Chapter Three

A Struggle for Survival

Non-Elite White Women in Lowcountry Georgia, 1790–1830

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EDITOR'S NOTE: *Western Europe was a relatively unimportant collection of poor agricultural societies on the edge of the Eurasian landmass when Portuguese maritime advances encouraged ocean exploration in the 1420s. By 1492 Columbus had landed in the Bahamas, establishing the first permanent link between the two hemispheres, and soon initiated the transatlantic trade in African slaves. By 1535 the Spanish had conquered the wealthiest and most populous New World societies (Aztec, Incan, and Mayan peoples), bringing so much gold and silver to Europe that it doubled the money supply and led to massive inflation. This sixteenth-century "Price Revolution" was exacerbated by a rapid increase in population due to declining death rates as epidemics receded. The Dutch, English, and French were the primary beneficiaries of these changes, which led them to enter the competition for North America.*

Because of their isolation, Native American populations lacked the immunities to diseases like smallpox, measles, and influenza that the Old World had built up over the centuries. The resulting depopulation hastened European dominance. There were probably two million Indians in the South in 1500, but that number had been halved by the time Jamestown was settled in 1607, and by 1790 had fallen to 3 percent of pre-Columbian figures.

Spaniards like Juan Ponce de Leon and Hernando de Soto explored Florida and other parts of the Lower South. By 1590 a chain of military and Franciscan outposts stretched from present-day South Carolina to Florida, and St. Augustine (1565) became the first permanent European settlement on the North American mainland. The French focused their efforts on fur trading in present-day Canada,

but the desire for a warm-water outlet led them to establish Gulf Coast colonies, the most important being New Orleans (1718). Ursuline nuns arrived in 1727 and founded what may have been the first school for Euroamerican girls. As the novel, opera, and ballet Manon Lescaut *illustrates, some French women from the streets and prisons also immigrated, as did "casket girls," rural women who brought their dowries with them. The French and Indian War (1763) brought the British removal of six thousand French families from present-day Nova Scotia to southern Louisiana, where they maintain their Cajun culture even today. Changing hands many times, Louisiana and Florida eventually became part of the United States in 1803 and 1819, respectively. Yet the influence of Latin culture remains larger than is usually recognized.*

Most Latin immigrants were male, a demographic pattern that produced racially mixed populations in Latin America and concubinage in New Orleans and other Deep South cities. White males formed relationships with slaves or free blacks, occasionally as an alternative to marriage. During the antebellum period New Orleans was a center of the "fancy-girl" trade in light-skinned women, who brought $5,000 when prime fieldhands sold for $1,600. Plaçage developed among free blacks, whereby light, well-educated, chaste women were introduced to white males at the city's quadroon balls. Ensuing relationships resulted in contracts with "protectors," stipulating support for the women and future children. From such interracial unions developed a caste of creoles of color, proud of their French cultural heritage.

French planters fleeing the uprising in Saint Domingue in the 1790s brought their slaves with them. Caribbean slaves had retained more of their African culture than those in British North America, because of the constant infusion of new slaves from Africa and because they vastly outnumbered whites. They were able to retain many African practices in New Orleans's Congo Square, where they were permitted to dance, make music, and trade. Women traded in the marketplace, as they did in Africa. African religious practices involving such things as signs and amulets were widespread in Louisiana. Marie Laveau, a free woman of color, and her daughter became powerful practitioners of Voodoo, an expression of African religious beliefs influenced by Catholicism.

If the Deep South was more Latin than is often realized, the Upper South was less English. Roanoke, birthplace of Virginia Dare (1587), the first English child born in the New World, was unsuccessful. Jamestown, founded in 1607, soon imported English women, mostly as indentured servants, but in 1619 the first Africans arrived, adding to the cultural mix. The Shenandoah Valley became a road down which families of Scots-Irish and Germans from Pennsylvania entered

the southern backcountry. French Huguenots settled in Charleston and Jews established themselves in coastal cities. Swiss, Welsh, Irish, and Highland Scots also contributed to this pluralistic society.

Georgia, founded in 1732 as a refuge for the worthy English poor, was no different. With the influx of Welsh, Swiss, Scots, Irish, German, and Jewish immigrants, it soon became part of the rice-indigo society of the Carolina lowcountry. Perhaps as much as 80 percent of white women immigrants arrived as indentured servants. Not all were able to rise, however; and poor women remained ubiquitous throughout the South — even in Georgia.

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This essay offers a brief look at the lives of non-elite white women in and around Savannah in the early national period. The Georgia lowcountry, like the rest of the nineteenth-century South, was a highly stratified society dominated by white males. Most social historians have concentrated on the well-documented lives of the most prominent white men, and even those scholars who have explored the lives of white women focus almost exclusively on the wives of the elite.[1] Any historian studying white women of the early South is hampered by evidential problems. The poorest white women were usually illiterate and left few of the direct historical records, such as letters and diaries, that could prove useful. Even official records that regularly encompass non-elite men are silent on non-elite women. Legal transactions, for example, were normally carried out by men (husbands, brothers, and fathers). By using Chatham County court documents, city council minutes from Savannah, and records of lowcountry churches and benevolent societies, this essay seeks to correct some of these omissions in current historiography. This study will delineate what may well have been the typical experience of non-elite white women in Savannah: lives of poverty, reliance on charity, and a constant and often futile struggle to make ends meet. Studying the everyday experiences of poor white women, their attitudes, hopes, and fears may give us some insight into the interaction among race, class, and gender in a slave society.

The southern myth of female gentility, especially pertinent in lowcountry cities like Savannah and Charleston, has tended to obscure the fact that many white women lived in poverty.[2] However, contemporary elites were cognizant of white destitution; by the early national period a complete network of benevolence had been formed in the lowcountry. The willingness of wealthy individuals to participate in charitable provision

stemmed from a popular perception that benevolence had a beneficial impact on society generally. By alleviating the suffering of the poor, the elite hoped to inculcate in them "the habits of industry & virtue, and furnish the means of useful and respectable employment."[3] Girls were acknowledged to be especially vulnerable to economic pressures, and in this highly patriarchal society the sight of destitute young white girls aimlessly wandering the streets of Savannah was very moving.[4] Contemporary gender conventions presumed that "a boy can make his way through this cold world well enough; but the situation of a young orphan girl is one which has the strongest demand upon the best sympathies that belong to our nature."[5] Girls were denied the chance of learning the variety of trades to which boys were apprenticed, and their resultant inability to earn their keep through casual work meant that they often became a burden to their parents. Catherine Williams, for example, was turned out of her mother's home because "she was fatherless and her mother was not permitted by her present husband to give her the shelter of her roof."[6] Catherine's evident inability to contribute to the family income no doubt influenced her stepfather's decision. Consequently, a number of benevolent institutions in the Georgia lowcountry were established specifically to assist young girls, the first being the Savannah Female Asylum, founded in December 1801 by "a number of ladies." This gendering of benevolence, organized by elite women for poor women, clearly "called [them] into a full spectrum of public roles" and gave them a new influence in society, caring for "female orphan and other equally distressed female children."[7]

While giving poor white girls a decent start in life was the principal reason for establishing female asylums, the subtext of benevolence was social control. The misbehavior and lack of discipline of older girls on one occasion forced the board to issue the matron "a whip with directions to use it."[8] In an attempt to instill the habits of industry, the boards of female asylums bound out girls to learn viable occupations. Applications from women involved in a trade were particularly welcome, though offers like Mrs. Irvine's to the Beaufort Female Benevolent Society to train two girls in the millinery trade for two years were all too rare. To some extent, these working women were motivated by the chance to employ cheap labor; in Mrs. Irvine's case the benevolent society agreed to pay for bedding and clothing, while Mrs. Irvine provided the girls' food.[9] Yet above all, work of this kind was intended to be character building; thus, misuse of the girls by employers was not permitted. In Savannah, Mary Ann Flynn was

quickly removed from Mrs. Monrow's service as the board had "every reason to think that she is kept for the sole purpose of attending on her [own] child."[10] The binding-out system allowed poor girls to encounter and learn from older white women who themselves may have lived meager existences, forming gender networks that crossed generational lines.

The social control exerted by charitable women on children also extended to their parents. All charitable institutions to some extent subscribed to the idea that parents who surrendered their children to the care of others were not fit to receive them back unless a substantial change in circumstances had occurred. Indeed, one of the stipulations of the Beaufort Female Benevolent Society to parents and guardians was that girls were "exclusively given up . . . to the control and directions of the society."[11] Even mothers who were permitted to take their children back sometimes had to sign "a bond authorizing the directresses to take the child back if they hear anything prejudicial to the future welfare of the child."[12] By restricting the rights of poor women over their own children, elite women exerted a class-based control that denied poor women the rights and responsibilities of motherhood.

The specific purpose of female asylums was to care for destitute white girls. Those parents who were not destitute, and therefore unable to enroll their daughters in the asylums, but who nevertheless lacked the means to educate their children could apply to the variety of lowcountry free schools and academies. The education of poor children formed an important part of the work of every charitable institution, for ignorance, it was believed, "leads to idleness, idleness to vice, and vice abandons to ruin."[13] Education therefore, while being intended to enlighten, primarily aimed to shape the behavior of the non-elite, who otherwise would "advance in vice." In Savannah the main provision of education fell to the Savannah Free School Society, which by 1820 taught more than two hundred children, slightly less than half of whom were female.[14] All applications to take a child resulted in an inquiry "into his or her circumstances, . . . that none be admitted who are not really indigent."[15]

A comparison of the membership lists of these societies and the federal census provides an estimate of the number of children in Savannah receiving some kind of charitable assistance. The pervasiveness of charity in the lives of the city's poorest inhabitants is clearly demonstrated by the fact that around 1820 nearly a third of the entire resident female population of Savannah under the age of twenty-one was in receipt of charity from

either the Female Asylum or the Savannah Free School. The gendered nature of this benevolence is self-evident: only about a fifth of boys received charity in the same period.[16] This would seem to suggest that a significant portion of the non-elite whites resident in Savannah lacked sufficient resources to care for their children as they might have wished.

By providing for indigent whites, the elite reduced social disaffection while adopting the mantle of Christian charity. In the early nineteenth century more than five hundred individuals—about a quarter of the adult white population of Savannah—subscribed to either the Female Asylum, the Union Society, or the Free School.[17] As part of their attempts to control the lives of poor women, the elite fostered a close relationship between charity and religion. On Sundays the charitable institutions sent orphan girls to church in order "to impress [on] their minds . . . the great importance of a modest and virtuous behavior." Efforts were made not to prefer one denomination over another. Girls at the Female Asylum, for example, were taken to Sunday morning worship at the Independent Presbyterian Church, followed by an afternoon service at the First Baptist Church.[18] Children attending the Free School, in addition to hearing twice daily readings from Scripture, were expected to attend the church "as may be designated by their parents or guardians."[19] Religious observance was therefore intended not only to inform but to control the behavior of the poor by instilling in them the virtues and social ethic believed by the elite to best ensure social stability. By adopting and utilizing evangelical religion in this manner, the elite had found a useful tool in their attempts to control the lives of the poor through benevolence.

Those poor girls who survived to adulthood (and many did not) found their economic choices limited. Although occupational information about white women is difficult to locate, third party diaries, travelers' accounts, and newspapers show that poor white women concentrated in certain trades, especially cloth making, food preparation and marketing, housekeeping, and retailing. Other poor white women found work as domestics to the elite residents of Savannah, and newspaper advertisements show that versatility was the key to successful employment. However, many African American women, free as well as slave, also worked as domestics in Savannah.[20] Consequently, poor white women often struggled to find work in this area. House servants often worked long hours, and it was no doubt easier for owners to use older female slaves who were no longer productive in the fields than pay white women. This is not to say that white women who managed to obtain employment as domes-

tics necessarily labored under better working conditions than African American women. In 1796, Nancy Burton obtained an order from the council to prohibit John Fitzpatrick from being violent toward her sister, Sarah. The council later gave Sarah Burton the option of renouncing her domestic indentures to Fitzpatrick in favor of her sister's care.[21] Clearly, working white women held no special status in the labor market of Savannah by virtue of their color.

The marginal social position of non-elite white women is reflected by the fact that they regularly worked alongside African American women. Emily Burke even saw "white women and black women" near Savannah working in fields together "without distinction." John Melish, visiting one lowcountry farm in 1806, noticed "a black girl carding cotton, and a daughter of the landlord spinning . . . they were quite busy and appeared to be industrious and happy." The new cotton mills established in the nineteenth century also offered employment to women of both races. One visitor observed "the white girls working in the same room and at the same loom with the black girls . . . without apparent repugnance or objection."[22] Cloth making had been part of the traditional female role in both England and Africa; it is therefore unsurprising that these roles should be re-created in the New World. What is significant is that white women were prepared to undertake this work with African American women on apparently similar terms of employment, enabling some women to form biracial gender networks that crossed and, therefore, weakened racial distinctions.

The most public sphere of economic interaction between women of different races and classes was the Savannah city market. Most market trading was undertaken by bondswomen, just as it was throughout the Caribbean islands and in West Africa.[23] Their dominance in the city market is shown by the numbers of licensed slave vendors. In 1801, Savannah City Council granted thirty trading licenses to slaves, twenty-five of whom were female. Free black women were also involved in trading goods. Ten free black women listed their occupation in 1817 as "huckstering"—selling goods on the streets, in direct competition to the licensed slave vendors.[24] White and black women, either daughters, wives, or domestics, were also the principal shoppers. This daily ritual of economic interaction brought white women into regular contact with Afro-American women on nondependency grounds. Race had little significance in these economic transactions.

Black and white women also interacted in Savannah's brothels, which

were frequented by Afro-American and white men alike. These women could expect little leniency from civic authorities if prosecuted. Indeed, some scholars have argued that white women were effectively deprived of their racial identity and the protection it afforded after they engaged in interracial sexual activity. An overwhelming proportion of the prosecutions for "disorderly conduct" involved women, and while sex between white men and black women was frequently overlooked by the legal authorities, miscegenation involving white women was taken extremely seriously.[25] In both 1808 and 1809 the Chatham County grand jury cited "houses of ill fame," which "are suffered to be kept in the very center of the city" and where "the sacred ties of marriage are forgotten, and the foundation of diseases laid."[26] Street prostitution was also apparent in Savannah. In 1814 a warrant was issued for an unnamed white woman "who is in the habit of passing through town at all times, and holding improper conversations with persons of color."[27] Poor women had, of course, been traditionally associated with prostitution, and there is no reason to believe that Savannah was any different; however, in the South, the denial of racial identity that miscegenation entailed for white women generated significant social repercussions. Nevertheless, prostitution remained for some a necessary way of earning a living, despite the fact that it was the ultimate gendered rejection of the elite social ethic. The fact that this would bring poor white women into contact with both male and female Afro-Americans was evidently insufficient reason for them to abandon this line of work.[28]

Although the marginal socioeconomic situation of poor white women is clear, it formed but one part of lives that also encompassed the familial and the spiritual. Many non-elite women sought a husband to obtain a measure of economic security, love, and happiness; but marriages also entailed the subordination of wives to their husbands.[29] Of course many non-elite white women lived contented married lives: in a series of letters from her husband, William Garland, we learn that while Harriet Garland lived a materially impoverished existence, she took comfort from the love and support of her husband. William was an itinerant mechanic working mainly in the Savannah River area and was thus frequently absent from their home in Beaufort. In times of good employment Garland encouraged his wife to look out for the next wage packet he had sent to her, while regretting that his work took him away from home. In leaner times he was forced to warn her to be "as careful of your money as you can."[30] While lack of evidence makes it impossible to estimate just how many

lowcountry marriages were unhappy, divorce petitions highlight some of the worst cases of abuse of poor wives by their husbands. Unlike residents of neighboring South Carolina, where divorce was prohibited, Georgians were able to petition county courts to obtain divorces.[31] One such petition to Chatham County Inferior Court is that of Mary Ryan.

According to surviving records, Mary Wood and William L. Ryan married in February 1817. Ryan was a merchant rich enough to own one slave, and even Mary acknowledged that in the early years their marriage had enjoyed "domestic peace and quiet." Around 1820 Ryan's business faltered, he no longer owned a slave, and the value of his property had fallen from $1,500 to $100. By 1821 he owned no property at all. Ryan began to drink heavily, though whether this was a cause of or a response to his economic problems is not known. But as a consequence, his wife stated, he for "three years beat, calumniated & in other ways ill-treated your petitioner, driving her from her home, compelling her to seek her personal safety by flying to her friends, leaving her at divers times unprotected & houseless, an object of the bounty and tenderness of an aged & infirm mother."[32]

Mary Ryan based her petition for divorce not only on the violence she had suffered but also—and probably more telling in terms of how gender relations were perceived in lowcountry society—on the marital failings of her husband. According to Mary, she "performed all those domestick duties which religion and the regulations of society require." In other words, William could not claim that he had beaten his wife to correct her failings. By throwing her out, he had forced her "to rely solely on her daily manual labor for support of herself and infant child," instead of fulfilling the traditional role of breadwinner. In a final damning appendage to her petition, Mary Ryan desired to be rescued from William's "unmanly, ungenerous and barbarous conduct." This manner of illuminating William's failings as a man was the clinching argument in her petition. Despite the fact that his lawyers pleaded innocence on his behalf, William was unable to convince the jury that he had dutifully fulfilled his matrimonial obligations. The jury heard testimony from three witnesses, all women, one of whom was Mary's mother, Catherine Wood. Their testimony has, unfortunately, not survived, but it is likely that these women were those friends Mary referred to as offering her refuge from her husband. Their testimony evidently gave weight to Mary's version of events, as the jury found "sufficient proofs" to grant the divorce petition.[33]

Mary Ryan was not the only non-elite white woman to obtain redress

against her husband through the courts. Shortly after the Revolution, Mary Wade was granted full rights "to deal and transact all lawfull business in your name independent of any interference or control of your said husband [Hezekiah Wade]." Hezekiah had been a tavern keeper, but was evidently unemployed by the time of this petition. Mary Wade testified that he had become an alcoholic and incapable of providing for the family, even resorting to pawning those articles "furnished by charitable people." The court therefore ordered that Mary Wade be given the rights usually reserved to men, to trade and make contracts in her own name "for the purposes of acquiring an honest and competent support." While empowering Mary Wade was significant, considering her gender, it should be noted that the principal reason for the actions of the court was to protect those with whom she formed contracts. Mary Wade was what was termed a "femme covert." In other words, she did not have a separate legal identity from her husband, and contracts signed by her would have had no legal validity. By this ruling, the court gave her the same legal rights held by men. Other femmes coverts obtained redress against abusive husbands by seeking a guardian to handle their affairs. When Ann Chauvin was ejected by her husband, William, she succeeded in persuading the Superior Court to appoint David Gugel as her guardian to obtain "her just rights."[34]

Many white women found that an appeal to their local church brought a swift and public condemnation of mistreatment by husbands. In 1770 the Congregational church at Midway suspended three men who failed to treat their wives in what was perceived as the appropriate manner.[35] While these cases were comparatively rare in the discipline meetings of evangelical churches, when they did arise the public humiliation of the man in question was complete. In 1829 Little Ogechee Baptist Church went so far as to excommunicate Lucas Bob for leaving his wife and "taking up with another woman."[36] His actions were not tolerated by a community that expected husbands to live up to their familial responsibilities.

The interest of churches in the domestic arrangements of their members, of course, applied to women as well. Those living in adultery violated the ethic of female "passionlessness" promoted by churches and consequently could expect censure through either suspension or excommunication. Both Morning Shepherd and Mrs. Jenkinson were expelled from their religious communities for improper physical relations.[37] It is important to note, however, that while adultery would probably result in

excommunication, separation from a violent husband would not necessarily involve long-term consequences. When the First Baptist Church in Savannah considered the case of Hannah Jordan, who had applied for a letter of dismissal to the Nevill's Creek church, they had to contend with the objections of several members who claimed that she had left her husband improperly. Hannah responded that her husband had thrown her out, forbidding her to live in town, and setting her at liberty to remarry. She was quick to point out that she had no intention of remarrying but that her husband intended to do so within two weeks. She also placed her faith in the church to effect a reconciliation, in which case she would stay. Evidently the church agonized over the proper course of action. Probably, the male members felt that she should not have left her husband, but so eloquently did she portray herself as the injured party that the church "unanimously agreed to dismiss her as an orderly member."[38]

Even though one of the major appeals of Baptist and Methodist churches to poorer white people was a theology that promised equality before God, they were not immune from contemporary perceptions about race and gender relations. In 1807 the Savannah River Baptist Association wrote a circular letter to its member churches concerning domestic relations. While it emphasized that husbands had a duty to care for and love their wives, it also stressed above all that women had a duty "to be obedient."[39] Such submission to the authority of husbands would "promote greater union, which will produce greater happiness." Similar sentiments motivated the exhortation to family worship by the Sunbury Baptist Association in 1823. This letter stated that not only was family worship the Christian duty of every white male to organize, but that it would also demonstrate that he was "the priest of his own little commonwealth." These public displays of Christian devotion would "enable him successfully to rule his own household."[40]

The shoring up of established gender structures that the associations were advocating also applied to race and familial responsibility. On the one hand, white males were held as the supreme temporal authority over their wives, their children, and their slaves. On the other hand, white women were meant to live up to the ideal of the hardworking Christian woman.[41] It is therefore unsurprising that the dominance of white men was reflected in the daily workings of evangelical churches. Discipline councils were organized and presided over by white men, despite the fact that the majority of members were female. On several occasions no business was transacted at the meetings of the First Baptist Church in Savannah, since no male members were present.[42] Churches therefore provided opportunities for women to develop female networks, but the structural dominance of men generally prevented the development of an alternative feminine social ethic.

Widowed and single women, without the economic support of males, were often seen as fit objects for charity. The purpose of Widow's Society in Savannah, founded in 1822, was expressly to "supply the wants of destitute infirm widows and single women, of good characters" outside an institution. Not that the Widow's Society worked on the same scale as some of the other benevolent institutions in Savannah. In 1828 less than $200 was expended on the support of only twelve women.[43] In 1816, another exclusively female charity named the Savannah Dorcas Society assisted about a hundred people in the city with "clothing and nourishment."[44] Both of these societies ensured that they were assisting the respectable poor: those who were elderly, infirm, or sick but who remained pious and humble. Charity, in these cases, was meant to tide a family "in a distressed situation" over difficult times, rather than have them become destitute.[45] In this sense we have come full circle: many of the young girls helped by the Female Asylum or the Free School returned to a dependence on charity in widowhood, never achieving the economic independence they sought.

The typical experiences of non-elite women in Savannah can be encapsulated in a single biography. Diana Kirkland was born in Savannah in 1813 to James and Priscilla Kirkland, both of whom had migrated to Georgia from the North.[46] While little is known of their life in Savannah, evidently the family's economic situation was precarious: less than a year after the death of her father, seven-year-old Diana was placed in the Female Asylum by her mother, who had already lost one child in infancy. Diana's mother married the innkeeper Isaiah Atkinson shortly afterwards, leaving Diana in the Female Asylum until Atkinson himself died in 1823.[47] Two years later Priscilla was again poised to marry; she petitioned the Female Asylum for her daughter's return but was refused, "the ladies knowing her character to be very bad." Despite this rebuff, Diana's mother secretly took her from the asylum, and the ladies had to initiate legal proceedings to get her back.[48] Returned by the civic authorities, Diana spent the next two years chafing at the authority of the matron and the board. She finally managed to escape the asylum in 1828, aged fifteen, and moved in with her mother, who had been widowed for the third time.

In their search for economic survival, Diana and her mother, together with at least two other women, opened a brothel under the guise of a sailor's boardinghouse, choosing to live as "abandoned women" rather than rely on elite benevolence. Not that either had long to enjoy any security they gained from prostitution: Diana Kirkland died at age seventeen in 1830, and was survived by her forty-nine-year-old mother by only eighteen months.[49] The lives these women lived of poverty, social ostracism, prostitution, frequent marriage and remarriage, and a constant struggle for survival would have been familiar to many non-elite white women in Savannah.

This essay has illuminated some of the methods used by poor white women to alleviate their social condition: appeals to third parties, casual employment, acceptance of charity, and the formation of cross-class or biracial gender networks. Peculiarly isolated in the social fabric because of their gender, race, and class, non-elite white women in the Georgia lowcountry found that the avenues that facilitated economic self-sufficiency were extremely limited. Many died as they had lived, in poverty.

NOTES

1. For notable exceptions, see Victoria E. Bynum, *Unruly Women: The Politics of Social and Sexual Control* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992); D. Harland Hagler, "The Ideal Woman in the Antebellum South: Lady or Farmwife?" *Journal of Southern History* 46 (1980): 405–18; Eleanor M. Boatwright, "The Political and Civil Status of Women in Georgia, 1783–1860," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 25 (1941): 301–24.

2. Hagler, "Ideal Woman," 405–18.

3. Oration of Rev. Willard Preston dated 23 April 1833, *Minutes of the Union Society: Being an Abstract of Existing Records from 1750 to 1858* (Savannah: J. M. Cooper, 1860), 120.

4. John B. Boles, "Henry Holcombe: A Southern Baptist Reformer in the Age of Jefferson," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 54 (1970): 387–88 and *Georgia Analytical Repository* 1, 2 (July–August 1802): 68–74.

5. *Daily Georgian*, 22 April 1828.

6. Records of the Beaufort Female Benevolent Society (BFBS), minutes, 26 May 1836, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC.

7. *Columbian Museum and Savannah Advertiser*, 22 December 1801; Henry Holcombe, *The First Fruits in a Series of Letters* (Philadelphia: n.p., 1812), 78–79; Gail S. Murray, "Charity within the Bounds of Race and Class: Female Benevolence in the Old South," *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 96 (1995): 58; Savannah Home for Girls Records (SHGR), minutes of the board, 1810–1843, box 1, vol. 1, Rules of the Society, no. 1, Georgia Historical Society (GHS), Savannah. I would like to thank Parent and Child Development Services in Savannah for granting permission to utilize these records.

8. SHGR, minutes, 9 June 1827, 6 March 1828. See also 13 August 1823.

9. BFBS, minutes, 23 July 1820, 22 August 1820. For examples of girls bound out to do domestic work, see 8 August 1823, 30 March 1827.

10. SHGR, minutes, 24 April 1818.

11. Constitution of the BFBS, 1814, Article 9.

12. SHGR, minutes, 14 November 1822, 1 June 1826.

13. Oration of Rev. Willard Preston, 129.

14. Account of the Origin and Progress of the Savannah Free School Society, (SFSS) (New York: Day and Turner, 1819), 3; SFSS minutes, 5 January 1820, 3 March 1817, GHS. In 1820, 228 children attended the poor school, 129 boys and 99 girls.

15. SFSS minutes, 9 December 1816.

16. I obtained these estimates by comparing the number of children helped in this period with the 1820 census. It is impossible to ascertain exactly the number of children under twenty-one in Savannah, because census enumerators grouped young people aged sixteen to twenty-six. For the figures used here, I divided this age group by half and added it to figures for the under-sixteen group to obtain an overall estimate of the number of children under twenty-one. In 1820 it was estimated that 881 white girls in Savannah were under twenty-one. If 285 were receiving charity (186 from the Female Asylum and 99 at the Free School), they represented 32.3 percent of the total. A total of 126 boys were educated at the Free School, and a further 53 by the Union Society. In 1820, 839 males under twenty-one resided in Savannah; the proportion receiving charity was 21.6 percent.

17. The Female Asylum had 190 subscribers in 1820. SHGR, membership list, 1820. The Free School enumerated 259 subscribers. SFSS, minute book, 1820. The Union Society had 137 subscribers on 1 April 1822. *Minutes of the Union Society*, 100–101. Of the subscribers to the Free School, 57 were also subscribers to the Female Asylum. Of the subscribers to the Union Society, 80 were also members of either the Female Asylum or the Free School. Therefore 554 individuals were members of at least one society. In 1820 the federal census counted 2,092 adults over twenty-one in Savannah. Therefore, 26.4 percent of individuals were making charitable contributions.

18. SHGR, Rules of the Society, no. 5, minutes, 7 May 1811.

19. SFSS, Rules, 27–30.

20. Julia Cherry Spruill, *Women's Life and Work in the Southern Colonies* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1938), 276–78. See advertisements for a "housekeeper, can work well at needle, and is a clear starcher," "a good cook,

washer and ironer," and "a good pastry cook, also a washerwoman and a chambermaid," in *Columbian Museum and Savannah Advertiser*, 26 July 1796; and *Daily Georgian*, 27 November 1828, 12 March 1829. Of 116 free black women assigned an occupation in 1828, all but 19 recorded domestic/cook, seamstress, or washerwoman as their job. *Daily Georgian*, 10 March 1828. See also Betty Wood, *Women's Work, Men's Work: The Informal Slave Economies of Lowcountry Georgia, 1750–1830* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995), 117.

21. *Georgia Gazette*, 21 March 1796, 26 March 1796.

22. Emily Burke, *Pleasure and Pain: Reminiscences of Georgia in the 1840s* (Savannah: Beehive Press, 1978), 77; Narrative of John Melish, in *The Rambler in Georgia*, ed. Mills Lane (Savannah: Beehive Press, 1973), 20; Richard W. Griffen, "Poor White Laborers in Southern Cotton Factories, 1789–1865," *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 61 (1960): 32.

23. Wood, *Women's Work*, 80–100.

24. Savannah City Council minutes, 26 January 1801, 9 February 1801; Register of Free People of Color, 1817, GHS.

25. Diane Miller Sommerville, "The Rape Myth in the Old South Reconsidered," *Journal of Southern History* 61 (1995): 495–98, 513–14; Catherine Clinton, "'Southern Dishonor': Flesh, Blood, Race and Bondage," in *In Joy and Sorrow: Women, Family and Marriage in the Victorian South*, ed. Carol Bleser (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 52–68; Bynum, *Unruly Women*, 41–47, 93–110. Women made up five of six defendants charged with "keeping a riotous and disorderly house" in Savannah. City Council minutes, 3 March 1805 (Priscilla Bilow); 21 September 1807 (Elizabeth Williams); 12 December 1807, 22 January 1810 (Black Hannah); 15 March 1811 (Rebecca Rust and John Fleetwood). See also Wood, *Women's Work*, 118.

26. Chatham County, Superior Court minutes, vol. 8, 1808–1812, January term 1808 and January term 1809; see also vol. 1, 1782–1789, October term 1787; vol. 2, 1790–1793, July term 1790; vol. 9, 1812–1818, January term 1814, Georgia Department of Archives and History, Atlanta.

27. City Council minutes, 13 May 1814.

28. Randall M. Miller, "The Enemy Within: Some Effects of Foreign Immigrants on Antebellum Southern Cities," *Southern Studies* 24, (1985): 43–53.

29. Stephanie McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Lowcountry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 15–17; Bynum, *Unruly Women*, 2, 59–60.

30. William Harris Garland Papers, folder 4, letters dated 6 December 1835, 22 April 1840; folder 5, letters dated 23 March 1841, 4 May 1841, 9 June 1841; folder 6, letters dated 11 October 1841, 11 November 1841; folder 7, letter dated 18 March 1842, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

31. Divorces were still rare, however; between 1798 and 1835 only 291 were granted by the legislature. Constitution of the State of Georgia, passed 30 May 1798; *An Act to Carry into Effect the Ninth Section of the Third Article of the Constitution*, passed 1 December 1802; Oliver H. Prince, ed., *A Digest of the Laws of the State of Georgia* (Athens: Oliver H. Prince, 1837), 910, 187–88. Statistic from 187 n.

32. *Marriages in Chatham County, Georgia* (Savannah: Georgia Historical Society, 1993), 176. Deed dated 2 February 1817. Savannah Tax Digest, 1819, GDAH. Petition of Mary Ryan, Keith Read Collection, box 4, folder 51, Chatham County Court Records, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia, Athens. Ryan owned a shop of some sort, and was fined ten dollars in 1818 for keeping it open after official hours, presumably to trade with slaves visiting Savannah. City Council minutes, 4 May 1818. Savannah Tax Digests, 1820 and 1821, GDAH.

33. Petition of Mary Ryan, Chatham County, Superior Court minutes, book 11, 1822–1826, January term 1824. Mary's mother was born in South Carolina in 1759 and died aged sixty-six on 14 July 1825. *Register of Deaths in Savannah, Georgia* (Savannah: Georgia Historical Society, 1989), 4:172.

34. Chatham County, Superior Court minutes, book 1, 1782–1789, October term 1785. See also book 7, 1804–1808, January term 1805. In 1809 Ann Chauvin was still filing a tax return separately from her husband. Savannah Tax Digest, 1809.

35. Minutes of the Congregational Church at Midway, vol. 1, dated 26 August 1770, GHS. Joseph Baker was suspended for "gitting in liquor and abusing his wife. John Goulding for suspicion of keeping his own wench and living in adultery with another man's wife, Adley Maxwell for unlawfully keeping his own wench in adultery."

36. Minutes of Little Ogechee Baptist Church, October 1829, Special Collections Department, Mercer University, Macon, GA.

37. Case of Morning Shepherd, Little Ogechee Baptist Church, 1 June 1797; case of Mrs. Jenkinson, First Baptist Church, Savannah, 1 May 1829, Mercer University; Nancy F. Cott, "Passionlessness: An Interpretation of Victorian Sexual Ideology, 1790–1850," *Signs* 4 (1978): 219–36.

38. First Baptist Church, Savannah, minutes, 12 October 1810, 21 December 1810, 11 January 1811, Mercer University.

39. Savannah River Baptist Association minutes, circular letter, November 1807, Mercer University.

40. Sunbury Baptist Association minutes, circular letter, 1823, Mercer University.

41. Hagler, "Ideal Woman," 412.

42. All lowcountry evangelical churches had a female majority among white members ranging from 60 percent to 80 percent. See, for example, First Baptist Church, Savannah, 71.3 percent; Darien Presbyterian Church, 59 percent; Indepen-

dent Presbyterian Church, 82.8 percent. GHS, Mercer University; McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds*, 178–95; First Baptist Church, Savannah, minutes, 14 August 1813, 21 August 1813; 6 January 1815, 13 January 1815, Mercer University.

43. *Daily Georgian*, 28 January 1823, 5 January 1828.

44. *Savannah Gazette*, 25 January 1817.

45. BFBS, minutes, 25 March 1817.

46. James was born in Massachusetts, Priscilla in North Carolina.

47. SHGR, members list, 1 June 1820; *Register of Deaths*, 4:13, 38, 153. Atkinson was propertyless in 1821, and described as an innkeeper in 1823. Savannah Tax Digest, 1821.

48. SHGR, minutes, 7 April, 6 May 1825.

49. SHGR, minutes, 9 July 1827, 6 March 1828, 2 October 1828; *Marriages of Chatham County*, 147; Savannah Tax Digests, 1826, 1831, 1832. In 1830 two women aged twenty-five to thirty, as well as a male infant, lived with Priscilla Johnson. Federal Manuscript Census, Chatham County, 1830; *Register of Deaths*, 4:240, 257.

Chapter Four

Cherokee Women and Cultural Change

Alice Taylor-Colbert

EDITOR'S NOTE: *By the 1750s there were several distinctive subregions in the South. Maryland, tidewater Virginia, and the Albemarle area of North Carolina were tied together by tobacco cultivation; rice and indigo production united lowcountry South Carolina and Georgia. These areas featured large-scale production of staple crops for international markets, unlike the backcountry, which stretched west to the mountains, where small farms and subsistence agriculture led to mixed economies. The Latin South represented a light military occupation by France and Spain of land along the Gulf from Florida to Texas. The remaining area was Indian country. Whites pushed into Kentucky and Tennessee in the 1770s, bringing tobacco culture with them. South to the Gulf was inhabited by Creeks, Choctaws, and Cherokees, and Seminoles lived in Florida.*

By 1750 the British had developed water- and steam-driven machines to power textile looms and hammers for forging iron, thereby becoming the first country to undergo the Industrial Revolution. They were able to produce more goods at lower prices, raising living standards in what is known as the "consumer revolution." The desire for comfortable cotton clothing caused the demand for raw cotton to outstrip the world supply, leading to large profits for producers. A major impediment to large-scale cultivation of cotton in the South, however, was the difficulty of removing its seeds, but the invention of the cotton gin in 1793 solved this problem. Now Euroamericans coveted the fertile lands of the Native Americans and used fraud and force to expel them. In addition by 1800 technological breakthroughs in the processing of cane juice opened south Louisiana to sugar plantations.

The demand for cotton and sugar ensured that slavery took on new life in the South at a time when it was declining elsewhere. Slavery was declared illegal in 1772 in England. The British abolished the slave trade in 1807 and ended the institution in their Caribbean possessions in 1833. Saint Domingue (Haiti), in