

The Civil War Diary  
of Rhoda Stone Lowry



RHODA STONE AND ROBERT LOWRY

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MAJOR WILLIAM GUSTIN LOWRY

*Singer*  *FREERPORT, PA.*



The flag of the Union Army 62<sup>nd</sup> Regiment Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry. Senator Edgar Cowan presented the regiment, mustered in Pittsburgh, with the state color on December 21, 1861. In July of 1863, Rhoda Stone Lowry's son, Major William Gustin Lowry, followed the flag into battle at Gettysburg. Both flag bearers appointed to carry the flag, as well as William Gustin Lowry, were killed at the battle of Gettysburg.

Pennsylvania Capitol Preservation Committee.

62<sup>nd</sup> Regiment Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry flag.

Pennsylvania's Civil War Flags.

<http://cpc.state.pa.us/main/cpcwev/history/flags/index.html>

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# Introduction

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*To say that the memoirs of women and clergymen were concerned with death is an understatement; to a degree that requires special consideration, they were exercises in necrophilia.*

— Ann Douglas

The Protestant sentimental religious movements of the nineteenth century were utterly fixated on death. Rich Victorians in England and America built great monuments to their dead, complete with ornate mausoleums, statuary, and the occasional obelisk, and a whole field of “consolation literature,” which included memoirs, obituary poems, mourner’s manuals, prayer guidebooks, hymns, and books about heaven, flourished in the period (Douglas, 201). The sentimentalist rhetoric specifically targeted and impacted women, with the effect being a heightened disenfranchisement and powerlessness. As Ann Douglas writes in The Feminization of American Culture, “sentimentalism provides a way to protest a power to which one has already capitulated. It is a form of dragging one’s heels” (12,). The result was crushing.

In the diary Rhoda Stone Lowry, of Freeport, Pennsylvania, kept from Saturday May 16, 1863 to Friday June 17, 1864, during the American Civil War, we see the appropriation of this rhetoric, voiced through the author, collide with overwhelming tragedy, and ultimately fail the writer. On Friday, June 12, 1862, about a year before the diary begins, Lowry’s mother died. Her sons, Robert Alexander and William Gustin, enlisted in the Union Army on July 4, 1861, and were killed on February 1, 1862, and July 2, 1863, respectively.

In her diary, we see both Lowry's acceptance of and participation in the discourse of religious submission. About half the text is comprised of the most basic notation of where the author went, what church services she attended, and what she did; the remainder is direct prayer, in which she laments, wishes her sons a place in eternity, and begs God to strengthen her will. In both of these sections, the central structuring influence of sentimental religion is apparent. RSL mentions attending twenty-six distinct religious meetings, including classes, prayer meetings, and two women's prayer meetings. She is also a frequent Churchgoer, though her denomination seems unclear. This is not unusual for the period; as Douglas writes, "by 1875, American Protestants were much more likely to define their faith in terms of family morals, civic responsibility, and above all, in terms of the social function of churchgoing" (7). From internal evidence, I conjecture that the author is a Methodist, but she also mentions attending services, meetings, and classes at Baptist, Presbyterian, and Lutheran churches.

The ideology Lowry developed through the rhetoric of sentimentalism clearly structures the prayer sections of her narrative. The writer directly sentimentalizes the past on several occasions. "While I was gone I saw great old friends and acquaintances," she writes in one entry, dated August 15, 1863, "but, oh, changed the most of them are, as well as myself— We do all fade as a leaf and our life is as a tale that is told" (Page 36). The particular implications of sentimentalism for women especially structure Lowry's diary. As minister Horace Bushnell wrote in 1845, the rhetoric preached that "a woman should be a Christian[...] whose character can be finished only by assimilation to God" (as qtd in Douglas, 44). Women, with no acceptable social outlets to exercise direct power, were instead encouraged to exert power through influence. As social beings,

sentimentalist literature “defined woman as the register of man’s capacity for personal experience” (Douglas, 46). On October 2, 1863, Lowry writes, “this day, 3 months [ago], my dear son Gustin died and I was left a widow, indeed, without son or husband” (Page 49). Sad as this statement may be, it also ignores Lowry’s two living daughters, and thus clearly indicates her interpellation of male superiority and her own worthlessness without men.

Lowry uses the word “Oh” to appeal directly to divine power 134 times in the diary. These appeals represent indirect attempts to exercise power both in that by their very nature they circumvent the real world and in that they overwhelmingly express an active commitment to submission. “O give me grace to submit to thy will, o my savior and redeemer, but not thy face be hid from me now,” she writes in one of many such entries (Page 93). There also seems something formulaic in these sections of Lowry’s diary. The repetition of specific terminology to describe her sadness (distress, 15 times; affliction, 6 times; world of sorrows, 7 times), seems to indicate a systematic method to her prayer. This again is symptomatic of the sentimental movement, during which classes and instructional literature taught specific strategies to open “channels of communication” and to “tune in with the infinite” (Douglas, 214). Lowry mentions eighteen different classes in her diary, including a “journal class” (Page 96). She also mentions reading the “life of Mrs. Fletcher,” a popular piece of didactic devotional literature about a consort of early Methodist movement leader John Fletcher, repeatedly. The following entry exemplifies the tone of the book, and of most nineteenth-century consolation and didactic literature.

September 12. This day I am thirty-nine years of age. O that I might live to Thee more than ever! What have I either done or suffered for thee, in this last year? As to the state of my soul, I trust I am nearer to God than before I went my journey. But I am still a dull scholar in thy school. I want that full baptism of the Spirit: God's promise to all believers (Chapter 3).

The adapter of Mrs. Fletcher's "Life," Henry Moore, has a more elaborative and embellished tone to his writing than Lowry, but the approach is the same in both diaries. The structuring hand of the sentimental movement through the organs of literature and church education seems the paramount influence on Lowry and the motivation of her diary. It represents a private attempt at the exercise of power, through divine influence and appeal, for which women had no social outlet.

For all that she appropriates the rhetoric of sentimentalism, however, Lowry also clearly struggles with it. Despite the frequency with which Lowry describes attending church services, meetings, and masses, she also mentions not attending church on seven occasions in the diary. Nowhere is this struggle more clearly exemplified, however, than in her immediate reaction to her son, William's, death. "It is reported my dear son is killed," she writes on July 7, 1863, in an unusually brief entry, "Lord forbid it should be true" (Page 29). Lowry does not write another entry for another two weeks, and then she further expresses frustration with, for the time being, a God she feels has been unjust. Here also, however, in her frustration, we see the destructive nature of the sentimentalist doctrine for women come full circle.

This day two years [ago], my dear sons were marched into the service of the country; now they [Page 28] are both in eternity. My dear son was killed the



second day of this month. Oh that I [?]. Why I have been dealt with thus? Oh  
Lord help me.

Overall, the diary of Rhoda Stone Lowry is a sad narrative of death, desire, and  
subjugation. It also, however, offers an interesting insight into both the home front of the  
American Civil War and the sexual politics and culture of the nineteenth century.



## A Note on the Text

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In editing this diary, I felt two obligations. The first was to Dr. Theresa McDevitt and the Special Collections department of the Stapleton and Stabely Libraries at Indiana University of Pennsylvania. The diary came to the IUP Special Collections department through a donation by Logan R. Moorhead, the great, great grandson of Robert and Rhoda Stone Lowry. The majority of the documents in the L.R. Moorhead Collection, including two letters written by RSL's son Robert Alexander Lowry (Gan, Ganny, Ganni, R.A.), and thirty-six by her son William Gustin Lowry (Gustin, Gus, Gust), are available online through the IUP Libraries Special Collections page. In displaying these letters, the website editors have placed the PDF reprints of the manuscript documents side-by-side with the textual transcription. Keeping this template in mind, my first transcription of the text strove to reproduce, with a few considered exceptions, an exact facsimile of the text in conventional type. I have preserved the spacing of the original to allow easy cross-referencing with the facing manuscript. I have preserved [mis]spelling, capitalization, abbreviation, and punctuation, or lack thereof. I have used sub- and super-script fonts to approximate insertions between lines. I also reproduced dashes, reproducing their length in as accurate a scale as possible. Proper editorial practice dictates that an editor should transcribe correspondence, a category into which diaries in a sense fall, *as is*, and I have made every effort to adhere to this standard (Greetham, 351). That said, I did deviate from a complete facsimile approach in a few measured ways. I have interpolated, sparingly, where I felt it essential for clarity's sake. I have also fully completed all dates to better orient the reader and to aid anyone who may wish to pinpoint significant

historical events in the diary. Also for navigation's sake, as well as that of citation, I have inserted page numbers at the top of each page of text. The inside cover of the diary contains a cryptic, probably ephemeral note in the RSL's hand, "Z y n aa[,] 20<sup>c</sup> aa," for this reason, and because it will appear as the first page of the website reproduction of the diary, I have included this 'page' and labeled it [Page 1] in both transcriptions. In many areas, the manuscript is difficult to read, especially before one becomes acquainted with some of RSL's more peculiar letter forms. In a few, it is completely or partially illegible to my eye. Where I could not reasonably interpolate a word, I have placed a ? in brackets. This first transcription of the diary, along with the photographic reprints of the manuscript documents, form the second section of this book.

At first, I had intended to transcribe perhaps fifty pages of the diary, in this manner, and be through with it. After getting this far, however, I began to feel another sort of obligation, not only to transcribe the entire document, a goal Dr. McDevitt also hoped I'd pursue, but also to edit the diary into a more digestible form. Part of my reason for creating this second transcription perhaps stemmed from a sort of debt I felt to Mrs. Lowry. Preserving the exact lineation, spelling, and capitalization of a document, especially one written on small (5x3"???) notebook paper with a crude quill and a faint pencil, mars its readability. This problem is compounded by the fact that RSL, in her diary, almost never uses punctuation, capitalizes words seemingly at random, and misspells a number of words repeatedly. She does have an interesting story, however, and one of definite interest for the Civil War home-front studies field. In hope that my effort would result in a greater dissemination of the text, I have take a more diplomatic

approach in creating a corrected version of the diary. This transcription forms the first section of the book.

In correcting the text, I have normalized punctuation, lineation, and capitalization. I have used standard grammar, as well as an interpreted spoken cadence as guides in punctuating the document. RSL's frequent direct addresses of God, which often begin "Oh," or "Oh Lord," however, created a problem to consider in punctuating the document. These often read as exclamations, but also frequently act as cries of lamentation. In others they serve to invoke God to the aid and protection of others. How should these sentences be punctuated? Should each sentence beginning with "Oh" end with an "!" or should the contextual purpose of the direct address dictate punctuation? Ultimately, I found both alternatives undesirable. The former would be visually unappealing, as nearly every entry in the diary contains some form of divine appeal or address, and the overuse of exclamation points breaks up text and impedes reading ease. The latter I thought could easily diverge into speculation as to how RSL would have voiced a particular sentence nearly one hundred and fifty years ago. As a diary is essentially a silent medium to begin with, I discarded this option as well. Having rejected both arguments for adding exclamation points, then, I decided to omit using them altogether, except in the few rare places RSL drew them herself. I have preserved RSL's dashes within paragraphs, but have omitted final dashes, as her primary purpose in using them seems to have been to separate dates in the diary. In this transcription, however, they would only add confusion. In general, then, all exclamation points and dashes in the corrected transcription may be assumed to be the author's, while all other punctuation may be assumed to be mine. I have also normalized all proper names, as best I could

infer. I have interpolated more liberally, correcting spelling and bracketing only words I added or completely changed (was to were, *ex.*). I have centered date headings and preserved the bracketed page numbers to further aid navigation and orientation. I have added historical footnotes, drawn primarily from Logan R. Moorhead's Introduction to his Civil War documents collection, posted on the IUP Special Collections website, in order to more accurately and intelligibly present RSL's personal narrative. I have also added footnotes describing the locations of towns and cities visited by RSL in order to better orient the reader. I have omitted bracketed ?'s where the sentence makes sense without the illegible word, but have left them where meaning depends on it. I have omitted repeated words, but have not otherwise altered word order in any way. In all these changes, I have made it my goal to present the written record, thoughts, and emotions of RSL in a format that faithfully reproduces the composition and expression of the original manuscript in the most lucid and digestible manner possible.