

# "Can the very spirit of freedom die out?"

Catherine Edmondston, diary entry of May 7, 1865, in Beth Gilbert Crabtree and James W. Patton, eds., *Journal of a Secesh Lady: The Diary of Catherine Ann Devereux Edmondston, 1860–1866* (Raleigh: Division of Archives and History, 1979), p. 708.

## As you read...

Catherine Anne Devereux Edmondston was the daughter of a wealthy eastern North Carolina planter. In 1846 she married Patrick Muir Edmondston, a South Carolinian, and they eventually settled on a plantation in Halifax County, North Carolina, where they were living in 1860. In June of that year Mrs. Edmondston began a journal in which she recorded her thoughts and observations of current events.

### QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. How did Edmonston describe the end of the war?
2. What did Edmonston think of white southerners who accepted defeat?
3. How did Edmonston feel about the people who went to parties, laughed, or appeared happy at the end of the war?
4. Did Edmonston consider herself a citizen of the United States? To what country did she feel she belonged?
5. Why might Catherine Edmonston have felt this way, while most people around her seem to have been ready to give up fighting?

What use is there in my writing this record? What profit, what pleasure, do I find in it? None! none! yet altho it is an actual pain to me I continue it from mere force of habit. We are *crushed!* subjugated! and I fear, O how I fear, *conquered*, & what is to me the saddest part, our people do not feel it as they ought — like men who have lost their Liberty. The cup has not to them the full bitterness which a once free people ought to find in the draught held to them by a Victor's hand. They accept the situation tacitly, fold their hands, & say "resistance is vain," "we have done all that men could do," we are out numbered, over-run, & have not the where withal to set an army in the field. Their once high spirit, their stern resolve, seems dead within them! "The War is over" & that fact seems to console them. O My God, can the very spirit of Freedom die out thus & leave not a trace behind it?

Are the lives laid down in its defence to be but as water spilled on the ground? Is the very memory of one dead to vanish from our minds? One would think so from the conduct of those around us. On Thursday, on our way out to Hascosea, we met crowds of people, almost the whole neighborhood it seemed to me, on their way to a Pic Nic at Hills Mill. The usual preparations for dancing had been made & there they spent the day feasting, dancing, fishing, & merry making in their old familiar way. It seems almost like dancing over their husband's, brothers, & sons graves. Do they realize what they do, or are they stupefied by the calamity which has befallen them & say "let us eat & drink for tomorrow we die." O my Country, my Country, I look forward to the future with bitter forebodings when I see your children thus forgetful of your and their own *honour*, of their own *blood*!

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## On the web

### Journal of a Secesh Lady

<http://nc-historical-publications.stores.yahoo.net/478.html>

The complete diary of Catherine Ann Devereux Edmondston may be purchased from the North Carolina Office of Archives & History. Educators and students receive a 10% discount.

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