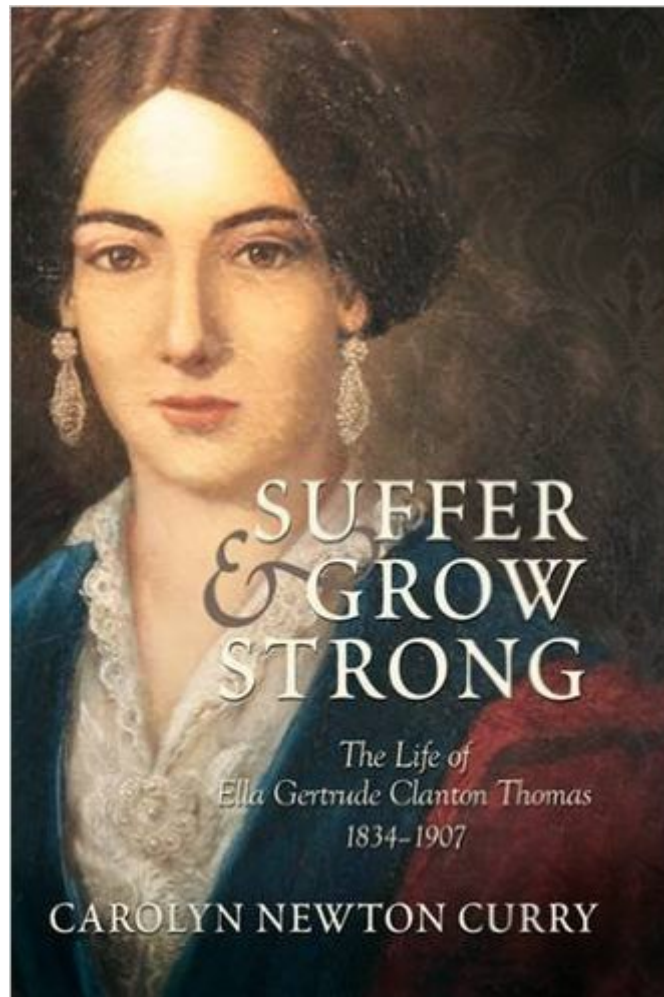


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Suffer And Grow Strong: The Life Of Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas, 1834-1907



Synopsis

Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas was an intelligent, spirited woman born in 1834 to one of the wealthiest families in Georgia. At the age of fourteen she began and kept a diary for forty-one years. These diaries of her life before, during, and after the Civil War filled thirteen hand-written volumes with 450,000 words. In the early years she described her life of leisure and recorded the books she read. Her father recognized her love of learning and sent her to the first college for women in America, Wesleyan Female College in Macon, Georgia. After college graduation in 1851, she was a gay young girl of fashion who met and married her Princeton-educated husband in 1852. However, with the coming of the Civil War and its aftermath, her life changed forever. Thomas experienced loss of wealth, bankruptcy, the death of loved ones, serious illness, and devastating family strife. She gave birth to ten children and saw four of them die. But, through it all, she kept pouring thoughts into her diary. Thomas examined what was happening, asked questions, and strived to find ways to improve her family's dire economic straits. She started a school in her home and later ran a boarding house out of the old family mansion. In 1893, Thomas left Augusta and moved to Atlanta where she became active in many women's organizations. She found comfort in her work with the Women's Christian Temperance Union and the Suffrage Movement. She began producing articles for newspapers, keeping them in scrapbooks that tell the story of her life after she quit keeping a diary. In 1899 she was elected president of the Georgia Woman Suffrage Association. Because of her own losses, Thomas was sensitive to the well-being of other women. As she said, she had suffered and grown strong. Her life is an amazing story of survival and transformation that speaks to women in our own time.

Book Information

Perfect Paperback: 256 pages

Publisher: Mercer University Press; Reprint edition (April 15, 2015)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0881465321

ISBN-13: 978-0881465327

Product Dimensions: 5.9 x 0.8 x 8.9 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.1 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.3 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (18 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #660,315 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #117 in [Books > History >](#)

[Americas > United States > Civil War > Women](#) #6490 in [Books > History > Military > United](#)

Customer Reviews

As a Wesleyan alum ('73) I eagerly anticipated reading the book. While there are things which didn't meet my expectations, I have to give kudos to Dr. Curry for the extensive research done to develop Gertrude's life story; it was a monumental task covering many years where she interpreted details of the 19th century, as well as confirmed the many organizations and achievements Gertrude enjoyed in her later years. But the actual diary itself was not telling enough. What I felt was lacking were more anecdotes about actual daily life in Augusta for the family, and day-to-day stories of Gertrude's school days at Wesleyan. Maybe the diary didn't include such details but there was no mention of Gertrude interacting with her friends, no comments about her children's antics or personalities, no mention of what Augusta life was like as far as descriptions of the homes, gardens and their entertaining. I would have expected to read about the plantations - growing operations and the homes there, as well as more about their servants (I cringed to learn they had so many, but was relieved that Gertrude seemed to be becoming enlightened about how wrong slavery was). Gertrude was raised in a very privileged life and not prepared for the responsibilities of marriage. She and her husband were both immature and their life of living beyond their means and financial ruin was a very sad element to their unhappy marriage. Interesting that much of her feelings about her husband were taken from the diaries by family. I missed learning more about Wesleyan in its early years and life in Macon. I couldn't get a real sense of who Gertrude was and felt that the story was flat and one dimensional.

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