



Torn by War: The Civil War Journal of Mary Adelia Byers

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The Civil War divided the nation, communities, and families. The town of Batesville, Arkansas, found itself occupied three times by the Union army. This compelling book gives a unique perspective on the war's western edge through the diary of Mary Adelia Byers (1847–1918), who began recording her thoughts and observations during the Union occupation of Batesville in 1862.

Only fifteen when she starts her diary, Mary is beyond her years in maturity, as revealed by her acute observations of the world around her. At the same time, she appears very much a child of her era. Having lost her father at a young age, she and her family depend on the financial support of her Uncle William, a slaveowner and Confederate sympathizer. Through Mary's eyes we are given surprising insights into local society during a national crisis. On the one hand, we see her flirting with Confederate soldiers in the Batesville town square and, on the other, facing the grim reality of war by "setting up" through the night with dying soldiers. Her journal ends in March 1865, shortly before the war comes to a close.

Torn by War reveals the conflicts faced by an agricultural social elite economically dependent on slavery but situated on the fringes of the conflict between North and South. On a more personal level, it also shows how resilient and perceptive young people can be during times of crisis. Enhanced by extensive photographs, maps, and informative annotation, the volume is a valuable contribution to the growing body of literature on civilian life during the Civil War.

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