**GERALDINE RYMAN (Circa 1953)**

Allen Nelson Peltier

Anyone lending half an ear to

Mrs. Ryman’s American history lectures

would have eventually drawn the conclusion that

the woman had breathed camp fire smoke and

shared corn dodgers with General Lee’s volunteers.

Although that illustrious Virginian and U.S.S. Grant inked

their resolutions a near century before Geraldine Ryman

faced her first George Wythe High class,

we could almost hear the whine of

Austinville lead above our heads

when Miz Ryman launched into the

grim particulars of Toland’s Raid

and the Battle of Franklin.

Despite the fact that the forty-something

Geraldine Ryman never actually *knew*

a bona fide Confederate veteran, she was

clearly imbued with enough rebel fire

to ignite a Gettysburg fence row. She seemed

one of those people who genuinely believed

common civility and etiquette, like kudzu

and Spanish moss, could find no purchase

in northern climes or soil.

Born around 1905, which, to her students’ thinking

made Miz Geraldine older than original sin,

the woman re-lived the War between the States with

as much fire and fervor as a Natchez irregular.

Please note that Miz Ryman’s partisanship had

nothing to do with politics. A kindly Baptist soul,

she would have polished a front row pew if invited

to a pre-war abolition rally. The woman

simply rankled at the thought of *losing*;

especially to folks who put sugar on their grits;

folks who served their tea hot and bitter, folks

who smelled of foundry smoke and codfish.

Assuming she is spending her eternity

in the same neighborhood as the General,

Geraldine Ryman doubtless invests her

honeysuckle-scented afternoons schooling

the old gent with unsolicited tactical advice;

maneuvers he could and should have used

in scotching that cigar-chewing Grant rascal

well north of Richmond.