

Weatherell, Mary E. (Mollie) Jordan Gorman ^[1]

Weatherell, Mary E. (Mollie) Jordan Gorman

By Helen R. Watson, 1996

1830–post-1897

Mary E. (Mollie) Jordan Gorman Weatherell, assistant editor of the *Spirit of the Age* ^[2] ([Raleigh](#)) ^[3], was born in Sussex County, Va., the daughter of Martha and James M. Jordan. Her father, referred to as "a man of education," moved to [Raleigh](#) ^[3] in late 1859 to become principal editor of the *North Carolina Planter* (1858–61). On 4 Dec. 1855 at Athelingay, Isle of Wight County, Va., she married [Alexander M. Gorman](#) ^[4], of Raleigh, the editor and publisher of a temperance and family newspaper, the *Spirit of the Age*, from its inception in 1849 to February 1864. Gorman was also owner and publisher of the *North Carolina Planter*.

Substituting as editor of the *Spirit of the Age* ^[5] in the absence of her husband, starting on 10 Dec. 1856, Mollie Gorman was immediately so popular that she was urged to take a permanent job with the paper. At once she became "editress" of the erratic Ladies Department, to which she had been a contributor before her marriage, and made various improvements. Obviously well educated, Mrs. Gorman wrote in a positive, often trenchant, style. Her persistent theme was the status of women, and she urged recognition of the homemaker's contribution to society, a strengthened and more practical education for women, a view of wives as equal partners in marriage, and a position of social dignity for unmarried women. Secondly, but warmly, she championed the development of southern [literature](#) ^[6], deploring the attachment of southerners to northern magazines and books and asserting that the South was able to contend boldly for the prize of excellence. With particular pride, she identified southern women then in journalism and free-lance writing, and her stated purpose for the Ladies Department of the *Spirit of the Age* ^[2] was to make it the paper's most intellectual and attractive feature.

In 1856 Alexander Gorman claimed for his paper—an assertion supported elsewhere—the largest circulation in the state, a popularity that apparently continued through 1859. However, the Gormans quickly felt the impact of the Civil War, which obscured the temperance cause and strained the family newspaper. By late 1861 the Ladies Department appeared irregularly, although Mrs. Gorman's pen appeared intermittently until 1863 as she took her husband's place during his absences on business. On 29 Feb. 1864 A. M. Gorman offered his paper for sale. He died less than a year later, leaving his widow destitute with four small children. In the bankruptcy of the Confederacy, she was unable to collect debts, had only meager provisions on hand, and was without liquid assets. A statement by her pastor praises her exemplary and economical habits, the strict frugality and great resourcefulness required of her to support her family.

On 12 Mar. 1869 Mary E. Gorman married Wm. P. Weatherell, a native of Massachusetts who had settled in [Raleigh](#) ^[3]. With the four Gorman children—Maxwell J., George H., Florence P., and Alexander M.—they made their home for many years at Martin and McDowell Streets, Raleigh, the site of the old *Spirit of the Age* office.

References:

Marriage Records of Isle of Wight County, Va., Estate Records of Wake County, N.C., and Marriage Registry of Wake County (1839–1967) (North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh)

Spirit of the Age (Raleigh), 1850–64

Wesley H. Wallace, "North Carolina's Agricultural Journals, 1838–1861: A Crusading Press," *North Carolina Historical Review* 36 (1959)

R. H. Whitaker, *Reminiscences, Incidents, and Anecdotes* ^[7] (1905)

Additional Resources:

Watson, Helen R. "[Mollie Meant Business](#) ^[8]." *The State* 51. Issue 4. September 1983. p.20-22.

Subjects:

[Biographies](#) ^[9]

[Women](#) ^[10]

[Writers, journalists, and editors](#) ^[11]

Authors:

[Watson, Helen R.](#) ^[12]

Origin - location:

[Raleigh](#) ^[13]

From:

1 January 1996 | Watson, Helen R.

Source URL: <https://www.ncpedia.org/biography/weatherell-mary>

Links

[1] <https://www.ncpedia.org/biography/weatherell-mary> [2] http://www.gilderlehrman.org/collections/a6b0e4a8-d7a3-4eb8-a721-863815322250?back=/mweb/search%3Fneedle%3DGLC05959*%2526fields%3D_t301001010 [3] <https://ncpedia.org/geography/raleigh> [4] <https://www.ncpedia.org/biography/gorman-alexander-maxwell> [5] <https://www.ncpedia.org/spirit-age> [6] <https://www.ncpedia.org/culture/literature/antebellum-literature> [7] <https://archive.org/stream/whitakersreminis00whit#page/n7/mode/2up> [8] <https://digital.ncdcr.gov/Documents/Detail/state/822326?item=822407> [9] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/subjects/biography-term> [10] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/subjects/women> [11] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/subjects/writer> [12] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/authors/watson-helen-r> [13] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/origin-location/piedmont-0> [14] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/entry-source/dictionary-no>