

# Trouble the Water

By Rebecca Dwight Bruff

Inspired by a true story, **Trouble the Water** is a story of courage and daring heroism. It explores race, human rights, family values and individual freedoms. Robert Smalls, named "Trouble" by his mother at birth because he was born on the night a runaway slave had been hung, was born a slave in Beaufort, South Carolina. Members agreed that without the influence of his strong mother, who insisted that all people should be treated honorably, and that one should speak proper English, Robert Smalls may not have become the man who became capable of sailing the CSS Planter through the Confederate blockade into the hands of the Union army. His owner, Henry McKee, was apparently a kind man, though subjected to his times and the institution of slavery, and treated Trouble much like a son, teaching him many valuable lessons which enabled him to learn the skills needed to pilot the *Planter* into Union waters. The novel presents Robert Smalls as an intelligent, caring person who yearned for freedom for himself and his family. He was willing to risk all in order to provide an opportunity for his family to attain that goal.

The McKee family figures prominently in the novel, providing insights into the structure of society in the antebellum south. The excerpts of a diary created by the author and purportedly written by Jane McKee, the wife of Henry, illuminate the position of women in Southern as persons subjected to the whims of their fathers, husbands and brothers.

Robert Smalls became a man who served as a Pilot in the Union Army during the Civil War, served in the South Carolinian Congress, and in the United States House of Representatives. He supported racial integration legislation, education for all children in South Carolina.