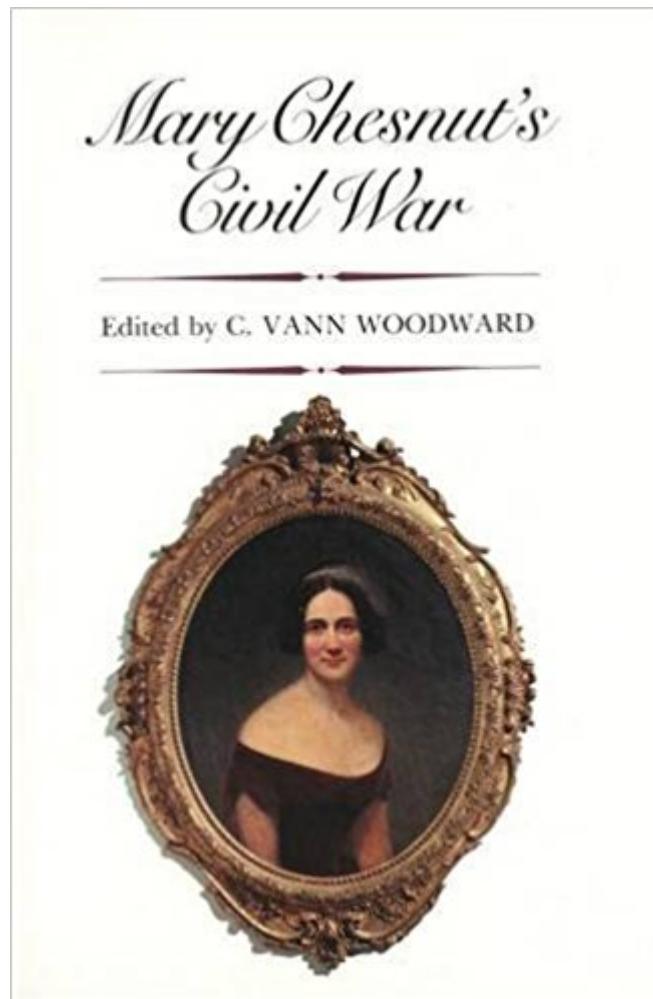


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# Mary Chesnut's Civil War



## Synopsis

An authorized account of the Civil War, drawn from the diaries of a Southern aristocrat, records the disintegration and final destruction of the Confederacy.

## Book Information

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"A major book of this year." •Edmund Fuller, The Wall Street Journal "Thanks to [Vann Woodward], we have the first authoritative text of this great work, now revealed as the masterpiece it is; the finest work of literature to come out of the Civil War, perhaps one of the half dozen or so most important diaries in all literature; if you will, a Southern War and Peace." •Reid Beddoe, The Washington Post Book World "Here is a book to curl up with over a whole lifetime •to read and reread, to ponder and savor." •Selma R. Williams, The Boston Globe "Perhaps one of the half dozen or so most important diaries in all literature; if you will, a Southern 'War and Peace.' " •Reid Beddoe, The Washington Post Book World "A feast for Civil War buffs. . . . One of the best firsthand records of the Confederate experience. . . . Mrs. Chestnut's diary is electrifying." •Walter Clemons, Newsweek "An admirable blend of scholarship and style. . . . C. Vann Woodward's impressive edition guarantees that Mary Chestnut's Civil War will take its rightful place as an American classic." •Joan Reardon, Christian Science Monitor Book Review "This definitive edition of her massive, much-revised journal captures vividly the experience of war in the Old South, from the first hopeful days. . . to the ruinous end. . . . The book teems with interesting portraits (of generals and society ladies, of maids and slaves), with reports of battles and balls, and

with highly evocative descriptions of everyday scenes (such as men sitting on coffins, talking and laughing) that bring the period to life." •Publisher's Weekly"Woodward's edition of this most famous of contemporary Southern sources on the war is definitive. . . . Woodward's work, scrupulously and exhaustively annotated, presents the most reliable portrait yet of this most remarkably vital, intelligent, witty woman. An outspoken feminist who abhorred the slavery system, Chesnut was also a keen observer of her times and of the men and women who crossed her path. An elaborate introduction and a magnificent index enhance a book sure to be hailed by historians, lovers of literature, and indeed anyone with a taste for the human story." •Library Journal"Mary Chestnut's spirit, wit, independence, and incisive pen come sparkling through, making this a literary as well as historical document of major importance." •Choice"Here is the rich and full context, as the author herself recreated it.Â It is by all odds the best of all Civil War memoirs, and one of the most remarkable eye-witness accounts to energy from that or any other war." •Louis D. Rubin Jr., *The New Republic*"Now, thanks to the judicious editing of C. Vann Woodward, the great Yale historian of the South, we can read nearly the whole of Mary Chestnut's work and see precisely which passages came from the original journal of Civil War vintage and which were revised in later years.Â And this more authentic version is if anything more impressive as the account of an exceptional woman and the society she both represented and questioned. . . . [A] splendid volume." •Kirkus Reviews"Part diary, part work of literary art, Mary Chestnut's Civil War retains its value as an account of a society caught in the vortex of far-reaching change.Â It is good to have, at long last, a definitive version of this classic, and it is appropriate that Woodward, who has done more to shape the study of southern history than any other historian of his generation, has produced it." •Eric Foner, *The History Book Club Review*"The 'big' book of 1981•the book that's going to be acclaimed and read and remembered over others. . . . No title has been more anticipated." •William W. Starr, *The State* (Columbia, South Carolina)"The work is really an epic in which the accumulation of quotidian detail•the weather, parties, receptions, rumors, duels, love affairs, murders, promotions and demotions, intrigues, illnesses, celebrations•provides a sense of the rhythms of ordinary life during those chaotic four years in a way that no other book has done." •William Styron, *The New York Review of Books*"Underlying even the darkest passages is a cheerfulness of spirit, almost a buoyancy, that in effect aerates the narrative and provides much of its charm and readability. A great epic drama of our greatest national tragedy." •William Styron, *The New York Review of Books*"Vann Woodward's long awaited edition of Mary Chestnut's 'Diary' of the Civil War is the first uncorrupted and annotated text of a novelistic memoir, at one an illuminating historical document and a work of genuine literary distinction. Woodward's ingenious blending of the original

journals and the subsequent 'Diary' makes this version immensely superior to the previous ones and enables us for the first time to appreciate the mind and art of this remarkable mind."•Daniel Aaron, Harvard University --This text refers to the Paperback edition.

This book contains the personal thoughts and feelings of the wife of a wealth plantation owner who is part of the highest political circles of the CSA. Mary Boykin Chesnut is also an ancestor of mine, so it was not only informative but provocative. Mary had many physical problems and took opium on a regular basis. She often thinks of herself as a victim and is depressed much of the time. If you are looking for a cheerful account of life, this is not the book for you; however, if you are looking for insights into the bloodiest period of American history, this book is worth reading.

I'm only 150 pages into this diary but struck by how well she communicates/writes in an age of little or no media, except newspapers. People relied on each other for information and news from the battles. Humans being what they are still have personality differences, idle talk, opinions, hurtful and complimentary remarks. I'm impressed with how she expresses her apprehension, fear and uncertainty. Rarely do we have such accounts from folks close to the center of things in a time of crisis, change and expectation. I'm anxious to read further to learn of her emotions as things slowly change and begin to unravel for the South. Clearly those initial emotions and anticipated results never take into account the realities and wastefulness of war and the destruction that follows those idealistic dreams.

One of the most personal and direct views of the US Civil War that's readily available. Most journals from the time are in dusty inaccessible archives but this one is readily available in many different versions with different editing choices. Nobody has time to read the 50,000 second hand books on the Civil War- so best to start with the journals of people who lived through it and wrote down their feelings and experiences at the time it was happening. And this book is one of the most famous and detailed of the available first-hand literature.

**WARNING:** Does NOT lavish glory on the Confederacy! If that's what you want, get the 1905 Jim Crow edition, "Diary from Dixie," which almost certainly inspired "Gone With the Wind."Chesnut belonged to the inner circle of the Confederacy and her husband, U.S. Senator James Chesnut, gave the fatal command to attack the United States at Fort Sumter. "Diary" spins another "Lost Cause" myth. This contains raw and uncensored comments recorded on the spot - Varina Davis'

boredom and Robert E. Lee confessing all he really wanted was a Virginia farm and "unlimited fried chicken." Only 4 percent of Confederates were wealthy enough to hold other humans as private property; as "superiors" by "ordinance of the Creator," they were not accustomed to having their orders ignored. Most of all, this shows the Confederates were clueless.

This book was a fascinating depiction of a highly-placed lady in Southern society during the Civil War. It is interesting for the attitudes it shows and the history it depicts. It helps to have some background in the history of this era, but it is not necessary. The book spends less time on history and more on the social events of the day. It is interesting for the attitudes and feelings about race and slavery as shown by someone who benefitted most from this institution.

of limited use, too much just society

This diary of a prominent woman who lived during the Civil War and moved within the inner circles of the Confederate government is very fascinating. It is a very thick volume and may contain too much information for the general reader. The author cites the names of many many people she encounters of varying degrees of historical importance and though the book is well annotated, it may simply be too much for many people to get through. It is very interesting.

Since I've read A Diary from Dixie over and over I welcomed Mary Chestnut's Civil War. I'm on page 700 and every page has been wonderful. Some, but not all, was familiar. I'd love to meet Mary, although I'm not on her side. She even makes Jefferson Davis sympathetic. The gossip was delicious!

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