

WENDY DEGROAT

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New York Herald v. Daily Dispatch (Richmond, VA)

A REBEL IRON-CLAD DESTROYED      EXPLOSION OF C.S. GUNBOAT CHATTAHOOCHEE  
June 1863      June 1863

Frightful explosion	Sixteen persons killed
Terrible suffering	at Blountstown, Florida
The vessel a total loss	and the vessel sunk
Off Apalachicola, the Chattahoochee	with most disastrous results
intended to make a raid on our blockade	A few moments prior
to recapture a schooner loaded with cotton	Messrs. Hodges and Arents in the engine room
For some cause	contended whether there was water enough—
unknown	The pump was started. Disaster happened
boilers exploded	immediately
Details are full	after cold water entered the boiler
of heart-sickening scenes	(magazines and shell room within three feet).
The rebels have lost	Panic commenced. Men jumped overboard
their boasted iron-clad	It was raining and blowing very hard
—strong—	when the wounded burned sufferers were landed
four broadsides, two pivot guns	and ship hauled in—
Our blockaders will have it easier now	poor fellows lay groaning in the mud.
Chattahoochee	Although the loss
useless	of brave men and vessel
to the rebels	is much to be deplored
As she is	yet with guns ashore
harmless	The river is
to us	much safer than before

## ABOUT THE POEM & AUTHOR

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Wendy DeGroat created “New York Herald v. Daily Dispatch (Richmond, VA)” from articles in two newspapers. About the poem and the process of composing it, Wendy writes:

This poem appears in a manuscript centered on Grace Evelyn Arents, a Progressive Era educator and philanthropist who made a lasting impact on Richmond, Virginia. Grace grew up in New York and, as a teenager, resided there during the Civil War. Yet she had family on both sides of the conflict. Her sister’s fiancé served in the Union Navy, while her uncle and two of her brothers fought for the Confederacy. Her brother Frederick was killed in the explosion of the C. S. Gunboat Chattahoochie, the incident described in these news articles. I placed this poem early in the manuscript in a section that provides insights into the tensions swirling around and within Grace as she came of age. Juxtaposing the contrasting depictions of this event in the press helps illustrate the tensions around allegiance that tore the nation apart, tension further amplified by arranging the text in a contrapuntal form. The biggest challenge craft-wise was arranging the words excerpted from the articles in such a way that the poem retained coherence when read in all three directions, with the third tipping the scales: down the lines on the left, down the lines on the right, and across the full lines from left to right and down.

Wendy DeGroat is the author of *Beautiful Machinery* (Headmistress Press 2016) and the co-editor, with Arlyn Miller, of *Poems from the Wellspring* (Poetic License Press 2019). Her work has also appeared in *the museum of americana*, *Cider Press Review*, *Commonplace*, *Rust + Moth*, and elsewhere. She teaches workshops that invite writers to find creative sparks in archival material and curates [poetryriver.org](http://poetryriver.org), a resource site for documentary poetry. She lives in Richmond, Virginia.

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