

With or Without Your Blessing: Elizabeth Grimball and the Struggle of a Southern Teacher

by

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Abstract

Driven by financial difficulties within the households of southern families during the Civil War, women entered the workforce on an economic basis, which unintentionally instigated a social transformation of traditional gender roles. For example, John and Meta Grimball's eldest daughter Elizabeth entered into the public sphere as a teacher due to the family's economic and personal losses. By doing so she defied her parents' wishes, and independently took control of her financial wellbeing. She became an independent thinker who no longer needed the financial stability of her father. Elizabeth Grimball is an example of a shift toward young American women taking an independent stand in professions made possible by the Civil War. Instead of conceding to follow the strict moral code of a "Southern Belle," Elizabeth forged her own path. Her courage to enter a male dominated workforce is commendable, and her struggle resonates with today's society.

In the spring of 1865, General Lee surrendered the Confederate army to Ulysses S. Grant at Appomattox Courthouse. As the South sighed with defeat, weary soldiers began to flood back to their homes. South Carolina, the champion of secession and southerners' rights, was faced with the challenge of fixing their broken state. Women, who had been forced into the public sphere due to economic hardships, were now confronted with a monumental decision. Would they stay in the male dominated workforce, or hurry back to the comfort of their homes? Elizabeth Grimbball was one of the many southern teachers who were given the opportunity to continue working in a public school and earn a wage. However, Elizabeth's unique position in coming from a respectable, wealthy planter family required her to make a difficult decision on her future in the public sphere. Letters from her mother demanded that Elizabeth resign her position and return to the family home. Torn between the love of her family and the gratifying feeling of being self-sufficient Elizabeth would learn that, although the war was over, the fight for women's rights had just begun. Elizabeth's final independent stand against her family began with the expression of her political views regarding the secession of South Carolina and gaining a consciousness with other like-minded women. The elite social structure into which Elizabeth was born demanded from women obedience and submission in the household. Through Elizabeth's decision to become a teacher and remain in the public sphere after the Civil War, she defied the expectations of southern society.

During the antebellum period, the South lacked an effective public school system. According to a study conducted by Soltow and Stevens the overall illiteracy rate at the beginning of the nineteenth century in the North was about twenty-five percent, while in the

South it was between forty to fifty percent.¹ However, these rates varied considerably on the state level due to urbanization, terrain, and lifestyle choices. Due to the rural landscape and southern way of life, common schools were sparse in the southern states, and children were not able to attend school regularly if they belonged to a poor family that relied on collective labor. Conversely, numerous wealthy southern families believed that poor whites would never understand the benefits of education and would not utilize public schools. Therefore, children who belonged to prominent, white, aristocratic families were usually sent to private institutions or instructed by private tutors who were typically from the North. Approximately 360,000 northerners moved to the South before 1860 in order to work as teachers.² Public education reform was never a notable concern for southern families because most opposed the institution. For example, the public school system in South Carolina was not well established during this time, and only a few charity schools were available to poor white children. Respectable academies funded by wealthy, white families, were only accessible to their children. The push for public education reform originated in the North, and before the Civil War about fifty percent of children attended school regularly in the North.³ The South's dependency on the North for teachers and textbooks led to increased caution and regret as circumstances leaned towards the possibility of a Civil War.

Before the beginning of the Civil War, only four southern states and various local communities had established common school systems.⁴ Within these schools, both girls and

¹ Catherine Hobbs, *Nineteenth-Century Women Learn to Write*, (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1995), 11.

² Christie Anne Farnham, *The Education of the Southern Belle: Higher Education and Student Socialization in the Antebellum South*, (New York: New York University Press, 1994), 97.

³ *Encyclopedia of the Antebellum South*. 1st ed. s.v "Education."

⁴ *Ibid.*

boys were allowed to attend; however, they were taught separately. It was believed that educating girls for vocations was unnecessary because their primary goals as young ladies was to obtain a husband, produce children, and run a household. The social structure of the wealthy class depended on women to fulfill these roles. The cultural construction of separate spheres barred women from respectably entering into any work outside the home. Therefore, their education was limited to subjects such as music, painting, and French. Additionally, only daughters of planters and prosperous families were allowed to continue their education long enough to advance to seminary or college training. In historian Laura Edwards's opinion, young women belonging to the planter class, defined as a household owning twenty or more slaves, enjoyed a greater deal of freedom in their education than daughters of poor whites.⁵ In Edwards's book, *Scarlett Doesn't Live Here Anymore: Southern Women in the Civil War Era*, she argues that young ladies' education was erratic, and focused more on obligations of overseeing house slaves and conforming to strict standards of subordination to their husbands. For instance, the ideology of womanhood allowed for certain limitations in property ownership, wages, and parental rights. Therefore, women's education mirrored their future roles as subordinate wives and mothers in the household. According to Edwards, "both the law and southern social conventions assumed that household heads were adult, white, propertied males."⁶ However, Edwards is adamant that the Civil War and emancipation shattered the social structure of the household and politically constructed ideologies of gender.

⁵ Laura Edwards, *Scarlett Doesn't Live Here Anymore: Southern Women in the Civil War Era*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 17.

⁶ Ibid, 3.

Furthermore, fathers never expected their daughters to work outside the home. According to historian Christie Farnham, “a college education became emblematic of class, a means to a type of refinement that labeled one a lady worthy of protection, admiration, and chivalrous attention.”⁷ The objective of educating women in the South, in Farnham’s opinion, was to develop young ladies’ minds and mold them into morally pure individuals. The wealthy southern family though, criticized independent-thinking and strong-willed women. Education was an attempt to offer women correct instruction on their proper role in southern society. Additionally, the hierarchical system of the slave South was incorporated into every aspect of southern life. Education for young ladies was seen as a way to better a family’s status in society. Higher education was seen as a mark of gentility, which signified the highest type of refinement because it rationalized the natural structure of elevation over others.⁸ The “Southern Belle” represented a romanticized and idealized picture of white domination in the South. Also, education brought honor to one’s family. Farnham suggests that this was a gateway into finding a husband, which led to children and the fulfillment of the cult of domesticity ideology. Women were seen as the ultimate symbol of piety, and this was expressed through benevolence. Benevolence was understood as, “the pain and suffering of others on an individual level without concern for the inequalities in the social structure that brought such pain and suffering into being,” According to Farnham,⁹ maternalism, the core structure of the household, was based on the practice of benevolence.

Moreover, education of young ladies was viewed as reinforcing republican motherhood, also known as the cult of domesticity. Previously, women prepared to become

⁷ Farnham, *Education of the Southern Belle*, 3.

⁸ Ibid, 28.

⁹ Ibid, 30.

wives and mothers through apprenticeships to their own mothers. With the acknowledgment of education as a class symbol and a requirement for women to fulfill their moral obligations and social services to the household, more southern families began allowing their daughters to attend school. By permitting young women to attend school, families were demonstrating the need to equip their daughters with appropriate skills in order to attract suitable husbands. Through marriage alliances, women moved from the authority of their fathers to the equally powerful authority of their husbands.¹⁰ Young women had virtually no legal standing in the South, and for many daughters of the planter class, wealth was the primary factor within a marriage contract.¹¹ Therefore, women became more appealing to suitors if they had a higher education. It was generally assumed that a higher education correlated with the ability to become a good wife and mother. Also, men presumed that an educated woman would better appreciate the intelligence of her husband, and was more suited to groom their children into good citizens. By recognizing women's role in the home through education, Farnham argues that women were given a unique chance to study the classics and disprove the previous colonial thought that women's brains were inferior to men's.¹² This inferior thinking shifted during the late nineteenth century into valuing the importance of preserving the home and the civic duty of women as educators to their children. Men, who viewed education as a refinement and a necessary quality in a wife and future mother, encouraged this shift.

Throughout the Civil War elite southern families viewed education as a way to reinforce class boundaries that had been lost by the absence of slaves and other symbols of wealth. According to Giselle Roberts, women clung to education as a means to assert their

¹⁰*Encyclopedia of the Antebellum South*. 1st ed. s.v "Courtship and Marriage."

¹¹ Ibid.

¹²Farnham, *The Education of the Southern Belle*, 15.

elite identities during the Civil War when they “struggled to navigate their way through a world that pitted patriotic sacrifice against marriage, and wartime practicality against gentility.”¹³ Education for women had always been seen as an opportunity to socialize and not as vocational training leading to a wage earning position. However, the Civil War forced women to shift their traditional opinions on work outside the home. Roberts argues that the Confederate ideology of womanhood that supported the war effort contradicted women’s well-established antebellum role.¹⁴ Consequently, many women were forced into difficult situations that opposed well-established precedents of marriage and gender roles. Elite women found education as a way to balance new ideas presented to them by the Confederate government, with longstanding views of social status.

In *Out to Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States*, Alice Kessler-Harris argues that southern society found it acceptable for elite women to continue their education in order to pursue social status and traditional means of courtship, if the family had the means to do so. Kessler-Harris is a R. Gordon Hoxie Professor of American History at Columbia University, in New York City. She is also the former president of the Organization of American Historians, and is a renowned scholar for her work on gender and labor history. Therefore, her extensive work on women and labor presents a unique perspective on higher education for women during the antebellum era. Kessler-Harris agrees that southern families believed that a higher degree of education meant that women would become better mothers who were suited to educate their children within the household when she states that “women had of course always taught children within the family and in small

¹³ Giselle Roberts, *The Confederate Belle*, (Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 2003), 93.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 90.

dame schools.”¹⁵ Becoming a governess was seen as a suitable job for women to enhance their moral sensibilities before marriage. Although education was seen as a sign of belonging to a wealthy family and furthering women’s ability as future mothers, there were limited career options besides marriage. Kessler-Harris argues that “a taste of education led some women to seek more, to reject the family option entirely and to select a profession instead.”¹⁶ Some families, specifically mothers, were horrified at the prospect of their daughters entering into the workforce. Many young women during the Civil War began to reject the moral code that permitted them to receive an education, but denied them legitimate wage work outside of the household.¹⁷

Additionally, it should be noted that many women viewed access to education as an opportunity for personal growth. Although most southern women still recognized their submissive place in society, education allowed women to begin closing the gap of inequality between men and women. In Alexis Girardin Brown’s award winning research paper, “The Women Left Behind: Transformation of the Southern Belle, 1840-1880,” she argues that women found intellectual satisfaction through schooling. Education was an outlet for the “limited identity women gained through marriage, as mistress of the plantation, mother of her husband’s children, and as [a] wife.”¹⁸ The restrictive roles left women with no social mobility outside the household, and education was seen as an equalizer.

¹⁵ Alice Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 56.

¹⁶ Ibid, 57.

¹⁷ Ibid, 56.

¹⁸ Alexis Girardin Brown, “The Women Left Behind: Transformation of the Southern Belle, 1840-1880,” *Historian* Vol 62, No.4 (Summer 2000): 759. Received the undergraduate Oppenheim Award for Excellence in Research and Writing in History.

Another proponent of the cult of domesticity was the ideology of separate spheres between men and women. In a commonly accepted social structure during the antebellum period, men were expected to assimilate themselves into the public sphere or workforce, while women were confined to the household or private sphere. Brown argues that “the private sphere of women embraced femininity, beauty, simplicity, and submissiveness; the highest roles to which a southern woman could aspire were those of nurturing mother, dutiful wife, and social moral pillar.”¹⁹ Education of women was important because men were mostly absent from the household. It was required of women to train the male children for future roles in the labor force, and to train female children on how to become proper wives and mothers. The split between private and public spheres also allowed for more focus on the role of women as authority figures inside the home, resulting in a moral influence over men. Patriarchy began to erode away due to the amount of time men spent in the public sphere working, therefore leaving their wives in charge of the household. The separate authority of spheres was limited somewhat because, although women gained autonomy in the household, men were still the dominate figures. Historian Aileen Kraditor notes that “It was not that social order required the subordination of women rather...it required a family structure that involved the subordination of women.”²⁰ Men were viewed as the primary wage earners who resided in the public sphere in order to provide for their families, and women were viewed as their supporters in the household.

Through the paper titled “Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman’s Place: The Rhetoric of Women’s History,” historian Linda Kerber argues that “the ideology of

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Quoted in Alice Kessler-Harris, *Women Have Always Worked: A Historical Overview*, (New York: The Feminist Press, 1981), 62.

republican womanhood was an effort to bring the older version of the separation of spheres into rough conformity with the new politics that valued autonomy and individualism.”²¹

Kerber analyzes the physical spaces to which women were assigned and how they dealt with the constricting limitations of their gender. The private sphere was a distinct area that encompassed a nurturing environment with a focus on children and husband. The metaphor of the “sphere” has allowed historians to categorize women’s roles throughout American history. The notion of separate spheres also allows for the visualization of a timeline where private and public spheres intertwine. During the Civil War, southern families faced financial difficulties within the household. This prompted women to enter the workforce on an economic basis, which unintentionally instigated a social transformation of traditional gender roles. Additionally, in historian Marilyn Culpepper’s opinion, women found teaching to be the most practical solution to a family’s financial problem.²²

Within the South, teaching was a male-dominated profession throughout the nineteenth century up until the Civil War. It was believed that teaching required strong discipline and initiative that only a male could provide. Due to the lack of educated adults in the South, teachers were imported from the North. This led to uncomfortable situations where northern teachers would express strong opinions against the southern way of life.²³ Women who entered into this male-dominated field were often pitied. Although teaching was seen as a respectable profession, any woman who inserted themselves into the public sphere were obviously in dire financial need, because it was assumed that no woman would want to

²¹ Linda Kerber, “Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman’s Place: The Rhetoric of Women’s History,” *The Journal of American History* 75, no.1 (Jun. 1988): 20.

²² Marilyn Culpepper, *Trials and Triumphs: Women of the American Civil War*, (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1991), 239.

²³ *Encyclopedia of the Antebellum South*. 1st ed. s.v “Teachers.”

work outside of the home. In historian Thomas Woody's opinion, this assertion contradicted the social understanding that women were natural teachers and that "teaching was, in fact, the best preparation for the office of mother."²⁴ Woody argues that women used the role of a teacher as a transition into marriage and motherhood. Women, who took on the task of a teacher, found it easier to educate their own children.²⁵ In the South, however, any woman who entered the public sphere in search of a job was an embarrassment to her family. A woman working outside of the home signified financial misfortune and the inability of a father or husband to provide for his family. The southern code of honor was based on a man's ability to provide for his family, thus a woman entering the public sphere signified his failure as a man. Therefore, in Farnham's opinion, "most teachers in the South were men, there being more schools for males than females and women being considered incapable of disciplining boys and teenage males."²⁶ Even though the cult of domesticity ideology illustrated the "Southern Belle" as a well-educated mother whose duty it was to teach her children, women were still not seen as educators in the public sphere.

The workforce was considered to be a part of the male's sphere whereas the home was a woman's domain. By entering into the workforce, southern women challenged the ideology of separate spheres, which in turned threatened men's honor. During the Civil War the profession of teaching rapidly shifted from a male dominated to a female dominated field. Woody notes that in the years after the Civil War, data shows the influx of women teachers in 1888 to be sixty-three percent and male teachers to be thirty-seven percent. However, in Mary Elizabeth Massey's opinion, the war should not be credited "with opening the

²⁴ Thomas Woody, *A History of Women's Education in the United States*, (New York: Octagon Books Inc. 1966), 483.

²⁵ Ibid, 483.

²⁶ Farnham, *The Education of the Southern Belle*, 98.

profession to women, since thousands were already teaching in 1861, [although] it did greatly enhance their opportunities when male teachers enlisted or took more remunerative jobs in industry and business.”²⁷ Nevertheless, the incursion of women into the public sphere was still seen as an encroachment on male territory, even though men were off fighting in the war.

Therefore, when southern women began to rapidly enter the workforce during the Civil War, employers justified paying women low wages because they were only supplementing their husband or father’s income. Consequently, up until the end of the nineteenth century, women were paid about one third to one half of a man’s wage.²⁸ This was hardly a sufficient wage to live on; however, many employers assumed that a woman would rely on her family to make up the difference. Additionally, women who entered into the workforce were seen as less respectable than women who stayed in the household. Kessler-Harris states, “their presence in the labor force placed them outside the ranks of respectability and subjected them to all the exploitation of the industrial wage earner.”²⁹ Respectable women knew their place, and stayed in the home where they could prove their virtue and morality through their families.

Furthermore, Massey argues in *Bonnet Brigades* that, even though women’s greatest opportunity in the workforce was teaching because of the cult of motherhood ideology, many women faced discrimination based on their gender. “Male teachers were generally preferred,” according to Massey, “especially as instructors of boys.”³⁰ The reason women were able to even enter into the profession was because they received smaller salaries than

²⁷ Mary Elizabeth Massey, *Bonnet Brigades*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1966), 109.

²⁸ Kessler-Harris, *Women Have Always Worked*, 63.

²⁹ Ibid, 63.

³⁰ Massey, *Bonnet Brigades*, 11.

men. Massey also argues, “the public assumed that no woman would teach school unless dire poverty drove her, and she was therefore an object of pity.”³¹ Consequently, women teachers found themselves in an unusual predicament. Teaching inside the private sphere was allowable and respectable, but not many families had the means during the Civil War to hire a governess. Teaching in common schools in the public sphere was not acceptable, looked on with pity, and only allowed because of lower wages. The Civil War forced southern women to abandon social norms and challenge gender stereotypes, which subsequently left women in a state of limbo during and after the Civil War.

Additionally Massey claims, “the best teachers are women, not because they performed their duties more satisfactorily, however, but because they demanded less pay and considered teaching a ‘prime vocation’ and not merely a stepping stone to a better job like most men.”³² Massey argues that many southern towns encountered difficulty in hiring male teachers for common schools. Compared to the North, the South was slow in the development of public education due to the less densely populated regions. The North was considerably more urban than the South. Also, many southerners were opposed to the idea of tax-supported schools. The Civil War prompted the idea in the South that women were better suited to teach. Men were increasingly abandoning teaching positions and enlisting in the war. With the constant disturbance in the teaching curriculum, many southerners begrudgingly turned towards women to fill in the open positions. In return, southern women pursued the opportunity to reconstruct public opinion of women teachers.

During the Civil War southern women were repeatedly confronted with conflicting ideologies and moral codes. The Confederacy developed an ideology based on sacrifice that

³¹ Ibid, 11.

³² Ibid, 108.

encouraged women to support the war effort. However, this clashed with the long held antebellum social obligation of marriage and child rearing. Education for women, before the Civil War, was designed as a way for women to learn how to become better mothers and socialize with their peers. There was no expectation that education would allow for further career opportunities other than becoming a wife and mother. When the war commenced, southern women found themselves without steady financial support because their male relatives volunteered to fight in the war. Therefore women began entering the workforce-the male dominated sphere-to support their families. Teaching was seen as a suitable profession for women only if it was inside of the home, the female dominated sphere. Teaching in the public sphere was seen as unsuitable because it was an encroachment on male territory. Before the Civil War, teaching was a male dominated profession in the South. This changed with the onset of the war and the need for men on the frontline. Women filled the gaps men left, and were subsequently paid less because of the longstanding view that women were expected to stay in the home.

In the article “Altars of Sacrifice: Confederate Women and the Narratives of War,” Drew Gilpin Faust argues that changing gender roles for Confederate women, ultimately led to the South’s loss in the Civil War. Although Faust’s conclusion is debatable, there is no denying that the Confederacy placed an unrealistic ideology on women. The ideology called on women to sacrifice their sons, husbands, brothers, and uncles, as well as their lifestyles, in order to benefit the Confederate cause of independence. Faust argues, “the system of reciprocity central to this understanding of social power had been violated by the wartime failure of white Southern males to provide the services and support understood as requisite to

their dominance.”³³ Women struggled to reconcile antebellum ideals with wartime realities. The institution of marriage and the way parents raised their daughters to become proper Southern Belles was inconsistent with the Confederate wartime ideology. This led to the entire breakdown of southern culture. Women invaded the public sphere because they were left with no choice but to do so, when the male figures in their life left to fight in the war. This unprecedented shift in social power required women to shift their behavior and reliance on male financial support. Although the Confederate government attempted to make “use” of women on the home front by shaping an ideology professionalizing sacrifice and valorizing their passive waiting by outlining specific roles a woman could acquire, it was not enough to stop the shifting of gender roles.

According to Faust, the Confederacy viewed teaching as a way to limit war-born behavioral changes because they expected the profession to have little postwar impact.³⁴ The feminization of the teaching profession had started at the beginning of the nineteenth century in the North, but had yet to influence the South. The shortage of male teachers in the South left the Confederacy no choice but to employ women. The Confederate government assumed that once they won the war and established independence from the Union, southern life would revert back to traditional gender roles and spheres. According to Faust, however, “the romance of the ‘battle piece’ had disappeared before the pressing realities of war.”³⁵ The romanticism and patriotism that categorized the beginning of the Civil War began to erode as the war continued on longer than expected. Idealistic assumptions about war gave way to harsh reality. Women started to question the Confederate ideology of sacrifice and lost their

³³ Drew Gilpin Faust, “Altars of Sacrifice: Confederate Women and the Narratives of War,” *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 76, No. 4 (Mar., 1990), 1221.

³⁴ *Ibid*, 1216.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 1227

idealistic assumptions of war. This led to the breakdown of the Confederate ideology that had not given women large enough roles in the war effort and forced them to embrace their new roles in the public sphere.

Giselle Roberts book *The Confederate Belle* further strengthens the proposal that an unrealistic Confederate ideology led to the breakdown of traditional antebellum ideals. Roberts argues that elite southern women were brought up in a society where the primary goal was to marry. In marriage a women would find financial security and purpose. According to Roberts, however, “wartime necessity had refashioned an ideal of womanhood into one that supported the war effort while contradicting the underpinnings of the antebellum role.”³⁶ Therefore, women were challenged to simultaneously abide by the notions that women must marry and become financially supported by their husbands, but also gladly sacrifice their male counterparts for the war effort. Consequently, women found they needed to enter the workforce to gain financial support and independence. This subsequent rejection of gender roles by women is demonstrated with the shift from male to female teachers.

Ultimately, education was used as a tool to increase southern women’s opportunities in the workforce. Previously, education had been thought of as a way to enlighten women on their social and maternal obligations to the family. Entering the workforce to teach was considered to be out of dire necessity, for only poor women would do so. Antebellum ideology stated that a man was to support a woman financially. A woman belonging to a wealthy family was not expected to become independent and earn a living for herself. The

³⁶ Roberts, *The Confederate Belle*, 91.

Civil War instigated the shift in gendered stereotypes, and the South opened the field of teaching to women.

In researching women's social transformation from the private to public sphere, I have focused on teaching as an opportunity for an individual southern, elite, white, woman to gain independence from her family. Teaching was an opportunity for many young women to become financially independent from their families when the Civil War began, and wealthy planters faced monetary challenges. Although many families felt embarrassed in not being able to provide for their daughters, many women found working as teachers to be rewarding and self-fulfilling. Elizabeth Berkley Grimball (later known as Elizabeth Berkley Munro) felt satisfaction from teaching in South Carolina, although it was hard work. Eventually as the war came to an end in 1865, Elizabeth would stay in Union, South Carolina as a teacher, against the expressed wishes of her mother, Meta Morris Grimball.

The Grimball Family will be used as an example to demonstrate the financial difficulties wealthy planters faced during the Civil War. The family will also be used to explore how John Berkley Grimball and Meta Morris Grimball faced the challenge and embarrassment of their eldest daughter, Elizabeth Berkley Grimball, entering into the teaching profession in Union, South Carolina due to the family's financial status. Before the war, the family's status within society was that of wealthy, white, aristocratic planters. Therefore, my research analyzes the upper class in southern society and their attitudes towards women and education. I have referenced notable historians to aid my argument that a higher level of education for women was used to advance elite families' status and honor in order to create wealthy and prosperous marriage contracts. However, the more education that women received, the smaller the disparity between women and men became. When the Civil

War started in 1861, women had a chance to fade the boundaries between spheres, and enter into the public domain of men. As elite families struggled to maintain order and wealth within their households, some women chose to become teachers and instigate a transition of traditional gender roles. Historians generally focus on women entering into higher education, but not their positions as teachers within schools. My research on Elizabeth Grimball focuses on the teaching profession and adds more insight into the unique position Elizabeth was in due to her wealthy background. Arguably Elizabeth had more of a challenge when entering the public sphere than middle or lower-class women. Where in historian Michelle Gillespie's opinion, women of the lower classes in society were economically motivated to enter the workforce; women belonging to the upper class were motivated with other incentives such as financial independence and gender equality.³⁷ Subsequently, when Elizabeth refused to resign her teaching position, she was risking the loss of her status in society.

Through the analysis of the Grimball Family Papers, 1683-1916, I will discuss the financial situation of the Grimball Family including the state of the plantations before and after the Civil War, and the number of slaves owned. Letters of correspondence between family members will give an insight into the personal affairs of the family and the relationships between family members. Five of the Grimballs' sons participated as soldiers in the Civil War, and William Heyward Grimball would end up giving his life for the Confederate cause. I will examine the brothers' correspondence with Elizabeth, and their thoughts on her social opinions. I will also use the journal of Meta Morris Grimball, kept from December 1860 to February 1866, to explore the relationship between Elizabeth and her mother as Elizabeth furthered her education and entered into the public sphere as a teacher.

³⁷ Susanna Delfino and Michele Gillespie, *Neither Lady Nor Slave: Working Women of the South*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 262.

With the diary of John Berkley Grimball I analyze the acquisition of lands, the Grimballs' financial status and property values, and John's opinions of secession and war.

Elizabeth Grimball's journey will be presented chronologically from the beginning of the Civil War to the after effects the family faced at the end of the war. Newspaper articles will be referenced for significant events in South Carolina that correlate with the timeline of events mentioned by the Grimball family. South Carolina, where the Grimball's Grove Plantation and Pinebury Plantation were located in Charleston, is considered to be a part of the Deep South. The South is a diverse region with differing opinions and traditions. I utilized Allen Guelzo's breakdown of the South to direct my research of southern society. In Guelzo's opinion the South is divided into three sections. The Border South which included the states of Kentucky, Maryland, and northern Virginia. The Middle South containing the states of Arkansas, northern Louisiana, Tennessee, southern Virginia, and the upcountry of Alabama, Mississippi, South Carolina, Georgia, and North Carolina. The Deep South, where the Grimball family resided, bordered the Gulf and south Atlantic coastlines, from New Orleans to Charleston.³⁸ There are many South's and I am not presuming they are all coherently the same. In regards to my research, I have analyzed the South from the perspective of traditional white, wealthy planter families and their ideas of women in education and the public sphere. Meta's family was from Morrisania, New York, and Elizabeth spent a significant time in the North with her aunt. Sources strongly suggest that Elizabeth's family influences in the North helped in her decision to step into the public sphere and become financially independent. Her final independent stand began with a disagreement about secession with her family, and continued with her finding a profession

³⁸ Allen Guelzo, *Fateful Lightning: A New History of the Civil War and Reconstruction*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 34.

that needed to be fulfilled during the Civil War, and gaining a consciousness with other like-minded women.

Southern War Hymn

By John A. Wagner of South Carolina

A Rise! arise! with arm of might,
Sons of our sunny home!
Gird on the sword for the sacred fight,
For the battle-hour hath come!
Arise! for the felon foe draws nigh
In battle's dread array;
To the front, ye brave! let the coward fly,
'Tis the hero that bides the fray!
Strike hot and hard, my noble band,
With the arm of fight and fire;
Strike fast for God and Fatherland,
For mother, and wife, and sire.
Though thunders roar and lightnings flash,
Oh! Southrons, never fear,
Ye shall turn the bolt with the sabre's clash,
And the shaft with the steely spear.
Bright blooms shall wave o'er the hero's grave,
While the craven finds no rest;
Thrice cursed the traitor, the slave, the knave,
While thrice is the hero blessed.
To the front in the fight, ye Southrons, stand
Brave spirits, with eagle eye,
And standing for God and for Fatherland,
Ye will gallantly do or die.³⁹

³⁹ Henry Marvin Wharton, *Songs and Poems of the Southern Confederacy 1861-1865*, (Chicago: The John C. Winston Co., 1904), 117.

On July 14, 1831 Elizabeth Berkley Grimball was born in New York, just one year after the marriage of her parents Margaret (Meta) Ann Morris and John Berkley Grimball. Meta and John Grimball would proceed to have nine children in total: Elizabeth, Berkley, Lewis, William, John Jr., Arthur, Gabriella, Charlotte, and Harry.⁴⁰ John was a wealthy plantation owner and planter who inherited property in St. Paul's Collection District, South Carolina, and in other nearby areas that are not entirely clear from his diary entries. Also, at one point John managed his mother's property on the Stono and Dawho Rivers until her death on July 27, 1844. The childhood of the Grimball children was spent in Charleston, South Carolina⁴¹ where John purchased the Grove Plantation from the Morris family, his wife's relatives from the North, with funds from selling his Slann's Island Plantation and his mother's Stono River Plantation. The Grove Planation was combined with the nearby Pinebury Plantation, land John previously owned. During the fall and winter the Grimball family would occupy the plantations where John could manage the planting of rice. At one point it seems that John was cultivating cotton, corn, and rice; however, around 1852, he committed to only planting rice. In the summers, the family would move further into the town of Charleston to escape the dangers associated with the swamps such as "country fever," commonly known as malaria.⁴² Additionally, there were frequent trips into Charleston for social events during all seasons and this resulted in John renting houses and sometimes purchasing and selling properties.

⁴⁰ See Appendix 1.

⁴¹ See Appendix 2.

⁴² Jill Dubisch, "Low country fevers: Cultural adaptations to malaria in antebellum South Carolina," *Social Science & Medicine* Vol 21, No. 6 (1985): 641.

The education of the Grimball children appears to have been from either private schools or at the homes of private tutors in Charleston. Some of the elder boys were sent to Willington in the Abbeville District and to the Military Academy in Columbia. The eldest son Berkley trained in the office of H. A. DeSaussure & Son, while Lewis went on to study medicine in Dr. Gedding's office in Charleston, and John Jr. went to the United States Naval Academy at Annapolis in 1854. Elizabeth attended Montpelier Institution near Macon, Georgia in 1847. An all female school founded by Stephen Elliot Jr., the Montpelier Institution, was the second oldest school for girls in Georgia.

Meta took great pride in raising her children and running an efficient household. She believed in upholding southern values and a traditional way of life. She remarks in her diary about proper customs and manners, and how Elizabeth was turning into a young, polite, Christian lady. Before the Civil War began in 1861, she wrote in her diary quite often about how she would like her oldest children to marry. It seems to have given her much concern that none of her children showed any interest in pursuing or being pursued by suitors. "It seems to me all the world are getting married except my children. I wish a suitable offer would come in Elizabeths [sic] way & that it would please her to accept it & that Berkley could find some nice girl with a little money to get married to. John will be obliged to resign & then he must try something else. - All this troubles me."⁴³ Frequently attending social events, such as weddings, Meta felt that her oldest children, especially Elizabeth, should be settling down. When rumors of war began, Meta was more adamant than ever that her four oldest children needed to be married in order to fulfill traditional roles of men and women. "I wish they, the elder ones, could be settled, married well, it is for the happiness of a woman &

⁴³ Meta Morris Grimball Diary, December 15, 1860, Grimball Family Collection (GFC).

for that of a man. I could wish that Elizabeth was well married and Berkley & Lewis. William might wait a little longer but if anyone very desirable should offer I would not object. I cannot alter this, and I think it better so, than married in an unsuitable way.”⁴⁴ Unfortunately for Meta, Elizabeth would not be married until after the Civil War.

In November 1860 the Republican Abraham Lincoln was elected president, and the South exploded with fury. John had not been an active member in politics, but soon became an advocate for secession and the defense of southern rights. He wrote that “the prospect before us in regard to our Slave property, if we continue in the Union, is nothing less than utter ruin.”⁴⁵ John owned somewhere between seventy to eighty slaves before the start of the Civil War, and meticulously kept track of their persons in his work logs.⁴⁶ With the election of a Republican president, southern slaveholders feared the destruction of the slave system. Therefore, on December 20, 1860, South Carolina became the first southern state to secede from the Union. John remarked on the occasion that, “the people have therefore with unexampled unanimity resolved to secede and to dare any consequence that may follow the act.”⁴⁷

Elizabeth was in Philadelphia with her aunt when news came of the secession. She saw no justification for the secession of South Carolina for she had experienced no hostility or aggression towards herself or the South. Elizabeth regularly traveled to the North to visit her mother’s family. Meta alludes in her diary to the fact that Elizabeth spent much time with her aunt in the North, and that she had a strong relationship with her. Moreover, Elizabeth felt that South Carolina had acted irrationally and without cause to call for secession from the

⁴⁴ Meta Morris Grimball Diary, March 15, 1861, GFC.

⁴⁵ John Berkley Grimball Diary, December 17, 1860, GFC.

⁴⁶ See Appendix 3.

⁴⁷ John Berkley Grimball Dairy, December 17, 1860, GCF.

Union. The threat of secession reveled Elizabeth's independent thinking separate from her families. For her to form a different opinion from her father and to demonstrate those political views is an indication of her active questioning of societal gender norms. Her brothers were all pro-secession, and in particular William, Lewis, and Berkley took it upon themselves to reprimand Elizabeth for her anti-secessionist views. They believed Elizabeth was wrong in reprimanding South Carolina, and may have felt that because she was a woman, she should not have a political opinion. On November 13, 1860 William wrote:

You, at the North cannot comprehend the irritation and hatred which animate without exception every man here. There have been two tremendous meetings here, which were addressed by Barnwall [sic] Rhett, Magrath [sic], James Conner and others, all declaring that our safety, our honor demanded from us as freemen no longer to submit to their insults and sneers, no longer to own as country-men men whose highest wish is to invade the sacred rights of our homes with poison in one hand and the incendiary's torch in the other. We are fighting for existence.⁴⁸

William was particularly adamant that southern honor was at stake, and that the only possible option to retain the southern lifestyle was to fight for their right to own slaves. He believed that the North had oppressed the southern people by restricting access to their property. On November 20, 1860 he again wrote to Elizabeth emphasizing the need to protect the family from dishonor, and the wrongs suffered by the South.

It is nothing to yell about that we are prevented from carrying our property into the common territory of the United States. It is nothing to yell

⁴⁸ William H. Grimball to Elizabeth Grimball, November 13, 1860, GFC.

for that the government is to be in the hands of men pledged to carry on the irrepressible conflict against us. It is nothing that they send incendiaries to stir up the slaves to poison & murder us? It is nothing that our brothers at the North robb [sic] us of our property and beat us when we reclaim it?⁴⁹

William was enraged at the audacity the North had at taking the South's property. He viewed secession as the only viable option to condemn the abuse southerners had faced. He also believed that South Carolina had a right to secede from the Union. To him secession did not mean a revolution, but rather a legitimate action of a sovereign state. If southerners' rights were being challenged, then the plight of southern men was both honorable and lawful. Elizabeth did not agree with her brother's argument. She believed that with the Democrats holding a majority in Congress, the Republicans would have little opportunity to pass any bills further restricting slavery in the South. She still saw no evidence in Philadelphia suggesting that the North was actively moving to restrict southerner's rights. Lewis responded to her rebuttal arguing, "every one at the North, who does not own slaves, is opposed to the Institution. They are all enemies of Slavery and hope for its extinction."⁵⁰ In his letter Lewis states that everyone in the North is a "frantic fanatic." He genuinely believes that because the North supports Stephen A. Douglas and Abraham Lincoln there will never be a compromise between the North and South. Individuals who have corrupted justice are running the North and promoting the notion of an irrepressible conflict.

We will have no more Compromises, and we will have our rights. If there be a man in South Carolina, who proposes delay in action, and a further continuance in this Union, he is a vile traitor and should be hung to the first

⁴⁹ William H. Grimball to Elizabeth Grimball, November 20, 1860, GFC.

⁵⁰ Lewis M. Grimball to Elizabeth Grimball, November 27, 1860, GFC.

limb that he can be dragged to. Aye hang him higher than Haman. South Carolina must go now, is she goes alone. There is no step backward, but to disgrace-wile submission and slavish chains.⁵¹

Lewis firmly believed that there was no alternative solution but secession, and South Carolina needed to rise up and meet the challenge presented to them by the North.

Elizabeth still did not agree with her brother's accusations of the North. She believed that, by seceding, South Carolina would look ungrateful to the Union. The states had been working together for many years and to abandon the institution now, she argued, would be ignorant. She firmly attested to the strength of the national government, and warned Lewis that South Carolina would make no friends by seceding. Lewis continued to admonish her by saying, "My God Lizzie! What are you writing? You speak as if we are the aggressors, and would dissolve the union on Blood shed, upon a mere abstract principle, when the fact is we are oppressed and are contending for all that we hold dear- our Property- our Institution- our Honor- aye and our very lives!"⁵² Additionally, Berkley Grimball wrote a letter to his sister on December 8, 1860 where he championed for the secession of South Carolina. "I hope it will end in establishing a Southern Confederacy who will have among themselves slavery a bond of union stronger than any which hold the north together."⁵³ Berkley too was adamant that the institution of slavery was being contested with the election of Lincoln. Seceding was the logical next step to a strong and united slave South. John, Berkley, Lewis, and William closely followed the convention that was to decide the fate of South Carolina. Before South Carolina seceded on December 20, 1860, Elizabeth still held out hope that the Union would

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Berkley Grimball to Elizabeth Grimball, December 8, 1860, GFC.

remain intact. Nevertheless, this was not the case, and when she returned to South Carolina in January 1861 it was to whispers of excitement and preparations for an upcoming war.

According to the *Richmond Whig*, South Carolina was preparing for war, and was sending commissioners to slave states to recruit others to the cause of secession and southern rights:

Whereas [sic], The State of South Carolina by her ordinance of 1852, affirmed her right to secede from the Confederacy [sic] whenever the occasion should arise justifying her, in her own judgment, in taking that step; and in the resolution adopted by her Convention, that she forlore [sic] the immediate exercise of that right from considerations of expediency; and whereas [sic] more than seven years have elapsed since that Convention adjourned, and in the intervening time the assaults upon the institution of slavery, and upon the rights and equality of the Southern States, have unceasingly [sic] continued with increasing violence, and in new and more alarming forms; be it therefore, “Resolved, unanimously, That South Carolina, still deferring to her Southern sisters, nevertheless respectfully announce to them that it is the deliberate judgment of this General Assembly, that the slaveholding States should immediately meet together to concert measures for united action.”⁵⁴

The Grimball sons wasted no time in enlisting themselves in service to South Carolina and its cause. John Jr. offered his services to the governor for active duty while Berkley, William, and Lewis applied to serve in military companies. Although Elizabeth was not in agreement with secession and opposed to the upcoming war, she did take great pride in

⁵⁴ “Commissioner to Virginia,” *Richmond Whig*, January 3, 1860.

her state. Meta notes in her diary that Elizabeth went to town with John to see her brothers involving themselves with the war effort. She seemed proud that her brothers were becoming brave soldiers who represented the great state of South Carolina and exclaimed, “anyone who says the Carolina troops would run, should be shot.”⁵⁵ Moreover, Meta also notes the excited state Elizabeth was in at learning the intention of Berkley gaining military exposure at Fort Sumter.

Less enthusiastic about the impending war was Meta. At the beginning of 1861 she seemed to still hope for a peaceable solution between the North and South. However, as a dutiful Confederate lady should, she encouraged her boys to enter into military service, and sacrificed her happiness for the good of the state. “They must do their duty to their State; and I put my trust in my God & their God, my Savior & their Savior, and I Pray for them & and for myself. The Government at Washington seem full of duplicity and in looking back to the conduct of the seceding States, there seems to have been a truthful and noble faith, actuating them.”⁵⁶ The same day Meta wrote this diary entry, the war began at Fort Sumter where her son Berkley was stationed.

At the beginning of May 1861 the Grimball family left the Grove and Pinebury Plantations, and moved further into the city of Charleston. Here they resided for some time in their family home. The war did not seem to be affecting the Grimballs’ social lives as there were frequent visitors to their home. For example, Elizabeth was seen consistently entertaining a Miss Aiken, the Manigaults, Mrs. Vanderhorst, and Mrs. Wayne for tea. Also, she made frequent trips with Ann Barnwell who, according to Meta, would “pour out her

⁵⁵ Meta Morris Grimball Diary, January 12, 1861, GFC.

⁵⁶ Meta Morris Grimball Diary, April 12, 1861, GFC.

discontent with life, herself, and all the world to Elizabeth.”⁵⁷ Elizabeth and her younger sister Charlotte were also busy working with relief societies for wounded soldiers, and sewing clothes for them for the upcoming winter months. The official titles of the societies were: Relief of the Wounded and Clothing for the Troops. Meta seemed to be pleased with the way Elizabeth was conducting herself in the early part of the war. She was immensely satisfied that Elizabeth was going to Miss Drayton’s twice a week to learn how to cut and sew, a proper skill for a lady to know.⁵⁸ Meta was consistently preparing her two daughters for married life, and believed that aiding the war effort demonstrated a mature, southern lady to society.

As the war progressed during 1861 the Grimballs started to face financial difficulties. In Meta’s opinion, the separation between the North and South was the right course of action, “but to us as a family it was just ruin-the Northern property was sold, and we were about to realize something from it the prices last Fall were very high, & now this is all over and the attainment of positions are so difficult the boys have nothing to do now besides the war.”⁵⁹ Mentioned earlier, John owned a vast amount of property not only in the South but the North as well. The older sons usually helped John in managing the multiple properties, but when the war began they were all eager to obtain commissions. It seems, however, that Lewis had difficulty in obtaining a position in the military at the start of the war. In November 1861, John returned to the Grove and Pinebury Plantations to see how his slaves were managing the fields. Pinebury Plantation had turned into a military station, and John was expected to entertain the officers at his home.

⁵⁷ Meta Morris Grimball Diary, July 11, 1861, GFC.

⁵⁸ Meta Morris Grimball Diary, August 10, 1861, GFC.

⁵⁹ Meta Morris Grimball Diary, October 19, 1861, GFC.

At the beginning of 1862, Meta was struck with worry about the enemy invading Charleston and Savannah. “Things are very dark now & for ourselves ruin seems pretty certain. The whole Country seems to be abandoned to the enemy.”⁶⁰ Furthermore, around eighty of John’s slaves⁶¹ fled the plantations, and made their way to Edisto. In an attempt to secure the rest of his property, John removed the remaining slaves to the plantation of Dubose Porcher at Monck’s Corner. In May 1862, Charleston was nearly deserted according to Meta. “Since the Fall of New Orleans and the Giving up of Nolfork [sic] I expect to hear of all sorts of dreadful things and it will be only necessary for the Gun boats to come here to have them take possession of the Town.”⁶² By May 16, 1862 the Grimballs had fled to Spartanburg, South Carolina to avoid the attacks on the coast. Here they acquired accommodations at St. John’s College where they would remain until the end of the war.

It is in Spartanburg, South Carolina where Elizabeth began to teach two children named Lotty and Harry. Her mother recorded that “through her kindness they are not left in perfect ignorance. I am afraid it tries her temper greatly.”⁶³ John and Meta considered Elizabeth’s tutoring sessions with the two children to be a highly respectable use of her time. She was still working within the private sphere and bringing no embarrassment to the family by venturing out into the workforce. Elizabeth would commit her mornings to instructing Lotty and Harry. She presented herself to be a very competent and dedicated teacher. Meta praised Elizabeth highly saying,

I know no one so cultivated and elegant in her manners as Elizabeth,
or accomplished, she has a disciplined, and highly improved mind, and it is

⁶⁰ Meta Morris Grimball Diary, February 27, 1862, GFC.

⁶¹ See Appendix 3.

⁶² Meta Morris Grimball Diary, May 12, 1862, GFC.

⁶³ Meta Morris Grimball Diary, July 23, 1862, GFC.

the help to her parents & her brothers & sisters, and the adoring attraction of the family circle...Lotty will be very handsome when she is fully developed and through E's care she will be a cultured & elegant young woman. - Harry is naturally clever but is not steady enough to do very hopefully. ⁶⁴

Elizabeth seemed to be showing intentions of working outside the home when she began to teach privately. Her frequent visits to the North with her aunt must have influenced her into doing more with her life than waiting to get married. However, Elizabeth would have to wait for the opportune moment to leave the private sphere and enter the public sphere. This moment would be when her father was absolutely no longer able to support everyone in the family.

As 1862 progressed the Grimball family fell into dire financial straits. According to Meta, the family had "no income, and are in a fair way of getting to the end of what we have, in this state of things, he [John] earnestly desires to subscribe to the free Market, to other demands upon the liberality of the public, but I tell him he has first to consider his own family."⁶⁵ Elizabeth must have seen this moment as a time when she could slowly influence her parents' opinion on women working outside the home. Teaching in a public school was a logical next step to help the family through difficult financial times. During December 1862 she began to bring around a Miss Butler, Miss Clemy Leggy, and Miss Palmer. Miss Butler's mother was a teacher at the local district school, and Meta found her to be polite and charming. Elizabeth took some time off from teaching Lotty and Harry to go on an excursion with Miss Palmer to the Iron Mills. Miss Leggy had also taken time off of school to go with Elizabeth as well. Meta notes that "the iron of this district is very fine, and they saw the

⁶⁴ Meta Morris Grimball Diary, September 2, 1862, GFC.

⁶⁵ Meta Morris Grimball Diary, October 24, 1862, GFC.

process of preparing the Iron and brought home some specimens. The ride was a pleasant one, and as they carried a lunch, E. returned home very much pleased.”⁶⁶ Elizabeth spent some time talking with these women about gender roles and education. They would have been good resources to consult with and confide in. Ultimately, when she entered the workforce as a teacher her attitude towards women in the workforce became clear.

Elizabeth spent the Christmas of 1862 with her friend Miss Leggy and Mrs. Dawkins in Union, South Carolina. Meta’s diary entry recounts Elizabeth’s day with both women:

She was invited to spend the day with Mrs. Dawkins, at Union, where there is a very nice Episcopal Church, the only difficulty was the rising so early to go by the cars. E. was up in time, and came back in the evening, unexpectedly accompanied by her father, who got a furlough, and is now with us. E. had a charming day. Mrs. D is an energetic woman, and having no children her self, take great interest in other peoples children. There was a plentiful breakfast on their arrival, and then the Christmas tree for the children, with little gifts made by kind hands. After the tree they practised [sic] the Church Music, then went to church, where E. took her place in the Choir, they returned to Mrs. D’s, had a real Christmas dinner, and came home by the cars in the afternoon.⁶⁷

Elizabeth had spent most of the winter with Miss Leggy and Mrs. Dawkins, and had become thoroughly interested in her friend’s views on working and making an independent living separate from her family. With the war still going strong, Elizabeth felt that she needed to ease the burden she placed on her family. Finding a husband was difficult given the

⁶⁶ Meta Morris Grimball Diary, December 14, 1862, GFC.

⁶⁷ Meta Morris Grimball, December 31, 1862, GFC.

circumstances, and an educated woman like Elizabeth saw teaching as a way to utilize her talents.

During the beginning of 1863, the Grimball family's misfortune continued. On March 10, 1863 John was forced to sell the remainder of his slaves. This would effectively end his career as a planter. Meta writes,

The interest of his debt for the Plantations goes on & we are living on what little ready money we have & no income to be expected. Mr. G feels this proposed sell very much & I should not be surprised if he gave it up as he writes me word the price will only be 6 hundred round and there is no longer a hope of investing in 8 per cent Confederate bonds but the 7 per cent. I hope he may be directed the right way. I pray that he may.⁶⁸

Although Meta held out hope that John would not have to sell his slaves, he ended up doing so. Meta's father advised John that he should sell the plantations as well. John did not take his advice, though, and continued to hold onto his properties.

By August 1863, the Grimballs' private matters still continued on a downward spiral, when Meta's father had his house sacked by his own slaves. Meta writes, "Papa has had all his negroes carried off in a recent raid on Pon Pon Heyward Manigault's too; Papa's house was sacked by his own negroes his Mill burnt and he lies ill at Adams Run."⁶⁹ Unfortunately, Meta's father would never overcome the attack, and passed away on the morning of September 30, 1863. Her youngest daughter Charlotte had been taking care of him for twelve weeks prior with no improvement. Meta writes in her diary how agitated with the war she has become, and her inability to see the end. She attributes the strain of continuous war and the

⁶⁸ Meta Morris Grimball, March 10, 1863, GFC.

⁶⁹ Meta Morris Grimball Diary, August 4, 1863, GFC.

struggling country to her father's death. Furthermore, her father had been a wealthy man and the war had bled him dry. Meta argues, "If the Country had not been torn apart by this revolution he would have left a very handsome property to his children, at least one hundred & fifty dollars apiece: but his negroes, 2 hundred of them, have left him, & the Plantations are ruined."⁷⁰ Nonetheless, the money left to Meta from her father helped the Grimball family avoid total bankruptcy. To add to the amount of pressure and financial difficulties the Grimballs faced, was the selling of St. John's College. The family did not know if they would be able to continue living at their current residence under the new owners. By January 1, 1864, the family could have been homeless if it was not for the kind heart of Mr. Irwin, the new owner who allowed them to continue paying the same amount of rent for another year.⁷¹

The Grimball family's situation became even worse during July 1864. Meta wrote in her diary on July 30, 1864:

Mr. Grimball received a letter from William written from the 3d N.C. Hospital, Charleston, telling him he was there ill, & at the end of the letter said there was such buzzing in his head from Quinine he could hardly write, he had received the stockings sent down & had a pair on, was thankful for them. Arthur wrote the next day & Berkley Wilkins, both saying William was very ill. Arthur sent a telegram begging his Papa to come down at once, Mr. Grimball sent off on Monday, arrived in Charleston about 5 o'clock on Tuesday 25. William knew him but when he spoke wandered. Arthur met his father at the cars, Berkley was at the hospital. Mr. Grimball passed the night

⁷⁰ Meta Morris Grimball Diary, October 4, 1863, GFC.

⁷¹ Meta Morris Grimball Diary, September 9, 1863, GFC.

there & at about 7 o'clock on Wednesday morning William passed away, apparently without pain, his father closing his eyes.⁷²

John and Meta had faced financial difficulty throughout the war, but the loss of their son was a heavy burden. Elizabeth had been especially close to her brother William. Writing letters frequently throughout the war, they conversed over simple matters to ease each other's minds of the war. After William's death the family mourned his loss greatly.

Through the hardships the family faced during the Civil War, Elizabeth convinced her parents that entering into the public sphere as a teacher would be beneficial to the family. Even though John and Meta were appalled and opposed to the idea of their oldest daughter working as a teacher, their financial situation offered no alternative. John had previously preferred to forgo necessities than see either of his daughters working outside the home. As time went on, however, John was not able to earn a regular income to keep his daughters home. He wrote in his dairy that he was, "much disturbed by this economic necessity."⁷³ A friend of Elizabeth's, Miss Emma Holmes, described the struggle Elizabeth faced when convincing her father that it was necessary for the family's and her welfare that she leave to take a teaching position in Union, South Carolina. "Her father and brothers were much opposed to it at first but she, like myself, was very desirous of doing something for herself, especially in these times, and they at last consented that she should do so for a few months."⁷⁴ Although John permitted Elizabeth to work for a few months outside of the home, she would stay in Union, South Carolina on her own free will and teach after the war ended on April 9, 1865. Elizabeth was finally able to use the disruption of war as a tool to acquire a

⁷² Meta Morris Grimball Diary, July 30, 1864, GFC. See also Appendix 4.

⁷³ John Berkley Grimball Diary, GFC.

⁷⁴ Culpepper, *Trials and Triumphs*, 240.

position as a teacher and earn a living for herself. No longer would she have to be a burden on her family's limited resources.

Meta described Elizabeth leaving home for the first time to work in the public sphere on January 16, 1865:

This day Elizabeth left us to be a assistant teacher in Miss. Read's School in Unionville. Miss. Kenedy [sic] had been very kind in interesting herself about this plan of Elizabeth's, & went down with her to day, to see the school begin, E is to teach French & Music. The dear child had been the comfort and help of her parents, and family, she has taught her sisters, & Harry, and benefitted them in every way. Lotty, owing to her care & instruction is well educated, & Harry has been most unwillingly instructed, in French, and in every way elevated, & improved. She must be followed, wherever she goes, with a blessing; a dutiful & Christian child. Miss Read is keeping house, & we hope E will find it pleasant there.⁷⁵

This diary entry written by Meta alludes to the notion that she was content with Elizabeth going to work in the public sphere. She gave Elizabeth her blessing when leaving home.

There are numerous references, however, where Meta plainly states her embarrassment about Elizabeth. In her diary, Meta said that she was, "mortified by Elizabeth being a teacher."⁷⁶ Additionally, in a letter written to her husband, Meta confessed that she was humiliated that Elizabeth must lead "the treadmill life of a teacher."⁷⁷ Even though the Grimball family was dealing with difficult issues associated with the death of their son and the Confederate war

⁷⁵ Meta Morris Grimball Diary, January 16, 1865, GFC.

⁷⁶ Meta Morris Grimball Diary, February 20, 1866, GFC.

⁷⁷ Meta Morris to John Grimball, August 23, 1866, GFC.

effort, Meta still retained the values and traditional ideas of gender. She still became ashamed of the family's position when Elizabeth had to leave the home in order to support herself. In Meta's opinion, Elizabeth should have been married before the war in order to have a husband to secure her financial wellbeing.

When the war ended in April 1865, Meta expected Elizabeth to stop working and come home. Meta assumed that, without the strain of war, the family would revert back to their prewar status and occupations. Therefore, Elizabeth could not be seen working outside the home. She would be damaging the reputation and honor of her family. Unfortunately, circumstances were not in the Grimballs' favor, and John was forced to sell off some of his property to pay off debts. Therefore, the Grove Plantation was returned to the Morris family in New York. However, John was able to retain the Pinebury Plantation until his death in 1892. Also, because John was no longer a wealthy planter, he was forced to go into the business venture of sharecropping with an old acquaintance and one of his former slaves. John wrote in his diary of the difficulties brought by unemployment and a lack of income.⁷⁸ The Grimball family had a challenging time recovering from the devastating war, and Elizabeth seemed to recognize the tough situation her family was in.

Furthermore, even though the Grimball family's economic base was completely destroyed, Meta still did not give up pestering Elizabeth about coming home. In a letter to Elizabeth, Meta demanded her resignation and a swift return to her rightful place in the home. Elizabeth became irritated with her mother's constant nagging and curtly replied, "I have received your ultimatum...and have made up my mind to one thing. I will hereafter act upon my own judgment...I will not be a dependent old maid at home with an allowance

⁷⁸ John Berkley Grimball Diary, GFC.

doled out to me while I could be made comfortable by my own exertions.”⁷⁹ Elizabeth then went on in her letter to speak about the injustices faced by unmarried women, and how society demanded them to live with their parents until marriage. She concluded the letter by assuring her mother that she was indeed not ruining the family’s honor by arguing that, “many noble women had entered the profession during the war.”⁸⁰ After the Civil War, southerners gradually began to accept female teachers in public schools. If children had to be educated, then southern women were to replace the men who went off to fight in the war and the northerners who retreated back to their home states. Elizabeth felt that she had accomplished a worthy goal in entering a male dominated sphere, and becoming an independent, financially stable woman. With or without her mother’s blessing, Elizabeth would not give up a life of freedom.

Ultimately, Elizabeth took control of her financial wellbeing by becoming a teacher in the public sphere. She defied the expressed wishes of her parents to pursue a career outside of the household, and became an independent thinker. The Civil War presented multiple opportunities to women who were unmarried and wanted to leave their parents’ home. Instead of conceding to follow the strict moral code of a southern lady, Elizabeth forged her own path. In the later years of Elizabeth Grimbball’s life she would marry William Munro and stay in Union, South Carolina to continue teaching. The death of her husband in 1900 would require her to move back to Charleston, South Carolina where she too would pass away on January 25, 1914. The remarkable journey Elizabeth made into the public sphere as a teacher, however, and the tension this act created between her and her mother, lives on in the letters and journal entries of the Grimbball Family Collection. Elizabeth Grimbball is an example of a

⁷⁹ Elizabeth Grimbball to Meta Morris Grimbball, September 11, 1866, GFC.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

shift toward young American women taking an independent stand in professions made possible by the Civil War. Instead of conceding to follow the strict moral code of a “Southern Belle,” Elizabeth forged her own path.

AMERICA FOR FREEDOM

America for freedom!
That was the old time cry;
The word for which our fathers stood
To battle and to die.
From throned oppression fleeing,
They felt the galling chain
A tyrant held within his hand,
To pluck them back again.
Woe worth the day we conquered
If we this pledge forsake,
For greed or wild ambition
A devious record make!
Against the world’s injustice
Ring still our battle cry:
“America for freedom,”
By this we live and die.⁸¹

⁸¹ Printed in the Program of the Closing Exercise of the Graded School, Union, S.C., June 3., 1898, GFC.

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