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Review of Best Companions: Letters of Eliza Middleton Fisher and Her Mother, Mary Hering Middleton, From Charleston, Philadelphia, and Newport, 1839-1846

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business practices. Apparently this chapter was meant to give life to the Woolsey family and, more importantly, contextualize Sarah's decision though it seems like quite a diversion from the story.

Teachers who might consider using this book in either an undergraduate or graduate class should be aware that the book suffers from organizational and contextual weaknesses. Although MacMullen is eager to share this rich source and is obviously passionate about the collection, his prose is often frustrating and overly complicated, the kind of writing that would dishearten even the most serious undergraduate. Additionally, Sarah's frequent digressions into French leave the reader either thumbing through a French dictionary or skipping sections altogether for lack of a translation by the editor. At best, teachers may want to consider using excerpts from the collection to discuss the pressures surrounding love and courtship in the antebellum period.

Perhaps the most frustrating aspect of this work is MacMullen's failure to contextualize antebellum conceptions of gender, especially expectations for manhood. An introductory chapter should have laid the groundwork for the meanings ascribed by antebellum society to success, self-made manhood, and independence, the three factors that ultimately proved Carrington to be an unworthy suitor.

Ultimately, MacMullen has exposed us to an incredibly rich source. Sarah's letters are wonderful to read. Full of emotion and sentimental prose, the reader will surely feel sympathy for the young couple and, in particular, for Sarah, who really had no choice at all.

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Best Companions: Letters of Eliza Middleton Fisher and Her Mother, Mary Hering Middleton, from Charleston, Philadelphia, and Newport, 1839-1846. Edited by Eliza Cope Harrison. (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2001. Pp. xlii, 532. Illustrations, maps. \$39.95.)

This is the eleventh volume in the series *Women's Diaries and Letters of the South* (formerly *Women's Diaries and Letters of the Nineteenth-Century South*), the immensely useful collection of primary sources by southern women edited by Carol Bleaser. But like some recent titles in the series, this book stretches the boundaries of southern history by documenting a relationship that transcended the slave South. Eliza Middleton was the last child of Mary Helen Hering Middleton and Henry Middleton, whose rice

plantations, family alliances, and political connections made the Middletons among the wealthiest and most powerful families in South Carolina. Eliza was educated in England and Russia while her father served as minister plenipotentiary to the latter from 1820 to 1830. In 1839 she married Joshua Francis Fisher, a well-connected, urbane Philadelphian. When they were not together—usually Eliza and Fisher, as he was called, summered with the Middletons in Newport—they exchanged letters approximately once a week until Mary Helen relocated to Philadelphia after her husband's death in 1846.

Their correspondence, which Eliza Cope Harrison has pieced together from a privately held cache of Eliza's letters and other collections at the Middleton Place Foundation, South Carolina Historical Society, and Historical Society of Pennsylvania, documents an extraordinary range of issues of interest to historians of the early national period. Historians of family life will find that these letters reveal the interior life of families in both the North and the South. Indeed, because they cross sectional boundaries, the letters offer a comparative perspective sorely lacking in most collections of primary sources. Both the Middletons and Fishers moved in the upper echelons of American society, and their correspondence illuminates the manners and customs that governed that set. One of the outstanding merits of Harrison's work is her painstaking reconstruction of the far-flung Middleton family, their relations in Charleston and elsewhere, and the byzantine world of high society in Charleston, Newport, and Philadelphia. Indeed, historians will find Harrison's many footnotes—particularly those that identify individuals and their family and social connections—as useful as the letters. And because Eliza and her mother were well-educated, cultured women, their correspondence will be an important resource for students of women's culture, reading habits, and intellectual life in the first half of the nineteenth century.

Historians of white, southern family life will likely find these letters of immense value. Eliza and Mary discussed family matters far more than any other issue. Consequently, these letters shed light on some thorny interpretive issues, particularly the extent to which patriarchy determined family relations. Certainly, in the case of Mary's marriage to Henry Middleton, the evidence for patriarchy is strong. Though theirs was apparently a close relationship, Henry seldom consulted his wife on important matters and ignored her preferences when she did express them. Most egregiously, he disregarded the urgent wishes of Mary and her daughter to be with each other during Eliza's three confinements between 1841 and 1844. But in other areas the evidence is sketchier. Certainly patriarchy seems to have played quite a small role in Eliza's marriage, which by her own testimony imitated the extraordinarily affectionate

relations between Fisher's guardians, George and Sophia Francis Harrison. And while Henry Middleton exerted strong control over his family, his children defied him in a number of ways—as suggested by his son Edward's surprise decision, in 1845, to marry Edwarina de Normann, a young Roman woman of obscure and vaguely disreputable ancestry. And there is very little evidence for patriarchy apparent in the relations between Eliza and her six brothers. Despite being a youngest daughter, Eliza enjoyed close relations with her brothers and felt little restraint in offering them advice and frank criticism. In this respect this correspondence reinforces the findings of Lorri Glover, who argued in *All Our Relations: Blood Ties and Emotional Bonds among the Early South Carolina Gentry* (2000; reviewed in this issue of the *JER*), that relations between siblings most often were marked by cooperation and egalitarianism, a conclusion that should complicate historians' understanding of the prevalence of patriarchy in the early South.

These letters address many other interpretive issues, only a few of which can be touched on here. Certainly, Mary Helen and Eliza's lives were far more fulfilling than one might expect given the bleak picture of white southern women's lives presented in recent historical literature. But this only underscores the immense advantages they enjoyed. Their lives were marked by privileges few women—in any region, on either side of the Anglo-Atlantic world—could imagine. Thus, this correspondence documents the lives of literate, culturally sophisticated women in the early nineteenth century. Eliza was a talented musician and vocalist who generously patronized visiting musicians and local cultural institutions. She entertained frequently, and both women read widely. Their letters are full of discussion about books, music, politics, and other cultural concerns. In particular, Eliza and her mother conversed about their family's interest in and experiments with phrenology, mesmerism, and homeopathy. Their letters offer a rare, street-level glimpse into how these fads played out in a family and a social circle.

The dust jacket promises that *Best Companions* will introduce readers to “the African slave who was captain of the Middletons' private schooner,” but these letters offer very little insight about the lives of slaves or of their masters' attitudes toward them. Nearly all of the Middletons' very few references to slaves refer to their service to the family. In fact, their discussion of blacks and lower-class whites is marked by expressions of disdain and disgust that should give pause to scholars who believe that a sense of paternalism was an important element of planter-class identity. That in itself is important evidence about planters' attitudes towards the underprivileged in their midst. Despite that very minor limitation, however, students of early national culture, family relations, upper-class culture, and

women's lives—not just in the South—will find these letters, and the extensive supporting information supplied by Harrison, to be a valuable resource.

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The Life of Selina Campbell: A Fellow Soldier in the Cause of Restoration. By Loretta M. Long. (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2001. Pp. 235. \$34.95.)

This first biography of Selina Campbell (1802-1897) is an interesting and provocative addition to the literature on women's lives in the nineteenth-century United States. Best known as the wife of Disciples of Christ founder Alexander Campbell, Selina was a conservative, vibrant, devoted woman who defined herself through her commitment to faith and family. This elegantly written and clearly organized biography celebrates the intensity of Selina Campbell's devotion even as it attempts to place her life within the larger context of American women's history. Some readers, however, will find Long's lack of critical analysis and her passionate defense of Campbell's way of life problematic.

Long clearly and thoroughly lays out in her introduction the two-fold argument she intends to develop throughout her biography. First, she asserts, Selina Campbell's life highlights the egalitarian way in which Christian religion influenced separate spheres ideology in the nineteenth century. Relying on a type of different-but-equal argument, Long maintains that Christianity emphasized the "spiritual parity that gave each gender equal standing before God but provided different gender-specific assignments in society" (2). Long's second point expands on this idea: she argues that the private sphere was not a location defined by subordination and inferiority, as many historians have contended, but rather one that "frequently offered women a more active role in creating in their lives meaning that was shaped in large part by religious faith" (6). Selina Campbell is an excellent example, according to Long, of both of these arguments. Although Selina and her husband had very different roles in their marriage—hers defined by the private sphere and his by the public—they nonetheless developed what Long regards as an equal partnership.

Long organizes her biography into four central themes that are loosely chronological, beginning with Campbell's childhood and early adulthood.