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## Chained to the Land: Voices from Cotton and Corn Plantations

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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.

Melinda F. Matthews  
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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](http://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.