

Mary Bowen

Introduction

A descendent of William Clark, Mary Bowen came from a well-respected St. Louis family. Her father, George Hancock Kennerly, was a Virginia-born veteran of the War of 1812 and established a mercantile business in St. Louis with his brother following the war. Mary was born at Jefferson Barracks in St. Louis and grew up in Carondelet. In 1854, Mary married John Bowen, a soldier and graduate of West Point stationed at Jefferson Barracks. By 1858, Mary and John were central figures among the city's military elite.

During the War

Both John and Mary were present at Camp Jackson when it was captured by Federal troops under Nathaniel Lyon. Following that episode John joined the Confederate army. Unlike many wives who remained in St. Louis as their husbands joined the rebel army, Mary eventually joined her husband in the field. When John was in Tennessee organizing the 1st Missouri Infantry Regiment, Mary worked from St. Louis to drum up recruits. When she joined her husband in Tennessee she smuggled with her the flag of her husband's unit, which had been captured at Camp Jackson—risking arrest or worse.

During the war, John would be promoted to the rank of major general. Meanwhile, Mary followed him, giving birth to their third child in a military camp in 1862, enduring the siege of Vicksburg, and serving as a nurse for wounded members of her husband's unit. Shortly after the surrender of Vicksburg, John died of dysentery. Mary continued on to Atlanta with the 1st Missouri. She stayed with the unit after her husband's death, saying "she did not intend to leave the South so long as Confederates were in the field." She even wore a Confederate uniform and participated in battle at Allatoona, Georgia, where she was shot in the leg.

Later Life

After recovering from her injuries she returned to St. Louis, where she remained the rest of her days. Life in postwar St. Louis was difficult for a Confederate widow. Her family was "broken up and destitute from the cruel ravages of war," and the Unionist city was mixed in its reaction to the return of its secessionist sons and daughters. In 1866, the city held a Southern Relief Fair to support ex-Confederate widows and orphans, and some Southern loyalists even held a convention in the city with "grand torchlight processions, but many could not forgive their former enemies for their "atrocious and fiendish brutality." As a result, Northern and Southern society operated separately for much of the rest of the 19th century. The Southern women became custodians of the past, focusing on burying their dead, building monuments, and fostering the "Lost Cause" philosophy. Mary was very much part of this group, working to build a monument to her husband, and

to see that he was buried at Vicksburg. She never remarried although she was only in her thirties when the war ended. She died in 1894.