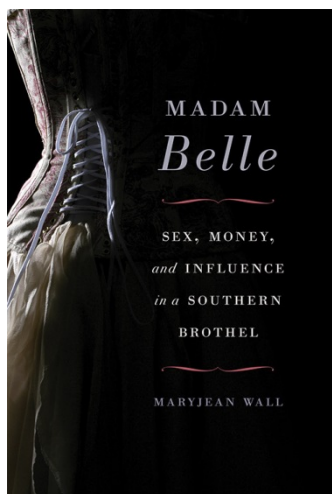
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From illustrations of international policy and historical effects to sociological evolutions, these essays create a compelling series that pulls an American reader out of the conditioned historical isolationism and American exceptionalism fallacies pervasive in U.S views on history and into a view of the Civil War that recognizes the impact of international events and perspectives. It is an interesting read for both historians and others who have an interest in Civil War History.

Kathelene McCarty Smith
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Madam Belle: Sex, Money, and Influence in a Southern Brothel. Maryjean Wall. Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2014. ISBN 978-0-8131-4706-2 \$24.95



The superior work has some connection to the southern USA by content since the splendid masterpiece is about Belle Brezing, who managed a famous lady of the evening establishment in Lexington, Kentucky. The author's association with the southern USA is the author Maryjean Wall who teaches at the University of Kentucky History Department. The writing style is superior and enchants the reader's attention from start to finish. The perceived interest to the readership of the journal is outstanding due to the excellent intriguing details on nineteenth century Lexington, Kentucky including horse racing, human living conditions, ladies of the evening, and the movement from horse and buggy to automobiles, dirt roads to brick roads, and the addition of electricity, sanitation, and the telephone.

The magnificently and profoundly researched contents include Preface, Chapter One "The Elegant Miss Belle," Chapter Two "Civil War and Home War," Chapter Three "A Troubled Youth," Chapter Four "A Business Woman Whose Business Was Men," Chapter Five "Networks of Power," Chapter Six "A Wealthy Benefactor," Chapter Seven "Lexington's Exclusive Mansion for Men," Chapter Eight "A Uniquely Powerful Woman in a Changing City,"

Chapter Nine "Crackdown on Vice," Chapter Ten "A Growing Moral Menace," Chapter Eleven "The Passing of a Legend," Epilogue, Acknowledgements, a seventeen page Notes, a Bibliography divided by primary and secondary sources, and an accurate Index. Twenty-six black and white photographs reveal beautiful and exciting places, buildings, and memorabilia of Belle Brezing's life. Twelve black and white photographs disclose the beauty and handsomeness of Belle Brezing and her companions and patrons.

Belle was married to James Keeney who left her so quickly it was as if he was never her husband. Belle's sole child was Daisy May Kenney whose real father is unknown. Belle shipped off Daisy May Keeney to live with nuns because Daisy May was believed to be suffering from retardation. Belle was a lady of the evening at fifteen on her own prior to entering in the ladies of the evening establishment directed by Jennie Hill. Belle's own initial house for ladies of the evening was on Upper Street. Belle had an increase in patrons when horse races were occurring. Horses were bought and sold at Belle Brezing's ladies of the evening establishment. Some race horses mentioned are Lady Thorn, Director, Mambrino Chief, Abdallah, Almont, Harry Wilkes, Goldsmith Maid, Jay-Eye-See, Regret, George Wilkes, Patchen Wilkes, Hindoo, Preakness Stud, Behave Yourself, Bubbling Over, Burgoo King, Broker's Tip, Firenze, Miss Woodford, and Man O' War.

Thirty four people wrote in *Lexington Daily* to stop ladies of the evening. Ms. Brezing and other ladies of the evening were declared nuisances by the court February 13, 1889. Belle's location was around Kentucky University and Kentucky schools which created a frown by Kentucky University president and the Kentucky school board. Belle left North Upper Street for a Megowan Street house purchase using a fifty thousand dollar present from the wealthy George and William Singerly who had money from their father's Philadelphia Germantown Passenger Railway Company valued in 2013 at 16.5 million dollars. Law enforcement did not tamper with the ladies of the evening in the designated red light area Megowan Street.

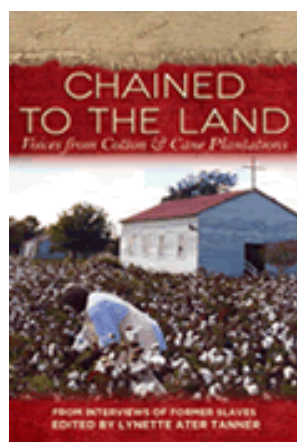
Belle's ladies of the evening were extremely prosperous with utilization of phaetons, drivers and buggies, and extremely elegant attire. Astonishingly, citizens of Argentina where Kentucky horses were sold were aware of Belle. Belle and her ladies were exclusively allowed to shop for clothes in boutiques after the boutiques had closed shop for the day. In 1915, courts were better at ending ladies of the evening. Fines were issued to a person in the red light area and females acting as ladies of the evening. Initially, there was no successful finale to ladies of the evening establishments in Lexington due to the aid by the Lexington city leaders and police for the ladies of the evening. 1800's Victorians were accepting of ladies of the evening, too.

However, Progressives in the 1900's averted ladies of the evening. Business earnings such as rent, doctor bills,

alcohol sellers, taxi fees, eating at restaurants, alcohol purchases such as Kentucky bourbon, telephones, and groceries were less when patrons from Belle's red light area and Belle's red light area itself were permanently gone in 1917. Ovarian cancer killed Belle Brezing on August 11, 1940. Belle Watling in Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* is analogous to Belle Brezing who Mitchell's husband John Marsh knew although Marsh and Mitchell disclaimed the parallelism. *Madam Belle* is a delightfully charming scholarly work of genius.

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Chained to the Land: Voices From Cotton and Cane Plantations. Edited by Lynette Ater Tanner. Winston-Salem, NC: John F. Blair Publishers, 2014. ISBN 978-0-89587-628-7. \$9.95 (pbk.)



My interest in this book, "Chained to the Land: Voices From Cotton and Cane Plantations", was a response to my visits to Brookgreen Plantation/Brookgreen Gardens along the South Carolina coast in summers and holidays between 1975 and 2010. A yearly trek to the Murrells Inlet and Charleston area included a visit to modern day Brookgreen Gardens, including a water tour of the rice plantation, its waterways and its sculpture gardens. Little did I know or perceive how these experiences might lead me to find plantation life fascinating and deeply troublesome.

Stories, photographs and paintings of plantation life are often glamorous with beautiful women in silk dresses and handsome men in black tailcoats and grey pants—led me to wonder if all that I was seeing in plantation life was superficial. I began by asking a simple question: what is a plantation? The Free Dictionary tells us: A plantation is defined as an estate on which crops such as coffee, sugar, tobacco, cotton or rice are cultivated by resident labor, usually in a newly established settlement (www.freeditonary.com).

The words that jumped out at me were "crops/cultivated/resident labor/newly established settlement". These words seemed to me to present a backdrop for stories I heard and read from books and news

articles about plantation owners, plantation workers, buying and selling of slaves and the historical impacts upon the plantation owner families and the slave families during and after the Civil War. Bits and pieces of impressions began to lead me to learn more about plantation life.

John F. Blair, Publisher, and Editor Lynette Alter Tanner, caught my attention with their recently authored and released book, "Chained to the Land: Voices from Cotton and Sugar Cane Plantations". Tanner relied on transcript narrations of 2200 former slaves collected between 1937-1938 by individuals who were employed by the Federal Writers' Project and the Federal Historical Records Survey. Those interviewed were in their 80s and some over 100. Recollections included food, housing, clothing, weddings, funerals, treatment and relationships (p. xii).

Tanner, co-owner of Frogmore Plantation in Louisiana, has contributed an immensely valuable group of narratives to the body of work that gives insight into the life and culture of plantations in Louisiana in the 1700s and 1800s. Her book is a must read for anyone who seeks an understanding of plantation life as seen through the eyes of those who lived and worked the plantation life.

My exclamation upon reading the first narrative of this book which is conducted with Mary Reynolds, age unknown, of Concordia Parish, Louisiana, was, "Is there no limit to man's inhumanity to man?"

For more information about plantations in the State of South Carolina, go to <http://south-carolina-plantations.com/> and for Louisiana, go to <http://www.louisianatravel.com/attractions/plantations>

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Asylum Doctor: James Woods Babcock and the Red Plague of Pellagra. Charles S. Bryan. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2014. ISBN 978-1-61117-490-8. \$34.95.

Asylum Doctor: James Woods Babcock and the Red Plague of Pellagra chronicles the life, work, and struggles of Dr. James Woods Babcock. His work with the cause and cure of the disease which came to be known as pellagra was unceasing, and paved the way for others after him. The disease caused, among other symptoms, dementia and confusion, which would often land patients in insane asylums. Pellagra occurred mostly in southern states. Throughout his career, Dr. Babcock fought for psychiatric institutional rights, and battled racism in the state hospital. He also fought to have his findings concerning pellagra acknowledged among the medical community of his time. The focus of Bryan's work is the years between 1907 and 1914, only a year before Dr. Joseph Goldberger proved the cause of pellagra, through experimentation, which we now know is a lack of niacin in the diet.