

Civil War Cookin', Stories 'n' Such

Courier Book Review by Edith Elizabeth Pollitz

This crazy little cookbook advertises 129 recipes "used by the troops on the field." This reviewer will have to take the author's word for it that there are, indeed, 129 recipes in this collection. Regional favorites (such as Kentucky burgoo) are included. Burgoo, a stew with not too many parameters as to what goes in the pot—in the meat department in particular, is described as "an unsettling combination of feathers, fur, claws, eyes and fangs," the eating of which becomes a proof of manhood.

It's actually delicious (by sheer coincidence, the reviewer had made it and had it for dinner the evening the relevant passage of this book was read) if you stick with the civilized meats instead of squirrel, possum, groundhog, etc.

For the would-be Civil War cook who wants the flavor of exotic meat and does not want to lose the taste by mixing it with tons of other ingredients, there are recipes for entrees including squirrel, possum and raccoon. The one for possum is particularly intriguing with its suggestion that the cook trap the intended meal and feed it clean foods such as lettuce for several days to purge it before it is prepared and eaten.

Even stranger is the one for eels (p. 65), where you clean, cut in bite-size pieces, and sprinkle your eels with salt, then dip the pieces in egg and cornmeal and fry them in lard. Alligator preparation is also discussed, not a surprise to Floridians.

Interspersed with the recipe groupings are a few war-related stories, including a rather corny one about Lee and Grant at Appomattox at the very end of the book. The tale of spy Rose Greenbow suggests Senator John C. Calhoun persuaded Rose to go into the spy business, if so, it must have been for some prewar purpose, as Calhoun died in 1850.

This little book is entertaining, and some of the recipes (mostly the ones for side dishes, which are generally attributed to slave cooks) are actually appealing. Some of the rest are so gross they are funny and truly make one appreciate modern-day food and the facilities for preparing it. Of course, the thrifty cook can save some money by following the possum recipe, if not the purging of the beast—the main ingredient is plentiful along every road (in the South, at least).

Title: Civil War Cookin', Stories 'n' Such

Author: Darlene Funkhouser

Publisher: Quixote Press

Price: \$9.95 plus \$2.00 s/h

Women of the Civil War: Soldiers, Spies and Nurses

Courier Book Review by Edith Elizabeth Pollitz

If there is one disadvantage to serving as a female book reviewer on a staff full of men, it's that one gets the lion's (lioness' ?) share of books pertaining to women for review.

While some of the offerings in this subject area are truly interesting, some are decidedly not (of course, that argument could be made to just about anything). There is no question women served important roles, often overlooked, in history, but it is also true some recent efforts almost seem an effort to be sure women receive their "quota" in our politically correct society.

"Women of the Civil War" is a longer and more serious attempt at Civil War-themed writing by Darlene Funkhouser than is her earlier Civil War cookbook, which was downright entertaining.

The women covered in Funkhouser's latest book tend toward the flamboyant and unusual. There is an entire section (as indicated in the title) on female soldiers, certainly not run-of-the-mill Victorian ladies. Some of these folks would likely be transsexuals if they were around today (maybe they were then).

Famous spies also have their own section of the book, and it is interesting to note most of those mentioned wrote books or went on the stage or lecture circuit after the war.

A more respectable group of women for the most part are the medical professionals, ignoring Dr. Walker, who was really far out for her day and time and would apparently be considered cranky and obnoxious, at best, in any time. Phoebe Yates Pender is one of the most enjoyable personages encountered in the section on medical folks.

Funkhouser continues a technique from her earlier book by interspersing something totally off subject between her major relevant groupings, in this case brief histories of Southern plantation homes.

"Women of the Civil War" is an unusual little book. Funkhouser engages in one odd little quirk consistently throughout the volume—the use of "Miss" with each woman's name, not just in the Old South sense of "Miss Scarlet," but also incorrectly referencing married women's last names, such as "Miss Lincoln" for Mary Lincoln.

The book's major appeal will be to women, particularly those looking for entry-level biographical sketches of women who made significant contributions to the war effort.

Title: Women of the Civil War: Soldiers, Spies, and Nurses

Author: Darlene Funkhouser

Publisher: Quixote Press

Price: \$9.95 plus \$2.25 s/h

To order this book go to www.civilwarcourier.com or call (800-624-0281)