



The Death of a Confederate: Selections from the Letters of the Archibald Smith Family of Roswell, Georgia, 1864-1956

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Spanning nearly a century, the letters in this collection revolve around a central event in the history of a southern family: the death of the eldest son owing to sickness contracted during service in the Confederate Army. The letters reveal a slaveowning family with keen interests in art, music, and nature and an unshakable belief in their religion and in the Confederate cause.

William Seagrove Smith was a private in the signal corps of the Eighteenth Battalion, Georgia Infantry. Smith was part of the force defending Savannah until it fell in late 1864, and then marched with General William J. Hardee in his famous retreat out of the city and through the Carolinas. Like so many other soldiers on both sides of the conflict, William Smith fell not at the hands of an enemy but from disease. He died in Raleigh, North Carolina, on July 7, 1865. A parallel and complementary story about William's younger brother, Archibald, also emerges in the letters. As a cadet at Georgia Military Institute, Archibald was (as his parents fervently wished) exempt from service; however, he ultimately saw—and survived—action before the war's end.

Scattered among the many lines in the letters that are devoted to the two brothers are a wealth of particulars about agricultural, industrial, and social life in the family's north Georgia community of Roswell, the Smith family's flight from Sherman's invasion force, their lives as refugees in south Georgia, and a final reunion of the Smith brothers outside of Savannah just after the city's fall. Also included are a number of moving exchanges between the Smiths and the family that cared for William in his final days.

A brief history of the Smith family through 1863 begins the correspondence, while the letters following the war reveal their fortitude in the face of William's death and the hardships of Reconstruction. The volume concludes with selected letters from the subsequent generation of Smiths, who conjure images of the Old South and revive the memory of William. Like the most distinguished Civil War-era letter collections, *The Death of a Confederate* introduces a personal dimension to its story that is often lost in histories of this sweeping event.

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