THE BUSINESS OF EXILE:

THE MONEY AND MEMORY OF A "CONFEDERATE" FAMILY IN CUBA

by

ROBERT CHRISTOPHER POISTER

(Under the Direction of JOHN C. INSCOE)

ABSTRACT

James and Eliza McHatton, a wealthy sugar planting family with multiple business and political partnerships before the Civil War, abandoned their plantation near Baton Rouge and escaped Union-occupied Louisiana in 1862. The family moved from Baton Rouge to Texas, Mexico, and eventually Cuba, where they purchased and resided on a plantation until after Reconstruction. While striving to recreate the brutal economic system that had sustained and enriched them at the cost of others, the McHattons attempted to recreate the culture, status, and lifestyle they had left behind. While James focused on business, the culturally-conscious Eliza found that Cuba, its people, and its laborers reminded her of her own skewed vision of life before the Civil War. James' death left the family legacy in Eliza's hands, allowing her to shape how the McHattons, Confederate expatriates, and the antebellum South came to be erroneously remembered by succeeding generations of McHattons and Americans.

INDEX WORDS: CONFEDERATE EXILES, EXPATRIATES, TRANSNATIONALISM, CIVIL WAR, CUBA, HISTORICAL MEMORY, ANTEBELLUM SOUTH

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DEDICATION

To All My Families—Poister, Napoli, Tusher, Folts, Sweeney, Wolf, Wright:

I am eternally humbled and grateful.

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Projects like these almost always test the will power of the author; this one, perhaps more than most, has tried the patience of many others, as well. To all who have listened to my intermittent doubts, excitement, and ramblings, now read of my thanks.

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advice without lecturing. She also gave one of the most accurate and succinct definitions of my adviser I have ever heard.

When Dr. Morrow learned that John Inscoe was my adviser, she stopped our class for a moment to make an announcement. John Inscoe is, according to Dr. Morrow, myself, and every other student that he tirelessly and continuously makes time for and takes an interest in, "a Fine Human Being." He may also be, to paraphrase a popular commercial tag-line, "the busiest man in the world." He writes about North Carolina in Georgia. He once took a day off just to see what it was like. With all of his responsibilities, he never refused a knock on his office door or an email seeking advice. He drove me down new avenues of inquiry and helped me refine my scholarship on this project and others. No one could ask for a better model.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

INTRODUCTION

Like any war from antiquity to today's headlines, the armies of the Civil War displaced thousands of families. As southern fields and farms transformed into battlegrounds and bivouacs, their tenants vacated to more peaceful surroundings. Some found this respite a short carriage ride down the road, perhaps abandoning besieged Atlanta for the temporary quiet of a South Georgia plantation. Others crossed state lines for the first time in their lives, making wagon-bound trips from Georgia to Alabama, or Louisiana to Texas. In admittedly rare cases, southerners of means found relief by traversing much larger distances, and left the newly conceived Confederate nation for fresh homes on foreign soil.

James and Eliza McHatton's decision to abandon their plantation near Baton Rouge and escape Union-occupied Louisiana in 1862 took them on just such a route to a new home. Making their way to Confederate Texas, James traded in contraband across the Rio Grande. In the fall of 1864, as business prospects in Texas dwindled, the McHattons crossed the border into Mexico, interacting with the thriving business community of Matamoros as both brokers and consumers. In March, 1865 they once again emigrated, this time to Cuba, purchasing a plantation near Matanzas on which they would reside until after Reconstruction. While striving to recreate the brutal economic system that had sustained and enriched them at the cost of others, the McHattons also attempted to recreate the culture, status, and lifestyle they had left behind. In some regards, both of these endeavors ended in failure.

With each segment of their journey between Baton Rouge and Matanzas, James' desire to interact economically with a thriving marketplace trumped his desire to assimilate culturally or become part of a community, unless it fostered business propositions. His correspondence is almost solely concerned with money: commodity prices, loans, the feasibility of trade routes, partnerships, the availability of slave labor. Eliza, however, critiqued both the economics and culture of the various places through which they moved. She admitted little distress over making money, and focused more on the lifestyle and status such wealth could provide. Rather than financial, Eliza's more cultural concerns often focused on comfort, fashion, and the arts; acceptance from her family, peers, and the search for people of her same mind; and support for the South where all these interests grew. These were the societal demands placed on a woman of her stature and heritage, and she chose to live up to them rather than disown them.

The McHattons encountered several cultures both foreign and familiar during their transnational relocation, yet, because of James' economic drive and Eliza's pretensions, these interactions were far more often cultural collisions than tales of successful integration. Even as they maintained contact with friends and family in the defeated South, they could no longer consider the region home, so different were the descriptions they received from the South they had left. For James, this meant seeking economic opportunities elsewhere; for Eliza, it meant falling back on her construction of life in the antebellum South.

Thus, their interests were different even when they did not run counter to each other. James' greatest concern, more even than the loss of a Confederate community, more than finding a replacement for it, was money: making it, spending it, and,

increasingly, owing it and not paying it back. The roots of his economic agency—and of Eliza's cultural imperialism—apparent in their post-bellum actions, are clearly evident in their antebellum lives. Contrary to the popular—if ill-conceived—belief in the support of the elite class regarding secession, war, and southern nationality, it was precisely James McHatton's wealth—and the desire for more of it—that prevented him from fully supporting the Confederacy. He epitomized the "whiggish" elite, the conservative wealthy who saw a volatile change like secession as a danger to their prosperity. After all, by 1860, the United States had constitutionally protected slavery and southern business interests for seventy-five years, and many conservatives saw no reason to stop trusting it over the election of a Republican.[1]

To fully understand the reasons for the McHatton family's flight and their memory of that journey, it is necessary to view their lives holistically. Rather than focus on their wartime actions or their time in Cuba, this includes an investigation into their antebellum business ventures. James McHatton was a wealthy sugar planter near Baton Rouge, but his investments were more diverse than that. He twice contracted with the State of Louisiana to lease convicts from the forerunner of the infamous Angola Penitentiary. He and his business partners pushed the convicts with dangerous work on levees, driving them hard with little concern for their rehabilitation. More important to

[1] Stephanie McCurry's recent book discusses secession as differentiated by class, and, though an excellent study, is but one of a long list: Stephanie McCurry, *Confederate Reckoning: Power and Politics in the Civil War South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), Ch.1-2; William L. Barney, *The Road to Secession: A New Perspective on the Old South* (New York: Praeger, 1972); William L. Barney, *The Secessionist Impulse: Alabama and Mississippi in 1860* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2004); William W. Freehling, *The Road to Secession: Secessionists Triumphant, 1854-1861* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007. Almost all present the class struggle of secession as yeomen farmers either embracing or rebelling against the pro-secession leadership of the elite. Wealthy conservatives—primarily ex-Whigs—comprised a minority of the anti-secession minority, and in 1860 they tended to support Stephen Douglas as a compromise between the extremes of Lincoln and Breckinridge. Douglas represented the last vestige of the bisectional parties that had kept the Union together for thirty years. His defeat in 1860 "marked the crystallization of two fully sectionalized parties." David M. Potter, *The Impending Crisis:1848-1861* (New York: Colophon, 1976), 446-7.

his political ideology and the McHattons' postwar lives, James co-owned a plantation with Illinois Senator and presidential candidate Stephen Douglas. While a delegate to the Charleston Convention in 1860, McHatton publicly declared himself in support of his business partner, in contrast to the rest of the Louisiana delegation and in spite of rebuke from his wife. When war came to Baton Rouge in the spring of 1862, the McHattons headed west away from it.

Facing theft, taxation, and the Union blockade, James found an ingenious, if inscrutable, means of moving and selling cotton in eastern Texas. Though he did not endorse secession and had clashed with the Confederate Army over matters of impressment, James served as a cotton purchaser for the State of Louisiana. Though he did not work directly for the state, James was given permission by someone who did work for Louisiana to fulfill state requests. While purchasing, moving, and exporting state cotton, however, he used the permissions granted by the army to do so for bales he invested in himself. As state property was exempt from impressments, McHatton disguised his bales in the paperwork and enjoyed the same benefits. Moreover, these permissions helped him navigate the contested authority of competing Confederate powers, as the Trans-Mississippi Department, the District of Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona, the Cotton Bureau, and other arms of the Confederate military all vied to regulate trade. Selling his cotton across the Rio Grande further allowed him to avoid the dangers of running the "Anaconda" blockade.

Eliza was more affected by what the Union kept out than what it kept in. She frequently complained of her lack of choice on her shopping trips. Seeds, clothing, and paper were at a premium, and she and her family were constantly on the move in Texas,

without the fancy home or clothing to which she had grown accustomed. The McHatton's move to Mexico changed her tone immensely, and she described a marked increase in the availability of goods and a culture that left much to be desired.

Due to political unrest and insecurity, the McHattons left Mexico for Cuba in March 1865, and James immediately began a year long search for a new plantation. Settling in Matanzas a year later, on a plantation called "Desangaño," James and Eliza went about the business of directing a mixed labor force of slaves and Chinese coolies in the production of cane and coffee. With the end of the War in America, James traveled home several times to attend to business matters, eventually declaring bankruptcy in the United States while maintaining his Cuban plantation. He was deeply indebted to Cuban creditors, as well, and became involved in a claims case against the United States Government by Robert M. and Stephen A. Douglas, Jr, concerning the plantation he had co-owned with their Senator father. James died in St. Louis, in 1872, of "nervous exhaustion." Eliza would have sold Desangaño were it not for the wishes of her son Henry, who styled himself an antebellum plantation master and managed the land after Eliza moved back to the United States.

Cuba, and the McHatton's journey to it, came to represent three different things to these three very different people, though to all it resulted in disappointment. After James' death, Eliza moved back to the United States, remarrying and living in Brooklyn. Despite her new surroundings, she wrote two books that declared she was both an American and a southerner. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, and the end of Eliza's life, announcing and performing one's "southern" identity grew in importance alongside commemoration events. This trend continued throughout the lives of her

children and grandchildren, who began editing the family history. Over two generations, James' descendants would usurp his identity as a "businessman" and "moderate"—words his wife and contemporaries used to describe him—and replace it with labels carrying more cultural cache: "Rebel" and "unreconstructed." Indeed, the shape this family's Civil War narrative finally took would be more important to those who lived years after than to those who lived it themselves.

Recent scholarship displays a growing interest in the economic impetus behind individual and state actions during the Civil War, and, viewed in its entirety, James McHatton's story adds to this body.[2] Moreover, the McHattons travels and travails add to the bristling historiography of Civil War studies of the "homefront," in which recent works have questioned its existence as distinct from the battlefield by focusing on violence, women, and slaves. As very little has been written about those whose own homefront changed during the course of the War—often multiple times—the McHattons' experience can help explain the experience of others who sought both opportunity and safety by leaving home.[3]

It is not the McHattons' escape from Louisiana that makes them unusual; Daniel Sutherland estimates that "a reliable, probably conservative, count" numbers the citizens of Louisiana roaming or vacating their state during the War in the thousands. Their

[2] Mark Geiger's *Financial Fraud and Guerrilla Violence in Missouri's Civil War, 1861-1865* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010) has certainly made the biggest recent splash in terms of economic rationale during the War, though books like Mark Wilson's *The Business of Civil War: Military Mobilization and the State, 1861-1865* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010) are not far behind.
[3] McCurry, *Confederate Reckoning*; Judith Giesburg, *Army at Home: Women and the Civil War on the Northern Homefront* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2009);Donald Sutherland, *Savage Conflict: The Decisive Role of Guerrillas in the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2009). Yeal A. Sternhell's *Routes of War: The World of Movement in the Confederate South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012) contends that the constant movement of soldiers and civilians inside the Confederacy at first fostered, and then deconstructed, Confederate nationality.

timing, destination, and motivation, however, were, at least in the historiography, unique. Scholarship has primarily focused on the "Confederados" of Brazil and those that fled to Venezuela and British Honduras after the War. Of particular popularity have been those renegades who fled to Mexico, inspiring trade books about General Joe Shelby and movies starring John Wayne and Rock Hudson.[4] Yet nearly all the men and women in these books departed the Confederacy after it no longer existed, as the majority of international exiles certainly did. In April 1865, however, while such people were packing trunks and boarding steamers, James and Eliza McHatton and their two children had been on foreign soil for over a year, living in a hotel in Havana while they searched for a suitable country estate.[5]

Among studies of the Confederados and other expatriate groups, Cuba seems an exceptional destination. Despite a large amount of scholarship devoted to Confederates in the countries mentioned above, no book length study exists of US Southern expatriates in Cuba, and little is known about what groups, if any, spent more than a brief visit there. While the island served as a stopping point for several prominent ex-Confederates after the War, including Robert Toombs, Judah P. Benjamin, and John C. Breckinridge, these

[4] Daniel Sutherland, "Looking for a Home: Louisiana Emigrants during the Civil War and Reconstruction," *Louisiana History* 21 (Autumn 1980), 343. For traditional scholarship on Confederate expatriates, see Lawrence F. Hill, *The Confederate Exodus to Latin America* (Columbus: Ohio State University, 1936); Alfred Jackson Hanna and Hanna, Kathryn Abbey, *Confederate Exiles in Venezuela* (Tuscaloosa: Confederate Publishing Company, 1960); Eugene C. Harter, *The Lost Colony of the Confederacy* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1985); William Clark Griggs, *The Elusive Eden: Frank McMullan's Confederate Colony in Brazil* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987); Cyrus B. Dawsey and James M. Dawsey, eds., *The Confederados: Old South Immigrants in Brazil* (Tuscaloosa: University Alabama Press, 1998); Donald C. Simmons, Jr, *Confederate Settlements in British Honduras* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2001); Anthony Arthur, *General Joe Shelby's March* (New York: Random House, 2010). For a popular representation, see *The Undefeated*. dir. Andrew V. McLaglen, Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation. Los Angeles, 1969, video recording.For accounts of the Hotel Cubano, see McHatton-Ripley, *Flag to Flag*, 126, and Eliza Ripley, *Social Life in Old New Orleans: Being Recollections of my Girlhood* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1912), 287-94.

[5] For accounts of the Hotel Cubano, see McHatton-Ripley, *Flag to Flag*, 126, and Eliza Ripley, *Social Life in Old New Orleans: Being Recollections of my Girlhood* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1912), 287-94.

men stayed only a short while before returning to the United States. They represent political expatriates, those who spent a short time outside the United States to view Reconstruction from a distance before returning or moving elsewhere. They were not seeking to enrich themselves or settle on the island, and their biographical studies focus on them as famous Confederates who happened to leave the South after the War; their salience does not stem from when these men left, why they left, or where they went. For these reasons Cuba has primarily been considered a rest-stop on the path to other, more permanent, destinations.[6] The McHattons, then, are all the more unique and intriguing for settling in Cuba and staying there for almost a decade.

Both academic and popular historians have long been enamored by other long term southern communities throughout Latin America, as evidenced by such romantic titles as *The Lost Colony of the Confederacy* and *The Elusive Eden*.[7] Many of their stories could be considered vestiges of the Lost Cause, reveling in attempts to transfer not only the culture of the antebellum South, but entire communities wholesale, to other countries. The McHatton family occasionally bragged of Cuban wealth to their friends in the South, but they had no intention of founding a new Confederacy on foreign soil.[8]

Eliza certainly missed the South and hoped that Cuba could take its place, but her hope for a substitute South should not be confused with the desire for a relocated Confederacy. Both she and James enjoyed the company of travelers, but never advocated for them to stay and start any manner of colony. The McHattons were, in many ways,

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[6] Robert Douthat Meade, *Judah P. Benjamin: Confederate Statesman* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 2001); Mark Scroggins, *Robert Toombs: The Civil Wars of a United States Senator and Confederate General* (New York: McFarland, 2011); William C. Davis, *Breckinridge: Statesman, Soldier, Symbol* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2010).

[7] Harter , *Lost Colony;* Griggs, *Elusive Eden*.

[8] Harter, *Lost Colony*; Simmons, Jr, *Confederate Settlements*; Hanna, *Confederate Exiles*, 1960.

alone. Indeed, despite a running correspondence with friends and family, traveling Americans, and the surrounding Cuban population, their failure to create a community in which they felt safe and comfortable proved their their borrowed Cuban homeland's biggest flaw.

Two recent books, however, focusing on world markets and commercial networks, leave mention of transported Confederate communities behind in favor of business and cultural circumstances closer to the experience of the McHatton family. Matthew Pratt Guterl reveals part of the McHattons' story in his exploration of the American South's relationship with the Caribbean in *American Mediterranean.* That Louisianans had so much in common with those living in the Caribbean made it a likely destination if they were to flee, but this shared culture was not in itself a reason for flight. Neither, however, was what Guterl describes as James' "heartfelt loyalty to the slaveholding South."[9] The McHattons comprise only a small portion of Guterl's book, and by treating their antebellum lives as superficial to his focus on their time in Cuba, Guterl confuses James and Eliza's reasons for relocation. The McHattons found Cuba agreeable only so far as it allowed them to make money, but focusing on their emigration as a post-emancipation phenomenon also ignores that they had been interested in Cuba for some time. Culturally, however, Cuba was not as similar as the McHattons expected (nor was it as similar as Guterl contends) and as their disappointment with the island grew, so did their acceptance of a New South.

In another work with a more modern approach, *A Confluence of Transatlantic Networks: Elites, Capitalism, and Confederate Migration to Brazil*, Laura Jarnagin

[9] Matthew Pratt Guterl, *American Mediterranean: Southern Slaveholders in the Age of Emancipation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 87.

avoids this complication by suggesting that antebellum southerners were so heavily tied to markets in Brazil, their immigration was a nearly inevitable, natural occurrence. While this is certainly not true in the case of the McHattons, Jarnagin's novel approach of combining the study of capitalist networks with one of social networks is revealing and enlightening. "Networks that had been fortified by centuries of interplay among familial, business, religious, political, ideological, and ethnic connections," she contends, "came to intersect and comingle in ways that promoted and facilitated this elite migration."[10] While the South as a region was heavily tied to South America and the Caribbean, the McHattons themselves were not. Yet their business and social networks certainly "commingled," most strikingly inside the family. Both James and Eliza hoped their different needs could be met in Cuba, a country which whispered to them the promise of profit and the lifestyle they were accustomed to. Jarnagin's case study of the Dabney family, and their ability to illustrate her arguments, provides a clear precedent for telling the story of the McHattons.

For all the differences between them, the stories most revealed by examining the contrasting interests of James, Eliza, and their family are those of other expatriates. A pattern of authors celebrating Confederate expatriates as those who would rather live freely on foreign soil than submit to Yankee rule overly glorifies the "rebel" stereotype and has persisted from the earliest publications on the subject. The desolation the war wrought on southerners' homeland was too heavy a burden, according to Lawrence Hill, along with the "vindictive reconstruction program that followed," and caused "dearest friends [to sell] their souls for a mess of pottage and [accept] service along with the

[10]Laura Jarnagin, *A Confluence of Transatlantic Networks: Elites, Capitalism, and Confederate Migration to Brazil* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2008), 2.

Negroes and carpet-baggers."[11] Such an emotional reasoning aligns the author with his subjects, however, and obscures any other motivations behind wrongly glorified rebel pride. Slightly more broadly defined, write Alfred and Kathy Hanna, exiles "were determined not to accept the new order of political, social and economic life being forced upon them." As late as 1987, historians like William Griggs still claimed exiles simply wanted a place where "they would be free from fears of Yankee domination, the humiliation of anticipated rule by former slaves, and the imminent possibility of criminal action."[12] The McHattons certainly witnessed the ravages of war—which, as events in New Orleans and Baton Rouge demonstrate, were as often the work of friends as they were of enemies—and received negative reviews of Reconstruction while abroad. Despite the likelihood that they, as slave owning southerners, would have agreed with the sympathetic characterizations above, focusing on the emotional and cultural reasons for leaving simplifies the McHattons' tale.[13]

Considering the monstrous variations in the narratives and experiences of so many groups of expatriates—different home states, departure points, destinations, means, and ambitions—it is curious that their reasons for leaving have coalesced into a singular, rebellious motive. The historiographic focus on expatriates' post-bellum lives has reinforced this thesis of Yankee occupation, Confederate subjugation, and southern humiliation as the reason for escape. Within the McHatton family, Eliza is clearly the character whose point of view aligns with such a narrative. James, who avidly supported a nationalist candidate in 1860, had Northern political and business ties, and gave a lukewarm endorsement of the Confederacy, could hardly contrast it more strikingly. Yet

[11] Hill, *Confederate Exodus*, 15.
[12] Hanna and Hanna, *Confederate Exiles*, 14.
[13]Griggs, *The Elusive Eden*, vii.

James and Eliza's ancestors would remember the journey to Cuba in the same manner that sympathetic historians would remember similar journeys to Brazil, Venezuela, and Mexico. How Eliza shaped and disseminated her narrative reveals, within one family, similar trends throughout the entire South.

While James focused on business throughout their travels, Cuba and their journey to it reminded the culturally-conscious Eliza of her own skewed vision of life before the Civil War, shaping her memory and embellishing her own narrative. James had never been prone to such cultural allegiance or nostalgia, and that the events that shaped his and Eliza's lives left the family legacy in Eliza's hands explains much about how the McHattons, Confederate expatriates, and the antebellum South came to be erroneously remembered by succeeding generations of McHattons and Americans.

CHAPTER 1

THE ESCAPEES BEFORE THE ESCAPE:

AN ANTEBELLUM PORTRAIT OF THE IRONY OF WEALTH

The river itself seemed to burn. Flames danced on the water, smoke obscuring the dying rays in the evening sky and the view of the captivated crowds along the banks. As though watching a scene by Dante, the men and women of Baton Rouge stared from the levee at the flowing inferno, marveling at the destruction they wrought upon themselves. Burning cotton bales filled the Mississippi, set alight by proud Confederates who would rather flood the river with King Cotton's funeral pyres than have the precious harvest fill Yankee wagon trains.

It was an ironic, bizarre, and hellish scene, and it was the second such scene of the day. Sarah Morgan confided to her diary that she had gathered with another crowd at the commons in Baton Rouge just that morning, April 26, 1862, to witness dozens of wagon loads of cotton meet the torch. "Negroes were running around cutting them open," she wrote of the bales, "piling them up, and setting fire to them, all as busy as though they hoped to obtain their salvation." News came from downriver that cotton on the wharves surrounding New Orleans had met the same fate. That afternoon, as far as any bystander could see, white men and slaves urgently rolled bales of the snow white fiber to the edge of the Mississippi. As they ripped the bales apart, Morgan reported, the mob "staved in the heads of barrels of Alcohol, whisky, etc. and dashed buckets of it over the cotton." A year's worth of work was set ablaze and adrift, floating down the river as "one sheet of

living flame." Morgan deemed the destruction a success on two accounts: not only would these bales not fall into Union hands, but so many casks had been emptied to this end that "if the Yankees are fond of strong drink," she wrote, "I fear they will fare ill."[14]

On the same banks a year earlier, a smaller crowd had gathered for a very different scene. In 1861, flush with the excitement of secession, Eliza McHatton had sewn a Confederate flag of blue denim and red flannel and directed that it be hung from a tall piece of driftwood where the river bordered her family's Arlington Plantation. She and her friends danced around their homespun "emblem of nationality," singing, shouting, and celebrating all night. Her husband, James—more businessman than secessionist, more concerned than jubilant—found the flag flying when he returned from a trip, and ordered it taken down. Now, in the spring of 1862, Yankee gunboats steamed up the Mississippi and Confederates burned cotton where the makeshift banner of their experimental country had flown. "While we openly declared that New Orleans should have been fired, like Moscow, rather than surrendered, men went about destroying cotton wherever it was stored," Eliza remembered, "and fierce and loud were the denunciations against any man who even by gentle remonstrance made the slightest objection to having his property touched by the torch of his neighbor." The flames from the torches, bales, and river lit up the celebratory night for Confederate sympathizer Eliza; for her businessman husband, they illuminated the need to flee.[15]

James and Eliza would, after nearly two years of movement through Louisiana, Texas, and Mexico, settle in Cuba. They are most often remembered, because of this

[14] These quotes, and an elegant description of this scene, can be found in Charles East, ed., *Sarah Morgan: The Civil War Diary of a Southern Woman* (New York: Touchstone, 1992), 48-49.
[15] Eliza McHatton-Ripley, *From Flag to Flag: A Woman's Adventures and Experiences in the South During the War, in Mexico, and in Cuba* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1896), 11-12, 17.

journey and emigration, as Confederate exiles, of a like mind with those groups who left the South after the War for new homes in the tropics. While Eliza pledged allegiance to her homespun Confederate Flag and honored the South in her writings, James was anything but a die-hard Confederate. His motivations were economic, and he was a shrewd enough businessman to know that burnt cotton, no matter which side lit the torch, could not sell. The post-bellum focus on the lives of the McHattons, and other southerners who left the South, has reinforced the thesis that it was the result of the war—Yankee occupation, Confederate subjugation, southern humiliation—that forced exile on these true believers. In the case of the McHatton family, however, a pattern of business and financial concerns established by James in the antebellum period, dedicated to enriching himself and his family, continued through the War and expatriation.

This pattern existed in stark contrast to the narrative created by Eliza, a narrative of resistance to ensured subordination, which blossomed alongside growing sectional hostilities. These separate interests both grew during the antebellum period, and caused James and Eliza, when they finally left, to ask of different qualities from their destination. James, having established various enterprises, sought continued monetary growth; Eliza sought the culture and people that, for her, had comprised the South she loved before the War. On the banks of the Mississippi before the War, she cultivated a status and lifestyle that would elude her for years after.

While James held the responsibilities of his business, the fortunes of his wife and children were fully tied to him. A monetary failure for him was a loss for them all. To diffuse the risks of mono-crop agriculture, James maintained two intriguing partnerships that did not rely on the sugar cane surrounding Arlington, however lucrative that crop

could be. He first formed two firms to lease convict labor from the ancestor of Angola Penitentiary, using state subsidies to purchase equipment and driving the prisoners for profit, rather than reform. More important to his political outlook—and for his life after the War—was a partnership with Illinois Senator Stephen Douglas that involved thousands of acres of McHatton land and over one hundred Douglas slaves. These economic ties made him strikingly politically moderate. Eliza, for her part, was raised in the wealthy Chinn family and was no stranger to money. Though she assisted her husband with his business dealings, she expressed her economic citizenship primarily as a consumer. When goods such as cloth and seed were available, and she had the means to purchase them, she found little fault with life. In time of War, however, both the Union blockade and Confederate taxes and impressments separated her from such transactions. More sympathetic to the Confederate cause than her husband, she blamed these hardships solely on Union forces.

Neither their McHatton nor Chinn forbears were strangers to the expectations of wealth, privilege, and upper class connections that defined James and Eliza's life. Family lore passed down that James' grandfather John McHatton had been a Revolutionary soldier from Scott County, Kentucky, and had made the acquaintance of the famous aristocrat, the Marquis de LaFayette. John's grandson James related to his children that "when General LaFayette made a tour of the United States in 1825, he visited Kentucky," where, in Georgetown, "he was given a royal reception, a feature of which was a precession in which former soldiers of the Revolution who resided in Scott County and adjoining territory were given prominent places." When the parade finished, LaFayette recognized the man at the head as his old friend John McHatton. "Captain McHatton

went up the platform," he claimed, "and LaFayette…advanced and with outstretched arms embraced him and kissed him on the cheek and they conversed reminiscent of their soldier days spent together in the camps of the Colonial Armies."[16] Also an active Mason until the day he died, John McHatton was buried with full Masonic and military honors, in what his grandchildren were told "was the largest funeral that had ever been in Kentucky up to that time."[17]

John's son Robert McHatton followed in his father's military footsteps, reputedly becoming one of Andrew Jackson's favorite Generals. As a member of Congress from Scott County, Robert was known as a fine stump speaker. He was survived by eight children, including James, who grew up conscious of the footsteps in which he must follow. James spent his boyhood in Kentucky, moved to Illinois for a short time when he reached adulthood, and eventually ended up in Louisiana with his wife Eliza, where he would amass the wealth and reputation befitting his storied ancestry.[18]

Also born in Kentucky, Eliza Chinn was raised in New Orleans from the age of three in a family whose history rivaled that of the McHattons. One grandfather, a Pennsylvania transplant to Kentucky named Ash Emmerson, "was said to be one of the best men ever in Kentucky." Emmerson built a fortune large enough to provide for his large family of four sons and five daughters, most of whom left Kentucky when he died. Some went to Texas, others, Missouri. Daughter Betsey, however, remained in Kentucky, betrothed to Richard Chinn, a talented lawyer who enjoyed fine cigars. Born and raised

[16] "Information Concerning Revolutionary McHattons and the Descent of T.H. McHatton Therefrom," MS 2855: Box 13: Folder 4. McHatton Family Papers, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia Libraries.
[17] "Henry McHatton Diary, April 1870," MS 2855: Box 10: Folder 91. McHatton Family Papers, Hargrett Library, UGA.
[18] *Ibid.*

in Kentucky, Chinn named one of his sons Henry, after his close friend Henry Clay. Clay returned this esteem, introducing Chinn to a foreign acquaintance as "an eminent and highly respectable counselor at law." According to Eliza, who kept a letter from Clay and a picture of him framed on her wall for years afterwards, the "Great Compromiser" was the only one ever to call her father by the nickname "Dick." [19]

Richard Chinn moved his family to New Orleans in 1835, where Eliza grew up watching her parents entertain their neighbors. Her father was particularly "hospitably inclined," having numerous social and business connections and a reputation as a man of vision; supposedly he had the first daguerreotype in New Orleans. Unfortunately, Richard Chinn was also inclined to overspend, and his dinner parties sometimes went beyond his means. Debt was not the only tragedy that struck the Chinn family. In 1844, while touring various ruins in Central America, Eliza's brother Henry disappeared in the Gulf on his voyage home. Without any word regarding what had happened to Henry's ship, Eliza's mother kept faint hope alive, refusing to let despairing optimism progress to mourning. "Every night for months she placed with her own hands a lamp in the window of Henry's room," Eliza remembered, "to light him when he came." Eliza, however, shared her brother's sense of adventure, and did not allow this misfortune to steer her life in any direction but the one she chose.[20]

As a child, Eliza enjoyed the high culture of the planter elite, learning Spanish and French in the hopes of accompanying her father on future overseas business. She sailed

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[19] *Ibid*; Guterl, *American Mediterranean*, 86; Eliza Ripley, *Social Life in Old New Orleans: Being Recollections of My Girlhood* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1912), 169. Eliza remarried after James' death and published her memoirs as Eliza McHatton Ripley or Eliza Ripley. While bibliographically it is necessary to refer to her as Eliza Ripley, I have chosen in the text to use the name she went by at the time: Eliza Chinn as a girl, Eliza McHatton after her marriage to James.
[20] Ripley, *Social Life in Old New Orleans*, 32, 125, 113.

to New York before steam ships made the voyage, attending a boarding school where she displayed a talent for painting. One historian called her marriage to James in 1852 "a union of dynasties," and, considering their heritage, this is but a miniscule exaggeration. Together they moved into a beautiful plantation home on the banks of the Mississippi, in East Baton Rouge Parrish, the style of which has become part of the myth of the antebellum South. "A spacious mansion," Eliza called it, "with deep verandas supported by fluted columns," and "a broad lawn, dotted here and there with live-oak and pecan trees." Arching trees lined an avenue that led down to the river, interspersed with the blooms of roses and crape myrtles, and the fragrance of jasmine, magnolia, and honeysuckle. Here, raising a garden and a family, Eliza and James also grew something else: They grew wealthy.[21]

As beautifully as Eliza remembered Arlington, and as important as its substantial house and beautiful grounds would have been to her and James' reputation and the status they enjoyed, it was not meant solely for looks. Arlington was a working sugar plantation, and while they fully appreciated their sugar as a valuable commodity, they also reveled in the process and production of the plantation. The people of the piedmont and Appalachian South connected the frosts of late autumn with hog butchering; in the low-country, they meant boiling sugar. Eliza sat on the veranda and watched the smoke billow out of the sugar house chimney, basking in the aroma of the boiling cane. "In Oct we will be making sugar," James once wrote a friend, inviting him to come and enjoy this "very pleasant season for strangers."[22]

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[21] Ripley, *Social Life in Old New Orleans*, 9, 14; Guterl, *American Mediterranean*, 88; Ripley, *Flag to Flag*, 7-8.
[22] Ripley, *Flag to Flag*, 8; J.A. McHatton to Hon. S.A. Douglas, 17 September 1860. Douglas, Stephen A. Papers, Box 47: Folder 23, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Libraries.

Their enjoyment and profit were predicated on the labor of the more than one hundred slaves who worked Arlington's cane fields. These men and women ranged in age from one to sixty years old, and their lives were obviously nothing like the pampered conditions of their master and mistress. Men and women freed after the Civil War recalled the harshness of life on other plantations around Baton Rouge. While Eliza relaxed on her deep verandas and admired her fluted columns, slaves inhabited basic log homes and slept on corn-shuck mattresses. If Eliza and James deliberately ignored the difficulties of slave life or were simply oblivious, not surprisingly, they chose not to write of or remember it.[23]

Yet these enslaved people were literally the life blood of the plantation as a profit making organism. According to historian Rebecca Scott, Louisiana "slaves planted, hoed, lifted, and hauled the sugar cane. On through the night work crews kept the mills grinding and the kettles boiling to turn the cane juice into crystals." To many of these slaves, "it seemed that there would be no end to constraint and exertion." On the eve of the Civil War, the value of these men and women, the product of their constraint and exertion, and Arlington itself, added up to nearly $230,000.[24]

Arlington's situation on the Mississippi was both ideal and dangerous. The river ensured that cane fields could always be sufficiently irrigated, and provided the easiest method of transporting goods to market. Rather than sell his crop to a commodities

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[23] See, for example, the WPA Narratives of Fred Brown and Caroline Wright, both available online through *Born In Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936-38*[database on-line] at memory.loc.gov.

[24]Rebecca J. Scott, *Degrees of Freedom: Louisiana and Cuba After Slavery* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008),1; Ancestry.com. *1860 United States Federal Census* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2009. Images Reproduced by FamilySearch; Ancestry.com. *1860 United States Slave Schedule* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2009. Images Reproduced by FamilySearch. This fortune, the sum of James McHatton's Louisiana property only, translates into approximately $5.5 million in 2012.

middle man in Baton Rouge or New Orleans, James traded his sugar up river to St. Louis and sold it to firm E.B. Kimball and Co. himself. But the proximity to the water was also risky. Even a small crack in a levee could lead to a destructive or deadly flood. "One malicious cut of a spade would make an insidious fissure," Eliza fretted, "through which those battling waters would in a few hours rush in an overwhelming torrent, destroying property worth thousands of dollars."[25] This danger had presented James with a business opportunity that helped him build the fortune on which he and Eliza lived.

Despite its necessity, planters hesitated to involve their slaves in keeping up the levees. Levee construction "required extremely arduous work," two scholars of Louisiana's penitentiaries explain, "involving long hours of labor under extremely unpleasant, if not hazardous, conditions." It was so difficult and dangerous, in fact, that deaths during construction were not uncommon. Rather than risk their slaves, which, as human property, often formed much of their masters' wealth, planters along the river would instead hire poor or immigrant laborers to risk their lives. James McHatton became the beneficiary of this necessity and desire when he contracted with the state penitentiary to lease convicts to construct the earthen dams. "The availability of cheap laborers for levee construction in the form of prison convicts," Burk Foster writes, "was welcomed with open arms by Louisiana's populace."[26]

James first contracted with the State Penitentiary in October 1844, though he would continue as a partner in the business until after he married Eliza and moved to

[25] "Receipts for Sugar sales with E.B. Kimball and Co," MS 2855: Box 10: Folder 10. McHatton Family Papers, Hargrett Library, UGA; Ripley, *Flag to Flag*, 19.
[26] Thurston H.G. Hahn, III and Wurtzburg, Susan, *Hard Labor: History and Archaeology at the Old Louisiana State Penitentiary, Baton Rouge, Louisiana* (Baton Rouge: Courthouse Joint Venture, 1994); Burk Foster, "Between Reform and Slavery: The Dilemma of the Baton Rouge Penitentiary," paper presented at the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences 2000 annual meeting, New Orleans, LA, March, 2000).

Arlington. The terms of the 1844 lease were "modest indeed," according to Mark Carleton, who writes that McHatton, Pratt, and Company "were required to pay nothing for the privilege of working the state's convicts." On the contrary, Louisiana advanced the Company substantial sums of money, and in return McHatton and his business partners were to pay for the convicts' food, clothing, and necessities out of the company's profits. Running a prison was an expensive proposition, and the State saw the terms of their deal as a means of saving money. Only a few years passed before they instead became jealous of the money James and his cohorts were making.[27]

McHatton, Pratt, and Company's methods were questionable by today's standards, but anyone living in the slave society of the antebellum South would have found them familiar. Whereas the state of Louisiana had concerned itself with the rehabilitation of the prisoners, McHatton's firm concerned itself only with profits. Distractions like reform and rehabilitation would interfere with this goal, as would hiring doctors and nurses to tend to the men or chaplains to minister to them. Instead, reports Carleton, "leisure time must be minimized, food and clothing cut down to a subsistence level, and discipline administered more thoroughly in order to maintain a profitable level of operation."[28]

In 1855, now married and watching the cane grind at Arlington, McHatton again signed a five year lease with new partners, consolidated as McHatton, Ward, and Company. Convicts almost certainly repaired the levies around Arlington that so concerned Eliza, but they also made James money repairing them up and down the Mississippi. Louisiana, wise to the income the previous agreement had garnered, charged

[27] Mark T. Carleton, *Politics and Punishment: The History of the Louisiana State Penal System* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1971), 9.
[28] Carleton, *Politics of Punishment*, 10.

McHatton and his partners a fee of one-quarter of their profits. That they set the minimum rent at one thousand dollars suggests they felt McHatton, Ward, and Company would do very well. A small amount of opposition to the lease came from a curious group of legislators who felt that the state should simply use the convicts for construction, and forgo the lease. Their colleagues answered these suggestions by pointing out the harshness with which the lessees treated the convicts. "If the state was unwilling to adopt the lessees' methods," pro-lease legislators explained, "it should not expect to make the lessee's profits." In the quest for profits, James McHatton and his partners were willing to push the convicts harder than the state could stomach, replacing reform with fear and punishment. These two tactics—shared risk partnerships coupled with brutally driving one's labor force—proved lucrative to James in both his sugar planting at Arlington and his levy repair business. By the time he tried these tactics in a joint plantation venture with Illinois Senator Stephen Douglas, it seemed a guarantee. [29]

That Stephen Douglas co-owned a Mississippi Plantation worked by slave labor is, perhaps, not widely known, though most biographers of the Senator do not hide his involvement. Historians have, however, paid far more attention to Douglas than to his partner, which is natural considering the different roles the two men played in the events that led up to secession and war. Yet James McHatton was not a bystander in these events, and his partnership with Douglas certainly influenced the political decisions James made during the sectional and secession crises. In addition to its business and political importance prior to the War, this partnership with Douglas would play a larger role in the McHattons' post-War life than either Arlington or the convict leasing.

[29] *Ibid,* 11.

The impetus of the partnership is unusual and, for a politician like Douglas, complicated. In the spring of 1848, Douglas father-in-law, Robert Martin, passed away, leaving a large Mississippi plantation, complete with slave labor and farming equipment, to his daughter Martha. Douglas had refused the plantation years earlier on political grounds, when Martin had attempted to give it to him as a wedding present. Leaving the plantation to Douglas' wife—Martin's daughter—seemed a reasonable solution to all the parties. In a country wrought by slavery, Douglas, a Senator with Presidential ambitions, now found himself directly linked to a Mississippi plantation populated and worked by human beings his wife owned. Once he employed an overseer, Douglas carefully worked to ensure his name was not publicly associated with the plantation. Census records, court proceedings, and bills all appeared in the name of J.S. Strickland, the overseer.[30]

When Martha died in 1853, the plantation and slaves passed from her to her and Douglas' two sons: Robert Martin Douglas, whose namesake had originally owned the plantation, and Stephen A. Douglas, Jr. Neither of the boys had yet reached maturity, and Douglas became the legal guardian of the estate. Attempting to maintain his distance from the land, in practice he remained closely tied to it. He began to let his legal practice slide, focusing on politics and his remarriage to Adele Cutts, a charming woman with expensive tastes like the Senators own. In 1852 and 1856, Douglas committed to serious, and expensive, campaigns for the Presidential nomination. His campaigning and lifestyle took a severe toll on his personal fortunes, and he would face a difficult campaign against quick witted Illinois lawyer Abraham Lincoln in 1858.[31]

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[30] Anita Watkins Clinton, "Stephen Arnold Douglas: His Mississippi Experience," *The Journal of Mississippi History* 50, no. 2 (June 1988): 56-88.
[31] *Ibid*.

McHatton provided what Douglas viewed as a solution to his financial distress, and in 1857 the two men agreed to the terms of a partnership. Douglas transferred his sons' 142 slaves from Lawrence County to 2,000 virgin acres McHatton owned in Washington County, calling the land Silver Lake Plantation. Evaluating their contributions, the two men decided that Douglas had supplied $118,000 towards the plantation and McHatton $80,000; they agreed to split the profits of the plantation in the corresponding proportion. When James Strickland, Douglas' overseer, balked at the loss of the Lawrence County plantation's labor force, McHatton did his best to convince. "So far as letting the negroes remain on the place another year it is utterly impossible," McHatton explained to Strickland, for "arrangements have been made between Mr. Douglas and myself to the contrary." As he already owned the land, McHatton was anxious to have the slaves to work it. "I do truly believe those negras could make more cotton in Washington County in one year than they could in four years where they are now."[32]

Strickland felt McHatton was brushing him off, and his complaints to Douglas revealed something of McHatton's drive and his hunger for slave labor. "I wrote to you last Sunday that I was visited by Mr. McHatton with a letter of Introduction from Mr. Ward," Strickland explained to Douglas, "requesting me to show him all the slave stock and lands and tools of the place." McHatton "seemed to be in the greatest hurry I ever saw a man and I could not prevail on him to stay longer than to take a list of the negroes and would not remain until I could get up any of the mules or other stock and would not go out to look at any of the lands only what he saw from the house to the ferry."

[32] Robert M. Douglas and Douglas, Stephen A., Jr, *The Claim of Rob't M. and Stephen A.* Douglas (Washington: Powell and Ginck, 1872), 6; J.A. McHatton to Mr. James Strickland, 6 November 1857. Quoted in Clinton, "Stephen Arnold Douglas: His Mississippi Experience," 75.

Attempting to follow Mr. Ward's directions, Strickland proclaimed that he "was very anxious to have shown fully all the concerns of the place…but it seemed as if the negroes was all that [McHatton] cared to see." Owning land already, the slaves were all McHatton needed, and he was eager to get the partnership working to his benefit. As for Strickland's own situation, the loyal though often ignored overseer was disheartened and clearly outmatched by McHatton in his attempts to convince Douglas not to move the slaves. "I asked him if you would want me to go with them," he wrote hopefully, "and he said no that you would want me to stay back."[33] Either McHatton or Strickland would be left with a plantation virtually worthless without slaves, and James McHatton never intended to hold onto anything worthless.

While McHatton and Douglas showed no concern for these slaves as anything more than a labor force to be exploited for financial gain, Strickland conveyed some of their human fears. "The negroes seems to be in a great deal of trouble for fear they will be broke up and move on the Mississippi River," he informed Douglas. They had overheard McHatton announce his plans for them, and "it brought such awful news…among them that I believe they would rather die than to go." The journey on the river frightened them, as did the unknown destination, and "the thought of going in to the hands of strangers seems to go very bad with them." One slave in particular served as a reminder of McHatton and Douglas' uncaring. "Driver Joe has a house woman of mine

[33] Jas Strickland to My Dear Judge, 1 November 1857. Douglas, Stephen A. Papers, [Box 47, Folder 15], Special Collections, University of Chicago; Jas Strickland to My Dear Judge, 24 October 1857. Douglas, Stephen A. Papers. Addenda, [Box 1, Folder 8], Special Collections, University of Chicago.

for a wife," Strickland wrote, "and seems to be in great trouble for fear he will have to part with her."[34]

Douglas, probably due to McHatton's self promotion, immediately saw the partnership as to his benefit. Strickland's argument mattered little when Douglas quickly decided to sell the Lawrenceville Plantation for some much needed cash. He assumed that McHatton would administer to plantation business, including sending Douglas' profits to him in Illinois. But without his own land, and without paying close attention to affairs in Washington County, Douglas hitched his financial wagon almost exclusively to McHatton's star.

McHatton, for his part, was determined to influence Douglas' political fortunes as well, or at least play what role he could. It should hardly be surprising that an active businessman like McHatton would find his economic and political interests intertwined. While this is not unusual, divergence between the two seems to come primarily from differences in culture. To James McHatton, who put his economic opportunities ahead of any regional identity, this did not present a problem. His business partnership drove his political affiliation. In fact, the only mention of Eliza in any of James' correspondence with Douglas was an invitation to stay at Arlington while campaigning in the South. "My wife joins me in a cordial invitation to Mrs. Douglas to accompany you and spend some time on our plantation," James wrote, though whether or not this happened and what Eliza's reactions were to Douglas can only be assumed.[35]

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[34] Jas Strickland to My Dear Judge, 24 October 1857. Douglas, Stephen A. Papers. Addenda, [Box 1, Folder 8] and Jas Strickland to My Dear Judge, 9 November 1857. Douglas, Stephen A. Papers, [Box 47, Folder 15], Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Libraries.

[35] J.A. McHatton to Hon. S.A. Douglas, 17 September 1860. Douglas, Stephen A. Papers, [Box 47, Folder 23], Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Libraries. Considering Eliza's large correspondence during and after the Civil War, it seems likely that she also wrote and received many letters during the antebellum period. These records, if they existed, were lost when she and James left Arlington

In 1858, while Douglas debated Lincoln over the future of slavery in the United States, his campaign was funded by his own slaves and aided by his slave-owning business partner. McHatton not only managed the business affairs of the Washington County plantation, but actively campaigned for Douglas. In September of that year, while on a business trip to St. Louis, McHatton made sure to visit John C. Breckinridge in Kentucky. Referring to the man by his Mexican War title rather than his political one of Vice President, McHatton informed Douglas that he "went immediately to see Maj. Breckinridge." Breckinridge and McHatton talked for some time, while the Major "expressed his great anxiety" for a Douglas victory, admitting that he had had similar conversations with others. Whether or not Breckinridge meant this as a formal endorsement, McHatton clearly figured on handling it that way, notifying Douglas that he intended to tell all of his friends and hoped some newspapers would publish the news, as well.[36]

McHatton met with several "prominent Kentuckians who have all agreed to go over to Ills and speak, if desired," he reported to his partner Douglas, listing eight willing men. "Except Breckinridge. His going is a little doubtful," but apparently his anxiety for victory was satisfactory to the eager Louisianan. "I have written several confidential letters…to my friends of Ill conveying Maj B's statements to me," McHatton wrote, describing his hopes that his campaigning would help his co-owner attain higher office.

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and the Douglas correspondence admits only brief mentions of her. We do not know if she ever traveled to the Mississippi plantation with James or met Stephen Douglas, and only little about how she dealt with James' frequent absences from Arlington.

[36] J.A. McHatton to Hon. S.A. Douglas, 28 September 1858. Douglas, Stephen A. Papers, [Box 47, Folder 19], Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Libraries.

If he lacked political grace, he certainly displayed some kind of acumen, and he had enough contacts to feel like he was making a contribution.[37]

In the interim between Douglas' senatorial and presidential campaigns, McHatton turned his energies towards business, but his mind constantly dwelt on the future. "I have been twice to Silver Lake this fall," he reported on the plantation, and "the crop has been injured by a freeze." Having spent so much of his life on and around the river, McHatton's practiced eye acknowledged that "the levees are going up finely and everything is being done to protect that country from future overflow." Then he abruptly changed the subject. "Whether delegate or not, I am going to the Charleston Convention," he confidently announced about the Democratic National Convention of 1860. Then he betrayed some concern. "I don't much believe I will be a delegate," he opined, "for I am rather in ill odor among the new democrats." Still, he hoped for the best, and was rewarded with a spot on the Louisiana delegation.[38] Similar letters followed. "I have been much at the plantation lately and am glad to report things going on well," he wrote just before the Convention, continuing to remind Douglas that he would be in Charleston early and "would be very glad to see you there, before it assembles."[39]

The Charleston Convention, as the 1860 Democratic National Convention came to be known, was a colossal blunder and precursor to Civil War. While Douglas was the clear favorite from the beginning, his policy of popular sovereignty angered the fire-eating delegates who argued that slavery was already protected in the Constitution,

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[37] *Ibid.*
[38] J.A. McHatton to Hon. S.A. Douglas, 5 December 1859. Douglas, Stephen A. Papers, [Box 47, Folder 21], Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Libraries.
[39] J.A. McHatton to Hon. S.A. Douglas, 3 April 1860. Douglas, Stephen A. Papers, [Box 47, Folder 22], Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Libraries.

clinging to the *Dred Scott* decision as though it were a sacred text. Northern delegates largely refused to pass a resolution endorsing *Dred Scott,* and the ideological split became physical as southern delegates marched from the hall, determined to boycott the convention. A split Democratic Party meant little consolidated resistance in the national election, one of the reasons Republican candidate Abraham Lincoln achieved victory.[40]

The Louisiana delegation aligned with the fire eaters, advocating a resolution that echoed the *Dred Scott* decision. "The owner thereof is entitled to carry his slaves into any Territory in the United States," they demanded, and "to hold them there as property" regardless of how the other inhabitants felt about slavery. Because the Convention would not recognize this as a fundamental right, the Louisiana delegation "unanimously" entered its protest and withdrew from the Convention. But Delegate McHatton disagreed with his state's decision. He and one other delegate remained "opposed to the retirement of the delegation," though, out of respect for the majority, they yielded judgment. These are hardly the actions of an ardent secessionist or southern nationalist, and McHatton came under fierce fire for his decision.[41]

His detractors at this point included his wife Eliza, a spirited and proud southern woman who had yet to experience the economic difficulties brought on by war that would diminish some of her ardor. From a seat in the balcony of the convention hall, Eliza leaned over the railing in anticipation of Louisiana's defiant departure from the convention. Instead, she witnessed her husband's denunciation by other members of the delegation. "To my unspeakable dismay," she remembered years later, "for I was too

[40] John G. Parkhurst, *Official Proceedings of the Democratic National Convention* (Cleveland: Nevins, 1860).
[41] Horace Greeley and Cleveland, John F, eds. *A Political Textbook for 1860* (New York: Tribune Association, 1860), 39.

hot-headed to be reasonable amid so much excitement—I saw my husband and his colleague remain seated" as aging Governor Alexandre Mouton pointed a bony, castigating finger at them and led their colleagues out of the hall.[42]

Louisiana and the other withdrawn delegations held their own conventions and nominated their own candidates. While Douglas won the National Convention's nomination, he faced both Lincoln and two Democratic challengers in the November election. There is little doubt that this erratic decision cost the Democrats the election. Significantly, McHatton did not endorse the fire eater stance championed by his friend John C. Breckinridge, for whom the state of Louisiana voted, but allied rather with his business partner, National Democrat Stephen Douglas.

After the election, Douglas, sapped from the campaign, wrote his business partner to inquire as to the availability of funds he thought he should already have. "The great pressure of public duties has deprived me of the time to attend to private affairs or friends' correspondence," he began, in an agitated tone that left unclear which category the current letter belonged in. No doubt irascible from the recent loss his own party had caused, Douglas was also unsatisfied with McHatton's management of their plantation. The Senator's dream of a steady income with minimum involvement was not the reality of the situation. "I have not heard or received a return of the amount of the proceeds of our crops," he complained, unsure if McHatton had started doing business with a new merchant. "I should like to know how our account now stands and what the balance due

[42] Ripley, *Flag to Flag*, 47.

us is, after paying our indebtedness and in whose hands it is," Douglas wrote, clearly in want of both information and financial support.[43]

The latter quickly proved the more important of his desires, as Douglas complained of the "inexplicable" low price at which McHatton claimed he had sold the plantation's cotton. "I cannot understand those sales when I compare prices at which it was sold with other sales reported in the newspapers of about the same date," he exclaimed. In his conclusion, however, his tone changed from exasperated to pleading, as Douglas begged McHatton for help. "I am exceedingly oppressed for want of money and I do not know where I can get enough to pay my little bills and current expenses, unless it can be got from sales of cotton," he worried. "Can you not arrange to send me two thousand- or even one thousand to relieve my immediate necessities?"[44]

McHatton stood by his actions, apprising Douglas briefly of the situation. "As soon as the rest of the cotton is ship'd and sold, I will go to the city and have a settlement with Ward Hunt and Com and see what arrangements I can make about sending you the money you want," he promised. But "the times are very hard," he explained, "and really I believe every house in N.O. will stop payment." As Anita Watkins Clinton points out, this news must have come as a great shock to Douglas, as the cotton harvest of 1860 was reputedly one of the best in years. As she puts it, "McHatton was not the financially responsible person Douglas assumed he was. He was a promoter and speculator who had been in financial difficulties for a long time." In debt to the merchants Ward, Hunt, and Company, McHatton apparently owed large sums to family and friends, as well. Debt was literally a cost of doing business for most antebellum planters, however, and this

[43] Douglas to My Dear Sir, 4 April 1861. Douglas, Stephen A. Papers, [Box 46, Folder 8], Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Libraries.
[44] *Ibid.*

alone does not necessarily identify McHatton as a rogue or swindler. In March 1861, however, shortly after McHatton sent the above reply to Douglas, he did take unscrupulous action and attempt to sell the entire plantation, including the live stock and equipment, the rightful inheritance of Douglas' sons.[45]

For all his economic principles, however, McHatton's dubious actions were also part of an emotional response to his disappointment in the failed 1860 campaign. He felt Douglas had let him, and the country, down. "There is immense excitement here," he wrote to Douglas less than a month after the firing on Fort Sumter. "The people are abusing you and Ex Gov Morehead," a former governor of Kentucky, participant in early peace talks, and yet another McHatton political contact. "Morehead was here and spent the day with me a day or two ago and we had a long talk," McHatton explained. "I had hoped you would have occupied either a peace or a neutral position in this matter, your friends hoped you would either influence Lincoln to peace measures or would have an issue with his administration, but they are disappointed. As for myself," he wrote, slyly aligning and separating himself from such a group, though concerned at the same time, "I have always thought war would be the result of Lincoln's election. The South was bound to repudiate him." This was part of the reason he had supported Douglas, who McHatton believed yet had the ability to stop what everyone seemed to accept—hope or fear—was the inevitable. "You have the advantage of most politicians, knowing all about both sections of this country," McHatton explained. "You know the Southerners are a daring people and can only be exterminated, never conquered," he wrote, careful to use the first person not in the previous sentence but in the next: "I still look to you, with your

[45] McHatton to Douglas, 11 May 1861, in Robert W. Johannsen, ed., *The Letters of Stephen A. Douglas* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1961), 509n; Anita Watkins Clinton, "Stephen Arnold Douglas: His Mississippi Experience," *The Journal of Mississippi History* 50, no. 2 (June 1988): 56-88.

influence among the masses, and your immense popularity, to save us from the horrors of Civil War." Douglas died soon after, and both the questionable practices at the plantation and Douglas' perceived influence seemed to fade from the minds of those involved as events swept the country into war.[46]

Even during the final months of their partnership, Douglas and McHatton lived in what many considered to be separate countries. Louisiana seceded from the Union on January 26, 1861, and events proceeded rapidly thereafter. By the time McHatton penned his final letter to Douglas, the Confederacy had fired on Fort Sumter and President Abraham Lincoln, Douglas' old political adversary, had called for 75,000 troops to put down the rebellion in the southern states. A short year later, as Louisianans lined the banks of the Mississippi to destroy their cotton, New Orleans, the valuable trade city just downriver from the McHattons' Arlington in Baton Rouge, fell to Yankee forces. In spring 1862, Union gun boats plied the waters that had connected the McHattons to a world of commerce and information.[47]

On the precipice of War, the McHattons' antebellum lives clearly shaped the decisions they made regarding the budding Confederacy. Eliza, misty eyed over her youth as a southern belle, reveled in the excitement, rebuking her neighbors—and her husband—for anything less than full support of the new nation. If war would soon dampen her fervor, it dulled neither her critical eye nor castigating pen. James, practical and self-interested, promised no loyalty outside his family and showed no overwhelming interest in southern independence.

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[46] J.A. McHatton to S.A. Douglas, 11 May 1861. Douglas, Stephen A. Papers. Addenda, [Box 1, Folder 8], Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Libraries.

[47] Donald S. Frazier, *Fire in the Cane Field: The Federal Invasion of Louisiana and Texas, January 1861-January 1863* (Buffalo Gap: State House Press, 2008), 24, 40.

The Confederacy desired the support of politically astute, wealthy men like James McHatton, hoping for their help in the effort towards independence. Ironically, it alienated many of these people, as it did James, by its mere creation. James McHatton had done well for himself in a South that was part of a united country. Though friends with fire-eaters, James had supported a nationalist Democrat and hoped for peace and Union. He had openly disagreed with his state at a national convention and was hurt and disappointed by his candidate's inability to heal the torn nation. In the young Confederacy, as in his antebellum business, he would aid only for the promise of reciprocal benefit to a specific end. Soon, that end would be escape.

CHAPTER 2

DOWN AND OUT:

LIVING IN BUYING IN TEXAS AND MEXICO

One of the pieces of correspondence that had the largest impact on the McHattons' ability to travel and conduct business during the Civil War was not written directly to either James or Eliza. In March of 1863, shortly after the McHattons arrived in Houston, Texas, from Louisiana, General John Bankhead Magruder penned a Special Order for one of James' associates named J.L. MaCaulay. Magruder, the Confederate head of the District of Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona, exercised—without explicit authority and in direct competition with Kirby Smith, the head of the separate Trans-Mississippi Department—full control of both military and civilian affairs in his jurisdiction. One of Magruder's main concerns, though contending with Kirby Smith's Cotton Bureau, was the cotton flooding into Texas and across the Rio Grande into Mexico. "Permission is hereby granted to J.L MaCaulay," Special Order No 78 read, "Agent for the State of Louisiana, to export (1150) Eleven Hundred and Fifty bales of Cotton to Mexico, via Brownsville, Texas." A few days later, MaCaulay added the less official, hand written addendum, "James A. McHatton is my authorized agent for the purchase of cotton." Behind this public appointment, James hid his private business, using his official status for highly unofficial commerce.[48]

[48] Clayton A. Jewett, *Texas in the Confederacy: An Experiment in Nation Building* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2002), 178; "Special Order No 78." MS 2855: Box 10: Folder 26. McHatton Family Papers, Hargrett Library, UGA. Hereafter MFP.

Long famous as a conflict that divided families brother against brother, the Civil War divided the McHattons—albeit much less violently—husband from wife. James had stoically dissented at the Charleston Convention and shared his concern and disappointment with Stephen Douglas while Eliza celebrated the news of secession by sewing her own flag and dancing with friends on the banks of the Mississippi. James worried about how war would affect his business empire; Eliza rejoiced as a citizen of a southern nation. These separate but intimately connected roles of provider and supporter were largely prescribed to them by nineteenth century gender mores, and, having grown alongside mounting sectionalism, they continued throughout the War.

It took just over a year after it began at Fort Sumter for the Civil War to reach the McHattons in Baton Rouge. In April 1862, with New Orleans and St. Louis under Federal control, the Mississippi River, the lifeline for so many southern planters, ceased to be a commercial highway and became, instead, a barrier. Rather than connecting James and Eliza to a larger commercial and social network, it separated them. Though the McHattons interpreted the War's impact on their home individually and differently, they agreed on this: money and safety, and perhaps a semblance of their old lives, lay to the West. "Because much of Louisiana was subdued so quickly during the war," due partly to the same assets that had made it accessible to antebellum domestic and international trade, Daniel Sutherland claims that "the disarray of its citizens was perhaps more pronounced than in any other Southern state." Only in Texas, "it seems, did Louisianans feel safe." The McHattons did travel down from Louisiana to the Texas border, but this did not provide the stability they sought. As commercial conditions, and,

in Eliza's mind, their personal well-being, worsened, they continued their travels out of the Confederacy into Mexico.[49]

Throughout this trip, Eliza weighed the cultural importance of remaining loyal to the Confederacy, blaming the hardships of War on those in blue rather than others who should have shared the blame but wore grey. James, however, personally felt the economic hindrances caused by both sides. He provides a participant's perspective of the complicated commercial situation in Confederate Texas and the difficulty of navigating the complexities of the Confederate economy. Along the Mexican border, the Civil War created business opportunities through scarcity that multiple bureaucracies attempted to regulate, frustrating both Texans and transplants like James. James aided the Confederacy as long as this support was mutually beneficial, but difficulties eventually made this partnership too one sided for his liking.

James' difficulties with the Confederacy began while he and his family were still in Baton Rouge and contributed directly to his decision to lead his family west. Both armies impeded the economic fortunes of Arlington plantation by blocking trade, impressing slaves and stock, and stealing, though the McHattons also felt the cost of war in more personal ways. As spring 1862 turned to summer, the Confederate troops that remained around Baton Rouge increasingly imposed on the city's population and the surrounding areas for supplies and sustenance, offering as compensation token receipts. On July 15, 1862, Captain Kemp of the 9th Battalion Partisan Rangers confiscated two horses worth approximately $350 from James McHatton. Considering James' supposed

[49] Donald S. Frazier, *Fire in the Cane Field: The Federal Invasion of Louisiana and Texas, January 1861-January 1863* (Buffalo Gap: State House Press, 2008), 24, 40; Daniel Sutherland, "Looking for a Home: Louisiana Emigrants during the Civil War and Reconstruction," *Louisiana History* 21 (Autumn 1980), 341-2.

fortune, this seems a trivial amount. Still, he was not eager to part with his property, and the receipt made clear that "these horses were *taken* by order of Major Genl M. Lovell."[50]

Later that month James received similar orders from a Colonel McMillan. "Sir," the demand began, "You will send twenty able bodied negro boys to report to the Post Quartermaster at Baton Rouge tomorrow morning at 7 A.M." Rather than offer compensation, the Quartermaster placed the responsibility for James' property on James himself. "You will send them in charge of some competent person," the note directed, "with list of names so they can be returned when we are through with them." In a small show of defiance, James sent only half of the laborers requested.[51]

Though Eliza blamed the Yankees for all that she could, when the Union Army brought written tidings to Arlington they were not requisitions for supplies. Arguably, they brought worse news, even as they showed a consideration most Confederates thought them incapable of. In the skirmishes surrounding Baton Rouge, James' good friend Gene Clark of Bolivar County, Mississippi, had been badly wounded and taken prisoner. A Union colonel brought the McHattons tidings of the sad event, along with a pass through their lines for James to visit his injured friend. "You will please accompany my orderly to these HeadQuarters with the view of fulfilling that request," a note from the Yankee commander read. A friend and fellow conservative—despite his active participation in the War—Clark recovered from his wounds while his wife stayed at

[50] Capt. MB Kemp to J.A. McHatton, 15 July 1862. MS 2855: Box 10: Folder 21. MFP, Hargrett Library, UGA. Emphasis added.
[51] Col JW McMillan to J.A. McHatton, 21 July 1862. MS 2855: Box 10: Folder 23. MFP, Hargrett Library, UGA.

Arlington with the McHattons. Though the outcome was not the worst it could have been, the event brought the War from the riverbanks into their home.[52]

Conditions at Arlington deteriorated rapidly while the two armies danced around it. Official requisitions by Confederate troops—and what Eliza called Yankee "insolence, and above all, how expert they are at stealing"—exacted a steady economic toll on the plantation. "So rapid do events crowd upon each other that the old saying 'we know not what a day may bring forth' is hourly verified before our eyes," Eliza wrote in an emotional letter to her brother Robert and his wife, Anna, in Brazoria County, on the coast of Texas. "Our foes have succeeded in draining away all of substance and have gone where 'pickings' are better," she lamented in August 1862, "and sad it is to witness the track of destruction they left behind them." Ignoring the impositions the Confederate Army had placed on her family throughout the summer months, she remained rebellious. "We saw them depart with happy hearts," she averred of the Yankees, "only wishing as the rickety transports went down, somebody would fire into and sink some of them." James' brother, "desirous of removing some negroes to Texas," planned to visit the Chinns in Brazoria County, and Eliza instructed him to deliver the letter and tell her relatives of the McHattons' troubles. James, too, was considering moving slaves from both Mississippi and Louisiana, and sometime that summer, before he and Eliza left, he sent at least part of Arlington's work force on to Brazoria County. Texas seemed sufficiently removed from the War that Robert and Anna would not have firsthand experience with the McHattons' difficulties.[53]

[52] Headquarters to J.A. McHadden, 6 August 1862. MS 2855: Box 10: Folder 20. MFP, Hargrett Library, UGA; Ripley, *Flag to Flag*, 17.
[53] Eliza to Mrs. R.H. Chinn, 28 August 1862. MS 2855: Box 10: Folder 25. MFP, Hargrett Library, UGA.

For this reason, Texas became a likely destination for many families fleeing the ravages of war. For Louisiana émigrés, it was by far the most popular. The Lone Star State was both large and largely empty, providing thousands of square miles in which to evade conscription, impressments, and war. Disillusioned Louisiana planters like the McHattons found that by transporting their slaves to Texas they could continue planting operations; by transporting themselves they might find safety. "We have been annoyed and harassed by the Yankees until we begin to think the time may not be far distant when we will have to flee for our lives," Eliza confided to Anna in August 1862. "We turn our thoughts towards Texas as a kind of 'Land of Promise,'" she wrote dramatically, "a Canaan to which we may have to journey without a Moses to guide us."[54]

James' thoughts, as well, turned to Texas and the business opportunities there. In his antebellum life, he had met with mixed, if often lucrative, success. His sugar planting and levee construction businesses, built on two different kinds of forced labor, had provided him with the money and stature he and Eliza were accustomed to. The Silver Lake plantation venture with Stephen Douglas, however, had strengthened his political contacts while stretching his financial assets. If not the most adept businessman, James was at least an energetic and innovative one. This he had proven with his various enterprises, all of which influenced his political stance in favor of the propertied and professional interests and minimal government interference in the economy. A slave owner himself, he understood, as many of the wealthy did, that slavery was better protected inside the Union than out of it. In 1862, however, he reckoned it was better protected in Texas than Louisiana.

[54] Sutherland, "Looking for A Home," 344; Eliza to Mrs. R.H. Chinn, 28 August 1862. MS 2855: Box 10: Folder 25. MFP, Hargrett Library, UGA.

Thanks primarily to the culture and politics of the antebellum South—staunch support of slavery, privately run government prisons, and a blind eye towards harsh treatment of both slaves and convicts—McHatton built a tidy empire. As a consequence of secession and war, however, he was unable to continue his antebellum business ventures. While the Yankees hindered his routes of trade, the Confederacy simply assumed control of his wares. If McHatton would not willingly support the War, the Confederate Army would simply take what they needed, driving his ideology further from their own. Texas beckoned to James, Eliza, and many others, an open land offering what they hoped would be minimal interference from either the Union or the Confederacy. "We were going to Texas for many reasons," Eliza explained later. "A loving brother, and our slaves were there at peaceful work on land cultivated on shares." The primary reason remained escape. "Above and beyond all," she admitted, "we could take refuge in Mexico if the worse came to the worst."[55]

In November and December of 1862, as they organized and embarked on their move to Texas, James and Eliza were already thinking ahead, past the Lone Star State, to a world even more removed from the Civil War than the American West. If Eliza understood that Mexico could provide some respite, James looked past even that foreign nation. To prepare for life in Texas, he had moved some of his slaves from Arlington and sent them West, instructing the Silver Lake overseer to do the same if ever they could not work the place with their full force. Auspiciously, to prepare for life after Texas, though

[55] McHatton-Ripley, *Flag to Flag,* 66.

he had yet to leave Baton Rouge, he had two Louisiana friends write him letters of introduction to a Mr. D. Morris of Havana, Cuba.[56]

Arriving in Houston in December 1863, Eliza appreciated Texas as "the great State that opened its hospitable doors to hundreds of refugees fleeing like ourselves," but, like many of those kindred refugees, she immediately found it lacking. "Proceeding west," she wrote, "we found the people poorer and more ignorant, consequently more helpless." Though they were not turned away when they asked to stop at a lonely farmstead, "the accommodations were always scant and more or less uncomfortable." Other Louisianans heading west concurred with the lack of intellectual stimulation and sad conditions. One group even named their Texas settlement "Vexation" in honor of their feelings.[57]

Provisions, like comfort and clever conversation, were always in short supply. "We stopped at many houses where there was no sweetening for coffee," Eliza complained, quickly clarifying her loose definition of the beverage in need of sweetening. "Such coffee; or rather, such substitutes! Peanuts, sweet potatoes, rye, beans, peas, and corn-meal" were "all of them wretched imitations, though gulped down." Tea was similarly concocted from all manner of bark and leaves, and paper and cloth were near non-existent.[58]

James, however, had a run of business luck. Partnering with J.L. MacCaulay, a cotton broker for the State of Louisiana, to move Government cotton across the frontier, "afforded him opportunities to move his own," Eliza admitted. The family was almost

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[56]Robert M. Douglas and Douglas, Stephen A., Jr, *The Claim of Rob't M. and Stephen A. Douglas* (Washington: Powell and Ginck, 1872), 17; "Letters of Introduction to D Butts Morris." MS 2855: Box 10: Folder 22. MFP, Hargrett Library, UGA.
[57] McHatton-Ripley, *Flag to Flag*, 66-67; Sutherland, "Looking For a Home," 346.
[58] McHatton-Ripley, *Flag to Flag*, 101.

always in motion, as they often traveled with James on his many trips to Eagle Pass, Laredo, and Brownsville, Texas, and Matamoros and Piedras Negras, Mexico. Sometimes Eliza and their son Henry would stay with Eliza's brother and sister-in-law near Houston, where D.C. Norwood, James' Mississippi overseer, met him soon after they moved with approximately 70 slaves from the Silver Lake Plantation. James put them to work growing cotton on rented land, allowing him his own product to take to the commercial ports in Mexico, along with bales he purchased from other plantations—primarily in Polk, Walker, and Liberty Counties, north of Brazoria—to resell. In June 1863, a second group of forty-two Silver Lake slaves arrived, no doubt as incredulous at their journey to Texas as they had been about moving to Silver Lake.[59]

There were several main paths through Texas on which cotton often traveled, historian Stephen Townsend explains, and it appears that James McHatton, at one time or another, tried nearly all of them. Most ran through San Antonio, where the McHattons also spent much of their time, to small towns along the border. The ports along the Rio Grande, quiet and difficult to use before the War, exploded into international boom-towns as the Union suffocated every other avenue of trade with its blockade. Mexico claimed the southern half of the Rio Grande, and the Union honored this claim as a neutral river. Matamoros, across the river from Brownsville and the closest river port to the Atlantic, functioned through four years of Civil War "primarily as a Confederate port."[60]

The cotton trade along the river was so thick, powdery white dust covered everything and everyone in the city. By 1863, when James McHatton made his first

[59] McHatton-Ripley, *Flag to Flag*, 77; Douglas and Douglas, *The Claim of Rob't M. and Stephen A. Douglas*, 17, 34.
[60] Stephen A. Townsend, *The Yankee Invasion of Texas* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2006), 7.

foray there, nearly two hundred ships a month were docking at Matamoros, often exchanging war materiel for cotton bales. Almost the furthest one could get from Richmond and still be in the Confederacy, Brownsville and its sister city "were the only open gates in the Confederacy," welcoming wagon trains of cotton from Texas and Louisiana and as far away as Mississippi and Arkansas.[61]

As the trade across the Rio Grande flourished, so did men like James McHatton. His early shipments proved some of his biggest. In an undated addendum attached to his appointment from McCaulay, James noted that "166 bales crossed the Rio Grande," then added that another 120 crossed soon after. He often dealt with Mexican traders directly, selling another "sesenta cinco pacas de algodon" across the river. While using his permission from Magruder to move state cotton to move some of his own, he also found this connection the ideal means of protecting his cotton and slaves from impressment, the kind of protection he had lacked in Louisiana. Claiming he had "seventy eight negroes employed as teamsters in hauling cotton for the State of Louisiana," though doubtless many of them were hauling his own cotton, "and three in the Commissary Department of CSA," the Labor Bureau in Houston found James "hereby exempt from any farther call for negro labor for Government service." The uncompensated requisitions he had experienced in Baton Rouge, James hoped, would not repeat themselves in Texas.[62]

By May 1864, however, after perhaps a year buying, moving, selling, and smuggling cotton, James found that the fear of a Federal Blockade and the loss of his slaves were not the only problems he faced. After being stymied in an attempt to move

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[61] Amanda Foreman, *A World On Fire: Britain's Crucial Role in the American Civil War* (New York: Random House, 2010), 411.

[62] "Special Order No 78." MS 2855: Box 10: Folder 26. MFP, Hargrett Library, UGA; "Bill of Sale." MS 2855: Box 10: Folder 24. MFP, Hargrett Library, UGA; "Orders from HB Andrews, Capt." MS 2855: Box 10: Folder 26. MFP, Hargrett Library, UGA.

his cotton by sea, he let Confederate officials know in no uncertain terms his dismay with their management. Compounding his frustration was the fact that he was now petitioning the Cotton Bureau, created by Kirby Smith of the Trans-Mississippi Department, with documents of approval from John Magruder, head of the District of Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona. Still, James included in his petition his appointment as State Agent and claimed that "In fulfillment of my duties I immediately commenced the purchase of the cotton, and during the months of March, April, May, and June 1863 bought the required amount." The Cotton Bureau was more likely to help a loyal Confederate discharging his duties than a businessman smuggling cotton through his own country.[63]

Anticipating an easy trip from the Texas coast on what he referred to as "the Bay Route"—possibly out of Matagorda—with his state-sanctioned cargo, James had been disappointed. "The Government exercised such exclusive control of the Boats that the owners were unable to fulfill their pledges to take the cotton and after being for months subjected to a series of disappointments and a large expense for storage I determined to procure teams and haul to the Rio Grande," he fumed. In November, however, while the cotton was en route, a major Union expedition captured Brownsville with the intention of severing any Confederate-Mexican alliance. James turned his cotton towards Laredo, and nearly 300 bales crossed the Rio Grande there. This was a fraction of his load, much of which was secreted along the journey on the King Ranch and elsewhere, the recovery of which James felt was doubtful. Some had even been burned in the road, igniting memories of the conflagration along the Mississippi in Baton Rouge.[64]

[63] "Special Order No 78." MS 2855: Box 10: Folder 26. MFP, Hargrett Library, UGA.
[64] *Ibid.*

"The expenses that have accumulated on this cotton are enormous," James complained to the Cotton Office six months later in May 1864, "and a large amount of it will not sell today on the Rio Grande, for a sufficient sum to cover the actual disbursements made upon it." James did not ask for reimbursement, but merely the approval to move his remaining 564 bales across the Rio Grande, snidely remarking that it had been purchased and "en route months before the organization of the cotton office."[65]

There is no record that this request was granted, and likely it was refused, as the McHattons' exports suddenly shrunk drastically. Whereas their earlier shipments out of Brownsville had counted hundreds of bales, a year later they were moving a fraction of that product. With Brownsville under Union control, James moved his cotton through Piedras Negras, further up the river, routinely selling as few as four, six, or eight bales in summer 1864. Slightly larger loads of twenty to thirty bales were considered a boon, but the days of hundred bale sales were gone. Despite these smaller shipments, James continued to move some—perhaps primarily—family cotton, including 50 bales sold in Eliza's name.[66]

Eliza was quite aware of her husband's business and hard work—"he needs rest," she wrote to her sister-in-law in March, while James was working to solve his difficulties with the Cotton Office—but found that economic problems inhibited the lifestyle she had come to value and seemed concerned about her appearance and fashion. "I have had my hair cut so short that you can't take a pinch," she wrote during one of her stays in San

[65]J.A. McHatton to W.J. Hutchins, 20May 1864. MS 2855: Box 10: Folder 28.MFP, Hargrett Library.
[66] "Sale by Putnam and Henderson." Box 10: Folder 28. MFP. Hargrett Library; "Piedras Negras, Mexico, 1864." Box 10: Folder 31. MFP, Hargrett Library; "Piedras Negras, July 11, 1864." Box 10: Folder 32. MFP, Hargrett Library; "Sale 1021." Box 10: Folder 34. MFP, Hargrett Library.

Antonio, admitting that "It is turning grey so fast." Sending a package of handkerchiefs, stamps, and envelopes to her niece and nephew in Brazoria County, she instructed that the paper "must come back to me neatly scribbled over. I find it so difficult to get paper that I could not get it, and so have to divide my small supply with you." The hope of cheerful tidings from her family was worth this division. Other presents would follow "as soon as I get the material," she promised, lamenting also that "I can't find any fresh garden seed in town." One present she was clearly dismayed with. "Mr McH got Tim a hat, which he shan't take to him, if I can help it, for I don't think aside from its ugliness it is not too big." Due to a lack of options, little could be done. James, Eliza informed her sister-in-law Anna, "protests that it is the only hat in town." The War had turned once-common items into scarce and valuable commodities.[67]

Eliza was openly concerned about her family's future, and reminisced of the quiet times in the past when they would vacation with relatives. "You are tantalizing in your picture of another summer in Matagorda," she wrote to Anna. "The more I thought of it the more tempting my little cool room did seem to me." In their present state, however, she doubted another such summer was possible. "Everything seems so very uncertain that we cannot make any plans for next month or next week," she worried. As with Tim's ugly hat, however, she presented a sense of humor that belied her disappointment and anxiety. She could not hide her amusement about a hen Anna had assumed was a rooster. "So Dwight laid a couple of eggs!" she cackled. "I always did think there was a deal of the feminism in Dwight. Now I am convinced."[68]

[67] Eliza McHatton to Anna, 11 March 1864. MS 2855: Box 10: Folder 30. MFP. Hargrett Library.
[68] Eliza McHatton to Anna, 11 March 1864. MS 2855: Box 10: Folder 30. MFP. Hargrett Library.

Perhaps due to her unease regarding their prospects, Eliza, like her husband, constantly prepared for the future. After considering the chances of Union invasion and the erosion of business opportunities in Texas, they decided in fall 1864 that they, like the hundreds of cotton bales that had gone before them, would cross the Rio Grande into Mexico. This would bring them one step closer to Cuba, and Eliza began laying in stores to ready for their journey from San Antonio immediately.

Like almost all of the McHattons' decisions, this one was not at all uncalculated or hasty. "I do not know how soon we will get off," Eliza wrote to Anna in September, "but I expect in about fifteen days. We go direct to Laredo and from there to Matamoros." Apparently Matamoros' proximity to the ocean made it a better destination than the further inland Piedras Negras. James spent time finding a wagon and mules while Eliza saw to the provisions that would make her "ready to camp, and make myself as comfortable as possible." The widely varied stores she itemized revealed a woman uncertain of the trip, but seemed to reassure her she was ready for the journey. "I have 2 jars of peach sweet pickle, 3 jars Brandy peaches, 4 bottles of tomato ketchup, 2 boxes guava marmalade, 2 cans oysters, 2 cans turtle soup, 1 loaf sugar, 1 can ham and 3 candy hams," she listed. "I will get some flour crackers and 100s things besides that would fill my paper to enumerate."[69]

Mundane news slipped into the letter as though her trip to Mexico scared her not at all. She and James had gone riding that morning; their young son Henry, already an avid sportsman, had been hunting but had no luck, as Eliza had "not heard the gun crack." Then the familiar concern and lack of goods crept back in. "I have made up Henry's winter flannels and shirts, but I cannot get anything here fit for pants," she

[69] Eliza McHatton to Anna, 4 September 1864. MS 2855: Box 10: Folder 30. MFP. Hargrett Library.

complained. "I do not know how long we will stay in Matamoros or what may happen to me before I get away from there," she worried, likely thinking of James' desired destination of Cuba. She was also admittedly apprehensive about "how long Martha and Zell," the only two slaves the McHattons were taking with them, "will stick." A third slave, Delia, who had accompanied them on their convoys around Texas, had already escaped. The Arlington and Silver Lake slaves remained in Houston[70]

Two weeks later, on September 18, almost exactly on the schedule she had predicted, Eliza again updated Anna on their progress in an emotional letter that spoke of the journey to Mexico as a move and not a trip. "We are off for Laredo on Tuesday 20th," one day later than she had forecast, "and I take the last quiet Sunday evening we will spend on Texas soil to wish you (aw, not a good bye letter- that would make us both feel too bad- but just) a letter, and as cheerful a one as I can pen, under these painful circumstances, for I do hate mighty-bad to go." James had received word that Matamoros was free of yellow fever, a concern that had slowed their departure, and now they would be off for good. "I have got all my plunder ready and think we will move off in fine style," she claimed, reassuring herself as much as Anna. "It would make you feel like going to," she bragged, hiding her worries behind bravado, "if you could see our nice eatables."[71]

Her desire to maintain her family's status, even under these circumstances and in such sparse surroundings, was also evident. "I cut up one of my cotton sheets and made bags and napkins so we aint going to travel like Mugginses," she exclaimed, the slang term for someone with bad judgment revealing her concern for what people thought of

[70] Eliza McHatton to Anna, 4 September 1864. MS 2855: Box 10: Folder 30. MFP. Hargrett Library; McHatton-Ripley, *Flag to Flag*, 113.
[71] Eliza McHatton to Anna, 18 September 1864. MS 2855: Box 10: Folder 30. MFP. Hargertt Library.

her family's decision. Reminding Anna of the long hours of debate that had concluded in a verdict of escape, she explained that "I have been very busy the past week getting ready to leave, helping Martha make two new dresses and a flannel sack, making shirts and pants for Zell and numberless stitches to take in things already made for Henry and myself." As hard as the journey would be, and as uncertain as she was about whether or not it was the right course of action, she reassured herself and her relatives that she was prepared for it, and hoped she would not be judged for it. [72]

If James revealed any concerns, they were for his business, his family's business, and the economic state of the Confederacy. "Mr. McH says he thinks Robert had better sell his cotton to plant for 10 cents or 12 cents," Eliza advised Anna. If Robert could not sell it, James agreed to "try to get it out" of the country, but predicted that "transportation will continue to be troublesome." Robert would be better off to "sell at store prices and keep the money" than gamble on a larger payoff later. This was unusual and telling advice from someone who had spent his life engaged in some of the riskiest gambles available and had always managed to stack the deck in his own favor.[73]

The combination of over regulation from the District of Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona, the Trans-Mississippi Department and the Cotton Bureau, and the threat of Union invasion had made business in Texas unpredictable at best in Texas. In August, a month before the McHattons' departure, Kirby Smith reassigned his rival John B. Magruder to the Arkansas District, and Magruder bragged of what he had done for Texas. "I found your State in danger, I leave it in security. I found the people in despondency, I leave them in hope. I found traitors, exultant; I leave patriots triumphant." Without this

[72] Eliza McHatton to Anna, 18 September 1864. MS 2855: Box 10: Folder 30. MFP. Hargertt Library.
[73] Eliza McHatton to Anna, 18 September 1864. MS 2855: Box 10: Folder 30. MFP. Hargertt Library.

pomp, and regardless of how they found Texas, the McHattons, too, were leaving. James hoped the situation would be better in Mexico, however brief their stay.[74]

The move in September1864 temporarily solved their economic woes. In Texas Eliza had searched for scarce material. In Mexico, she reeled under the choices, debating not how to find material for dresses but which material to buy. James, for his part, continued to sell cotton in Matamoras and Piedras Negras. Having abandoned the Confederacy, the McHattons were viewed with suspicion by the Confederate military, which had retaken Brownsville. "You must all be very careful what you write to us about specie and leaving the country etc," Eliza warned her family almost immediately, "for all the letters to doubtful individuals are opened in Brownsville before delivered." Of all the letters she mailed her brother in Laredo, she claimed, there was not one "that was not opened on the Texas side first."[75]

Culturally, Mexico left much to be desired. For a woman used to fluted columns and high verandas, living in wagons and shacks was quite an adjustment. "The building consisted of one long, narrow room, with a small window, innocent of glass at one end, and two doors opening on opposite sides," she recalled of one of their temporary abodes. While one door opened to a "sandy lane that represented a street," the other led to a small yard, barren except for a dead dog "swollen to the size of a calf."[76] The population was of little consolation, and years later in her memoirs Eliza described the border children as "little, half-naked *muchachos* who never had seen an ambulance [wagon], never had seen

[74] Eliza McHatton to Anna, 18 September 1864. MS 2855: Box 10: Folder 30. MFP. Hargertt Library; Magruder quote in Townsend, *The Yankee Invasion of Texas*, 114.
[75] Eliza McHatton to Anna, 10 October 1864.MS 2855: Box 10: Folder 30. MFP. Hargrett Library. Emphasis in original.
[76] McHatton-Ripley, *Flag to Flag*, 87.

anything but themselves and the muddy river."[77] She openly mocked their isolation with a sense of humor. "If they had ever heard of Queen Victoria," she claimed, "they might have thought she was coming to town, for I was the first *white* woman and my attendant the first *black* one the generation had ever seen." [78]

These two passages reveal that Eliza used a racial lens to interpret her new surroundings. Encountering a group of people who were neither white nor black, Eliza laughed at their ignorance and isolation and called them "muchachos." Despite encountering a new group, she clearly had not changed her thoughts on the old binary of southern race relations. In the next passage, she depicted herself as not only white, and therefore superior, but as a Queen. This is a simultaneous joke at the border children's expense, for they are apparently so ignorant that they wouldn't know the Queen from any white woman. Rather than a queen, Eliza explicitly stated that the only black person was an "attendant." Despite the vigorous border trade and business potential, socially and culturally, Mexico was not a suitable place for the McHattons to settle.

Moreover, Mexico could claim to be even less politically stable than the United States, despite the Civil War. The Mexican Government under Benito Juarez battled not only Maximilian but his international supporters, the French and Napoleon III. In some cases this instability helped business opportunities, as the Union would not blockade the Rio Grande, nor impress the war materiel and cotton bales traveling up and down it. Often bound for Confederate troops, and paid for with Confederate cotton, the weapons and powder could easily be claimed as destined for the troubled Mexican Juaristas.[79]

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[77] McHatton-Ripley, *Flag to Flag*, 83.
[78] *Ibid.*
[79] Foreman, *A World On Fire*, 412.

These opportunities came with the trade off of unpredictability. In Brownsville and Matamoros, two cities most important to the McHattons, fortunes turned particularly quickly. In July 1864, after nine months of Union occupation, the Confederacy reoccupied an abandoned Brownsville. Two months later, in September 1864, as the McHattons prepared to cross into Mexico, Emporer Maximilian's forces claimed Matamoros from the Mexican Government. Juarista refugees flocked across the river, and the Imperial Army was still in control of Matamoros when James and Eliza arrived in October. In this small corner of the world, so unimportant five years before, four different flags now floated in sight of each other, reminding Eliza in her memoirs of the "pride, pomp, and circumstance of glorious war." If the pride was her own, and the pomp belonged to the likes of Maximilian and John Magruder, the circumstances in Mexico could be anybody's best guess. [80]

Mexico offered a new start for the McHatton family. Propelled to Texas on the tides of war and fortune, James and Eliza had done the best they could to make both money and a home. Finding the same interference of the Confederate government in Texas from which he had run in Louisiana, however, James moved his family to Mexico, one step closer to the island destination that had been on his mind for three years. Despite heading so far south from Louisiana, and further still outside the country, the brief improvement in their fortunes had turned stagnant. The birth of their daughter Annella in February 1865, in a shanty outside Matamoros, was symbolic of the beginning of the rest of their journey.[81]

[80] Townsend, *The Yankee Invasion of Texas*, 112-13; McHatton-Ripley, *Flag to Flag*, 114.
[8181] There are no extant letters between November 1864 and Annella's birth in February, making it difficult to decipher whether Eliza was keeping her pregnancy a secret. Possibly she was concerned she might lose

"The baby and I are doing 'well as could be expected," Eliza reported to Anna and Robert, who remained in Texas, a few days after Annella's birth. "She can only eat and sleep and grunt when a flea gets hold of her" but both mother and baby were fine. "I have plenty milk for my baby and she bids fair to be a great source of happiness to me—so fat and healthy—such black hair and black eyes—and such a pretty name," Eliza flattered, naming the baby Annella after the sister-in-law to whom she was writing. Eliza wished she could return to Texas and spend the summer with her brother and sister-in-law, but concerns of a Union invasion kept her from committing. "I find myself dreaming of peace and spending the summer with Sister in M[atagorda]," she wrote. "What delightful day dreams!" they were, but they were not to materialize outside of her mind.[82]

The reality of her situation struck her vividly. Her family could not return to Texas, could not remain in Mexico, and of James' final intended destination, she did not share. "I don't know what we will do this summer," she worried, and though she admitted that "we will have to go somewheres else," she was not at all certain where this might be. "We may go to Monterrey," she offered, noncommittally, but "We only talk over our plans [and] it is too early to decide."[83]

It was, in fact, too late to decide, and likely the decision had been made long before, perhaps back in Baton Rouge. One month later they would be in Havana.

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the baby, or that her decision to cross the frontier into Mexico would seem even less wise were it to be considered by a pregnant woman.

[82] Eliza McHatton to Anna, 21 February 1865. MS 2855: Box 10: Folder 38. MFP. Hargrett Library.

[83] Eliza McHatton to Anna, 21 February 1865. MS 2855: Box 10: Folder 38. MFP. Hargrett Library.

CHAPTER 3

CUBAN LIBRES:

THE SEARCH FOR ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

AND CULTURAL CONNECTIONS

The two letters of introduction James McHatton procured before leaving Baton Rouge contained his first recorded thoughts of Cuba and exhibited several of his most impressive traits. While one proffered his social status as "a prominent citizen of this state and well known all over it as a gentleman of worth and influence," the second revealed more of inner machinations. His hunger for business opportunities was obvious. "My friend James McHatton Esq is visiting your island for the purpose of locating himself or to purchase a Refinery," his letter of introduction to a Mr. D Butts Morris of Havana, Cuba, read. "Oblige him and give him all your assistance he may need, and take care of his interest," his friend urged, "which I will consider as a personal favor to me." The second trait, his foresight and ability to plan ahead, was slightly less apparent. That McHatton's benefactor wrote this note for him in November 1862, nearly three years before McHatton and his family landed in Cuba, reveals his prescience. It would have been unlikely for him to seek two letters of introduction—particularly letters that named his interests so directly—had he not been looking ahead to relocating there. During the intervening thirty months between when James' friends wrote these letters and when he could actually introduce himself to Mr. Morris, James had chased economic opportunities across two states and two countries. While striving to recreate the brutal economic

system that had sustained and enriched them at the cost of others, he and his family failed to recreate the status and lifestyle they had left behind.[84]

There was likely no single incident that propelled the McHattons from Mexico to Cuba; their momentum seems to have carried them there from the moment they first made plans to leave Baton Rouge. The decision represented the culmination of a search for better economic prospects, one that began long before the War. That money could be made and goods could be purchased along the way may have slowed their departure, but it never eliminated its possibility.

Though Cuba had been on James' mind for years, it had been in southerners' thoughts and political aspirations for far longer. An island buzzing with agricultural promise and thick with slavery, Southerners saw Cuba as ripe for an expanding nation in need of both land and slaves. James K. Polk had offered Spain $100 million for the island in 1848, while then Senator Jefferson Davis avowed that "Cuba must be ours" to "increase the number of slaveholding constituencies." James Buchanan renewed efforts in 1858, when Southern and Northern Democrats found that Cuban annexation was the only item they could agree on. In 1860, Lincoln worried that the South would demand annexation in return for abandoning secession.[85]

As historian Matthew Pratt Guterl argues, "if British and American abolitionists saw Cuba as the most grotesquely abusive slave system in the Atlantic world, Southerners and venture capitalists from the eastern seaboard" sensed, rather, "an

[84] "Letters of Introduction to D Butts Morris."MS 2855: Box 10: Folder 22. McHatton Family Papers, Hargrett Library, UGA. Hereafter MFP.
[85] Quoted in James McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 104, 194-195, 253.

intoxicating aroma of decadence and profit, decay and slavery."[86] By mid-century, he explains, the South and Cuba enjoyed what he describes as something of an illicit affair: the Cuban elite sent their children to be educated in the United States, American mechanics worked the island's estates, and many southerners were already absentee Cuban landlords. "The relationship between Cuba and the South," as he describes it, "was always something more than mere flirtatiousness and something less than marriage."[87] No matter how badly the South wanted Cuba as a legal, political, pro-slavery state, the politically charged sectional atmosphere kept them apart. Ironically, when the sectional powder keg that had kept them apart actually exploded, it brought some southerners like the McHattons closer to Cuba than ever before.

Yet historical theories of a brotherhood of slaveowners have over emphasized this camaraderie. Guterl even describes the fraternal order of slave masters as "cosmopolitan." "As members of a pan-American slaveholding class, their apparently shared cosmopolitan interests could triumph," he argues, "over the various linguistic, racial, national, and historic chauvinisms that otherwise fractured the Hispanaphone and Anglophone Caribbean."[88] There is more to community than slaveowning, however, just as there is more to it than nationality. Southerners like the McHattons were initially enthralled with Cuba and its opportunities, but as those opportunities were taken away by political unrest and a lack of like-minded people, this enchantment turned to disappointment. Guterl insists his book is not a comparative history, but it was precisely comparisons with the South that informed the McHattons' opinions of Cuba.[89] When the

[86] Guterl, *American Mediterranean*, 85.
[87] *Ibid.*
[88] *Ibid*, 6.
[89] *Ibid*, 9.

South was depicted as ruined, Cuba appeared to them immaculate. As reports of Reconstruction from friends improved, however, the island's reputation slipped.

James' focus on business outweighed any real concern he had about becoming part of a familiar community. He, however, spent much of the period during which the family resided in Cuba involved in international ventures, often visiting the United States and maintaining a steady international business correspondence. Eliza, who had always aligned herself more closely with the South—and, in particular, with the Confederacy—than had her husband, was left in Cuba to fulfill her role as a southern plantation mistress and raise her children in a different country. She found Cuba less like the South than had been reported to her, and a poor substitute for home.

"My heart turns lovingly to Texas and the last resting spot for my weary feet on my own, dear, native soil," Eliza wrote in undated correspondence, sometime after her family left Texas for Mexico in late 1864 on their way to Cuba. "The last spot where I saw my own flesh and blood, the last American home I shall ever have, the last land where my own tongue was spoken. God knows how I love the spot where our dear old flag floated freest and longest," she wrote, identifying the Confederate flag as a symbol of nationalism and, in her case, the home she had abandoned. "I have a miniature flag, nicely framed in my parlor. I love to look at it and think what we perilled and what we dared in its defense."[90]

Perhaps due to what she had lost, Eliza never allowed Cuba to become her "home." Early in their years in Cuba, during the mid-1860s, she hid or ignored Cuba's turmoil and deficiencies. As time passed, however, she became increasingly critical and unhappy. Despite many cultural similarities between the ports of Louisiana and those of

[90] Eliza McHatton to Unknown, Undated. MS 2855: Box 13: Folder 7. MFP.

Cuba, Eliza found herself far more comfortable among visiting southerners and Confederates, who provided her with short-term southern communities. Even as the McHattons maintained contact with friends and family in the defeated South, they could not consider the region home in its current state, so different were the descriptions they received from the South they had left.

For James, this defeat meant seeking economic opportunities elsewhere; for Eliza, it meant falling back on her construction of her life before Cuba. Life on the island reminded her often of the South, so much so that her son Henry, away at boarding school, came to think of Cuba as the world he would have inherited were it not for the War. Whereas the time Henry spent away from Cuba drew him to it, the longer Eliza dwelled on the island the more she found it lacking. Three members of the same family, who made the same journey, had three distinct desires and perceptions of the island they tried to make their new home.

Eliza's first thoughts on entering Havana in 1865 were not necessarily about making money, but about having money. "How prosperous and rich Cuba was in those days!" she later remembered. "We arrived when it was at the very acme of its opulence," she wrote, describing a place so affluent it was "fairly drunk with the excess of wealth and abundance."[91] It seemed exactly the kind of economic environment for which she and her husband had spent the last three years searching, one that fostered business and financial rewards and held the potential to compensate handsomely for their risk and knowledge. If any place could reward James for his entrepreneurial schemes, Cuba seemed to be it.

[91] Eliza McHatton-Ripley, *From Flag to Flag: In the South, In Mexico, In Cuba* (New York: D. Appleton and Complany, 1896), 126.

Eliza felt that the glory of Cuba was not only in its wealth, but also that it was culturally everything Mexico was not. Her immediate reaction to Havana could not have been more different from her response to Mexico. Rather than laugh at its inhabitants, she sang its praises with hyperbole, and rather than confining herself to discussions of money, she emphasized the city's beauty and the disposition of its people. "No pencil can give an adequate picture of Havana as one enters its harbor," she wrote. "It is the loveliest gem of the ocean." Compared to their rough trip through Texas and the people of Mexico, "it was as a bit of fairyland, where everybody was happy."[92] Transient southerners provided her with familiar conversations while staying at the Hotel Cubano, which was "kept by a true rebel woman."[93] The cultural connection led Eliza to recommend the hotel to any other southerner who happened to be coming to Cuba, though she knew of no one in particular who was for certain coming, nor did she explicitly invite anyone. She had minimal interaction with the locals, however, and the "southern" population was constantly changing as people came and left. The most stable network the McHattons had in terms of interaction remained their business and family correspondence between Cuba, England, and the United States.

Much of the economic news they received from their international network, however, could be considered dreadful, and James and Eliza were likely torn as they realized that their economic fortunes were closely tied to the destruction of the home they once knew. "Our cotton market has been in a very unsatisfactory condition ever since 1st January, prices having steadily declined and stock accumulated largely," R.C. Curd and Company wrote to James from Liverpool, England in April 1865. Though addressed to

[92] McHatton-Ripley, *Flag to Flag,* 125.
[93]Eliza McHatton to Tim, 25 January 1866. MS 2855: Box 10: Folder 42. MFP.

him in Havana, the correspondence concerned cotton he had shipped out of Mexico prior to his move, confirmation that James and Eliza knew well in advance that their travels would ultimately lead them to the island. That some of these sales were in Eliza's name also shows that not all of the cotton James moved as an agent of the Confederacy was for the war effort, though all of it seemed worth less than it had been.[94] "One cause of the decline has been a belief in peace being brought about by defeat of the Confederates," they offered, "and as a matter of course as long as this belief prevailed nothing short of peace prices were looked on as safe for cotton."[95]

Cotton was not selling, though it seemed the material would sell were the War to end. "It would appear that we have now about reached this point, for we have news of Richmond captured and Gen Lee's army almost destroyed," Curd and Company wrote, though in reality Lee had already surrendered and the news simply traveled slowly across the ocean.[96] "Yet for the first time this year," they explained, "the market has shown more animation after the receipt of the bad news. Prices gave way at first but under the active demand they are improving."[97] Unfortunately for the Confederacy, "It looks now as if peace would not do cotton any harm and if peace should not ensue we may again have much higher prices."[98] Whether or not their forecast was accurate, the uncertainty no doubt strained James, for only days later his cotton brokers repeated their unconvincing predictions. "If we have immediate peace prices will not go down much,"

[94] "Sale 1021 of 50 Bales of Cotton," MS 2855: Box 10: Folder 34. MFP, Hargrett Library.
[95] R.C. Curd and Co to J.A. McHatton, 19 April 1865. MS2855: Box 10: Folder 40. MFP.
[96] R.C. Curd and Co to J.A. McHatton, 19 April 1865. MS2855: Box 10: Folder 40. MFP.
[97] *Ibid.*
[98] *Ibid.*

they wrote, though "if we have war they will go up immediately to a much higher figure."[99] His fortunes were, quite literally, tied to the War.

While James struggled economically, these were the days when Cuba most closely resembled the South of Eliza's childhood, and she romanticized her initial response to the island as she would her memories of Louisiana as a little girl. Havana immediately struck her with its display of fortune, likely related to its proximity to the smuggling and blockade running James and Eliza had so played a role in, and she had found a suitable hotel in which to live run by a fellow southern expatriate. She and James made friends with traveling ex-Confederates when they came through to catch up on news, slander the Union, and, in James' case, form potential business acquaintances. "I can't begin to tell of the crowd that promenaded the galleries and *azotea* of Hotel Cubano toward the end of the war," she wrote later. "They all talked and talked fight, the ex-army men declaring they would not return to their homes with sheathed swords. Alas!" she lamented, "Before their talks came to an end the Confederacy did."[100]

Eliza mourned the loss more than James. "Thus faded the Confederacy," she remembered. "We prayed for victory—no people ever uttered more earnest prayers," though the loss had been coming for some time. "Long expected though it may have been by the clear-sighted among us," she admitted, it "was none the less a severe blow." The crowds of exiles she enjoyed grew immensely, as boats of fresh expatriates seemed to anchor in Havana Bay each day, and Eliza and James wasted little time enlarging their social and business circle among the transients. While Eliza befriended their wives, James took to riding the countryside with Robert Toombs, searching for a plantation to

[99]R.C. Curd and Co to J.A. McHatton, 22 April 1865. MS2855: Box 10: Folder 40. MFP.
[100] Ripley, *Social Life in Old New Orleans*, 288.

take Arlington's place as both a home and a business. Years later, Eliza clearly delineated their interests. "General Toombs joined in many of my husband's trips over the island, and shared his admiration of its unrivaled agricultural wealth," she wrote, "while Mrs. Toombs and I sat in our marble-floored parlor or on the broad, gas-lighted veranda" of the hotel. Unlike the McHattons, however, "one by one…they drifted back to their old homes" or continued their travels elsewhere.[101]

James kept apprised of the cotton market while in Cuba through both his Liverpool brokers and his global contacts. One letter in particular reveals how integrated he was in a network of international southern expatriates, and how he hoped this network would further his business prospects. When Robert Toombs left Cuba for Europe, he carried with him a letter from James concerning a lawsuit, delivering it to Judah P. Benjamin. Despite Benjamin's appointment as a barrister in an English court, he was unable to help James, though he recommended two other gentlemen who could help for £200.[102]

By surrounding themselves with the people most like themselves, they showed their lack of self awareness and insulated themselves from the reality of the uneasy political situation in Cuba. This made Cuba more of a substitute for home than a home itself, a headquarters for an international community that was isolated from the local community. As a substitute, however, it was certainly better than Mexico. Even if it could not be a recreation of Baton Rouge, Cuba was far more similar to Louisiana than Louisiana was to Mexico. Louisianans like the McHattons *felt* they had much in common with Cuba, even if the reality of life in Cuba would prove their feelings

[101] *Flag to Flag*, 124, 130, 132.
[102] Judah P. Benjamin to J.A. McHatton, 8 June 1866. MS 414. Hargrett Library.

misplaced. Planters from both sides of the Gulf of Mexico had long kept tabs on each other, for their shared commodity and life built around sugar cane growth and production ensured economic entanglement. "A record-breaking harvest in Cuba could mean lowered profits in Louisiana," Rebecca Scott explains, or "a new tariff in the United States could be a blow to Cuban producers."[103]

Sharing a crop, however, like sharing a labor system, did not provide a seamless transition for southern expatriates, though Eliza and James' disillusionment was delayed by comparisons to their vanished South. As Eliza's transient friends and news from home reminded her, the Louisiana she thought of as home was likely gone forever. When news came of Abraham Lincoln's assassination, Eliza claimed that "a large party of braves were dining at our house [and] some of them were jubilant." Gen. Breckinridge, however, running from defeat in Cuba, announced, "'Gentlemen, the South has lost its best friend,'" noting concern for how their homeland would be treated as a defeated enemy. Judah P. Benjamin, a former member of the Confederate cabinet on his way to exile in England, rejoined "'We will let the painful subject drop,'" which "acted as a quietus for our boisterous guests."[104]

News came from relatives that made life in Cuba all the more familiar and appealing. "Annie wrote very cheerfully, but they all, every one of them, write us not to come back. The country is terrible," Eliza's friend had warned her in January 1866, "and as long as we have a cent, to stay away."[105] Her brother sent her "a fearful account of

[103] Rebecca J. Scott, *Degrees of Freedom: Louisiana and Cuba after Slavery* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 2.
[104] Eliza Ripley, *Social Life in Old New Orleans: Being Recollections of my Girlhood* (New York: D Appleton and Company, 1912), 288.
[105] Eliza McHatton to Tim, 25 January 1866.Box 10: Folder 42. MFP.

things in New Orleans."[106] Apparently a Union General was using Arlington as his headquarters during Reconstruction. Eliza later mused about a painting of a bird she had made while a girl in school and blamed the Union Army for the destruction of this sentimental canvas. "Perhaps some Yankee may own it now," she wondered, "for during the war they took everything else we had, and surely a brilliant Baltimore Oriole did not escape their rapacity![107] Her most virulent criticism was reserved for her old slaves, however, when she denigrated them as "perfect leaches (sic)," an ironic remark from someone who had made a handsome living by taking advantage of the uncompensated labor of those same men and women. Slavery remained legal in Cuba, a situation that James and Eliza viewed as both an economic and a cultural bonus, evidenced by their purchase of a plantation and enslaved laborers, as well as Eliza's repeated racial remarks.[108]

The plantation in Matanzas to which they moved in May 1866—on the north side of the island, but east of Havana—had been christened Desangaño by one of its former occupants, and James purchased it and its enslaved labor force, along with the remaining contracted time of a large group of Chinese coolies, from a Cuban named Royo.[109] Eliza, long used to the sight and labor of African slaves, was critical of the coolies. When James brought thirty-five new Chinese laborers to the plantation from a recently arrived cargo, Eliza remembered that "the new crowd presented a grotesque appearance" and

[106] *Ibid.*
[107] Ripley, *Social Life in Old New Orleans*, 18.
[108] Eliza McHatton to Tim, 25 January 1866.Box 10: Folder 42. MFP.
[109] "Record of Movement in Cuba." MS2855: Box 10: Folder 39. MFP, Hargrett Library; "Henry McHatton Journal." MS2855: Box 10: Folder 91. MFP, Hargrett Library.

questioned their masculinity. "Beardless, and with long pigtails, loose blouses, and baggy breeches," she thought "they looked like women."[110]

At such times Desangaño seemed like an amalgam of cultures and languages. Contracts were written in both Spanish and Chinese, and interpreters were called in from Havana to translate into English. Eliza certainly felt that the barriers included more than language, and remarked in her memoirs that "the Chinese did not mingle with the negroes, either in their work or socially." She described the raucous environment of a slave holiday dance, offering her opinion that the Chinese, aside from not joining in the festivities, complained too much. "On the whole," she wrote, pitifully and ridiculously, "life was almost as much of a burden to us, with this new discontented element, as it was to the Chinese themselves." She preferred slaves to coolies, though the only two with whom she showed any familiarity remained Zell and Martha, who had journeyed with them from Mexico.[111]

Though the McHattons were now settled on their new plantation, 1866 continued to bring bad news from relatives in the South. Writing again to her brother and sister-in-law in August, Eliza was "mighty sorry to hear how the tax collectors have been serving you."[112] The situation sounded so bad that Eliza predicted the South "will soon get to be like they were in France in the time of Louis XVIII, when…people 'sold their beds and lay in the straw' so they could pay the government taxes."[113] Louis XVIII had been made king by the French Revolution, though he had to rule in exile. To Eliza, the United States

[110] McHatton-Ripley, *Flag to Flag*, 170.
[111] McHatton-Ripley, *Flag to Flag*, 171, 189; "Contract for Chinese Labor." MS2855: Box 10: Folder 45. MFP, Hargrett Library.
[112] Eliza McHatton to Robert and Anna, 26 August 1866. MS2855: Box 10: Folder 42. MFP, Hargrett Library.
[113] *Ibid.*

government had taken the Civil War as a signal that it was now a monarchical dictatorship rather than a Republic. It was ruling the South as a King ruled his subjects. "Were not for some of my own precious blood in the country," she admitted, referring to her relatives, "I would wish the whole concern would go to the dogs. It looks like things did have a tendency that way."[114] Though Eliza could remove herself from the South, she could not remove her family and everyone she cared about, who, like her memories, kept her tied to a place other than where she lived.

The repeated bad news, however, made Cuba seem more and more idyllic in the moment. "I am more thankful daily that I am here," she continued in the letter. "If there's any political disturbance in this lovely land or any oppression we do not find it out," she averred, referring only to her own freedom and blissfully ignoring the enslaved African and Chinese laborers toiling on her recently purchased plantation.[115] She and James remained unengaged with the locals. "The more we see of the Cuban character the more are we convinced that a military government is what they need. They are totally unfit for freedom and the pusillanimous puppies will never have it unless some strong nation fights for it, for them."[116] Even as Eliza decried the military government—or king, as she represented it—controlling her beloved homeland, she saw no irony in calling for just such a measure in Cuba. Despite their similarities, she was beginning to accentuate the differences between the two regions. Whereas the South needed freedom, Cuba needed control. In contrast to the last four years of war, however, she enjoyed the calm and sedentary life at Desangaño. "We lead such a quiet life out here that I scarcely

[114] *Ibid.*
[115] Eliza McHatton to Robert and Anna, 26 August 1866. MS2855: Box 10: Folder 42. MFP.
[116] *Ibid.*

have anything to write you," she claimed.[117] Yet her future and that of the South remained uncertain. "Three years ago we were all so happy in Matagorda—when will we meet again?," she wondered. "God only knows."[118]

Two years after the War ended, having re-entered the business world of a sugar planter with his new plantation in Cuba, James took the opportunity to return to the United States to settle some financial issues. "Don't be disappointed if you don't get a cent," his brother-in-law warned him. "No one in the states will pay a dollar on the past—the war settled all claims so they seem to think."[119] Still, James made the trip to see for himself, and judged the South in cultural and economic disaster. Explaining the situation to Eliza in November 1867, he wrote from New Orleans that "nearly all the [state] house are negroes and I really assure you things look gloomey here and everyone I have conversed with appear to be down hearted."[120] Their familiar racial cast had been inverted and James saw nothing in the way of lucrative business. He informed Eliza that one of their friends, whom he thought was doing "big business," had assured him that, unfortunately, "he is not making any much." With no home or community to return to, Eliza and James settled into life in Cuba, finding its rhythms closer to that of their antebellum years than anywhere else, including the very place where they had spent those years.[121]

Reports of a devastated, severely changed South made the McHattons emphasize—mentally, emotionally, and in their correspondence—the wealth, safety, and racial boundaries of Cuba all the more. Conversely, when Cuba proved less lucrative and

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[117] *Ibid.*
[118] *Ibid.*
[119] R.H. Chinn to James, 19 July 1867. MS2855: Box 10: Folder 48. MFP.
[120] James McHatton to My Dear Eliza, 12 November 1867. MS2855: Box 10: Folder 44. MFP.
[121] *Ibid.*

safe than they had anticipated, James and Eliza's opinion of the South rose. Though Eliza had touted how quiet and peaceful Cuba was, violence erupted in their house in September 1868 when James was attacked by two highwaymen in the middle of the day. Though they demanded his watch at gun and knife point, James almost inconceivably "defended himself with his only weapon—an umbrella," and refused to relinquish his property. The brigands shot at James four times, one bullet finding its mark in his neck, "narrowly escaping the jugular vein." Eliza admitted that "for months past the whole neighborhood has been harassed by thieves and desperadoes. Cattle and horses and hogs are nightly stolen." What was incomprehensible to the McHattons was that James' assailants were well known to everyone in the area and could be easily identified, yet evaded apprehension.[122]

In contrast to the McHattons' earlier perception and misrepresentation of the peacefulness of Cuba, this banditry and violence was far from uncommon at the time. Around the time James was attacked, a nationalist insurgency was building in eastern Cuba that would, one month later, become an armed call to end Spanish rule on the island. The first act of the white leaders of this rebellion was to free their slaves, something inconceivable to the McHattons.[123] Though the revolution was largely on the other side of the island, not all the violence was contained by geography. The concentration of land in wealthy hands on the western side of the island, where Matanzas

[122] E. McHatton to F. Fessir, 21 September 1868. MS 2855: Box 10: Folder 51. MFP.
[123] Ada Ferrer, *Insurgent Cuba: Race, Nation, and Revolution, 1868-1898* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1999), 15, 22.

and Desangaño lay, gave rise to the social bandits that Eliza claimed frequented their plantation.[124]

Neither was their financial situation what they had hoped. The Cuban market for the sugar and coffee the McHattons produced on their Desangaño Plantation was sold under better conditions than their business ventures during the War. There was no smuggling or blockade running involved, yet James was perpetually behind with his creditors, as he had been at his Mississippi plantation. Rather than repay them with earnings, he began borrowing additional funds to pay off the debts he already owed. Despite the size of his operation, he, like many of his fellow plantation owners, placed his faith in the crop of the coming year. For funding, he uncharacteristically turned to local banks, perhaps because his international creditors knew him too well. On one trip into Havana in 1869, James borrowed $12,000, which he figured "will be sufficient to take us through I think until we commence to grind." The profit from his sugar would have to help pay for two other debts he mentioned to Eliza. His lender, a Señor Sainz, "did not want sugar shipt him only molasses," and thus the twelve thousand dollar "advance is on our molasses only I could get no advance on our sugar."[125] The uncertainty of the market was making it difficult for James to guarantee his loans, much less pay them back.

Perhaps due to this shattering of their mythological Cuba, when James next visited the South in 1870 he reported enthusiastically, if without specifics, "I am so glad I came…you have no idea of the number of our old friends I meet here."[126] Having

[124] Louis A. Perez, *Lords of the Mountain: Social Banditry and Peasant Protest in Cuba, 1878-1918* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1989), Introduction.
[125]J.A. McHatton to My Dear Eliza, 17 June 1869. MS2855: Box 10: Folder 65. MFP.
[126] J.A. McHatton to My Dear Eliza, 15 November 1870. MS 2855: Box 10: Folder 82 in MFP, Hargrett Library.

recently been brutally attacked on an island that supposedly lacked problems and oppression, McHatton said of the South, "The place has improved very much."[127]

James returned to America multiple times for business reasons, though none of these ventures worked out well for him. Creditors tried to collect debts from before the War, and while James and Eliza were certainly living the lifestyle of wealthy antebellum aristocrats, cash flow was an eternal problem. While staying with his brother in St. Louis in 1871, James petitioned for bankruptcy and was "duly adjudged a bankrupt." The Court gave him a certificate "for all purposes as a Protection in Bankruptcy," absolving him from his American debts.[128] Though this can certainly be viewed as a business failure, it was also a rational decision. Saddled with American debts, but without American assets, James had every reason to petition for bankruptcy. His Cuban property would be safe, and, in the event that he and Eliza moved back to New Orleans or Missouri, the wealth he brought with him would be protected as well.

Constant travel and his bullet wound took their toll on James' health, but perhaps not as much as the unyielding strain and stress he felt from his business attempts aimed at maintaining a lifestyle. On March 3, 1872, on a trip to St. Louis, he was pronounced dead of "nervous exhaustion" at 58 years old.[129] At the time, he was chasing one last scheme, helping the Unionist sons of his Mississippi plantation partner, Robert M. and Stephen A. Douglas, Jr, file for recompense with the Claims Commission. Unionist soldiers had reportedly stolen their cotton during the War, and they were suing the American government for repayment of that debt. They promised McHatton a potentially lucrative—and certainly illegal, as his testimony would form the crux of their

[127] *Ibid.*
[128] "Certificate of Protection." MS2855: Box 10: Folder 89. MFP.
[129] "Death Certificate." MS2855: Box 10: Folder 106. MFP.

argument—twenty percent of any settlement they were awarded.[130] Whether it was a blessing or a final insult, James died before they learned their claim was rejected.

Eliza remained at Desangaño with her daughter Annella after James' death, though she would eventually remarry another southerner and move to Brooklyn, New York, a place far different from the antebellum South of her memory and imagination or the Cuban substitute she inhabited for almost a decade. After her failed attempt to recreate the South of her memory on a Caribbean island, she settled into life in the North by writing two memoirs and recreating the South on paper. Henry, named after Eliza's brother who, in turn, was a namesake of their father's friend Henry Clay, provided an interesting cultural contrast.

Henry, born in 1856, had been fairly young when his family left the South, though he was aware of his father's vast landholdings, his elite family history, and the social expectations that went along with being a southern aristocrat. When James and Eliza attempted to recreate this in Cuba, for Henry, it worked all too well. Whereas Cuba had been a substitute for the Old South for his parents, it was, culturally, the only Old South Henry actually knew. His parents raised him to assume a role that the Civil War had made both obsolete and illegal in the American South. It still existed in Cuba, and Henry longed to return to the island to live the lifestyle that he felt was in his blood: the elite slave master and aristocratic southern sportsman.[131]

Eliza, however, had been educated in the North and expected the same thing for her son. Fairly silent in the historical record until this point, Henry made it clear that he

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[130] "Memorandum Agreement," 21 July 1872. MS 2855: Box 10: Folder 104. MFP.

[131] Nicolas W. Proctor, *Bathed in Blood: Hunting and Mastery in the Old South* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2002) illuminates the similarities between mastery of the home and mastery of the field, contending that social standing dictated that, in the Old South, any gentleman was, by definition, a sportsman.

hated it. "Have made arrangements to go on a grand fishing party on Saturday," Henry wrote his mother from New Haven Collegiate and Commercial Institute in Connecticut. The ugly northern weather ruined his plans. "This A.M. got up to find about three inches of snow on the ground," he explained, sarcastically proclaiming Connecticut a "Splendid place to live. Yesterday 72, today 31."[132] More complaints about the weather followed. "I will never live in this country," he vowed. "We have frosts every night and rain all day. Beats our rainy season [in Cuba] all to nothing."[133]

Like his mother's opinion of Mexico, the people in the North offered little consolation for the terrible climate. Once, when Henry learned he would miss a visit by some family friends, he was openly disappointed. "I should enjoy our evening with them better than 100 evenings with these Yankee girls that only know what pork and beans is and don't know what this is when it is rain, poor girls." His mind was constantly on the hunting he had done as a southern youth and his longing to return to it. "How I wish Charley [his uncle] could express Frank [his hound] over. How I would make these Yankee hunters open their eyes."[134]

Henry's biggest fear was that his mother would sell their Cuban plantation and he would be unable to return. "Old Desengaño," he lamented, "how I wish I were there and not coming north again. I hate this country…I should be very sorry for you to sell Desengano," he informed her. "I do not think there is any safer thing to put the money into. Whatever you do I want you to know that I never want to live in Yankee land. I have been here three years now," since 1869, and "I think that is long enough to try the place and I hate it more now than I did the first day I set foot on it and hate it more and

[132] Henry McHatton to Dear Mother, 4 May 1872. MS 2855: Box 10: Folder 112. MFP.
[133] Henry McHatton to Dear Mother, 13 October 1872. MS 2855: Box 10: Folder 109. MFP.
[134] Henry McHatton to Dear Mother, 18 October 1872. MS 2855: Box 10: Folder 109. MFP.

more every day."[135] While claiming to hate the cold and the people, it was likely something engrained deeply in Henry's southern upbringing that caused him to gripe. His parents had brought him up with their particular interpretation of the South, the interpretation that came through in Eliza's letters and the books she later authored. Henry knew only the legends and what he had lost, and knew the myth far better than the reality. He did return to Desangaño to live the gentlemanly sporting life he envisioned, but he was so preoccupied with it that the plantation's productivity suffered. As with his father before him, the lucrative opportunities Henry envisioned merely disappointed him.

Culturally and economically, Cuba represented different things to different members of the same family. To James, it was an escape, an opportunity, wealth. To Eliza, it was an isolated economic headquarters; not a home, but a place where she could be comfortable with her lifestyle if not part of a community. Henry saw in Cuba the South as he had learned of it, a land of sugar and slaves that could sustain the last of the southern gentlemen. They all ignored the worst aspects of Cuba as long as they had something to compare it favorably against. For James and Eliza, the New South provided this comparison, with its poor business environment and racially inverted politics. For Henry, it was the North. For all of them, it was more the idea of something better than anything tangible.

To each of them, too, Cuba was not an extension of the South, but a substitute for it. James would never find the wealth he sought in Cuban cane fields, never find the economic opportunities he had made for himself before the Civil War. Eliza would not lament her departure from Desangaño with the same lifelong sense of loss she—and much of her home region—would feel for the mythologized Old South. Henry could not

[135] Henry McHatton to Dear Mother, 24 November 1872. MS 2855: Box 13: Folder 7. MFP.

live his father's life, nor the lives of his storied ancestors.[136] Cuba allowed him a brief glimpse into such a life, but the end of American slavery and Union victory in the Civil War demolished the life he expected to live and broke the chains of those he expected to bind. Cuba represented the hopes and failures of each of these people as they learned that the Caribbean was not an "American Mediterranean," not an extension of the lower South. It provided a brief escape and refuge, but in the end, even a mythologized Cuba could not live up to a mythologized South.

[136]For an interesting comparison of sons' expectations before and after the Civil War, see Stephen Berry, *All That Makes a Man: Love and Ambition in the Civil War South*(New York: Oxford University Press, 2002)and Peter S. Carmichael, *The Last Generation: Young Virginians in Peace, War, and Reunion* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

EPILOGUE

MONEY AND MEMORY: THE LEGACY OF THE MCHATTON FAMILY AND CONFEDERATE EXPATRIATES

As she grew older in America after James' death and her own remarriage, Eliza was aware that her story was unusual enough to interest others, and could be a form of explanation and power for her and her family. In 1896 she penned *Flag to Flag*, a narrative of her family's escape from Baton Rouge and movement through Texas, Mexico, and their life in Cuba. Obviously written after events, *Flag to Flag* emphasized Eliza's view of their journey—in which capacity the book does not largely differ from her letters and contemporary accounts—and hid some of her husband's dissent with the Confederacy. By establishing her and James' credentials as true Confederates, she gained the social capital to congratulate the country on reunion without leaving herself open to charges of abandoning the Confederacy. "The God of hosts gave us victory in defeat," she wrote. "We prayed for only that little strip, that Dixie-land, and the Lord gave us the whole country from the lakes to the gulf, from ocean to ocean—all dissensions settled, all dividing lines wiped out—a united country forever and ever!" Viewed as a departure from the Confederacy and a return to America, her personal story read as emblematic of national reconciliation.[137]

In her twilight years, in a book that was actually published after she died, she wrote of her life before the war, as a girl in Baton Rouge. *Social Life in Old New*

[137] Eliza McHatton-Ripley, *From Flag to Flag: In the South, In Mexico, In Cuba* (New York: D. Appleton and Complany, 1896), 124.

Orleans fit solidly into a body of literature created at the turn of the century by aging southerners eager to reminisce about the glory days of the Old South and shape public memory of that particular time and place and the reasons for Civil War. Eliza realized that her tone, along with the pervading feeling throughout the South, had moved past the desire for a swift reunion to the celebration of her southern homeland. If the truth were a little hazy in her memory, she reveled in this, for it, too, merely strengthened the feelings she had as a youth. "Like all old people who are not able to take an active interest in the present, I live in the past," she explained, "where the disappointments and heartaches, for surely we must have had our share, are forgotten." This, she happily felt, applied to her entire generation. "We old people live in the atmosphere of a day dead—and gone—and"—importantly, righteously—"glorified!"[138]

Eliza was but one of many women dedicated to this glorification. "Women were longtime leaders in the movement to memorialize the Confederacy," Karen Cox explains. These women, Eliza included, arguably established and strengthened the "Confederate tradition." While groups such as the United Daughters of the Confederacy receive the lion's share of attention regarding their ability to memorialize and build the Lost Cause—including monuments, cemeteries, and other symbols—other women had their own personal ways of participating. "Even as the Lost Cause evolved to include new ways of celebrating the Confederacy," which included "writing and publishing history," individual southern remained at the fore. By salvaging the past, their mission focused on shaping the future, as they "sought to educate coming generations of white southerners

[138] Eliza Ripley, *Social Life in Old New Orleans: Being Recollections of my Girlhood* (New York: D Appleton and Company, 1912), 22.

about an idyllic Old South."[139] Such arguments generally center around how groups of women shaped national memory, Eliza shows that individual women played a large role in merely shaping the memory of the future generations of their own families.

Of the McHatton descendants Eliza designed these stories to inspire, Henry was the closest to the events depicted, so devoted to the idea of the Old South that his desire to live in the mythology would eventually lead to the loss of Desangaño. His version of McHatton family history took a larger eraser to their saga than even his mother's, who had been honest, if excusing, of her husband's uninspired response to southern nationalism. Henry ignored this controversy. "He was also a delegate to the Charleston Convention," he wrote of James, leaving out the controversial dissent from the rest of the Louisiana delegation. Instead, Henry focused on the wealth his father accrued in the antebellum years and the toll taken by the Yankee victory. "He owned five plantations in Miss and La and five hundred slaves," he exaggerated. "He lost half a million of money by the war."[140]

One of the few written traces by Henry's younger sister, Aunella, similarly emphasized the toll the War took on her family. Though written in Brooklyn a year after the election of Rutherford B. Hayes, the adolescent girl's journal cast blame on Yankees and slaves with a truly un-Reconstructed pen. Her birthplace, in "a one story old fashioned shanty" on the Rio Grande, was a vastly different scene from the fluted columns of Arlington on the Mississippi. One story Eliza had engrained in her memory served particularly as a harsh reminder of their loss. "I remember my mother saying that

[139] Karen L. Cox, *Dixie's Daughters: The United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Preservation of Confederate Culture* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003), 1-2, 12.
[140] "Henry McHatton Diary, April 1870," MS 2855: Box 10: Folder 91. McHatton Family Papers, Hargrett Library, UGA.

in time of the war when I was born she dug a hole and hid her silver there so none of the soldiers would find it," Aunella professed. Similar stories with similar endings flowed throughout southern families: "A negro found it and so told the soldiers of it," and the silver was the McHattons' no more.[141]

In the letters of Henry's son, Thomas, almost eighty years after James and Eliza made their infamous voyage, the family's selective memory continued. "My grandfather was a representative to the Charleston Convention from Louisiana," Thomas wrote, ignoring, like his father before him, the unpopular position James took while at the Convention. Also like his father and Aunt Aunella, Thomas stressed his family's losses while maintaining southern loyalty. James, he wrote, "was driven off of his plantation as a result of the Civil War and migrated to Cuba where he met and lived, in Havana, for a year with Robert Toombs." Implicit in the explanation Thomas offered was the wrongful pursuit of his grandfather by enemy soldiers, and dropping the name of Georgia's most famous un-Reconstructed son reinforced his patriarch's loyalty to the Confederate cause. Finally, Thomas added a bit of outright misinformation. "My grandfather never came back to this country," he lied, "and died an unreconstructed rebel."[142]

Thomas showed, too, that his family's story, however it had shifted and evolved over the years, played a role in shaping his own identity. Born in Brooklyn, New York, before his father Henry returned to the South to practice medicine, Thomas was concerned that some would doubt his southern identity. James and Eliza's story, particularly when it included famous Confederates like Robert Toombs, lent him the

[141] "Henry McHatton Diary, April 1870," MS 2855: Box 10: Folder 91. McHatton Family Papers, Hargrett Library, UGA.
[142] Thomas H. McHatton to Mr. T.W. Reed, 13 April 1944. MS 2855: Box13: Folder 3. McHatton Family Papers, Hargrett Library, UGA.

legitimacy to sway his skeptics. "All of this is to lead up to the fact and to explain why I was born in Brooklyn, New York rather than in Macon, Georgia," he wrote in a letter after explaining his grandparents' journey. "My father's mother [Eliza Chinn] had remarried, after my grandfathers death, a Connecticut Yankee who had been on General Kirby Smith's staff in Texas during the Civil War and was living in New York," he clarified while dropping yet another famous family acquaintance. Most importantly, he reassured his recipient, "I was brought back to Georgia before I could walk and talk and was reared in Macon."[143] If his birthplace drew cynical attention, surely the storied ancestry of an "unreconstructed rebel" with associates like Robert Toombs and Kirby Smith—and notably not the nationalist, moderate politician Stephen Douglas—provided enough validation to qualify Thomas as a true southerner. The story of James and Eliza that he revealed placed his family's journey in the Lost Cause vein of history prevalent at the time: righteous in their cause, unrepentant in their loss, loyal to their defeated home.

James McHatton could not pass a legacy of wealth to his descendants. He died a bankrupt in the United States and his devalued Desangaño Plantation in Cuba could not even sustain his family for one generation. Rather than a bequest of riches, his successors instead became heirs to an estate of memory, a family story of pride in culture over a loss in wealth. Eliza made certain that this inheritance, at least, would be theirs without dispute, and the narrative of the McHatton family joined those of other expatriates in an ever converging, mono-causal plotline of southern loyalty in rebellion. As Lost Cause literature obscured the abomination of slavery behind a veil of "state's rights" rhetoric and glorified the Old South rather than apologizing for it, the McHatton

[143] Thomas H. McHatton to Mr. T.W. Reed, 13 April 1944. MS 2855: Box13: Folder 3. McHatton Family Papers, Hargrett Library, UGA.

family's story paralleled this trend. Their family narrative bragged of antebellum prosperity but hid the crass desire for continued accrual and extolled pre-war political participation while glossing over the position taken. This tale made their family appear loyal, the Confederacy innocent, and the South, victimized.

Exiles and expatriates risked both their economic and social situations in their search for economic and personal security, perhaps more than they ever reckoned they would have to. When their gamble was laid to rest, however, for the McHatton family and others like them, memory trumped money as the final prize.

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