

# PUTTING RUMORS TO REST

BY VICKY DICKSON

Ella Swain and her beloved "Genl" must finally be resting in peace, now that their legacy is no longer besmirched by the rumors that have dogged the Southern belle and her Yankee husband for almost 150 years. It's all thanks to *Undaunted Heart*, a new book by Suzy Barile, which tells the story of the Chapel Hill marriage of the daughter of UNC president David Swain and Union Gen. Smith Atkins, shortly after the end of the Civil War. And it's an enthralling tale.

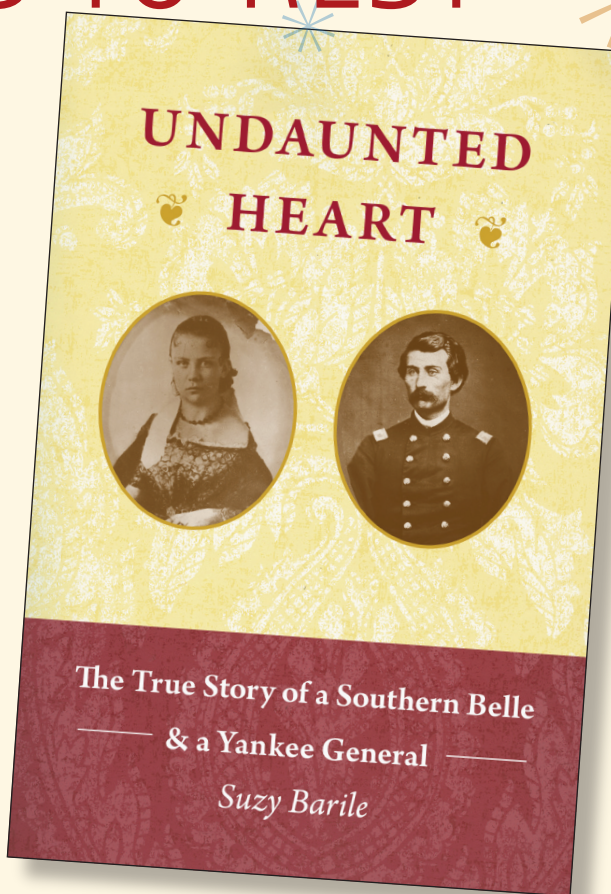
Barile, great-great granddaughter of the couple, has wanted to tell their story ever since 1991, when she found two packets of letters among her late mother's effects. The letters were written by Ella Swain and other members of her family, and in them Barile found evidence that would help her dispute the vicious stories circulating about Ella and the general: that they fled North with jewelry and silver belonging to other Chapel Hillians, that Ella was disowned by her family, that UNC's closure in 1870 was due to the marriage.

That rumors would arise in Chapel Hill after the couple's engagement is understandable, given the fact that Atkins was part of the force that occupied the town after the war, and given the bitterness that war engenders among the defeated. But the real misfortune

is that the rumors managed to obscure the true story of Ella and her general. Luckily for us, Barile has now succeeded in redressing that wrong in her unsentimental account of the bitter Illinois winters; the difficult separation from North Carolina loved ones; and the unrelenting pain at the loss of children, siblings and parents endured by Ella and Smith Atkins. Barile pays homage to their legacy with her portrayal of the abiding love and mutual respect that sustained Ella and the man she called her life's "greatest blessing" throughout their all-too-brief marriage.

Barile received a degree in journalism and mass communication from UNC and, after working in the newspaper business for 25 years, now teaches English and journalism at Wake Tech. Her training is evident in *Undaunted Heart*, which is well-researched and deftly written and deeply moving. All those with an interest in Chapel Hill, UNC or Civil War history should check it out.

So what's next on Barile's plate? Another of her ancestors is Richard Caswell, first governor of North Carolina following the signing of the Declaration of Independence, and Barile is working on a collection of his letters with another descendant, who's a new-found cousin. It seems history is in the author's blood.



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## LIT NOTES

To learn more about Suzy Barile and *Undaunted Heart*, come to the Bull's Head Bookshop on Wednesday, Dec. 2, at 3:30 p.m. Barile also will appear locally at the American Legion Hut on Legion Road. in Chapel Hill, Tuesday, Dec. 15, at 7 p.m.

Readers who are Tar Heel fans (and who isn't around here?) have a lot to look forward to in November, with Roy Williams' upcoming appearances at McIntyre's at 7:30 p.m. on Nov. 3 and the Bull's Head on Nov. 5 (time TBA) to promote *Hard Work: My Life On and Off the Court*. You also can get your copy of *Light Blue Reign* signed by author Art Chansky at the Bull's Head at 10 a.m.

on Nov. 7. And if you still hunger for basketball stories, return to the Bull's Head at 3:30 p.m. on Nov. 12 to hear Adam Lucas, Steve Kirschner and Matt Bowers discuss *One Fantastic Ride: The Inside story of Carolina Basketball's 2009 Championship Season*. Whew!

Finally, we're thrilled at the news that a new, independent bookstore is due to open next to Foster's Market in Chapel Hill in mid-November. Flyleaf Books should prove to be a most welcome addition to our community. Kudos to partners Jamie Fiocco, Land Arnold and Sarah Carr for their vision and initiative!

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