

The Civil War

Through the Eyes of
Lt. Col. John Withers
and his wife
Anita Dwyer Withers

American Civil War Diaries
of a Confederate Army Officer
and His Wife, a Woman in Civil War History

Lt. Col. John Withers
Anita Dwyer Withers

with
Jennette Green



Diamond Press

THE CIVIL WAR, THROUGH THE EYES OF LT. COL. JOHN WITHERS AND HIS WIFE, ANITA DWYER
WITHERS

A Diamond Press book

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A few months ago, I discovered the images of Lt. Col. John Withers' diary on the National Archives website. I was amazed that his story had not been published before. As I went beyond his diary and researched more of his life, I soon learned that Withers was an extremely well-liked and respected man. He was also closely acquainted with many of the notable people of Civil War history, and his diary is rich in facts and detail of that time period. It is a fascinating read.

While researching the background for Lt. Col. Withers' book, I discovered that his wife, Anita Dwyer Withers, already had her Civil War diary transcribed by the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. It is available online. It has been a rewarding and fascinating journey to weave together Lt. Col. Withers and Anita's diaries to create a multi-dimensional picture of the Withers' lives together during the Civil War.

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Thank you to everyone at UNC-CH for making Anita's diary available to all. Special thanks to Jim Crawford, who scanned the text via OCR, and to J.G. McKim and Natalia Smith, who encoded the text.

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Introduction

This book weaves together the diaries of Lt. Col. John Withers, an Assistant Adjutant General for Jefferson Davis, and his wife, Anita Dwyer Withers. Reports of battles fought meld with domestic life in these journals, creating a multi-dimensional picture of the Withers' lives together during the "War Between the States." Jointly, their diaries encompass the entire length of the Civil War; from May 1860 – September 1865.

A West Point graduate, John Withers served as an officer in the U.S. Army in Michigan, New York, California, Washington, Oregon, and Texas. As a Brevet Captain in 1857, Withers was appointed as Staff-Assistant Adjutant General for the Department of Texas.

Captain John Withers' wife, Anita Dwyer Withers, was "the daughter of a very distinguished citizen of San Antonio, and who was connected with the exciting scenes that delivered Texas from Mexican rule and Indian terror," later wrote John Withers' friend, D.S. Stanley. Anita married John on June 15, 1859.

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In September 1860, six months after the birth of their first child, Captain Withers was ordered to Washington, D.C., and assigned for duty as an Assistant in the Adjutant-General's office. As Anita was very close to her family in Texas, she was deeply troubled by the move. She wrote, "I regret it mightily." In Washington, D.C., John served under General Samuel Cooper's command until March, 1861.

John Withers' family was from the south. His uncle, Clement Comer Clay, was the 8th Governor of Alabama, (and also in his lifetime, Chief Justice of Alabama, Congressman, and U. S. Senator). When Withers received a letter from his aunt, Susanna Withers Clay (Clement Clay's wife), urging him to resign his commission in the U.S. Army and come south to join the Confederate cause, Withers did so. He joined the Confederate Army in March, 1861, and "was appointed a Major in the Adjutant-General's Department." (Stanley)

As an Assistant Adjutant General working in Richmond, VA, both Lt. Col. Withers and his wife were closely acquainted with many of the notable figures of Civil War history, including C.S.A. President Jefferson Davis, his wife, Varina Davis, and the Secretary of War. Edward A. Palfrey later wrote, "his relations with the President and Secretary of War were of an intimate character, as was necessarily the case from the position he held." In addition, Withers mentioned meetings with famous Confederate Generals Robert E. Lee, Joe E. Johnston, A.S. Johnston, and others. He casually alluded to other heads of state that he met as a matter of course in his position.

While stationed in the Confederate capitol of Richmond, Virginia, both Anita and Lt. Col. Withers recorded Civil War events as they happened, including the Seven Days Battles, and other battles that took place during the “War Between the States.” Each also wrote of the more personal aspects of their lives, such as Anita’s near fatal illness and the agony of their young son’s death.

Anita’s diary records the family’s transition from Texas to Washington D.C., then to Richmond, VA, and later to Texas again near the end of the war. In all, her journal records events from May 1860 – September 1865. Many selected excerpts from her diary are included, which complements Lt. Col. John Withers’ journal (October 1860 – December 1862).

Both Lt. Col. John Withers and Anita’s diaries provide a detailed Civil War timeline rich in facts and details. John and Anita were ordinary people living in extraordinary times. Their story is well worth being remembered.

May – July, 1860.

Anita's Diary.

May 4th. 1860. *May the 1st. was the first time that I went down to breakfast with my Husband since the birth of our baby. That morning I practised on the Piano, and took a ride in the afternoon.*

May 4th. *All well (T G) Mrs. Mitchell, Miss Conrad, Miss Post, and Miss Rodriguez called to see me, they were all delighted with little Edward. We took a short drive. My Mother came over in the evening to take care of the baby so that I might go and hear the Swiss bell Ringers but I did not care to attend.*

May 7th. *A very windy day. The Capt. and myself made a few visits today, for the first time since the birth of my Edward.*

May 10th. Thursday. *A beautiful day, our bath house was completed today, it is a mighty nice one. My Mother and myself went down to see it this morning. Ma bought the baby a sweet little hat at \$4. We had a number of calls today, and we took a drive in the evening. The Captain was planting Water melons all the afternoon.*

May 14th. Monday. *Quite warm and close today. I stayed at home as usual all the morning. In the afternoon we took the baby out driv-*

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ing for the first time, he paid Miss Conrad a visit, they were all delighted to see him, he behaved exceedingly well, didn't cry at all. Capt. and Mrs. Lee called whilst we were out. We remained at home in the evening.

May 22nd. Tuesday. *Today the baby is two months old, his Papa weighed him and he has gained 2 lbs this last month. He now weighs 11 lbs.*

June 15th. *The Anniversary of our marriage, we have been married a year 1860. In the morning we arranged the house for an entertainment. Miss Aurelia and Mrs. Mickling came in today to assist me. They made the chicken salad and got Joe [Anita's brother] to help them. We set the table very prettily in the afternoon. I have had the headache all day, and got worse in the evening. I was obliged to leave the company and go upstairs to bed. About half past seven we went to the New Church with the baby, a great number of persons were already there. The Church was all lighted very prettily. Father Shean performed the ceremony. The party went off very well, although the Captain sent the Mexican musicians off. Joe played Robert on the Violin and I accompanied him on the Piano.*

June 19th. Tuesday. *The Capt., baby and myself took a ride before breakfast. In the afternoon I made a few calls, went to the casita and took a drive with Joe and the Captain. After Tea Joe and Capt. went to call on Col. Lee—and Mr. Toutant. Joe talked about Miss Whitely and made my Mother mad.*

June 20th. Wednesday. *The Capt., baby and myself took a drive before breakfast. My Ma and myself went to see Isabelle Casiano who*

has a young baby. Joe was fined 6 dollars today for galloping on horseback in town.

July 22nd. Joe, my Ma and myself went to six o'clock Mass, I lost a little veil I had. Today the baby Edward is four months old, he weighs 13 and a half pounds. My Mother, the Capt, Joe, Myself, Charlotte with the baby went out to Major Dashiell's after our siesta. We had a nice moonlight drive returning. After Tea my Ma, Capt. and Joe commenced talking about the cattle on the Ranch, upon which topic my Mother got mad and went home.

September, 1860.

Sept. 6th. *The Captain received an order to go to Washington quite unexpectedly to us. I regret it mightily.*

Sept. 14th. Friday. *We left home for Washington by the way of Columbus. My brother came a part of the way with us. I hated to leave my Mother and home greatly.*

Sept. 27th. *We arrived in Huntsville. They were all glad to see us.... The baby is sick, we sent for a Doctor on the 29th. On the 28th. I was obliged to wean Edward much to my sorrow.*

October, 1860.

Lt. Col. John Withers' Journal.

Monday, 1st. Anita, Edward and I, left Huntsville about 7, A.M., on our way to Washington: we traveled all day and night. Edward was pretty well during the day, but was not so at night.

Tuesday, 2nd. We again traveled all day and night, although our little boy had fever nearly the whole time.

Wednesday, 3rd. We reached Washington City about daylight, and put up at Brown's Hotel. I reported at the Adjutant General's Office after breakfast, and then went house hunting. The Prince of Wales, and Suite, arrived here at 5, P.M., and went to the President's.

Anita: October 3rd. Wednesday. *We arrived in Washington, and stopped at Brown's where we spent nearly a fortnight. My baby is sick all the time, Dr. Edwards is attending him.*

Thursday, 4th. In company with the other officers of the Army, as well as the Navy Officers, all in full dress Uniform, I went up to the President's at 12, M., to-day, and paid my respects to

Lord Renfrew: I bowed to him, and he to me, as I passed him. I shook hands with Mr. Buchanan and Secretary Floyd. The reception room was jammed with people. The Prince is a pleasant looking, amiable appearing young man, with a big nose. I had seen the Prince and suite pass down Pennsylvania Avenue earlier in the day, on his way to visit the capitol and other public buildings.

Friday, 5th. Baron Renfrew, the Prince of Wales, went to Mount Vernon with his suite to-day. Nothing special going on except the magnificent display of fire works near the President's in the evening: Anita and I saw a portion of them.

Saturday, 6th. The Prince of Wales and suite left to-day for Richmond, Virginia. Anita and I both saw them as they passed down Pennsylvania Avenue.

Sunday, 7th. Anita and I attended St. Aloysius church to-day, and heard a splendid sermon by Father McGuire.

Sunday, 14th. During the past week I have been busy house hunting, and finally determined to take a furnished one, No. 261, "I" St., between 17th and 18th. We have been much worried all the week on account of Edward's being indisposed—he is much better to-day. It is raining and quite cool, cold I might say, and we have fire in our room.

Monday, 15th. We moved from the Hotel to our rented house on I Street, between 17th and 18th to-day: we had no wood, coal or gas, but succeeded in getting the former two before night. We are very nicely fixed on the whole. I was down in

the city a while in the earlier part of the afternoon, but remained at home at night. Pleasant weather.

Tuesday, 16th. Anita and I were engaged getting our groceries, and other little necessaries for house keeping. We have gas to-night. Our cook and chamber-maid answer our purposes very well. Pleasant day. Frost.

Wednesday, 17th. Our little son is better to-day—we took him out in the carriage with us as we went visiting: we made half a dozen calls. Fine weather. We are faily [sic] house keeping again. Mrs. Genl. Is. Johnston called to see Anita sociably late in the afternoon.

Thursday, 18th. Anita and I took Edward out visiting with us to-day, although he was quite sick last night—the ride in the open air seemed to do him good, but he got worse again late in the afternoon. The doctor came whilst the little fellow was suffering, and seemed to understand at once what was troubling him: he made a prescription for him which relieved his pain and put him to sleep. Mr. Calvert, the gentleman from whom I rented our house, spent the evening with us.

Friday, 19th. Cloudy and windy all day: rained hard at night. I wrote letters all the evening. Our little boy is very much better indeed. Nothing going on. Mrs. Dr. Wood called to see Anita to-day. The storm was very severe at night.

Saturday, 20th. Rainy, disagreeable day. I was at home most of the day and at night. Edward is very much better.

Sunday, 21st. Anita and I went to St. Matthews Church in the forenoon, and took the baby out riding after dinner. Fine day. We consider Edward well now. Dr. Wood called to-day.

Anita: October 21st. Sunday. The Captain and myself went to St. Mathiew's Church this morning at 11 O'clock. The baby is a great deal better, I might say well since yesterday. Thank God. We dined early today so as to give the servants time to go out. After dinner the Captain hired a carriage and took Eddie, nurse and myself to Georgetown. We saw some sweet places on the heights. After Tea we took a walk, the Captain wrote to Joe.

Monday, 22nd. Pleasant day. I was duly installed at my desk in the Adjutant General's Office to-day. Anita and I walked out in the afternoon, and I walked down the avenue after tea. Our baby is seven months old to-day: he was not well last night, and kept us up until about three O'Clock.

Tuesday, 23rd. I was at the Office until 3, P.M. Anita and I walked down the avenue after dinner, and I called to see Genl. Harney after tea. I found the General alone—he has rooms at a negro man's named Wormley. We sat and talked for about two hours.

Wednesday, 24th. Anita walked down in the City before dinner, with Charlotte and the baby: I found her complaining of fatigue when I came from the Office, she ate only a little dinner, and then went to bed. I remained at home all the afternoon. Lt. and Mrs. A.P. Hill, and Capt. Williams called at night and sat an hour or so. After they left I went down for Dr. Edwards,

who came up to see Anita—he gave her a dover powder to take, which nauseated her and made her vomit.

Thursday, 25th. Anita had violent headache and nausea this morning, and spit up a little blood in her efforts to vomit. I remained at home with her all day: she got some better by noon, and was much improved by night, but still kept her bed.

Friday, 26th. Anita was better in the morning, and continued to improve all day. I was at the office to-day, and called in the evening to see Mr. Bell, and to bid Maj. and Mrs. Nichols goodbye.

Saturday, 27th. Neither Col. Cooper, Maj. Townsend nor Capt. Williams were at the office to-day, so Capt. Garesché and I had it all to our own way. I took Anita and Edward out riding in the afternoon. Beautiful days and moonlight nights—the nights are not bright as we have them in Texas, there being much more moisture in the air here than there. Nothing very interesting going on.

Sunday, 28th. Anita and I walked to church at ten O'Clock, but we could not get a seat and returned home: in the afternoon we went down to the laying of the corner stone of the St. Aloisius Orphan's Asylum, and heard a sermon by the Rev. Father McGuire. There were several thousand persons present. McLean and Ihrrie came around in the evening: Dr. Smith, Dr. Foard, and A.P. Hill were around to see us during the day. Cloudy nearly all day, and strong indication of rain, but no rain fell.