

Another Year Finds Me In Texas: The Civil War Diary Of Lucy Pier Stevens

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Review

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Reflections in Isolation: Lucy Pier Steven's Texas Diaries

In *Another Year Finds Me in Texas*, Vicki Adams Tongate brings to light a remarkable diary illuminating home-front life in Civil War Texas. The diarist, Lucy Pier Stevens, was a young woman from Ohio who became stranded while visiting family in Texas at the outbreak of the war. Lucy found herself a guest for more than five years in the home of her socially prominent uncle and aunt, James Bradford Pier and Lu Merry Pier, in the town of Travis. Her observations on life in this still-developing region, the comings and goings of the local boys serving in the Confederate army, and social life on a Southern farm worked by slaves offer a rare perspective that is both insightful and enigmatic.

The book begins with an 81-page introduction that provides valuable background for Lucy's story. Tongate places Lucy's experience in the Pier household within the context of the "cult of true womanhood," the theoretical framework of expectations for middle-class women in mid-19th-century America expounded most famously by historian Barbara Welter. As Tongate points out, this framework tended to breakdown in areas outside of the Northeast, but it is clear that Lucy carried with her the virtues of modesty, piety, and submissiveness, and made herself useful during her unexpected exile.

Lucy's diary covers only the years 1863 to 1865; Tongate explains that her 1861 diary was discovered only recently, and was not kept as faithfully as the later diaries. Thus, we can sense little of the anguish Lucy must have felt when it first became clear that she could not return home. By 1863, however, she had (in Tongate's words) "put on a cloak of Southernness" (p. 65) and adapted to her circumstances—though never abandoning her hopes of returning home. Her diary entries include reports of battles in Louisiana, where most of the local boys

served. Clearly she wished them well, but her opinions on the war are harder to decipher. She often repeated rumors or comments, some disparaging Northern leaders, but never clearly expressed her own opinions about the conflict. Although there is no indication that she felt a need to be discreet about her opinions, she had as an example of indiscretion the case of Dr. Richard Peebles, a local acquaintance who was arrested and exiled to Mexico for distributing pro-Union tracts.

The reader senses that Tongate, a long-time lecturer in the English Department at Southern Methodist University, is not entirely comfortable writing about 19th-century American history, but she makes excellent use of secondary sources to put Lucy's experience in context. Tongate notes on page 63 that Lucy's growing sense of isolation mirrored the growing isolation of Texas as the war progressed. The Union's Mississippi River campaign and the Red River campaign of 1864 purposely cut Texas off from the rest of the Confederacy, leading to an "almost total information breakdown." News of the outside world became infrequent and often faulty. All Lucy knew was that not even a letter could find its way out of Texas by the end of 1861, nor did she receive any word from home until late in the war.

As the war drew to a close, Lucy grew more anxious to return to Ohio. In mid-April, 1865—unaware of Lee's surrender at Appomattox—she arranged passage on a blockade-runner out of Galveston and made her way to Havana, thence to New York. It might still have been several weeks or months before she could travel safely overland, but her sudden decision to take a risky voyage of escape underscores a desperation that she gave only partial voice to in her diary. Her account ends just before she was reunited with her family.

Tongate's treatment of Lucy Pier's diary is a work of exhaustive research and devoted scholarship. She might have chosen to interpret the diary in other ways—for instance, by comparing it to those of other northern women stranded (or living voluntarily) in the South. Nevertheless, the richness of Lucy's narrative, supplemented by Tongate's well-researched commentary, make this a delightful and informative read.

Another Year Finds Me in Texas includes a useful timeline, a list of friends, family, and acquaintances mentioned in the diary, and photographs of family members.

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