

No. 2

Subject and Scope of Proposed Book

In this biography of my mother, Sallie
~~it is proposed~~
Comer Fisher, ne Abercrombie, ^{to} tell the story of her life and
her amazing times, as these developed in the South and Southwest.
The scope of the presentation of the study will be largely local.
But for that I have no apology to offer, since it is the local
repercussion to the larger events which in the end determines
the history of nations. For instance - what total good to a
nation ~~in~~ the wonderful inventions of the machine age, if the
millions of small local schools give no training in the use and
care of machinery, and the millions of farm families continue to
plow with one ox, or one mule, ignoring power drawn equipment ?

It is proposed ^{to} ~~arrange~~ the material in
twelve chapters each one of which roughly represents an era of
history and a way of life. Since Sallie Abercrombie was born in
Alabama and came to Texas with her parents, ~~in~~ the first chapter
deals with life in Alabama in the 1830s and 40s; and with the
westward movement from that state to Texas toward the end of the
40s and in the early 50s. In this chapter through family events
there can be shown health conditions and the status of medical
science; the limitation of goods through the crudeness of the
various means of transportation; the dependancy of families on
their own skills and initiative; the wasteful opening up of
virgin pine forests common in those days when converting timber
land to crop land; ~~and~~ the total absence of the soils science now
considered so important to the nation; and something of the method
by which children grew up in close contact with their parents.

The second chapter, while dealing with the education of Sallie Abercrombie, indicates the educational problems of the Southwest and the various methods Texans tried out in their effort to get a system of public education established in this area. The manners and customs of a pioneer East Texas community are shown through the life of Sallie and her family and friends. And something of the establishment of early church schools in the state, but not too much of this as it has been very well covered in stories of the Spanish Missions and in the Texas Centennial year books of the various protestant denominations. "School Days in Early Texas" is the working title for this chapter.

"War Comes to Waverly" is the next chapter. Sallie finished the last year of her school life in July, 1860. East Texas was in a state of ~~ferment~~ wild excitement. The whole state was. Governor Sam Houston, friend and neighbor of the Abercrombies, was opposed to secession of the state from the Union. In January 1861 the state did secede and Houston was deposed as governor. These things affected the life of Sallie Abercrombie profoundly; and turned her thinking away from the purely personal affairs that were absorbing her and her companions to the larger affairs of the world. She served the war fully with sacrifice and devotion, but she was never for the war. Never in all her life for any war. She considered them wasteful and silly as well as brutal and inhuman. But the war came to Waverly and affected every single thing that she ate, wore, thought and did. It tore at her life and changed it beyond all dreaming. It brought sorrow that never left her. It found her a child and left her a mature woman, determined to hold her own against the future.

" A Wedding in Waverly" is chapter four's title. That was Sallie's wedding on Sept. 14, 1862. She was a few months over 17 years of age. Her favorite brother Len had been killed at the second battle of Bull Run. All the young men were away in the war. All of the families were deeply absorbed in sorrow and war production; yet, as is the way of war time civilian life, there was much gayety of a feverish and grim sort. War shortages and failures were beginning to pinch. East Texas was abandoning all crops except cotton and food; the cotton was going by ox-cart to the Rio Grande and across into Mexico to be bought by England and sometimes New York. Some goods were being imported and brought back by the carts on the return trip, but these were chiefly for the war. Sallie had both a trousseau and an imported French bed-room suite, quite a contrast to the heavy mid-Victorian Walnut and mahogany in use.

" The War Bride Turns to Domesticity", the fifth chapter will undertake to show the efforts of a young woman of no experience and with little encouragement to prepare herself to be a competent mistress of a plantation at a time when the plantation system itself was slipping. Management cannot go on with the old ways, but has no idea where to turn for an understanding of new ways. This chapter shows the beginning of the expression of the will power and courage and faith and hope which later found ways to create a new world, wasting no time at all in sighing for the vanished one.

" The War Ended: The New Life Begins" will deal with the return ~~from~~ of Sallie's husband, Confederate Captain Horatio White Fisher, from the war and a brief resume of his personal military experience. A look at the adjustment that every woman had to make in her home management after the

slaves were freed and the spirit in which Sallie made the needed changes in her life; illustration being the ^Narchitecture of the house her husband began before the war and completed afterward. Birth^{and loss of} the first child; use of the first "artificial ice"; first trip to New Orleans; new styles and hair dressing; the French Opera; first adventure into the world of making money, all these come into this chapter as well as something about the other members of the Abercrombie family.

"The Abercrombie Family Scatters" relates the story of the breaking up of a large family as a result of the war and the instability of the mother of that family; while at the same time Sallie's growing story shows the building of another family largely because of the determination and adaptability of another mother. This chapter shows something of Texas in the immediate post war era and introduces Mexico, Maximillian and the brief and untenable plan of some Confederate officers to establish themselves south of the border, including the colony in Brazil. The final complete loss of the Abercrombie fortune and two family deaths are related in this chapter.

"The Fishers Lose the New Home" is the story of inflationary debts and deflationary prices following the war between the states. It is the story of losing their own home and inheriting Fisher Farms, the plantation of Capt. Fisher's father.

"Carpetbaggers and Deflation Came Together" Reconstruction was a delayed bomb in the Southwest, probably because the older Southern states were nearer -- and richer than Texas. Pioneer families have no great stores of art treasure, nor wealth of jewells, even the houses, though comfortable enough, were after all mostly made of logs hewn square and plastered over. So, for a time after the war, Texas had thought to escape the scourge. But this was not to be.

In the tenth chapter " The Railroad Comes"

we get fairly into the new era of development. Railroads made a few gestures here and there in Texas before the war between the states, but there was certainly nothing like a system of roads you could ~~man~~ go long journeys on. When the Abercrombies had moved to Lampassas and the Fishers wanted to go out west to see them and the country, they went by rail to Round Rock, the end of the line, then they hired a wagon and team and took days driving across country and camping at night in order to get there. At the beginning of 1870 there were only 500 miles of disconnected systems in the state. Twenty years later there were 8,700 miles. The building of the Railroad through Fisher Farms is a family saga. When the Railroad began to operate Sallie went into business in earnest , raising and shipping vegetables, fruits, butter and eggs. The education of all the children was paid for in this way.

The eleventh chapter deals in some detail with how this was managed and the twelveth makes the turn of the century with new ideas, new inventions, ways and ~~new~~ perils. Sallie began to express her own progressive self through her children. The bridge from the Old South to the new had been built and all were safely over, now she was urgent that there were important things still to do.

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The requirements

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Reasons why the proposed biography of my Mother, Sallie Comer Fisher, is needed by the reading public and should be published in the immediate future:

- (1) The story of the settlement of the Southwest by families from the other States is a relatively unknown section of the history of our country. But the increasing importance of the natural and human resources of the area (underscored by the War use of our oil, sulphur, helium, magnesium and so on) makes it desirable for the Nation to understand its Southwestern area better. Evidence toward that point may be deduced from the fact that Cambridge(England) University thought it worth while to import as teachers first Walter Prescott Webb, and then J.Frank Dobie. The fame of both these men rests on books written about the history and folk lore of the Southwest.
- (2) Women who came to the Southwest from the old South always brought with them waffle and wafer irons with long handles for fireplace cookery, and reflector baking pans for hot biscuits to be cooked on the hearth. They brought spinning wheels and looms. But, more important, they also brought certain ideas and standards of kind and quality and quantity of household goods and clothes to be spun and woven. And they brought family recipes and traditional menus for setting a good table which they passed on to their children and grand children.

Women who came from other sections of the Nation brought their own traditions, ideas, standards, equipment and furnishings.

Both encountered in the Southwest the modifying difficulties usual to pioneering. Both met the disasters of the Civil War. And in addition both became influenced by the colorful household stuff of Spanish extraction, by what they learned from each other, and by the French and German settlers who were earlier on the scene and had made some progress in adapting their own customs to local conditions and supplies.

It would be only in the biography of a pioneer woman like Sallie Comer Fisher that these related facts could be brought out and interpreted in terms of living in a way to make understandable the resulting Southwestern civilization.

(3) Texans have, like the Athenians, ~~long to~~ become very State conscious. As was the case of the Athenians, the State pride of Texans has been played upon to a startling extent by those who aim to profit by this weakness. One of the methods of making our vanity the servant of special privilege is to publicize and glorify "typical Texas" personality -- dress -- food -- what have you. The extreme example of this that I can think of is that at the height of the crisis on transportation of crops and war material, the Governor of Texas shipped a thousand pounds of "Texas dirt" to a South Carolina camp for a Texas company ^{training there} to use in planting a flag staff from which to float the Lone Star Flag.

The less gullible among us have a saying: "there are three kinds of Texans, Synthetic Texans, Professional Texans, and Just Texans. The last class, though rarely wearing custom made cowboy boots or hand tooled leather belts with hammered silver ornamentation, ~~mm~~ constitute a large majority of the State's population. It would seem to be a good and timely thing to present the simplicity of our hard working forbears to our own

about-to-be enormously rich or shockingly poor children and grand children as the State goes on to industrialize and fullfill its destiny in the Post War World.

(4) Sallie Comer Abercrombie Fisher was a powerful person. That the circumstances of her life limited the extension of her influence is beside the mark. She faced her crises with courage and met her responsibilities to the fullest. She was creative in the economic field and exercised her ability with unmeasured enthusiasm at a time when economic leadership was what the State most needed to save us from despair and loss. Her life influenced ^{every} ~~many~~ human being who ever came in contact with her determined character. All this in an age when women had little separate property, few property rights and almost no opportunity ^{to} amass property.

Women of today are said to control 90% of the purchasing power of the Nation; to be the beneficiaries of most of the insurance policies; to own a majority of the wealth represented by stocks and bonds and savings accounts; all of which gives them power. But greater power yet they have because they are responsible for the nutritive value of the three meals a day served their families; they have responsibility for the physical care and mental and spiritual direction of the children; this is practically the power of life and death ^{over} ~~in~~ the Nation. They have power as voters to create the kind of Public Health, Public Welfare, Educational and civic agencies they want.

But with all this power do they know what to want and why they should want it? I believe that the Biography of Sallie Comer Fisher will be a timely contribution to aid many women to wield wisely the power which they hold whether they wanted to hold it or not.

Fiction

- Laura Krey's And Tell of Time
" " Long Tide
Karle Wilson Baker's Family Style
E.Louise Mally's The Mocking Bird Sings
John W Thomason's Lone Star Preacher
Ola H. Beaubein's Red Sun
Monte Barrett's Sun in their Eyes
Lorraine Carr's Mother of the Smith's
Edwin Lanham's The Wind Blew West
Louisa M Alcott's Little Women
Stark Young's So Red the Rose
Margaret Mitchell's Gone With the Wind
Ebeth Tarkington's The Two Van Revels
Charles M. Brook's Texas Missions -- Their Romance and ~~Architecture~~
Architecture
L. Gough's Spur and Jingles
Walter Edmonds' Cadmus Henry and the Hand of God
St Almo. mrs

Miscellaneous

- The Scenic Resources of the Tennessee Valley
The Pictureseque Southwest - 1937
A Pictorial History of Texas Under Six Flags
The Cattleman - Centenniel issue, March 1936
The American Hereford Journal, Texas Centennial Edition
The Big Bend of Texas- a pictorial history
U.S. Campbells in Texas
Antoine's Centennial Menu - 1840--1940
Pictorial Program 43rd Annual Reunion UCV at Amarillo, Tex.
The Politics of Oil by Chas. Metz, Century Magazine, May, 1924
The Plantation South, WPA Research Project Report 1934-1937
Frank Dobie's folklore books; ditto the two Lomax' men

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