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The Women of the House: One Hundred Years, One Georgia Family

By Cheryl Hilderbrand

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Readers and literary critics may argue the virtues of fiction versus non-fiction; the power of truth versus the power of the imagination. However, occasionally a historic narrative is so wonderfully woven, so carefully paced and arranged, narrated with such humor, honesty, and style that the reader is immersed in the events of long ago and experiences the characters' emotions as his or her own.

In Jane Anne Settle's new book *The Women of the House*, the power of real events combines with the ethos of one family to create an inspiring, readable story.

Based on years of scholarly and attic research, trunks of primary documents, and a lifetime of talk and stories, this family history reads like a novel. I laughed out loud frequently and cried more than once during the moving tale.

Ostensibly, this book is the story of Effie Jane Fletcher McKibben, Hattie McKibben Lane, and Mary Lane Mallet, the author's great-grandmother, grandmother, and mother, respectively. Each woman had to create a new life for herself and her several children after the death of a handsome, bright, important husband. In each generation the lives of the women are affected by war, progress, plenty, poverty, triumph, and tragedy, and in each generation daily lives and important days are played out within the walls of the lovely Victorian house that was home to five generations.

But this book is more than its subtitle, *One Hundred Years, One Georgia Family*. It is a book about the idea of family, the heroic supporting family, and how each member influences the succeeding generations.

The McKibbens, Lanes, Mallets, the Buttrills, Balls, and Fletchers, and other close families in the book had several common characteristics: They believed in hard work, serving their country and their community, and they valued literacy and music. They provided encouragement and support both emotional and financial to each other and their friends.

While chronicling the story of a pioneering Butts County family, *The Women of the House*, also offers a panoramic glimpse of an earlier Jackson. The large cast of characters comes alive in the book against the backdrop of cotton fields, unpaved roads, and ferry crossings, in a time when letters, the noon meal and train arrivals were the highlights of most weekdays, a time when civic leaders were respected for their contributions despite their flaws.

Real people are the heart of this story. The family pictures and paintings, and the stories behind the pictures all help the myriad characters to stay in their century. The real women of the house had a tendency to pass names down like eye color so the pictures are quite helpful as well as interesting.

The very sympathetic and often witty characters of this story endured and prevailed upon the same same soil we Butts Countians tread upon today. However, Third Street and the family lands have changed. Author Jane Anne Settle, however, "bulldozes" the "filling stations, fast food restaurants and other late-coming intruders...the concrete in which they are imbedded the signs which advertise them and the billboards that tower above them," and takes us with her to the past. We see and experience the wonderful Circus party that Mary and Hugh engineered in the midst of the depression. We go to movies, play Rook, and make a fan quilt with Grandmother Hattie. We drive the mules to Willow Valley Dairy. We worry with Janie, Hattie and Mary when sons and grandsons go off to war.

The men and women of these families loved learning and language. Because of this Ms. Settle had a rich array of materials from which to draw: primary documents, newspaper clippings, memorabilia, post cards, sheet music, to little blue poetry books, letters, photographs, and to autograph albums. But most importantly, she had an oral history full of stories, family sayings, jokes and descriptions. She had the privilege of living with her extended family and of keeping before her the knowledge that she is connected to those who sat on the same porch, played under the same tree.

And she has given us the privilege of sharing in her family history. It is a joy to do so.

The Women of the House is available from the Violet Press, P.O. Box 25156, Alexandria, VA 22313 or at www.violetpress.com.

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