

Dr. Victoria Ott:

Exploring the history and identity of young women in the old South

BY PAT COLE



Ott

We're all familiar with the innumerable caricatures of the Scarlet O'Haras and the elite and quintessential young Southern belle of the pre- and post-Civil War South. But Birmingham-Southern historian Dr. Victoria Ott has quite a different view, especially in terms of the role these young women played in shaping Southern culture.

Ott's research on this topic, a continuation of her doctoral thesis, culminated in her first book being published last year by Southern Illinois University Press entitled *Confederate Daughters: Coming of Age During the Civil War*. In the book, she delves into gender, age, and the creation of Confederate nationalism by examining the lives of several teenage daughters of Southern slaveholding, secessionist families.

"I argue in my book that their willingness to support the Confederacy was born out of a conservative movement to support and maintain the status quo, to

make sure they stayed elite girls and that they would eventually marry elite men and have elite families," says Ott, who is an assistant professor of history. "Yet, ironically, I found too that these young girls were at times challenging convention. They became political and civic activists throughout the war; entered areas of paid work, primarily as teachers; initiated a liberalization of courtship behavior; and took on new roles in the home like childcare. They were very willing to step out of traditions and expectations if it meant preserving the traditional path for elite, slaveholding women.

"These young women lived in a patriarchal society that held them captive to a way of life. Although bent on sustaining their families, their political engagement—rooted in the female youth culture—was expressed through their clothing as well as through social activities, relationships with peers, and interactions with Union soldiers."

Ott also explores the issue of war and memory in regards to this age group. She contends that they created in their published and unpublished memoirs a unique female identity from that of older Southern women, which she terms the "Confederate belle" image.

"This image helps augment our understanding of women's roles in supporting the Lost Cause narrative that attempted to venerate the Confederacy, as well as to support a return to racial and gender hierarchy

in the postwar era," she describes.

For the book's genealogical and historical research, Ott drew from several personal and published recollections of the war, slavery, and the Old South. She spent dozens of hours browsing historical U.S. census records online and mining state archival sources and libraries for slave-holding families that had daughters between the ages of 12 and 18 when the war began. She spent an entire summer traveling and visiting research centers such as the Southern Historical Collection at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill and the Virginia Historical Society.

"In my searches for girls coming of age in the Civil War South, I was able to come up with a sample group of 85 young women," says Ott. "I dove into the diaries and letters of these young girls, most of whom were born between 1843 and 1849. I found one girl who started a diary when she was 13 and wrote until she was 28."

In fact, the majority of the diary entries she found from the Civil War-era were written by teenage girls. Twenty eight of the young women in her study were from Virginia.

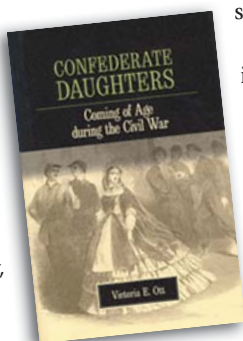
"It was much harder to find diary writings from other age groups during that period," she notes. "These young girls were daughters of the Southern gentry and likely had more time to write."

Ott could very easily identify with some of the girls' writings, but wanted to stay objective as an author.

"As a married woman myself, my hearts breaks a little when I read the diary of a young woman whose beau was on the battlefield," she says.

Her book falls right in line with her main field of research which centers on the U.S. South and women's history with regard to the pre-Civil War and post-Civil War periods.

She says she has learned through her studies how history often has viewed teenagers as apolitical or





Dr. Victoria Ott (center) received this year's Bob Whetstone Faculty Development Award from BSC Interim Provost and Ada Rittenhouse Snavely Professor of Biology Dr. Wayne Shew (left) and Dr. Bob Whetstone.

apathetic, yet these girls found their own meaning out of a war, which in turn shaped their identity. While they supported the fight against the northern enemy for the freedom to own slaves, these young women also expanded their own personal rights and liberties.

"It made me realize that when young people come of age during a time of crisis—be it war, economic depression, or a major environmental catastrophe—the experience becomes a crystallizing moment in their lives," says Ott. "Then, as they get older, it sets their world view, and they look at life through the lens of that experience, whether knowingly or unknowingly."

Ott holds bachelor's and master's degrees in history from the University of Central Florida and a doctorate in American history from the University of Tennessee.

As the daughter of a University of North Alabama history professor, she grew up in Florence, with the college campus "literally in my backyard," Ott notes. She started college at UNA as a theatre major, but got turned on to history instead after eventually transferring to Central Florida.

"What really got me excited about the study of the South and women was a Southern history course I took during my undergraduate years at Central Florida," she says. "The way the professor wove the story of Southern women into her lectures left me wanting to learn more. I'm inspired by the women from the past. It's their strength, courage, tenacity, even their mistakes, that I enjoy reading about."

is among a bold new generation of critics providing a radical shake-up to those Southern images.

"Southerners back then weren't the kind of homogenous group that people like to think they were," remarks Ott. "I think Southerners and their history is very complex, and often over-simplified in our popular culture. I chose to study those complex issues that stem from race, gender, and ethnic differences."

Ott joined the BSC faculty in 2004 after leaving a teaching stint at the University of Tennessee. She teaches core courses in Civil War and Reconstruction, Old South, New South, and U.S. Women. She also teaches a first-year student seminar each spring called *Reforming America*.

"What has been pleasantly surprising about the students here is how much they 'raise the bar,'" she says. "They ask questions and bring up perspectives about history that I don't even think about, and they make me want to be a better professor."

Ott is a member of the college's Faculty Advisory Committee, serves as an advisor to three student organizations, and is invited to lecture from time to time at special events on- and off-campus. She has written numerous encyclopedia articles and contributed to a book of essays published by the University of Alabama Press in 2008 entitled *The Great War in the Heart of Dixie: Alabama during World War I*. Her essay deals with African Americans working on the Muscle Shoals project in northwest Alabama and how their new economic roles became a stepping stone in the path

Through her readings, she's also discovered that specific details of Southern women's contributions to America's history and traditions remain largely stereotypical. She

to gaining civil rights.

Although nothing could quell her love for researching history, Ott does say she would much rather be known for her teaching and scholarship. One of her main goals has been to avoid simply spoon-feeding information to her students and to teach them to think in the tradition of a true liberal arts education.

"I encourage them to critically examine information rather than memorize facts and dates," she remarks. "I want to give them the tools of history, but I also want them to make their own informed position; to come up with their own interpretation about the past from the evidence they're given."

Ott's teaching has made an impact and drawn attention. This past fall, she was recognized with the 2008 Bob Whetstone Faculty Development Award. The cash award, named for the 1955 BSC graduate, professor emeritus, and former chair of the Division of Education at BSC, is presented annually to a non-tenured faculty member who has demonstrated excellence in teaching during the previous year. She plans to use her monetary award for expenses associated with her new research project.

"I am working on a new project that I hope will culminate in a second book," she says. "It is dealing with poor and yeomen white families in Alabama before and during the Civil War, with particular emphasis on how this group used gender ideals and imagery as a source of social and legal empowerment. Currently, I am mining the court records of this socio-economic group."

Ott's non-academic pursuits include hiking, live music, and documentary films. She also is deeply concerned about animal welfare.

"All the animals I have taken in over the years have been either neglected or abandoned animals," says Ott, who has a dog and three cats. "I try to advocate for those animals in some way or another."

Four longtime BSC faculty members retire with a combined 114 years of service

Birmingham-Southern will lose an incredible knowledge resource when four longtime professors, whose years of service total more than 100 years, retire at the end of the spring semester. Here are a few details of their accomplishments and careers, along with their comments:



Allen

Mildred Allen Professor of Music

For Mildred Allen, a gifted operatic soprano once noted by *The Birmingham News* for her "impeccable musicianship," music has always been and continues to be foremost in her life.

During her 23 years at BSC, she has been an integral part of the vocal faculty and has directed many opera productions in the College Theatre. Highlights of her professional singing career include 10 years with the Metropolitan Opera as a principal artist and a solo engagement with the New York Philharmonic.

"Many of my former students have

become finalists at Metropolitan Opera auditions in New York, and I am very proud," says Allen, who joined BSC in 1986. "I've always tried to teach them plain stick-to-it-tive-ness; to not be deflected by defeat in auditions; to improve and stay with it."

Since she was a youngster growing up in parts of Tennessee and Mississippi, Allen has had a passion for classical music and opera. She graduated magna cum laude from the University of Mississippi with a bachelor's degree in vocal performance, and earned a master's summa cum laude from the New England Conservatory of Music.

"I really love teaching and especially working with young singers," Allen expresses. "I've also enjoyed instructing classes in the Harrison Honors Program at BSC and being around those dedicated students, as well as formulating the multidisciplinary honors course "Impressionism in Painting, Music, and Literature."

For a long time, she has been a champion of new music, particularly the work of her BSC colleague Dr. Charles Norman Mason [professor of music], who composed the song, *Caged Skylark*, for her. She sang the title role in his opera *Daphne at Sea* in 1999.

In terms of post-BSC plans, Allen says she will remain active in local art and cultural organizations, especially Birmingham Opera, and continue teaching voice lessons through the BSC Conservatory and from her home. She also plans to travel with her husband, Dr. Edward Taub, in his work as a neuroscientist at UAB.

Dr. James "Jim" Cook '68 Professor of Music

"Some of the most memorable parts of life are the things that happen for the first time," says Birmingham-Southern organist Dr. Jim Cook. "I remember the first time I had a student win first place in an organ competition beyond Alabama. That was the most exciting news I had ever heard!



Cook

"The student was a junior and she had competed against organists from graduate school as well as from all over the Southeast. That's when I thought that maybe I was doing something right."

Although Cook will remain at BSC as a part-time organ teacher, he'll be retiring after the spring term as he finishes his 35th year at BSC.

Cook graduated from Birmingham-Southern in organ performance and earned a master's and Ph.D. from the University of Texas. A native of Birmingham, he began teaching at BSC in 1974, developing a specialty in organ performance and music history classes.

"After working with students over a long period of time, from two to four years, and remembering what they could do when they started, and then finding out what they can do now ... it's wonderful," expresses Cook.

In addition to his teaching on the "king of instruments," Cook directs the Chancel Choir at Birmingham's First United Methodist Church, where he has served on the music



LaMonte

staff since 1974. He continues to perform throughout the Southeast and has been an organ consultant to many churches in Alabama.

Cook also is a national officer with the Organ Historical Society and maintains their database that documents pipe organs all over the country. His online *Introduction to the History of the Pipe Organ* is used as a textbook in several colleges and universities throughout the country.

Dr. Edward LaMonte

Howell Heflin Professor of Political Science

Dr. Edward LaMonte doesn't just teach his students, he "engages them," while sharing knowledge of his active participation for many years in local government and community life.

A professor of political science at Birmingham-Southern since 1987, LaMonte has taught his students such varied topics as U.S. public policy, civil/human rights, leadership, and ethics and politics. He grew up in Columbus, Ohio, and is the recipient of an undergraduate degree in history from Harvard and a master's degree and Ph.D. in political science from the University of Chicago.

He says unequivocally that "the best part of teaching has been associating with students both inside and outside the classroom—over an extended period of time—and watching with delight as old assumptions were challenged and sometimes cast aside, new insights were gained into intellectual interests and community and world conditions, unexpected opportunities developed, and career decisions were made."

During his 22 years on campus, LaMonte has served as chair of the Behavioral Sciences Division, dean of the former Adult Studies Program,

and instructor in the college's Master of Arts in Public and Private Management program. He branched out in 2000 to become director of the college's International Programs Office (now known as the Sklenar Center) to help develop policies for students who study abroad and also serves as coordinator of BSC's international studies major.

For his encore, LaMonte plans to travel with his wife, Ruth (they have trips planned to Northern Ireland and Scotland this July and the Middle East in the fall), and teach overseas as a Fulbright Senior Specialist. He recently completed the first draft of an essay on the career of former Birmingham Mayor David Vann as an elected official.

"After this essay, I would like to write on the significance of the election of Richard Arrington Jr., viewed not purely academically, but also more personally," says LaMonte, who was Arrington's senior staff member from 1979-87. "I also want to maintain some involvement with BSC's international efforts and hopefully teach a course on campus from time-to-time after the 2009-10 academic year."

Dr. Eileen Moore

Professor of Education

For the past 34 years, Dr. Eileen Moore has trained many student teachers and has served as a visionary with big ideas when it comes to integrating technology into the classroom.

Moore joined the Birmingham-Southern faculty in 1975. Originally from Florence, she has a bachelor's degree in art from Florence State College and a master's and doctorate in education from Auburn University.

While she says her work in the Education Department has been particularly rewarding, she will miss her current level of interaction with



Moore

both students and faculty.

During her 44-year career, Moore has taught on the graduate level and in elementary, middle, and high schools throughout Alabama, as well as been actively involved in national and state educators' associations. She also has traveled to many countries overseas to attend teaching seminars and has taught at foreign universities.

Moore teaches seven courses each year at BSC, with recent courses being Creative Arts in Teaching, Teaching High School Subjects, Reading in the Content Area, Teaching Mathematics, Human

Growth and Development, and Seminar in Teaching Technology.

"I will continue to be supportive of the Education Department and new faculty on this campus," she remarks. "This is an exciting time to be a teacher. The National Council for Teachers of Mathematics has made a 180-degree change in their philosophy and pedagogy. The change from worksheet-driven courses of study to a focus on student inquiry has been amazing."

In post-retirement, Moore says she will continue teaching, but her venue will change. Unbeknownst to many, she is a tremendously talented quilter.

"I currently teach quilting at three different places in the Birmingham area," she says. "As teaching always does, quilting fills me up and always leaves me wanting more."

Remembering Professors Holliman and Bailey: two greats of BSC biology

Two well-respected former biology professors at Birmingham-Southern died in February 2009. Each, because of the length of his service to the college and because of his impact—both in the classroom and beyond—will long remain in the memories of BSC faculty, staff, and the many students whose lives and careers they influenced.

Dr. Dan Clark Holliman, professor emeritus of biology, died Feb. 19. He was 76. A native of Jefferson County, Ala., who held bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees from the University of Alabama, Holliman retired in 2000 as the Ada Rittenhouse Snavely Professor of Biology at BSC. His teaching and research careers at BSC, UAB, the University of Alabama, and Dauphin Island Sea Lab on Dauphin Island, Ala., spanned 44 years, including 38 at Birmingham-Southern. He also conducted research in the Galapagos Islands and the Amazon River Valley at the first international rain forest symposium in Peru. He was among those involved in the creation of the first rain forest canopy walkway in the New World.

In the tradition of the liberal arts, this skilled research scientist taught honors courses on Henry David Thoreau and studied under Thoreau scholars at Concord, Mass. He worked with the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Science Foundation, Coastal Area Board of Alabama, and NASA. He was on the staff of the Alabama Museum

of Natural History as curator of mammalogy and had been contributing editor for the quarterly series *Nature South*. He was instrumental in the establishment of the Audubon Mountain Workshop at Mentone, which for more than

30 years has been a highly-regarded annual spring program for adults and children on the natural history and ecology of the Southern Appalachian Mountains.

Holliman authored 35 scientific papers and was a member of Phi



Holliman



From left, Professor Holliman, Chemistry Professor William Mountcastle Jr., and Professor Bailey

Beta Kappa. His research interests included rare and endangered species and avian and mammalian ecology, with emphasis on the taxonomy of aquatic macro invertebrates. The subjects of his research ranged from purple gallinules, clapper rails, and beach mice, to wetlands and land use studies in the Southeastern U.S. His work led to the protection of specific endangered species, including the Perdido beach mouse, and aided in



the establishment of the Bankhead Wilderness.

His many formal honors include the Gardner Award from the Alabama Academy of Science for notable achievements in the field of science in Alabama, ODK Excellence in Teaching Award at BSC, Legacy Award for the creation of the Greystone Educational Wetland, Alabama Governor's Award by the Alabama Wildlife Federation for the Wildlife Conservationist of the Year, and Exemplary Teaching Award by the Board of Higher Education and Campus Ministry of the United Methodist Church. Informally, he was honored by the high regard of his colleagues in the scientific and environmental communities of his home state, one of whom described him, at a March 14, 2009, memorial service in Yeilding Chapel, as one of the greatest all-around naturalists Alabama has ever produced.

Dr. Scot Duncan, a member of the current biology faculty at BSC, in the same service, called Holliman "an inspiration," and said he should be remembered for his scholarship, his impact on the environment, and his impact on hundreds, perhaps thousands of students.

At the request of family, donations, designated "Dan Holliman Memorial Gift," may be made to Birmingham-Southern through the Office of Institutional Advancement, 900 Arkadelphia Road, Birmingham, AL 35254.

Dr. Paul Clinton Bailey Sr., a former chair of the Department of Biology and the Division of Math and Sciences at Birmingham-Southern, died Feb. 27 at the age of 87. With master's and doctoral degrees from Vanderbilt University, he joined the faculty of Alabama College (now University of Montevallo), serving as professor and chair of the Biology Department from 1947-63. He then came to BSC, where, in addition to his work in the Division of Math and Sciences, he served as acting president and academic dean at the college until his retirement in 1985. He was awarded an honorary doctorate of literature degree from Birmingham-Southern in 1993.

Bailey, a noted research geneticist, dedicated more than 20 years of his career to cancer research identifying numerous causes and treatments of lymphoma. He worked to publish several college textbooks for freshman biology, and his academic pre-med program at BSC produced many doctors and dentists in practice today.

Honors accorded him include Phi Beta Kappa, Omicron Delta Kappa, Pi Tau Chi Honor Society, Society of Sigma Xi, and Beta Beta Beta Honorary Biological Fraternity. He was recognized as Marquis's Who's Who in the World and Outstanding Educator of America. He also was honored with the Alabama Academy of Science Distinguished Service Award and listed in the *Library of Alabama Lives*.

At the request of family, donations designated "Dr. Paul C. Bailey Scholarship Fund" may be made to Birmingham-Southern through the Office of Institutional Advancement.



Bailey

Flowers receives Exemplary Teacher of the Year Award from United Methodist Church



Flowers

Michael Flowers, professor of theatre and chair of the Department of Theatre and Dance at Birmingham-Southern, has been presented with the 2008-09 Exemplary Teaching Award funded by the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry of the United Methodist Church.

The award is presented annually to a BSC professor who is characterized by excellence in teaching; civility and concern for students and colleagues alike; commitment to value-centered education; and service to students, the institution, the community, or the church. Nominations are solicited from the college community and are reviewed by a faculty committee.

"Michael is a role model for his students, demonstrating high ethical standards, a passion for learning, an outstanding work ethic, and the discipline that one needs to succeed—whether in the classroom or in a profession," said Dr. Wayne Shew, interim provost at BSC and Ada Rittenhouse Snavely Professor of Biology. "He is a dedicated teacher and is willing to put in the time and energy to ensure that he does the best job possible."

Flowers has taught theatre courses at Birmingham-Southern since 1984. He earned his bachelor's degree from Arkansas State University and his master's from the University of Mississippi.

Bruess to publish eighth book



Bruess

Dr. Clint Bruess, professor of education at Birmingham-Southern, is writing his eighth book, entitled *Promoting Health Behavior*, scheduled for release by the Benjamin Cummings Publishing Co. of California in 2012.

Intended as a high-level college text for use in personal health courses around the country, the book will provide a comprehensive and rigorous introduction to the theory and practice of health promotion. Bruess plans to use concept modules throughout the book to help students recognize and focus on the main ideas of each chapter.

"The heading of each module is a carefully designed statement of an important health concept," Bruess explained. "Each concept heading is a focal point for a module, and all the module's text and illustrations will come together around that concept."

Bruess' already published books he co-wrote, three of which are active college texts, are *Selected Readings in Health* (Macmillan Co., 1970), *Implementing Comprehensive School Health* (Macmillan Co., 1978), *Sexuality Education: Theory and Practice* (Wadsworth, 1981—revised in 1988, 1994, 2004, and 2009), *Decisions for Health* (Wadsworth, 1985—revised in 1989, 1992, and 1995), *Healthy Decisions* (Brown & Benchmark, 1994), *Sexuality: Insights and Issues* (William C. Brown Co., 1986—revised in 1989 and 1992), and *Exploring the Dimensions of Human Sexuality* (Jones & Bartlett, 2000—revised in 2002, 2004, 2007, and 2010).

Two of the books, *Exploring the Dimensions of Human Sexuality* and *Sexuality Education: Theory and Practice* are used in classes at BSC as well as at a number of colleges in the United States, Canada, England, and Australia.

Bruess came to Birmingham-Southern in 2001 after serving as dean of the School of Education at UAB for 12 years. He received his bachelor's degree from Macalester College, his master's from the University of Maryland, and his Ed.D. in health education from Temple University.