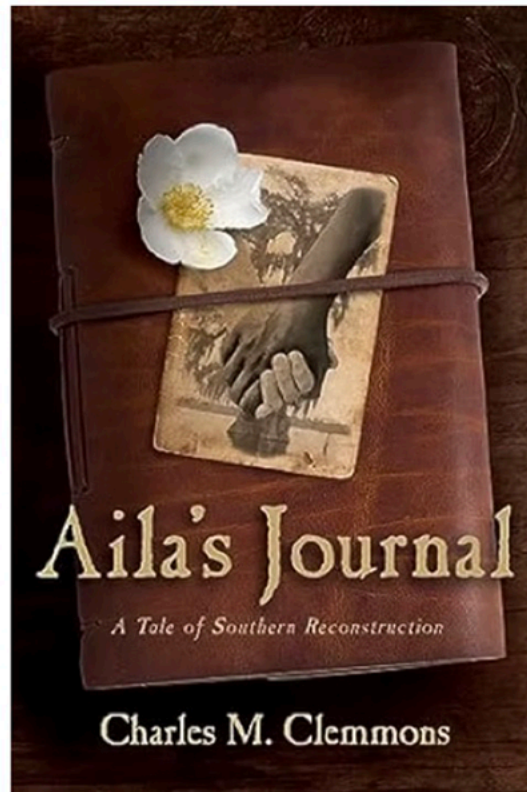


## A Tale of Southern Reconstruction - an Editorial Review of "Aila's Journal"



"Aila's Journal" by Charles M. Clemmons receives five stars and the "Highly Recommended" award of excellence from The Historical Fiction Company

### Award:



## Book Blurb:

Relive the story of two young women, one White, one Black, as they struggle for survival, dignity, and purpose against the tide of history in the late nineteenth century.

Aila's Journal tells the story of Aila MacKenzie, a White indentured servant, and Mary Jane Sanders, a Black slave, who meet at age thirteen on a small farm near Wilmington, North Carolina. The Civil War has left the South, the community, and personal lives in shambles. Jubilation over the emancipation of the slaves had been replaced by oppression, discrimination, hatred, and violence directed toward Blacks and their sympathizers. The two women struggle together with hardships during the war and Reconstruction into the Jim Crow era, culminating in the 1898 race riot and coup d'état in Wilmington. Through their shared experiences, they become lifelong friends.

For the author, Aila's Journal is a work of introspection, the primary purpose of which is to encourage examination of history's relevance to our values today. As such, publication and sale will be on a not-for-profit basis.

**Book Buy Link:** <https://geni.us/aeAoUNR>

## Editorial Review:

"Aila's Journal" is a captivating journey into the historical past and the soul of a young white indentured servant, Aila, amidst the American Civil War. Author Charles M. Clemmons crafts a richly detailed story about the life and thoughts of the protagonist, providing readers with an intimate glimpse into the harsh realities of slavery. The novel begins with a vivid description of the Southern landscape in the summer of 1864, along the banks of the Cape Fear River.

Clemmons skillfully captures the stifling atmosphere, smells, and characteristic sounds of the era, as well as Aila's daily struggle for survival and identity in a divided society.

*"Mud squeezed between her bare toes as she chose her steps carefully, trying to avoid sharp roots hidden in the muck. Feels like puddin' but it don't smell like it. she thought. More like hawg turds. I bes' be quiet passin' 'em stables colored folks stay in. No tellin' what 'em bucks might be up tuh. The sweltering heat and humidity sweat-soaked her shirt. She could still see the setting sun on the horizon through the bramble and majestic outstretched arms of live oaks ornamented with long strands of Spanish moss. Bullfrog croaks and tree frog chirps floated from the swampy delta made by Mott's Creek. Waves of cicada choruses echoed around her, almost covering the hum of annoying mosquitoes around her head."*



The story revolves around Aila's relationship with her employers and her interactions with others as an indentured servant, highlighting the disparities between their lives and the human similarities that transcend societal barriers. Authentic dialogues and profound thoughts of the main character bring to life the social context of the time, revealing diverse perspectives on religion, freedom, and life in general.

The narrative also focuses on Aila's connection with nature and the river, providing her with a sanctuary amidst the adversities of slave life. The detailed description of the landscape and the shining white flowers adds a poetic and symbolic element to the story, emphasizing the beauty that can be found even in the most challenging circumstances:

*"Then she noticed something bright white among the bushes beside the path. Coming closer, she could see several cup-sized white flowers. Moving some bush branches, she could see an open area with a bush-sized tree covered with several of the flowers, brightly lit by rays of the setting sun. "Well, I'll swanny!" she exclaimed quietly. "What purdy flahers!" Drawing closer, she sniffed one of the flowers. What a nice smell! Looks like God jes' put 'em thur an' shined his light on 'em jes' fur me! God does make a purdy world. We jes' ain't seein' it sometimes. She picked one of the smallest blooms and put it in her hair."*

In a chance encounter with a girl of color, Aila discovers similarities and differences in their lives, emphasizing the complexity of relationships among slaves. This sequence adds depth and humanity to the main character, highlighting that, despite harsh conditions, there is room for compassion and mutual understanding.

"Aila's Journal" tackles sensitive themes related to slavery, race, and freedom, offering the reader an introspective perspective on American history. Through his vivid and detailed style, Charles M. Clemmons manages to create a captivating and emotional story with well-defined characters and an authentic atmosphere of the era. The tragic events surrounding Wilson Dunbar intensify tensions and explore the impact on the slave community. The recorded dialogues among them bring to the forefront difficult choices in the face of fear and the desire for freedom. Dunbar's death and the slaves' escape mark a turning point, changing the fate of the Sanders farm and adding complexity to the story. The relationship between Aila and Mary Jane illustrates solidarity in facing prejudices.

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Exploring themes of friendship, compassion, and the struggle for freedom adds narrative depth. The relaxation of restrictions imposed by James paves the way for learning and change among characters. Family traditions, such as pig slaughtering, bring captivating realism. Details about daily life, including eating habits, contribute to the authenticity of the narrative. The dramatic event at Fort Fisher highlights the impact of the Civil War on communities, placing the protagonists in the face of moral dilemmas and uncertainties regarding freedom and justice. "Aila's Journal" becomes a poignant journey into the lives of characters in a complex historical period.

The writer explores the solemn atmosphere of Christmas in 1864 amid the Civil War and uncertainties in the Sanders community. Despite threats and chaos, the author authentically captures the spirit of the holiday, emphasizing joy and hope amidst challenging conditions:

*"Before the war, Christmastime had been a joyous occasion for both the celebrants in the Sanders home and the Sanders slaves. Not only was the religious significance of the day important for Christians, both Black and White, but it also was viewed as a festive time to celebrate the coming new year and the ebb of winter's short days and long nights. Christmas 1864 was different, though, solemn and shrouded in uncertainty."*

Authentic dialogues and the decoration of the Christmas tree add vibrant life to the story, illustrating how the community maintains normalcy and celebrates Christmas despite the war. The events on Christmas Day emphasize the contrast between the apparent joy of the holiday and the brutal reality of war. The author skillfully addresses complex themes such as the fear of invasion and the uncertainty of the future, adding narrative depth. The detailed setting of the festive meal immerses readers in the traditions of the American South during that period, providing an authentic glimpse into the culture of the time.

*"Group chatter erupted as everyone went about gathering servings for their supper plates: venison hash; lard-fried squirrel, boiled potatoes and onions; fatback-seasoned collards and black-eyed peas, insurance for health and happiness in the coming new year; baked sweet potatoes; butter beans; and lard biscuits with butter. Apple, pecan, pumpkin, and sweet potato pies completed the feast. The sounds of conversation were replaced by chewing and the rustle and tinkle of cutlery. At least for the remainder of the evening, Peace on Earth was a reality in the Sanders home."*

In the intriguing continuation of the story, the author explores the dramatic transitions and daily challenges faced by the characters, providing a complex portrayal of post-war life in the Campbell community. Significant events and personal changes bring sensitive questions about race, freedom, and identity to the forefront in a crucial moment in American history. The author captures the drama and daily efforts required to cope with the new circumstances, adding a touch of realism and authenticity.

"Aila's Journal" delves into post-war life and the complexity of events, illustrating attempts at reconciliation and political struggles. The narrative offers an authentic and profound insight into a crucial moment in American history. The author reveals the collaboration among farmers and social events, highlighting the joy of marriage and the story of family losses. The love story between Aila and Alan, emphasized in the marriage proposal, adds warmth amidst social and racial tensions, emphasizing that love can be a powerful force for change.

*"She understood. I'm hopin' yuh still care fur me . . . 'cause I still care fur yuh." "Good heavens, Alan! I've loved yuh ever since that first mule ride we took tuhgether tuh ol' Preacher Campbell's place back when I was fourteen. I been waitin' all mah life tuh show mah love fur yuh!" The two arose from their chairs and embraced as if the promise of their lives had been fulfilled. "Of course, we kin marry. That'd make me the happiest woman alive!"*

However, racial attacks and the 1919 epidemic serve as reminders to the reader that the path to equality and justice is strewn with obstacles. The story remains captivating, and the character developments suggest multiple possible directions for the novel's further development.

In the emotional conclusion of Aila's journal, it underscores the narrative power and profound message, exploring the complexity of interracial relationships and the struggle for civil rights in the postbellum and post-abolitionist South. The revelation of Aila's tragic past adds an emotional dimension, emphasizing the traumas caused by racial hatred and the healing power of love and understanding. The writer brings optimism and reconciliation, highlighting the importance of family ties and the message of unity and solidarity.

"Aila's Journal" is not only a captivating chronicle of historical events but also a profound introspection into the human condition in the face of injustice and the fight for freedom. Sensitive themes such as slavery, racism, and the struggle for freedom are delicately and deeply addressed, and the powerful message of unity, compassion, and reconciliation resonates in the reader's soul. Through its complex story and well-drawn characters, "Aila's Journal" not only reflects history but also illustrates timeless human challenges, turning it into a literary work that remains alive in the reader's memory.

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