

Assignment #4

Scholarly History Journal

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“As Ann Barnes Archer gazed upon the dull, frozen grounds of her Mississippi plantation in January 1856, she resigned herself to another day of dismal weather. “A cloudy day suits my feelings best,” she wrote to her absent husband.””¹ This is the opening line from *A Family Firm; The Marital and Business Partnership of Ann and Richard Archer* by Nikki Berg Burin. That “hook” line that Burgin contended with and gave a snap shot of Ann’s diary on the thirty plus years of the Archer’s marriage was about; loneliness, despair, and resentment.

The essay of *A Family Firm* painted the picture of what plantation life was *really* like for many wives in the early to mid-nineteenth century. Instead of the stereo-typical idea of a plantation family living a spread of acreages with and overseer out in the fields with the slaves, preparing for the harvest, servants within the home. The wives had servants to take care and look after the children while the mother’s read or cross-stitched in the rocking chair while the morning sun warmed the sitting room. The husbands conducted business as usual until dinner time. The family would sit around the table enjoying the home cooked meal by a servant and the husband would talk about his day and ask his wife how hers was. In reality though, Burgin showed what managing and living on a plantation was like with Richard and Anne Archer.

Ann was a sixteen-year old girl who married Richard Archer, a man thirty-years her senior. The Archer’s, over the course of their thirty-three-year marriage had sixteen children. Nine of them, living. What started out as an inheritance plantation in Mississippi, for the marriage of Richard and Ann with one-hundred slaves attached to the plantation, turned into four

¹ Nikki Berg Burin. “A Family Firm: The Marital and Business Partnership of Ann and Richard Archer.” *Family Values in the Old South*. ed. Craig Thompson Friend and Anya Jabour (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2010). 135.

more plantations, multiple, change-of-hands business deals, gambling on a new railroad system; steam engine, and the multitudes of slaves that went with all of this land.

Burgin hit you from the beginning on how Ann Archer felt regarding her life as a plantation wife. As written throughout the essay, Ann Archer disliked being on a plantation without her husband, Richard. Ann was the plantation manager for the inherited planation when Richard was away and that was, ... all the time. A plantation manager was a person who the owner trusted, and there was no better plantation manager, than your own wife. Ann had the duties of the home and servants and the care of the children. Along with the managing of the slaves, production of day-in and day-out business with the fields, cotton-gins, and the local markets come harvest time. Ann wanted her husband to sell off a couple of the plantations and business deals to be able to spend more time at home. Unfortunately, Richard did not concede to what Ann wanted, even though, he was just as exhausted, if not more than Ann was. But how do you sell off property when it is making a profit for you, twice-fold? *That* was Richards dilemma. He just...could not.

Many of the references via the footnotes, came from the Primary Source of Ann Archers journal over the course of her marriage. In the footnotes, the entries varied from Ann's own thoughts, discussions between Ann and her sister, mother, friend. Many of the entries were Ann feelings when she would receive a letter from her husband.

Reading the essay, Burgin has the reader feel the distraught that Ann is feeling while her husband is away. When she receives a letter stating that he is not returning for another month due to an issue that's arise. The turmoil that comes to Ann as she has lost another baby, in a row, and her husband isn't there to manage the planation. Burgin has the reader understand that Planation life wasn't all rainbows and sprinkles as one may think, and that's why I like how Burgin set the

essay up. She hit you hard in the first line, and then, built up throughout the essay and came full circle, back to the first line so that the reader understood what life was like for Ann Archer.

Bibliography

Burin, Nikki Berg, "A Family Firm: The Marital and Business Partnership of Ann and Richard Archer," in *Family Values in the Old South*, ed. Craig Thompson Friend and Anya Jabour (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2010), 135-157.