

A Woman Called Patience

Elizabeth Pringle

After the death of her husband and child, Elizabeth Pringle determined to stay in the rice business in order to provide herself a living and gain a refuge from her loneliness.

Pringle's father, Robert Francis Withers Allston, served as a state legislator and as governor of South Carolina before the American Civil War. He also became one of the wealthiest rice farmers in the state, and he wrote a comprehensive manual on rice cultivation, including a history of the crop, methods in culture, and the reclamation of land.



Start Today

Elizabeth married John Julius Pringle in 1870. Her rice planting experiences began soon after John's death in 1876, even as the local economy suffered from the aftermath of the Civil War. With managerial help from her brother, Pringle bought Casa Bianca, the plantation where she and her husband had lived, and she eventually diversified, raising livestock, poultry, alfalfa, cotton, and local fruits.

In addition to market uncertainties, Pringle had to maintain levies to irrigate her fields, deal with unpredictable weather, address personnel issues intensified by a labor shortage, and control weed and insect pests. In the midst of these difficulties, Pringle learned to enjoy her work, focusing on the natural beauty around her and on what she could accomplish.



Recognize the Larger Purpose

One October morning, Pringle found her crew manager, a fellow named Bonaparte, had grouped five field workers close together so that he could look over their shoulders. Pringle had instructed him to give each worker ten rows and check behind each one to determine who did well and who did not do well.

Pringle wrote in her diary, "I simply had to leave the field or have a tremendous flare up, so while I could control myself I left; but it was very trying, for this is the richest part of the field, and he had got the hands in such a bad humor that they were positively digging the seed out of the ground instead of covering it."

Under the circumstances, sending Bonaparte from the field would have destroyed "his prestige and authority for all time." Therefore, Pringle decided to address Bonaparte's stubbornness at a more constructive time. She usually took Bonaparte back to poorly managed projects and corrected him privately, protecting the team morale she had worked to build.

Move Forward

After the turn of the century, Pringle used the pen name “Patience Pennington” and recorded her experiences in diary form for the New York Sun. In 1914, the Macmillan Company published her material in a book titled *A Woman Rice Planter*. By the time Pringle’s book came out, mechanization and improved production in other rice regions had pushed South Carolina’s labor-intensive rice plantations to extinction, but her writings preserved the history and people of her plantation.

The Civil War and its economic consequences permanently changed Pringle’s life, but she adopted a large enough perspective to see her duty and to use her resources to care for herself and those around her. In the process, she left an example of patience and grace.



Points to Ponder:

Elizabeth Pringle succeeded under difficult circumstances because she had the perspective to be grateful for what she had and patient with what she could not change.

- Find something to do instead of becoming consumed by what you have lost.
- Understand others’ perspectives and needs as well as your own.
- Develop a habit of gratefulness so that you can appreciate the benefits you receive each day.
- Understand what should and should not change, and adjust your plans as necessary.

Useful Links:

- <http://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/pringle/summary.html>
- <http://www.carolinaplantationrice.com/>