

**Tuesday, June 21, 2011. The Summer Solstice, and the longest day of the year. Yesterday in New York was sunny and warm. But not humid.**



Amanda Foreman

Last night **Kathy and Billy Rayner** gave a Southern-style dinner – Mrs. Rayner grew up in the South – to celebrate the upcoming newbook by their friend **Amanda Foreman**, the author of *Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire*.

The book is called *A World On Fire: Britain's Crucial Role in the American Civil War* and will be in the stores next Monday.

I first heard about the book several months ago when I ran into Amanda at a party and asked her what she was working on. How she went from an 18th century British duchess to the 19th century War Between the States begged the obvious question: how come?

Georgiana's great nephew who would become the 8th Duke of Devonshire, **Spencer Compton Cavendish** "had spent Christmas Day 1862 making eggnog for the Confederate cavalry officers of **General Robert E. Lee's** army."



Georgiana

It turned out that when she was doing her research on the Duchess she discovered that

Amanda already knew something about the British relationship to the War Between the States because of a thesis she had written for her doctorate about race and color in pre-Victorian England. What surprised her was that this duke – then the **Marquess of Hartington** (and known to his pals and the press as **Harty-Tarty** for reasons alluded to in the nickname), was that the "heir to the greatest Liberal peerage in England thought the slaveholding South had the moral advantage over the anti-slavery North."



Harty-Tarty, later the 8th Duke of Devonshire

Why? We'll have to read the book, which although it hasn't come out yet, got a five star rave in the Washington Post this past week. This isn't surprising if you've read Amanda's biography of the duchess who was also a direct ancestor of **Diana the Princess of Wales** and lived a life as ill-fated in many ways as her famous descendent. You can still get it in paperback, incidentally. Georgiana lived to the hilt.

The Rayners had about forty for dinner with a menu of quail and grits, biscuits and a vegetable gelee, topped off with a raspberry meringue cake with berries and a raspberry sauce. Also Southern. Well, sorta, said our hostess.

*When we were all seated, Kathy* introduced her guest of honor and then Amanda got up and told us how she came to the book.

Harty Tarty, incidentally was a longtime bachelor and of course very eligible. In his youth, when he was known as Lord Hartington (or the marquess) he had relationships with two courtesans, the most famous of whom was **Catherine Walters**, known as “**Skittles**.”

The marquess also conducted two affairs for a long time, the other being with the **Duchess of Manchester** who was very much married. The duchess, nevertheless was in love with Hartington and wanted to get him away from Skittles.

Eventually she succeeded and eventually her husband -- of whom it was said, she never loved -- died, leaving her free to marry the man she loved. She did and was forever known among her set (and in the press) as the double duchess.



Catherine Walters, aka Skittles



Louisa the Duchess of Devonshire

1862 was the year that Hartington came to America, to break off his relationship with Skittles -- and commit himself to the Duchess of Manchester. For Skittles, he was said to be the love of her life. Although he was breaking it off, when she was first his mistress he arranged for her to have an annual income of 2000 pounds -- comparable to a six figure income today -- which continued after the separation and his subsequent marriage.

When he died (at 74 in 1908), her income was continued, acknowledged by the family as a “debt of honor” to be paid until her death. She lived another 12 years, dying in 1920.

Some of this information was imparted by Amanda Foreman last night speaking to the dinner guests.

Among the guests last night were **Philip Howard, Jane and Peter Marino, Shelley and David Mortimer, Renee Rockefeller, Andrew Solomon** and **John Habich** (small world department: Solomon and Habich formalized their partnership with a grand civil ceremony four years ago next week at Althorp, the ancestral home of Georgiana, the Duchess of Devonshire and Princess Diana).

Also **Christopher Mason, Cathy and Stephen Graham, Tania Vartan, Steve Kroft** and **Jenny Conant, Virginia Coleman, Vicky Ward, Jonathan Barton** (Amanda’s husband), **Jonathan Burnham, Marina Rust, Robert Silvers, Peggy Siegal**.