

**HISTORICAL SKETCH OF ANN
PAMELA CUNNINGHAM, "THE
SOUTHERN MATRON," FOUNDER
OF "THE MOUNT VERNON
LADIES' ASSOCIATION"**

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MOUNT VERNON LADIES' ASSOCIATION

**HISTORICAL SKETCH OF ANN
PAMELA CUNNINGHAM, "THE
SOUTHERN MATRON," FOUNDER
OF "THE MOUNT VERNON
LADIES' ASSOCIATION"**



Mrs Pamela Cunningham

First Regent Mount Vernon Ladies' Association.

HISTORICAL SKETCH
OF
Ann Pamela Cunningham

"THE SOUTHERN MATRON"

FOUNDER OF
"THE MOUNT VERNON LADIES' ASSOCIATION"



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*T*O attempt, in a mere profile sketch, to do justice to so remarkable a woman as Miss Cunningham is not possible; only a full-length portrait could offer an adequate conception of her energy and her sacrifice—the obstacles surmounted, the years of discouragement and disappointment bravely met, and the joy of the crowning success.

This little volume is the loving tribute to the memory of Miss Cunningham upon this the fiftieth anniversary of the initiation of her patriotic effort; an offering from those who have humbly followed her instructions and example, and who hope, in these few pages, to impress the reader with some idea of the priceless gifts bestowed upon the nation by Miss Cunningham in the preservation and protection of the Home and Grave of Washington.



Miss Cunningham.

ANN PAMELA CUNNINGHAM was a daughter of South Carolina. Her home "Rosemont" was the focus of elegance and refinement, "where she reigned supreme, worshipped as a princess, dominating all by her independence of thought and act—self-reliant and talented," writes one who knew her in health and youth and prosperity as well as in her days of illness and misfortune.

It was upon a clear moonlit night in 1853 that the mother of Miss Cunningham passed by Mount Vernon. The steamer's bell tolled out its requiem to the dead hero, whose resting-place, even under the half-tones of the moonlight, revealed only neglect and desolation. Reflecting sadly in the night silence upon this melancholy scene as it faded in the distance, Mrs. Cunningham realized that unless some immediate

effort were made for the preservation of this sacred spot utter ruin would result. But where should the effort begin? Thinking intently—suddenly, like the flash of the star which shot across the heavens, came the inspiration, "Let the women of America own and preserve Mount Vernon!"

When Miss Cunningham read the letter from her mother containing the proposition she said, "I will do it."

At this time Miss Cunningham was confined to her room a helpless invalid, whose lack of physical strength was compensated by strength of mind and great intellectual ability, accompanied by an enthusiastic, sympathetic nature which accepted no discouragement or rebuff.

When this delicate, sensitive woman declared, "I will do it!" her friends sought, by reason and ridicule, to dissuade her from so wild an undertaking.

Her answer was the letter addressed through our journals to the "Women of America"—an earnest, stirring appeal to their patriotism, urging them to unite in an effort for the rescue and preservation of this neglected Home, this forgotten Grave—to make of Mount Vernon a shrine sacred to the memory of the Father of his Country.

But so great was her shyness and timidity as to lead her to insist upon concealing her identity during the four years of her unceasing efforts under the nom-de-plume of "The Southern Matron."

This initiatory letter was followed by others in quick succession. A newspaper, *The Mount Vernon Record*, was published monthly, giving details of the progress in collecting funds, of the public meetings, private entertainments, and the general and increasing interest shown.

It was in 1853 that Miss Cunningham founded "The Mount Vernon Ladies' Association." She writes: "When I started the Mount Vernon movement it was a Southern affair altogether. My appeal was to Southern ladies. The intention was simply to raise \$200,000; give it to Virginia, to hold title and to purchase 200 acres of the Mount Vernon property, including the Mansion and Tomb—Virginia to keep it for a public resort. The ladies to have it in charge and adorn it if they could have the means." A charter was drawn up and presented to Mr. John Augustine Washington, the owner of Mount Vernon. He refused to agree to this charter. All efforts were for the time paralyzed.

The Northern press now began to notice the move-

ment, but condemned the sectional reserve, claiming that the effort should be a National one, and offering the aid of the Northern States. So great was the clamor that Miss Cunningham yielded, and at once began to extend the powers of the Association by the appointment of ladies as Vice-Regents from each State in the Union, with full powers to appoint committees in their respective States for the purpose of raising money.

"The Southern Matron," as Regent, was to be the head of the Association. But so extensive a work was necessarily slow in organizing. The difficulty of interesting the people was most discouraging. But in 1855 Philadelphia awoke; great enthusiasm prevailed; clubs were formed; boxes for contributions were allowed in Independence Hall; hope revived; — when suddenly the leading men in Philadelphia refused any support to the movement, "because it was a woman's effort, and they disapproved of women mixing in public affairs"! Again discouragement, — but no halt in the onward course of these patriotic women, who fought on against the tide, inspired by their untiring leader.

On the 19th of March, 1856, when in Richmond to deliver his great eulogy on Washington, Mr.