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### As belts tightened, Georgia women stormed the streets for food

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By Chuck Mobley

Driven by hunger and despair, a determined pack of women went from store to store in downtown Savannah one day in the spring of 1864, stealing bacon and other items, said David Williams, a history professor at Valdosta State University.

Williams, one of the authors of "Plain Folk in a Rich Man's War: Class and Dissent in Confederate Georgia," which described the Savannah incident in great detail, said the riot was motivated by hunger.

"Food was scarce and prices were up dramatically," said the professor, "mainly because planters were growing too much cotton and not enough food."

One of their sources "placed the number of rioters at between 50 and 100," said Williams. Four stores in the City Market area were struck, including that of A.F. Mira on Whitaker Street.

Mira was "forced into a corner" as the women helped themselves, and the rioters then moved on to John Gilliland's store on Congress Street and distributed all his bacon amongst themselves, Williams and his co-authors, Teresa Crisp Williams and David Carlson, said in their book.

This food riot in Savannah was hardly the first in Georgia during the Civil War, and it certainly wasn't the last.

In "The Women Rising: Cotton, Class, and Confederate Georgia's Rioting Women," a 2002 article in the Georgia Historical Quarterly, David Williams and Teresa Crisp Williams chronicled similar incidents in Atlanta, Columbus and other locations.

Earlier this month, the Georgia Historical Society put up a marker to commemorate the April 11, 1863, riot in Columbus. In that disturbance, 65 women, some armed with knives and guns, were eventually brought under control by the police.

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