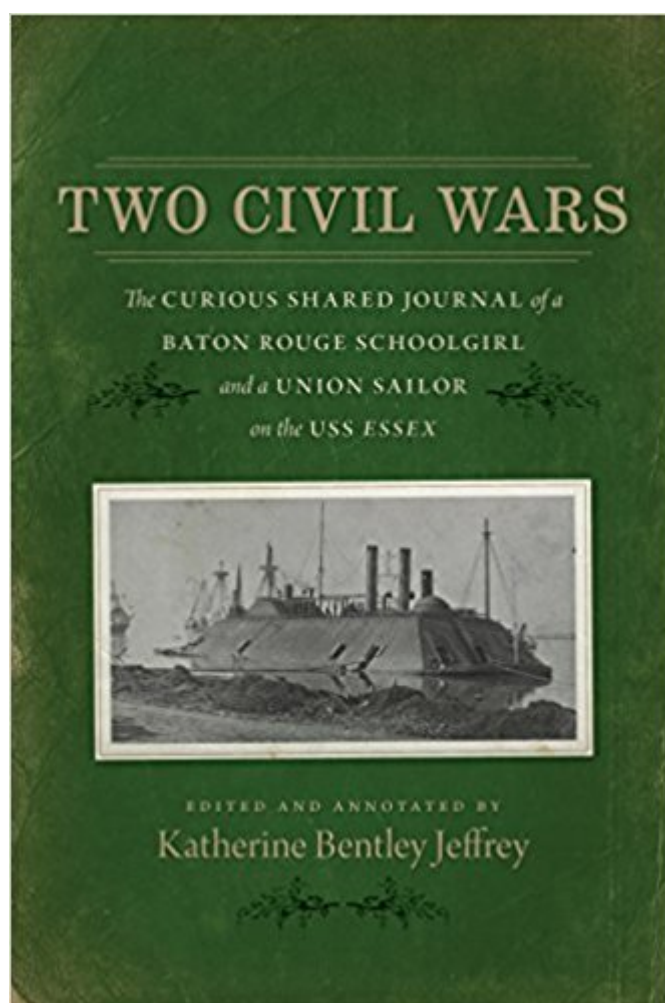


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Two Civil Wars: The Curious Shared Journal Of A Baton Rouge Schoolgirl And A Union Sailor On The USS Essex



Synopsis

Two Civil Wars is both an edition of an unusual Civil War--era double journal and a narrative about the two writers who composed its contents. The initial journal entries were written by thirteen-year-old Celeste Repp while a student at St. Mary's Academy, a prominent but short-lived girls school in midcentury Baton Rouge. Celeste's French compositions, dating from 1859 to 1861, offer brief but poignant meditations, describe seasonal celebrations, and mention by name both her headmistress, Matilda Victor, and French instructor and priest, Father Darius Hubert. Immediately following Celeste's prettily decorated pages a new title page intervenes, introducing "An Abstract Journal Kept by William L. Park, of the U.S. gunboat Essex during the American Rebellion." Park's diary is a fulsome three-year account of military engagements along the Mississippi and its tributaries, the bombardment of southern towns, the looting of plantations, skirmishes with Confederate guerillas, the uneasy experiment with "contrabands" (freed slaves) serving aboard ship, and the mundane circumstances of shipboard life. Very few diaries from the inland navy have survived, and this is the first journal from the ironclad Essex to be published. Jeffrey has read it alongside several unpublished accounts by Park's crewmates as well as a later memoir composed by Park in his declining years. It provides rare insight into the culture of the ironclad fleet and equally rare firsthand commentary by an ordinary sailor on events such as the sinking of CSS Arkansas and the prolonged siege of Port Hudson. Jeffrey provides detailed annotation and context for the Repp and Park journals, filling out the biographies of both writers before and after the Civil War. In Celeste's case, Jeffrey uncovers surprising connections to such prominent Baton Rouge residents as the diarist Sarah Morgan, and explores the complexity of wartime allegiances in the South through the experiences of Matilda Victor and Darius Hubert. She also unravels the mystery of how a southern youngster's school scribbler found its way into the hands of a Union sailor. In so doing, she provides a richly detailed picture of occupied Baton Rouge and especially of events surrounding the Battle of Baton Rouge in August 1862. These two unusual personal journals, linked by curious happenstance in a single notebook, open up intriguing, provocative, and surprisingly complementary new vistas on antebellum Baton Rouge and the Civil War on the Mississippi.

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Customer Reviews

"Two Civil Wars is valuable and joins the still growing body of Civil War first-person accounts. It gives voices to two interesting nineteenth-century Americans who never met but shared a tremendous experience."--Civil War Book Review"Editor Jeffrey, an independent scholar who has written on several unusual aspects of the Civil War, does an outstanding job in preparing the writings of these quite different people for publication. . . . Valuable for its many glimpses into the social and cultural environment of the times, and to the course of the war on the Mississippi."--NYMAS Review"The 1859-1861 journal of Celeste Repp comprises only a fraction of the book's total content but the meticulousness of Jeffrey's detective work really shines through in her generous volume of supporting material. . . . As with her handling of the writings of Celeste Repp, Jeffrey's expansive primary and secondary source research in this section adds greatly to the value of the Park journal. . . . If a yearly book award for Civil War manuscript editing exists, Katherine Bentley Jeffrey richly deserves to be on its short list of candidates."--Civil War Books and Authors"Katherine Bentley Jeffrey leads the reader on a journey into the lives of two seemingly disconnected people--an innocent Catholic school girl in Baton Rouge and a rough-and-tumble sailor aboard one of the United States's most worthy gunboats, the USS Essex--and gives a compelling glimpse into a world swept away by war. The fighting along the lower Mississippi provides all of the warp and weft of the human experience that makes the American Civil War so captivating, and these two participants take their place among its important chroniclers."--Donald S. Frazier, author of *Blood on the Bayou: Vicksburg, Port Hudson, and the Trans-Mississippi*"Two Civil Wars resurrects the written record as an historical player. It is as innovative as it is instructive."--Michael J. Bennett, author of *Union Jacks: Yankee Sailors in the Civil War*"Although Celeste Repp's entries comprise only a small portion of this dual journal, they nonetheless open a window to a little understood story: that of a young Catholic girl in the antebellum South. In addition to her extensive and impressive research

into Repp's life and family, Jeffrey exhaustively explores the unusual lives of her two mentors, Matilda Victor, a single Catholic woman struggling against the norms of society and her church, and Father Darius Hubert, an extraordinary priest and Confederate chaplain. In going beyond other studies that tend to focus on the Irish experience, Jeffrey has produced a useful work for those seeking to understand better the Catholic experience in the nineteenth-century South."--William B. Kurtz, author of *Excommunicated from the Union: How the Civil War Created a Separate Catholic America*"Katherine Bentley Jeffrey uses a diary with a personality disorder to glue together four individuals from divergent backgrounds and with surprising future accomplishments, and she does so with exceptional research know-how, a detective's intuition, and a flowing style of writing. The result is an enthralling read about Baton Rouge from 1859 to 1864 and beyond. A delightful contribution to Civil War historiography." --Cornelius Buckley, author of *Frenchman, Chaplain, Rebel: The Civil War Letters of Pere Louis-Hippolyte Gache, S.J., 10th Louisiana Infantry*

Katherine Bentley Jeffrey is a freelance editor and writer, and an independent scholar.

Katherine Bentley Jeffrey has skillfully reproduced a valuable primary document and placed it between detailed narratives that shed light on period-specific people, places, and events. Readers need no other text to understand the lives of Celeste Repp (the "Baton Rouge Schoolgirl") and William Park (the "Union Soldier on the USS Essex") than *Two Civil Wars*. Plentiful footnotes deepen one's understanding of the "lived experience" and demystify what many dealt with during the American Civil War. Those interested in the Civil War will be pleased with the overarching account while students (new and old) of history will be impressed with the book's visible mechanics. *Two Civil Wars* is an excellent piece of scholarship that will be enjoyed by a variety of readers. Jeffrey is to be commended for presenting a fascinating slice of history!

This book is a must read for any person interested in the American history, especially the American Civil War. Katherine Jeffery has done a meticulous job of piecing together the details of the lives of two ordinary Americans who otherwise would probably remain unknown to the world. The journal/diary entries of William Park, who served on the iron clad ship the Essex, are particularly fascinating since little is known about the day to day lives of the men who served about the ironclad ships during the Civil War. It is very poignant to read the school compositions written by a teenage Southern girl during such a violent period in American History. How these two separate lives came

to together so very briefly and possibly unknown to each other yet to remain intertwined to this day makes for a very entertaining read. It makes one wonder how many other journals are out there moldering in attics? How many were tossed out without anyone realizing the value or significance. Thanks to Ms Jeffery and her research, at least we have these two individuals thoughts and words.

This is a fascinating book and so meticulously researched. Two such very different lives cross in this curious shared journal and yet never cross in life: a war necessitates their coming together, only as wars can. Don't be put off by there being book page notes; without them, all of the valuable information, the remarkable research, and much of the real story behind the journal entries would have been lost at the back of the book.

A summary of the review on StrategyPage.Com 'The "Curious shared journal" refers to a note book that 13 year old Louisiana creole Celeste Repp began using in 1859 for poems, French exercises, copies of letters, and notes about her life, which, somehow in 1862, came into the hands of the 26 year old Scots-born William L. Park, a gunner on the USS "Essex", who began using it as a diary, without ripping out her pages. Editor Jeffrey has done an outstanding job in preparing the writings of these quite different people for publication. She provides extensive biographical notes on both Repp and Park, with shorter notices for the many other people who appear in the entries, from a beloved priest to Admiral Farragut. In addition, she has added extensive annotation to comment or expand upon references or observations made by both authors on events, customs, life, and people. This helps make "Two Civil Wars" a valuable reference for the social and cultural environment, and to the course of the war on the Mississippi.' For the full review, see StrategyPage.Com

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