MISS BUIE, THE SOLDIER'S FRIEND.

LEORA H. McEACHERN and ISABEL M. WILLIAMS

Mary Ann Buie, one of the interesting people who came to Wilmington during the Civil War, must have been a controversial person as those who wrote of her evidently thought she was either a saint or a nosey old maid. Many references to her are found during the years 1861-1865, the majority being in the Wilmington Daily Journal and the letters of James Ryder Randall to his fiancee. The daughter of J. R. Buie of Richmond County, North Carolina, Miss Buie was a graduate of Floral College and had taught school in South Carolina and Augusta, Georgia for at least seven years before the war. In September, 1862 she was in Edgefield Court House, South Carolina when she wrote to Governor Vance protesting the lack of favorable publicity being given North Carolina Troops. She stated that she had written for the press under various pseudonyms and was asking the Governor "if you will sustain and aid me in writing history."

James Ryder Randall, prevented by his health from active service, was in Wilmington during the war years, first as a secretary to a shipping company and then at Headquarters of Naval Defenses. He was engaged to Katherine Hammons of Hamburg, Edgefield District, South Carolina to whom he wrote many and detailed letters. Mr. Randall and Miss Hammons also had close friends in Augusta so it is most probable that they had known Miss Buie long before the war.

The first newspaper account of Miss B. appears August 20, 1861: "Miss Buie, of North Carolina, we think a native of this section of the state, her brother now residing in Brunswick, is on a visit to Wilmington for the purpose of procuring subscribers to the Southern Field and Fireside. Miss B. has laid before us various productions of hers for the Southern Press, and we have no hesitation in saying that they are creditable to herself and worthy of the patriotic cause—Southern Independence. The Southern Field and Fireside is, we believe, the only really family newspaper now printed in the southern states. The subscription is very moderate—only $2 per year. Miss Buie may be found at the City Hotel during to-day and to-morrow where she will be pleased to receive subscriptions as above. She leaves to-morrow for Augusta. We hope she will receive a liberal list in this place. None will regret the small outlay for a really valuable Southern family paper, as completely filled as the New York or Philadelphia literaries, but with matter unexceptional in tone and spirit." Things must have gone well with Miss B. as the paper next day recorded her decision to remain in Wilmington another day and she "will be pleased to receive subscriptions..." Kelly's Book Store had an advertisement in the August 22nd paper that subscriptions for Southern Field and Fireside, published in Savannah, could be obtained at the store. By March 1863, subscription rates had advanced to $4 a year.

Early in the war, Miss Buie left journalism to specialize in solicitations for the welfare of the soldiers. It was her dedication to this cause that made her a celebrity. On July 14, 1863 the Journal had the following: "Miss Buie's Appeal—Attention is directed to this appeal. It is a zealous one, and Miss B. evidently has the best good of our brave men at heart. Will she not find a responsive sentiment among those upon whom she calls? 'Help the Soldier and you help yourself' has become an axiom. But the appeal is to a higher feeling than that of self. The Soldier should have an open door, through which to enter each man's and woman's heart, on account of his bravery and fidelity, not to speak of the inestimable privileges he is fighting to save for this same man and woman.

City Hotel, Wilmington
July 14th, 1863

Miss Buie will be pleased to receive hospital stores of any kind for the late wounded in the last fights at Charleston. It will afford me much pleasure to receive money, clothing, lint, or anything to benefit a sick or wounded soldier. All my collections will be handed over to Dr. R. W. Gibbs, Surgeon General of South Carolina, at Columbia, and he will have it applied properly. While the dark cloud of war hangs over our heads, we can spread sunshine by liberality and kindness to our brave Soldiers. I have come before you with a woman's heart to plead the sufferer's part. Persons wishing to aid will find me here to-day and to-morrow. Our all is at stake. Do not let the expenses you may be at for our brave Soldiers be

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This is the first reference to Miss B. as the "Soldier's Friend".

The July 16th paper stated “Miss M. A. Buie, a native of this State and district, for some years past president in Augusta, Georgia and Edgefield District, South Carolina, where since the commencement of the war she has distinguished herself by her devoted and untiring exertions to contribute to the health and comfort of our soldiers, is now here endeavoring to raise a fund for the North Carolinians taking part in the defence of Charleston, who may be wounded or become sick while so engaged... Miss Buie will remain a few days longer at the City Hotel where she can be found.” The next day she acknowledged $160 had been contributed. Ten days later she was still receiving contributions for the North Carolina Troops in Charleston but by the 27th she had begun visiting the local hospitals. “Miss B. visited the hospital [Wayside] on Thursday and on Friday returned with an apron filled with wine, limes and fans which she distributed among the sick and wounded with many kind and encouraging words to the gallant sufferers.” General Hospital #6 thanked Miss Buie for a gift of limes. On August 11th, the Reverend Colin Shaw acknowledged $200 from her for the North Carolina soldiers on Sullivan’s Island, South Carolina, and she was still collecting.

By October, 1863, Miss B. had evidently turned her attention to the hospitals in North Carolina and Virginia, particularly those in the Wilmington area. Sometimes previously she had acquired a permit to land delicacies from the ships that had run the blockade. On the 21st of October Mr. Randall writes “Miss Buie’s (Soldiers Friend) great annoyance is Col. Crenshaw of Richmond, a large owner of Steamer engaged in blockade running. About three months ago, she told him that she wished her next ship to enter would be lost. About two days after this pious prayer, he did lose the Hebe. She boasted of this vociferously. Last week, Crenshaw refused to subscribe to her fund. She imprecated all kinds of vengeance upon him—reminding him of the Hebe—and asking God to destroy the next vessel of his that attempted to pierce the blockade. Well, on last night, the old witch was gratified. Crenshaw’s fine steamer ‘Venus’ was chased ashore and burned precisely on the same shoal where the ‘Hebe’ was wrecked. Old Buie has cast the Witch of Endor completely into shade.” But Col. Crenshaw’s troubles were not at an end as on December 9th Randall writes “Col. Crenshaw, upon whom Miss Buie launches her anathemas, has just lost another Steamer—the third one in three months. She was a new vessel called ‘Ceres’ and was abandoned and burned, yesterday morning. I am afraid Miss Buie is the Sister of Baalzephub. The next time I see her, I must bestow my most dulcet smiles and all my shinplasters.” Again on January 16th “Miss Buie’s anathema still clings like destiny to Col. Crenshaw. Day before yesterday he lost another ship!”

Miss Buie apparently was well known throughout the Confederacy. In March, 1864, Sterling C. Eve who was in the medical department of a hospital in Wilson, North Carolina wrote Richard P. Paddock, Superintendent of Military Hospital #4 in Wilmington “Miss Buie is a little sick with Neuralgia. A great many of the first ladies of this place [Wilson] have called on her. Mrs. Geer sent her a nice dinner today.” Also from Wilson E. E. Blake, Hospital Steward of General Military Hospital #2, wrote in June “It would be entirely superfluous in me to add any compliments to a lady so well known as

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The BYLAWS: ARTICLE II, Section 3. Dues are payable at the annual meeting. Members failing to pay their dues by the end of the calendar year shall be dropped from the rolls. If you have not paid your dues by December 31, 1974, this is the last Bulletin you will receive.
Miss Buie, and who is so often and highly extolled of late by Medical Officers of the Army and Navy.” Again in July he wrote “Miss M. A. Buie so widely known throughout the Confederacy, will please accept our thanks for her valuable donations.” The Matron of Winder’s Hospital in Richmond wrote to thank Miss Buie “so well known throughout the Confederacy for her widespread benevolence.”

During June and July, 1864, Miss M. A. Buie, the Soldiers’ Friend, was thanked through letters to the journal for the following: 72 pounds coffee, 4 bottles wine, 4 bottles brandy and 1 pound tea to the hospital in Wilson; coffee, French Brandy, wine, Tamarind to Winders Hospital, Richmond; $10 to General Hospital #4 in Wilmington, signed Spencer Galloway, Co. C, 21st South Carolina Volunteers; contributions to the North Carolina Hospital at Petersburg, signed J. G. Brodnax, Surgeon in charge—Miss B. listed 150 pounds sugar, 48 quarts ale, 60 yards shirting for bandages, 42 pounds loaf sugar, 6 bottles brandy for General Beauregard’s disposal, 4 bottles ale, a bottle honey, ½ pound tea, $38 cash, 1 bottle pickles, 10 yards shirting, 6 yards shirting, pickles, $40 Confederate money, $5 in silver as the contributions sent on this date to Petersburg; $10 to Hospital #4 in Wilmington, signed John D. Riels, a wounded and disabled Soldier, Co. C, 7th South Carolina Battalion; sack coffee, gallon Old French Brandy, 1 bottle choice wine, fine lot limes, soap, linen to General Hospital #2 at Wilson; 2 gallons Brandy and 1 sack coffee to General Hospital #5, Wilmington, signed Jas. R. Cleveland, Hospital Steward; $1,000 to Wayside Hospital, Columbia, South Carolina; 1 case gin to General Hospital #4, Wilmington, signed Mrs. A. E. McCaulin, Matron; 1 bag coffee from Frazier & Co. through Miss B., 136 pounds coffee, 2 pounds tea, 1 pound soda, 1½ dozen nutmegs, pineapples, black pepper, 50 bottles French Brandy, 18 bottles wine, 12 bottles ale, 2 bottles Port, 8 gallons molasses, 45 yards linen duck, signed R. P. Padidson, Hospital Steward.

In this same period Miss Buie also through the newspaper thanked the ship Annie for a box containing limes, bottle limes and 2 bottles of Brandy; Mr. Savage for his kindess in permitting the landing of articles subscribed to her; Jervey & Mueller of Nassau for $80; Mrs. Thomas Roberts for 2 bottles of wine, 3 cakes of soap, a package of old linen, 4 yards for bandages, 2 packages of corn starch, $100—Mrs. Roberts had given $300 before; Mr. Petteway for 1 bottle French Brandy; Mr. Shackleford for 2 bottles French Brandy; Mr. Salinas for $50; Howell & Harris for deduction of $1,200 on a large lot of coffee deducting $400 off each sack; Miss Ann Smith for $10 for Winder Hospital; Captain Coxeter for 10 cases gin; Mr. Donelly for $400 on a lot of coffee for Georgia Soldiers; J. W. Murray of SS Alice for limes, etc.; the Express Company for carrying things free. She requests Officers of Ships landing articles through her “permit” to inform her when they are landed as she “has legal authority to collect and land any such delicacies from ships.”

During 1864 there were at least two Relief Associations and five hospitals in Wilmington, probably more. J. MacRae was president and William Reston secretary of the Wilmington Relief Association and there was a Soldier’s Aid Society which administered a relief fund. Hospital #4 was at the corner of Dock and Front Streets, #5 was the Marine Hospital, the Wayside was at Front and Red Cross, the Naval Hospital on Chestnut between Water and Front and one at the City Garrison.

It is important to remember that anyone who could was speculating in cotton that was being shipped through the blockade. Even Miss B. made some money, as Mr. Randall writes on June 18, 1864 “Miss Buie speaks of her sacrifices of person and fortune. She has had every luxury under the sun, and by cotton shipments has realized not less than $5,000 in gold, she showed [Dr.] Shepperdson this morning which she keeps in her room. At present she is very sweet towards the Hospital Steward here. He sees the gain and profits by it.”

The only description of Miss Buie that has been found is Mr. Randall’s in 1864 and is obviously a caricature. “Met Miss Buie this morning. She wanted to know what you all thought of her. ‘Greatest woman in the world’, I said. She was about to have her photograph taken in order to send it to England, by express invitation. Says London Illustrated News or something of that sort sent for her’s and Gen. Beauregard’s. What a conjunction! Imagine Buie’s Squat body, long mouth, twitchy chin, oyster eyes and preposterous nose held up to the pictorial gaze of Hold Hingland — as the Cockneys style their native land. Miss M. A. B., the Florence Nightingale of the South. (Sketched from life by our Special Artist in America). Her vanity has swollen into the ultra prodigious and sublime. Her mouth widens to gulp down the compliments of interested wags who have designs upon her for blockade brandy and sardines. Still, she has been of Stupendous value in making the extortioners disgorge, and I regard her as the very Empress of Benevolent Scavengers.”

In July, 1864, Mr. Randall writes Kate “I have nothing to do with any girl younger than Buie and then she is engaged. At least she says so. She told me that the young man was but 28, and his father had dedicated a piece of poetry to her. She quoted some of it to me but I cannot recall any but the first line: ‘O Mary Ann! dear Mary Ann!’” and “Miss Buie sends you her regards. She has been quite kind to me, and, like you, ‘I have not the heart to speak about her any more’... She is desperately in love with a young fellow at the Hospital—the Steward. She has given him thousands of dollars and unlimited luxuries. They are engaged; but I am afraid that the precious youth will fly the track in the end. She is quite old enough to be my Mother: your Poet has no taste for the antique. She has done a vast amount for the Soldiers—the Soldiers have done a vast amount for her.”

Just before the First Battle of Fort Fisher, the soldiers there sent the following letter to “Miss M. A. Buie, Soldier’s Friend, Wayside Hospital #5, Wilmington. Fort Fisher, December 16th, 1864. Dear Miss Buie: We enclose you herewith $135, being the proceeds of a Concert given to-night at this place, for the purpose of aiding you to give the sick soldiers at Wilmington a Christmas dinner. Wishing it was more, we remain your hearty well wishers, W. H. Miller, M. D. Pate, N. M. Hamlet, W. L. Anderson, J. P. Hawkins, E. M. Whitehead, M. L. Whitehead, J. J. Fleming, B. H. Justice and Balfour.
L. C. Siler.” The newspaper commented “Miss Buie, whose name has become historical by her untiring devotion to the soldier in not only supplying but anticipating his wants . . . acknowledges the receipt of the money inclosed, and has already distributed it to the suffering and wounded. When the brave soldier is so mindful of his comrade, how much more interest and liberal should be the citizen, who owes his protection to those brave boys. Let our citizens bestir themselves. The wounded need attention and delicacies.”

She then turned her attention to civilians who were in need. A refugee at Mrs. McCaleb’s Hotel, Wilmington wrote on December 30, 1864 “We are refugees from Fort Fisher, shelled from our homes, and lost all that we had. We have appealed to others for relief, but it was positively refused; but Miss M. A. Buie, the soldier’s friend, has sought out the refugees and has indeed been a true friend. She has paid out of her own purse many dollars, and given the hungry and half starved little ones bread to prevent starvation. She has the grateful thanks of us all, and many will be the prayers offered by the homeless mother, at the shrine of Almighty God, for her future and eternal felicity.”

Miss Buie’s last communication through the Wilmington newspaper during the war appeared on January 7, 1865 “Miss Buie regrets having to inform the soldiers that are continually appealing to her for aid, that she is quite sick, unfit for any kind of business, being confined to her room from the effects of a severe cold, she would take this occasion to state that she would be very thankful for a few lines.”

The Journal of January 22, 1867 quoted from the Charleston Mercury “Miss M. A. Buie has issued a circular, in relation to her noble enterprise of raising funds for the orphans of Confederate Soldiers . . .” Apparently each district was to have a local treasurer and Governor Jonathan Worth of North Carolina suggested that William A. Wright of Wilmington be one.

The last we have on Miss Buie is in the Wilmington Morning Star, November 2, 1878 “We omitted to mention in our last issue that Miss Mary Ann Buie well known as “the Soldiers Friend”, died at Aiken, S. C. on Tuesday last. She had been spending some time in Charleston, and was on her way to Augusta, when she was taken sick on the train and stopped at Aiken, where, after a brief illness, she died. Miss Buie, who was a sister of Dr. D. M. Buie, was formerly a resident of this city, and was a faithful friend to the soldiers during the war, hence the title by which she was distinguished during the remainder of her life.”

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**FOOTNOTES**

1. James Ryder Randall Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Library of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
3. James Ryder Randall Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Library of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
5. Wilmington Journal.
6. Williams and McEachern records: Colin Shaw (August 16, 1812-July 8, 1905), Presbyterian Minister; Graduate University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; Union and Columbia Theological Seminary; Chaplain Bladen Volunteers; stationed Camp Wyatt that later was Fort Fisher; 1861: 18th, 61st, 51st Regiments; served through the war; buried Sampson County.
8. Wilmington Journal, June 2, 7, July 9, 1864.
9. Wilmington Journal, June 2, 6, 7, 17, 25, 27, July 6, 9, 11, 18, 1864.
15. Dr. Duncan McFarland Buie lived on 3rd street between Ann & Num; m. Mary Jane McKay (McKay), niece of Anna M. Parsley; d. May 7, 1895 while resident of Burgaw.