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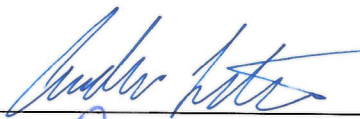

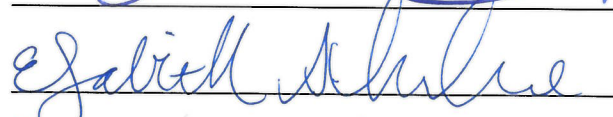
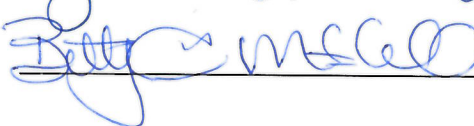
“Every Woman Was to Some Extent a Politician”

Elite Virginian Women from The Antebellum Period Through
Reconstruction

Presented to the faculty of Lycoming College in fulfillment of
the of the requirements for Departmental Honors in American
Studies

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4/26/2017

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 5/4/17
 5/3/2017
 5/4/2017
 5/4/2017

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American Studies – Departmental Honors

INTRODUCTION

Throughout the American Civil War, Sallie Brock Putnam dwelled in Richmond, Virginia, and diligently documented the events and the repercussions of the war occurring around her. Writing of the first year of the war, in 1861, Putnam records, “It was at this period that the women of Virginia, and especially of Richmond, began to play the important part in public affairs, which they sustained with unflinching energy during four years of sanguinary and devastating war... Every women was to some extent a politician.”¹ Putnam’s acknowledgement of female participation in politics highlights the important role that women played in the American Civil War, but she understates their involvement prior to the war and the duration of their activity after the war. Like many other ladies of Virginia, Putnam’s involvement in the Civil War demonstrated the important role that women fulfilled in the years leading up to the war and continued to satisfy long after the South surrendered to the North.

Virginia, for both political and geographical reasons, is a particularly interesting location to explore how females involved themselves and shaped the political sphere in the Civil War era. Since the colonial period, Virginia played an important role in the politics of North America; in many cases, other colonies, and later states, looked to Virginia for leadership and guidance.² During the Civil War, this was no different. In the months leading up to the breakout of fighting, both the Northern and the Southern states watched Virginia, anxious to see which “side” of the conflict they would choose to support. The politics of Virginia was also closely related to its geography. Historians often view Virginia as the border between the North and the South, and

¹ Sallie B. Putnam, *Richmond During the War: Four Years of Personal Observation by a Richmond Lady* (New York, NY: G.W. Carleton & Co. Publishers, 1867), 4.

² Ulrich Bonnell Phillips, *The Course of the South to Secession*, ed. E. Merton Coulter (New York, NY: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1939), 60-82.

for this reason also reflects political characteristics from both regions. Consequently, understanding the political movements of Virginian females illustrates influences from both the North and the South as well.³

Female political involvement started long before the outbreak of the Civil War. Since the beginning of the republic, women found ways to influence the men around them and to play a meaningful role in the dawn of the new nation. As the nineteenth century matured, females found ways to play a more public position in the politics of the nation, even though some would classify these methods of participation as non-traditional. Nevertheless, these unique methods of breaking into the political sphere helped Virginian women find a particular and substantial place for themselves. However, a majority of the women who were immersed in Virginian politics belonged to the upper class of society, which reflects the class stratification of women during this era.⁴ Elite women, through illustrious bloodlines and prominent marriages, arguably possessed a greater power as political entities than their poorer white sisters; they were educated, socialized, and most importantly, had a certain amount of clout which allowed for an easier entry into the political realm. Only white women were able to fulfill this responsibility; minority women were completely excluded from the political sphere.

Although Virginian women fulfilled political roles long before the outbreak of the war, the impending sectional conflict created opportunities for their increased presence in the political domain. Throughout the initial years of the war, they flourished in their roles as domestic

³ Phillips, *The Course of the South to Secession*, 160-165;

⁴ See Elizabeth Varon, *We Mean to Be Counted: White Women and Politics in Antebellum Virginia* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Paula Baker, "The Domestication of Politics: Women and the American Political Society," *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 89, no. 3 (June 1984): 620-647.

politicians, and fostered great support for the war effort in their home state of Virginia.⁵ They did so through acts that were inherently domestic, but became political in the face of the war, such as nursing, sewing battle flags, and raising money to support their troops. For some women, however, most notably elite women, the end of the war saw a decrease in their dedication to the Confederacy; through similar political means, they fought to undermine the Confederate political cause in hopes of ending the war to regain their roles as successful caregivers and mothers since the Confederate government did not provide for them in the ways promised.⁶

Following the end of the war, these same women fought for room in the political sphere in hopes of memorializing the Confederacy that they initially supported wholeheartedly, despite their faltering dedication to the cause in the final months of the war. Through memorialization, these women again asserted their political natures and their ability to influence the public sphere through seemingly domestic tasks. Because memorialization was inherently a political act, Southern males, who realized the power that females held in this movement, noticed their role in Southern memory. Much like their actions at the end of the war, these movements were important for the women to act as caregivers when they noticed a void in the services provided by the Confederate government.

Historians frequently consider the role of Southern women in society and the ways they shared their influence both inside and outside the home. Historians such as Catherine Clinton and Elizabeth Fox Genovese consider the role of the antebellum women, and how they were able to transform their identities through both the duties as wife and mother, as well as mistress to the

⁵ See Catherine W. Bishir, "'A Strong Force of Ladies': Women, Politics, and Confederate Memorial Associations in Nineteenth-Century Raleigh" *The North Carolina Historical Review* Vol. 77, No. 4 (October 2000), 455-491; Stephanie McCurry, *Confederate Reckoning: Power and Politics in the Civil War South* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010).

⁶ See Stephanie McCurry, *Confederate Reckoning*; Drew Gilpin Faust, *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

slaves owned by the family.⁷ This scholarship, although transformative for understanding the importance of women in this region throughout the antebellum period, can provide even more insight into the lives of Southern women when applied to the larger scope of the Civil War and the postbellum period throughout Virginia.

Historians who have taken a broader approach, such as Stephanie McCurry, elaborate on the scholarly work of both Genovese and Clinton, but have not extrapolated the workings of Confederate women throughout the Civil War into the beginning stages of Reconstruction. Applying scholarly research in such a way is extremely important, for it is able to explain trends through a changing society. Although McCurry's study is instrumental for the trajectory of this study, she mainly focuses on the roles of soldier's wives, and their participation in public actions, whereas the focus of this project is more geared toward elite women and their surplus of political determination and potential.⁸

This honors project utilizes secondary sources that discuss Confederate women before, throughout, and after the Civil War, as well as a plethora of primary source documents, and combines them in ways that the historical community has not yet accomplished. Although some of these primary source documents are readily available and used by other historians, a large portion came from independent archival research undertaken at the Virginia Historical Society in Richmond, Virginia.⁹ This unique combination of sources provides new evidence on the topic of Southern women that has been overlooked by some historians who have focused on this area of study.

⁷ Elizabeth Fox Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1988); Catherine Clinton *The Plantation Mistress: Woman's World in the Old South* (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1982).

⁸ See Stephanie McCurry, *Confederate Reckoning*.

⁹ The Virginia Historical Society deserves acknowledgement for the use of their archival material in this research project. Any source obtained from the institution will be designated by VAHS in the citation. The research completed was generously funded by the Haberberger Fellowship at Lycoming College.

The first chapter of this study focuses on the political developments and how women came to be involved in public politics prior to the war. Outspoken women published their feelings on the political candidates (especially in election years), and men, in some cases, sought out their support and participation. These women influenced the thoughts of their husbands and, ultimately, were able to make their opinions public. Prior to the war, elite, white Virginian women infrequently published their thoughts, but were still able to convey their opinions. They were expected to attend political events as both spectators and active participants. Most importantly, it was expected that by participating in campaign events, these women could, according to Elizabeth Varon, “transform the public sphere, fostering ‘domestic’ virtues such as fairness, harmony, and self-control in a larger setting.”¹⁰ These ladies were not politically inept prior to the war when they faced a severe change in their social status and function, and this was demonstrated time and time again throughout the war as their participation in the public sphere swayed the feelings of those around them toward their country. The first chapter of the project focuses on the antebellum era in relation to elite women and politics. This topic requires examination, especially in relation to how women utilized similar tactics during the Civil War.¹¹

The second chapter concentrates on the political movements during the war, with an emphasis on the turning point for these elite women. At the start of the war, they were frequently the most ardent supporters of secession. However, the difficulties of extreme weather, such as snowy and cold winters, and economic hardship changed the minds of many of these women. In addition, this chapter analyzes the loss the women of Virginia faced, and how the death of the men in their lives, in conjunction with the women’s hardships, resulted in their increased desire to convey their opinions and grievances. One of the many responses to this hardship was public

¹⁰ Varon, *We Mean To Be Counted*, 80.

¹¹ See Elizabeth Varon, *We Mean to Be Counted*.

demonstration, such as the Richmond Bread Riot on April 1st, 1863. Although to many, the riot appeared to be a bread riot, with the end goal of acquiring food, these women also stole items of greater luxury such as shoes and brooms. In addition, some of the women involved in the riot were extremely well dressed, which indicated wealth at a time when a nice calico dress could cost over \$30.00.

The women continued to push back against their government, ultimately wanting the war to end. They published their opinions, pleaded with their government, and wrote their thoughts in their diaries – these elite women were terrified of losing everything they had and were not willing to sacrifice everything for the Confederate cause. Their increasing desire to restore the antebellum stability and prosperity ultimately taxed those around them. Within three short years, the women who heralded the cause of the Confederacy the loudest through secession were ready for the violence and the loss to stop. Other women and men noticed this, and it ultimately took a toll on them as well. Their actions against the Confederacy, such as outbreaks of violence with the Richmond Bread Riot, or more passive measures such expressing their discontent through their writing, were not out of hatred for the Confederacy. Instead, it was the women's effort to return their lives to normalcy. The second chapter encompasses the entirety of the war and ends at the conclusion of the war.

The final chapter of this project addresses what happened at the end of the war for these elite Virginian women. As Reconstruction started, Southern women collaborated to retrieve and return the bodies of many Confederate soldiers from Northern soil. In the North, Confederate soldiers were not given proper burials; many were left in unmarked graves because national cemeteries were reserved for Union soldiers. Not only were Southern women able to memorialize their fallen soldiers, but this process also created a meaningful role for them in the

preservation of Confederate memory. Most importantly, for the elite Southern women, this was their way of bringing order back into their society and regaining control as mothers and caregivers. This chapter will bring the project full circle by showing that the white, elite women of Virginia always had political power, it just manifested in different ways as their environment changed.

The political movements of white, elite Virginian women throughout the nineteenth century demonstrate how these women were able to influence those around them through political acts, even though their methods were not traditional. Through their domestic power, their relationships with males, and their desire to maintain status and stability in Southern society, elite Virginian women had a meaningful impact on the politics of Virginia from the antebellum period throughout Reconstruction.

CHAPTER ONE

Origins of Female Involvement in Politics

Following the American Revolution, women maintained a clearly defined position in society. They fulfilled an important role in the fledging republic as “republican mothers”; it was their role to educate their children to become well informed and responsible for the next generation.¹² Abigail Adams, a famous founding mother, claimed this role of “republican motherhood” fit into the other domestic expectations that women fulfilled in society. Adams wrote to her son, John Quincy Adams, of the importance of parental roles to young children, and stressed that upbringing, “when inforced by the joint efforts of both of your parents will I hope have a due influence upon your Conduct, for dear as you are to me, I had much rather you should have found your Grave in the ocean you have crossed, or any untimely death crop you in your Infant years, rather than see you an immoral profligate or a Graceless child.”¹³ Despite Adams’ emphasis on both the role of the father and the mother, she placed the responsibility of her son’s rearing on herself, since it was her duty as the mother to ensure her son became a respectful and honorable individual.

The women of the South harnessed these overarching expectations of females, but specifically molded them to fit their culture. As important members of the planter society, women were tied to the home. Within the plantation houses, women were in charge of distributing food and watching over the slaves, which tied back to the “republican motherhood” ideas introduced in the dawn of the republic and reinforced their connection to the domestic

¹² Baker, “The Domestication of Politics,” 624-625.

¹³ Abigail Adams, “First Letter to Her Son/To John Quincy Adams.” June 1778.

sphere.¹⁴ In the era of the early republic, “men wanted women’s participation to take private rather than public forms.”¹⁵ Because women were tied directly to the home, which was considered the centerpiece of Southern society, they found ways to exert domestic control in a society where they were defined in typical feminine ways. Their connection to the home connects to the overall expectations that women were expected to fulfill in American society.

Similar to the ideas of “Republican Motherhood,” women’s magazines popularized the idea of “True Womanhood” throughout the antebellum period, which dictated not only how women should view themselves, but also how society should view women. The term “True Womanhood,” although coined in the twentieth century by Barbara Welter, idealized four virtues – piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity.¹⁶ Although each of these ideals was important to the budding republic, domesticity was arguably the most important virtue. An issue of *Lady at Home* stressed, “Even if we cannot reform the world in a moment, we can begin the work by reforming ourselves and our households - It is a woman's mission. Let her not look away from her own little family circle for the means of producing moral and social reforms, but begin at home.”¹⁷ “True Womanhood” tied women to the home as they sought to fulfill their roles as republican mothers and wives. As a part of domesticity, women sought to perform a variety of domestic tasks; nursing, needlework, letter writing, and other housework was viewed as uplifting, but also as a way for women to gain authority for themselves with their husbands.¹⁸

Although historians frequently study the roles of nineteenth century women in the home and their movements for political power, they rarely connect the two. Paula Baker however

¹⁴ Catherine Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress*, 16-35.

¹⁵ Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress*, 7

¹⁶ Barbara, Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860," *American Quarterly* 18, no. 2. (Summer 1966): 152.

¹⁷ Quoted in Welter, “The Cult of True Womanhood,” 162-163.

¹⁸ Welter, “The Cult of True Womanhood,” 164-165.

argues that by studying the political actions of women in conjunction with the political parties of the time, women's political capabilities become clear. As a result, she believes scholars will uncover the implications of female involvement in politics and the resulting transformations. Baker argues that American female political participation can be traced back to the Revolutionary War, and that in this period, the majority of their politically-charged actions took place within their homes; because elite white women were confined to the domestic sphere, these places remained under their influence. However, as the nineteenth century progressed, women took on more public acts of benevolence, which Baker considers as the catalyst for women to become more involved with organized political parties.¹⁹

As the United States matured and industrialized, women found a new voice for themselves in a public manner through public services that were decidedly domestic causes. In the Northern states, industrialization caused many women to devote themselves to "benevolent work."²⁰ When they saw issues plaguing society, they found ways to combat them in public ways. Of these issues, abolition was often the most prominent. To Southern women, these Northern women were acting in abhorrent ways and threatened their style of living. In response to the accusations of the North, educated Southern women fought back in the way that was deemed acceptable by their society, but could still make an impact – with their pens. Through literary methods, Southern women "vigorously defend[ed] their section from outside attack" by Northerners.²¹ Participation from Southern women varied across the Southern states, but women from Virginia, which separated the Northern states from the Deep South, acted as barrier where women acted more freely than in other states. For elite women, their actions became a mix of

¹⁹ Baker, "The Domestication of Politics," 620-247.

²⁰ Lori D. Ginzberg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics, and Class in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990), 4.

²¹ Robert J. Dirkin, *Before Equal Suffrage: Women in Partisan Politics from Colonial Times to 1920* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1995), 39.

Northern and Southern behavior in a time when many women attempted to find a more public role for themselves. This new behavior also called into question the idea of “True Womanhood.” Although society viewed the home as the perfect place for woman, politicians questioned whether women should take a more active role in society to help rectify these problems, “for if woman was so very little less than the angels, she should surely take a more active part in running the world, especially since men were making such a hash of things.”²²

The females that became more involved in partisan politics were also undergoing a change at the time. At this moment, women dedicated themselves to reforming where they found issues in society, such as abolition and general equality, especially for women. Although Northern women largely undertook these reform movements and focused on issues such as temperance, abolition, and female suffrage, the motivation to participate in the public sphere still influenced the women of the South.²³ Despite the momentum of these political movements, the males who witnessed these fledgling movements did not understand these actions as women directly influencing politics. Men allowed women to participate in the political sphere because they contributed in very feminine ways, which ameliorated the potential threat of the women becoming unwomanly.²⁴

Elite Virginian women actively participated in the Virginian political sphere. They were not granted traditional political powers, such as voting or holding office; however, throughout the antebellum period, women found ways to participate in Virginian politics that males deemed appropriate and helpful. Even though elite women were still very much confined to the domestic sphere prior to the Civil War, they transformed feminine actions, such as attending picnics, into political actions. Women conveyed their own political opinions through typically masculine

²² Welter, “Cult of True Womanhood,” 174.

²³ See Dirkin, *Before Equal Suffrage*, 41-48; Ginzberg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence*, 67-97.

²⁴ Dirkin, *Before Equal Suffrage*, 50-55.

methods, such as the publications of essays, attendance at political rallies, and hosting political meetings. Men agreed that women were important partners in the political process and embraced female participation in many cases in the late 1830s. This participation started with the wives and daughters of political figures, but once men realized female participation could bring positive feedback, they encouraged their involvement. It was expected that female association would “transform the public sphere, fostering ‘domestic’ virtues such as fairness, harmony, and self-control in a larger setting.”²⁵

However, the women who were granted permission to partake in political action understood the implications of such actions and, accordingly, took full advantage of their opportunity to influence the larger political scene. Julia Gardiner Tyler, the wife of John Tyler, a former President of the United States, publically defended Virginia in an open letter to the Duchess of Sutherland. Although the argument between these two ladies ultimately revolved around slavery, the Duchess also mentioned the backwardness of Southerners. She believed that they were unaware of the issues plaguing their society and were quite oblivious. In response, Tyler retorted that the women of Virginia were able to procure information of public matters due to their high education and that “politics is almost universally the theme of conversation among men, in all their coteries and social gatherings, and the women would be stupid indeed, if they did not gather much information from this abundant source.”²⁶ Women were fully cognizant of where they could obtain information regarding what was happening around them and, therefore, acted accordingly to secure such knowledge.

²⁵ Varon, *We Mean to be Counted*, 80.

²⁶ Julia Gardiner Tyler, “Reply to the Duchess of Sutherland and Other Ladies of England,” in *America Through Women’s Eyes*, edited by Mary Beard (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, Publishers, 1933); 136-141.

Many of these women obtained such political awareness through their affiliation with organized political parties, as historian Paula Baker mentions in her scholarly work. The Whig Party, one of the two organized political parties in the late 1830s, understood the political capacity of women and harnessed their abilities to bolster the success of the party. Therefore, involving women in politics in ways they found comfortable furthered the Whig's goals and beliefs. Although the Whig Party did not dominate Southern politics, their inclusion of women remains more prolific than other political parties in the antebellum era.

According to historians, "the Whigs' 1840 campaign marks the first time a political party systematically included women in its public rituals."²⁷ One woman in particular was especially outspoken on behalf of the Whig Party in Virginia during the 1840 election cycle. Lucy Kenney, who resided in Fredericksburg, Virginia, vehemently opposed Martin Van Buren and published *A Letter Addressed to Martin Van Buren* to challenge his leadership.²⁸ Kenney's disapproving publication attacked Van Buren and claimed that his "administration was the source... of evil" because of its "weakness, inefficiency, and disgrace."²⁹ Although Kenney intended to speak her mind regarding one of the political candidates, the publication more importantly signified women's role in politics. This publication demonstrated that Lucy Kenney was well informed of actions within the national political scene and felt comfortable enough to address them in a public letter to the President. For these actions, the Whig Party respected Kenney, despite her gender, by paying her for her publication.³⁰ Kenney and her actions reveal that women were

²⁷ Varon, *We Mean to be Counted*, 71.

²⁸ Varon, *We Mean to be Counted*, 75.

²⁹ Lucy Kenney, *A Letter Addressed to Martin Van Buren, President of the United States, In Answer to the Late Attack Upon the Navy, By the Official Organ of the Government* (Washington D.C.: n.p., 1838), 2-3.

³⁰ Varon, *We Mean to be Counted*, 75.

capable of political thought and action in antebellum Virginia, and that their communities recognized their political competencies.

The Whigs' success with female involvement in politics ensured their success throughout the early 1840s, but the Democratic Party maintained the most power in the Southern states throughout the late antebellum period. However, the Democratic Party is rarely discussed in correlation to female involvement in politics, because their efforts to include women in public politics faltered in comparison to the Whig Party. They made some minimal efforts, through the invitation of women to attend festivals, rallies, and picnics, which all manifested an impressive turnout of women.³¹ The *Daily Richmond Enquirer* reported on a specific rally in 1845 where a large population of women poured out to support the Democratic Party. The *Enquirer's* report emphasizes that women belonged to both the Whig and the Democratic Party; participation by females "demonstrates the falsity" that women only aligned with the Whig Party.³² As a result, the growing acceptance of women in both of the major political parties shows that male politicians were beginning to acknowledge women in the political domain, even though they still were not granted traditional political powers, such as voting or running for office.

Women flexed their political muscles when they demonstrated their loyalties and honored public figures. The Whig Party, in Richmond, Virginia, strongly supported the participation of women in their political activities and in return, women sought to honor and memorialize important Whig statesmen. In 1844, a group of Richmond ladies joined together and suggested the erection of a monument to honor Henry Clay, an important Whig from Virginia who had just lost the nomination to run for the presidency of the United States.³³ The women who joined together in the name of this cause formed the "Virginia Association of Ladies for Erecting a

³¹ Varon, *We Mean to be Counted*, 94-95.

³² *Daily Richmond Enquirer*, October 7, 1844.

³³ Varon, *We Mean to be Counted*, 88.

Statue to Henry Clay,” and they elected women to serve on their executive board, with the exception of the treasurer, who was a male. In order to raise money for this undertaking, these women reached out to other Whig strongholds in an attempt to raise funds from other towns, and as a result, other associations were founded throughout Virginia and dedicated themselves to the same cause. Each woman paid to be a member of her respective association, which is how many of these groups raised their funds to support the statue. Overall, the women were responsible for soliciting money, discovering and hiring the sculptor, and planning festivities to celebrate the implementation of the new sculpture, such as an official dedication.³⁴

At first, the actions of these women seemed uncharacteristic of their expected roles. Democratic men called out these new associations and claimed that they were overstepping their welcome in the political sphere; however, the Whigs felt the women’s actions were appropriate since it was an extension of the Whig Party. One newspaper editor wrote, “We are willing to avow our own opinion that woman’s proper sphere is HOME,” but argues that she was fully able to operate in the political sphere when “her domestic duties themselves demand that she should enter the arena which man has considered his exclusive province.”³⁵ For the Whigs and the supporters of these associations, the activities of the Virginia Association of Ladies for Erecting a Statue to Henry Clay and their auxiliary associations were deemed acceptable organizations for women. The women planned and executed public events to raise funds, but as the treasurer of their association was male, they were not handling the money directly, which was a responsibility reserved for the men. These acts gave a level of political participation to women, but in such ways that they were not seen as overstepping their bounds, but merely playing into

³⁴ W. Harrison Daniel, “Richmond’s Memorial to Henry Clay: The Whig Women of Virginia and the Clay Statue,” *Richmond Quarterly* 8 (Spring 1986): 39-40. VAHS.

³⁵ *Lexington Gazette*, January 9, 1845.

their feminine duties. Female actions through associations of this type allowed women to perform public political acts, but in ways that did not violate their expected social roles.

Some women understood that they did not need to be politically active within the community to influence political thought. In *Godey's Lady Book*, a publication intended for women, one female published an editorial explaining how she participated in politics without ever asking for suffrage or an invitation to a political event. She explained that through the influence she possessed over her seven sons, she never needed to cast a vote; as long as she had their ear, she could influence their thoughts and consequently, their political actions. As their mother, she “trusts her country will be nobly served by those whom her example has taught to believe in goodness, therefore she is proud to vote by her proxies.”³⁶ Overall, she felt American women “should vote, namely, by influencing rightly the votes of men.”³⁷

Historians analyze how the political roles of women evolved throughout antebellum era into the age of the American Civil War. Some historians emphasize that the war provided the necessary catalyst for women to become more politically active and enter public political movements. Historian Drew Gilpin Faust argues that the ability for Confederate women to participate in Southern politics, even unofficially, gave them the ability to help reform their identity as the war constantly stripped away what they saw as being essential to their character.³⁸ Faust accentuates the importance of female writing, and stresses that the private publications of women are indicative of their position in Southern politics. She also argues that female political involvement extended beyond their private texts and into the public sphere. Faust claims, in addition to the circulation of female-authored political publications, Southern women

³⁶ “Editor’s Table,” *Godey's Lady's Book*, April 1852.

³⁷ “Editor’s Table,” *Godey's Lady's Book*, April 1852.

³⁸ Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, xi-xii.

participated in effective conversations that critiqued the Confederate government.³⁹ Similarly in *Confederate Reckoning*, Stephanie McCurry reasons that at the turning tide of the war, lower class females entered the political sphere in opposition to their government, most notably because of their new role as soldiers' wives. This change in identity led them to take action against the government in an attempt to be recognized as important political figures. McCurry contends that some of these women, specifically those from the lower class, had "no previous history of political participation."⁴⁰ These women, regardless of how they asserted their opinions, created room for themselves to discuss political grievances and issues, such as Confederate nationalism.

However, unlike Faust and McCurry, Elizabeth Varon emphasizes that Southern women always held political power in some form, even if it manifested in nontraditional ways. Varon reasons that such power had always existed with Southern women and that "the elite and middle-class women played an active, distinct, and evolving role in the political life of the Old South."⁴¹ Although they could not participate in politics in traditional ways, such as office holding and the right to vote, they still used methods unique to females to involve themselves in politics. Varon argues that through the written word, such as petitions, novels, and essays, women found a place themselves in politics, whether they acted as the author or the readers of these opinion pieces.⁴² Although Varon provides significant insight into the lives of women prior to the war, her analysis concludes at the onset of the war and ignores class distinctions of women. However, her ideas can still be combined with those from other historians to provide a more thorough analysis of women's wartime political actions, especially from the perspective of elite women.

³⁹ Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, xii.

⁴⁰ McCurry, *Confederate Reckoning*, 8.

⁴¹ Varon, *We Mean To Be Counted*, 1.

⁴² Varon, *We Mean to be Counted*, 1-3.

Throughout the late 1850s, as hostilities between the North and South developed, elite Virginian women exerted political power through similar methods as when they became involved in the Democratic and Whig parties to protest their frustrations with the ensuing crisis. Aggressions between the two regions came to fruition during John Brown's Raid on Harper's Ferry in 1859, and this occurrence evoked strong reactions from the South's female population. In newspaper responses to Brown's Raid, Virginian women lashed out against Brown's actions in defense of their home state and against the Northern women for allowing such discord to continue and grow. In support of these accusations, women organized groups to start a boycott against Northern products to ensure the survival of Virginia against "Northern aggression."⁴³ By penning a public response to Brown's actions, the women who organized the boycott helped to mobilize other women against a common cause, much like when they rallied behind political parties in earlier decades. In her private diary, which became a very public display of sentiments, one woman wrote, "This day will long, long be remembered as the one that witnessed Old Topototomy [Brown], the villain - murderer, robber, and destroyer of our Virgin Peace, swinging from the gallows. Oh, how many are rejoicing at his end, be it ever so severe."⁴⁴

Julia Gardiner Tyler, the same woman who defended her home of Virginia against the attack of the Duchess of Sutherland, wrote following the crisis in Harper's Ferry that "if there is not an important demonstration of good feeling on the part of the North towards the South... I believe disunion will be the consequence."⁴⁵ To these women, John Brown's attack on Virginian soil threatened the societal order and the very livelihood of Virginians. To these elite Southern women, this attack represented not just an individual, but also an entire region's hostilities, and they sought protection for both their homes and their families following this assault.

⁴³ Snowden, Edgar, *Alexandria Gazette*, December 5, 1859.

⁴⁴ Catherine Cochran, "Recollections 1861-1865," VAHS.

⁴⁵ Tyler Family Papers, quoted in Varon, *We Mean to Be Counted*, 140.

In addition to penning responses to the growing tensions between the North and the South and the raid on Harper's Ferry, women also performed domestic tasks to demonstrate their support for their home state, as they had in the past through their affiliation with the main political parties. In response to the assault organized by John Brown, Virginian men organized themselves into militias to protect their homes. Virginian women, in support of these homegrown organizations, gathered in sewing circles to create banners with the emblems and insignia of their local militias.⁴⁶ Although this act seems to be a simple domestic task, the women who created these banners illustrated their political sentiments by supporting these homegrown militias who took up arms in the name of the State of Virginia. Support from women and the home front in the form of domestic tasks demonstrates a dedication to both the men in the militias and the communities as a whole.

As the country neared the verge of secession, women called for a permanent separation of the Northern and Southern states. Although many Virginians remained apprehensive about leaving the Union, a considerable number of women rallied behind the cause.⁴⁷ Following the firing on Fort Sumter and Lincoln's call for troops from the Old Dominion, Virginian women called for their neighbors to join the cause of the Confederacy; as one elite Virginian woman wrote to her local newspaper, "Mothers, wives, and daughters, buckle on the armor for the loved ones; bid them, with Roman firmness advance, and never return until victory perches on their banners."⁴⁸ Even though the war appeared to be a very masculine cause, these women joined the male voice that called for secession from the Union and attachment to the Confederate States of America. In response to the number of women involved in discussions surrounding secession by attaching themselves to male politicians, Sallie Brock Putnam, a Richmond elite noted, "every

⁴⁶ Snowden, Edgar, *Alexandria Gazette*, December 20, 1859.

⁴⁷ Varon, *We Mean to be Counted*, 144-150.

⁴⁸ "Correspondence of the Richmond Dispatch," *The Daily Dispatch*, April 19, 1861.

woman was to some extent a politician.”⁴⁹ Putnam’s exclamation contends that women were an active part in politics, even though they could not be directly involved. The history of elite Virginian women shows women actively participated in the political scene during the antebellum period, and their support for the secession of Virginia demonstrated their support to their state and their Southern identity.

⁴⁹ Putnam, *Richmond During the War*, 17.

CHAPTER TWO

Movements During the Civil War

On April 2, 1863, a boisterous and animated group of Richmond women frantically entered the store owned by Mr. R. H. Pollard to take tea, bacon, brooms, and other luxuries. One of the first plunderers that Mr. Pollard acknowledged was Mrs. Margaret A. Pomphrey, “a woman of means.”⁵⁰ In her hands, she held two pieces of bacon for sale in Pollard’s shop. When she attempted to exit the shop, Pollard exclaimed, “Why, Mrs. Pomphrey is it possible that you too are robbing me?”⁵¹ Mrs. Pomphrey coolly responded that it was her obligation to her fellow women to participate in the demonstration, and exited the shop, bacon in hand.⁵² Pomphrey’s contribution to the riot was not an anomaly; the community recognized a considerable portion of the women who partook in the Richmond Bread Riot as respectable women of means. Their involvement was not for want of bread, but instead was a manifestation of their frustration from living in a war-torn Confederate stronghold.

By the beginning months of 1863, the Southern states felt the economic strain of the American Civil War. Following a harsh winter, citizens of the Confederacy faced inflating prices and a shortage of food, which created the perfect environment for resistance. For many women, especially elites, these hardships provided a harsh juxtaposition from their lives prior to the start of the war. Although many elite women dedicated themselves to “suffer and be strong” for the revolution at all times, others felt the Confederate government ignored the hardships faced on the

⁵⁰ “The Courts,” *Daily Richmond Examiner*, May 15, 1863.

⁵¹ “The Courts,” *Daily Richmond Examiner*, May 15, 1863.

⁵² “The Courts,” *Daily Richmond Examiner*, May 15, 1863.

home front.⁵³ As war kept husbands and sons away from their homes in Virginia, dismissive authorities pushed exasperated women to grasp for control and express their grievances; these women felt forgotten by their government as their former lives slipped away from them. The Richmond Bread Riot, although a short-lived resistance movement, symbolizes one of the many ways that elite Virginian women politically responded to their changing lifestyles as a result of the American Civil War. Throughout the Civil War, elite Virginian women expressed themselves through written opinions and public demonstrations. These politically charged actions amplified feelings of Confederate nationalism within their community and ultimately, by the end of the war, tore it down.

Historians frequently debate the origins and fluctuations of Confederate nationalism throughout the war for Southerners in general, not just women. Anne S. Rubins asserts that Confederate nationalism was rooted in “a combination of institutions and symbols.”⁵⁴ She claims that the switch from “American” to “Confederate” for white southerners easily occurred – for many, this occurred without problem after the Election of 1860. However, as Rubins argues, Southerners faced difficulty with their national identity as they struggled to create and maintain an effective “institutional framework for the nation.”⁵⁵ Therefore, according to Rubins, the problems Southerners faced with their national identity were not rooted in the symbolism and the meaning of the Confederacy, but rather in the way the Confederacy operated. George C. Rable complements Rubins’ argument, but focuses more on the implications of nationalism for southern women. Rable describes how by the time the Confederacy started to decline, “many women wavered in their support for the southern cause, but they seldom questioned the racial,

⁵³ Putnam, *Richmond During the War*, 210.

⁵⁴ Anne S. Rubin, *A Shattered Nation: The Rise and Fall of the Confederacy, 1861-1868* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 1.

⁵⁵ Rubins, *A Shattered Nation*, 1.

class, and sexual dogmas of their society.”⁵⁶ Therefore, according to both historians, a shift in nationalistic sentiment does not necessarily signify the loss of national identity, but rather a growing impatience with institutions, such as the government, which Southerners viewed as broken and in need of reform.

Although historians commonly address issues of Confederate nationality, they frequently ignore the importance of class among women – for a long period within this field, academics lumped southern women into one all-inclusive group. However, modern historians assert failing to delineate class is harmful and leads to the oversight of important cultural aspects. George C. Rable maintains, although white women shared “certain experiences common to their sex,” the distinction of varying classes created a set of very different problems as compared to women of a lower class.⁵⁷ Stephanie McCurry contends a similar point in *Confederate Reckoning*. McCurry, who specifically focuses her attention on the political strength and actions of soldiers’ wives, who would have belonged to a lower class than planter women, claims that class is no longer a designation that can be ignored by historians. She avows that “the practice of women’s history has moved beyond such univocal categories; we can no longer talk coherently of “southern women.””⁵⁸ McCurry develops these distinctions between classes of women in her work, but focuses solely on lower class women. Although the lower classes played an important role in the formation and perpetuation of Confederate nationalism, the critical role of the elite women deserves attention from historians.

Historians have analyzed how the roles of women fluctuated throughout the Civil War. Historian Drew Gilpin Faust debates that the ability for Confederate women to participate in

⁵⁶ George C. Rable, *Civil Wars: Women and the Crisis of Southern Nationalism* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1989), x.

⁵⁷ Rable, *Civil Wars*, x.

⁵⁸ McCurry, *Confederate Reckoning*, 388.

Southern politics, even unofficially, gave them the ability to help reform their identity as the war constantly stripped away what they saw as being essential to their character.⁵⁹ Similarly, Stephanie McCurry reasons that at the turning tide of the war, lower class females entered the political sphere in opposition to their government, most notably because of their new role as soldiers' wives.⁶⁰ Both historians contend that these women were able to create room for themselves in the political sphere. Elizabeth Varon, who studies antebellum women, emphasizes that elite Virginian women always held political power.⁶¹ Although they could not participate in politics in traditional ways, such as office holding and the right to vote, they still used methods unique to females to involve themselves in politics

By lumping Southern women together as one all-encompassing group, which is an ineffective way of studying their influence on society, historians have not effectively analyzed the ability of elite Confederate women to impact feelings of Confederate nationalism. Because elite women arguably possessed more power to change their surroundings than lower class women, their role in the Confederacy deserves attention. Through the analysis of public demonstrations and written sentiments, studying the effect of Southern women on Confederate nationalism helps to explain their importance and their sway in the community and the new nation as a whole.

Creating a Southern Identity

At the start of the Civil War, when fighting commenced and Southern men left their homes to defend their countries, the women of the Confederacy heralded their soldiers' cause and proclaimed their dedication to their new nation. These Southern women, through performing

⁵⁹ Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, xi-xii.

⁶⁰ McCurry, *Confederate Reckoning*, 8.

⁶¹ Varon, *We Mean to be Counted*, 1.

domestic tasks and sharing their views in public demonstrations, earned an impressive and dependable reputation as strong Confederate women. Communities therefore recognized the women as the backbones of the Southern cause.

Elite Virginian women especially exhibited pride for their Southern identity, as well as their home state. Betty Herndon Maury, an elite Virginian who married well and came from an impressive Southern family, frequently bragged about being Southern in her diaries and to the different communities she inhabited. She privately boasted in her diary at the start of 1861, “Our troops are fewer and more indifferently armed than I expected to see. But with such indomitable spirits, and such mothers and wives, they can never be beaten!”⁶² Her confidence in the Confederacy, however, balked when compared to her confidence in Virginian troops. Following the First Battle of Manassas, she crowed, “the Virginians eclipsed them all... their valour and courage beyond praise.”⁶³ The private opinions of elite Virginian women demonstrated that, despite the hardship associated with handing their men over to the war, they had bought into the ideals of the Confederacy and were willing to sacrifice to a larger cause.⁶⁴ Although these private convictions were important to growing feelings of Confederate nationalism, and the women wrote these sentiments with the intention to share them with their neighbors, this method lacked the ability to reach and influence entire communities.

To show publically their pride for their newly formed country, however, many Virginian women wrote to newspapers and overtly acknowledged their pride in the Confederacy. These declarations show that, much like their private diaries, their love for their country outweighed their personal needs. A mother from Winchester, Virginia, wrote to her son in a newspaper

⁶² Betty Herndon Maury, *The Confederate Diary of Betty Herndon Maury* (Washington, D.C.: privately printed, 1938), 3.

⁶³ Maury, *Confederate Diary of Betty Herndon Maury*, 27.

⁶⁴ Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 12-19.

editorial that she was “ready to offer [him] up in defense of [his] country’s rights and honors.”⁶⁵ More importantly, she thanked God for a son and for motherhood, which allowed her such a privilege to do so.⁶⁶ In a similar display of patriotism, women sent poetry to their local papers. One such poem, which talks of a mother’s bravery and her courage to give her sons to the battlefield, was meant to call men to arms and fight bravely for their women. Accompanying this poem, the newspaper editor wrote, “No man can read it without thanking God that the mothers, wives and daughters of Virginia have not degenerated, and that with [sic] such women in Virginia, the men must and will, in turn, prove themselves worthy of this historic fame.”⁶⁷ This editorial note, in conjunction with the patriotic poem, discusses the female dedication to the state of Virginia and the importance of men holding their home state at the same level of prestige.⁶⁸ In these public displays of Confederate pride to local newspapers, these patriotic women identified to their communities the importance of regional pride. More significantly, these demonstrations encouraged others to display similar levels of patriotism towards their local neighborhoods and their country.

Impressively, these Southern women exclaimed their declarations of loyalty and admiration for the Confederacy at a time when they faced extreme difficulties in their own lives as a result of the war. Many were forced away from their homes as they fled from the grasp of the enemy, which drastically altered their usually luxurious and carefree lifestyles. Betty Herndon Maury lived in Washington D.C. at the onset of the war, but was forced to flee because of her family’s allegiance to the Confederacy. Her husband was in a more delicate position, because at the time she fled, he still held a position with the Federal government, which he soon

⁶⁵ Ann Catron, *Winchester Virginian*, May 8, 1861.

⁶⁶ Ann Catron, *Winchester Virginian*, May 8, 1861.

⁶⁷ “For the Dispatch,” *The Daily Dispatch*, April 18, 1861.

⁶⁸ “For the Dispatch,” *The Daily Dispatch*, April 18, 1861.

abdicated. Mrs. Maury, because of her short-notice flight from the nation's capital, was forced to leave many of her luxurious possessions behind and only carry the necessities to safety in Virginia, where the remainder of her family resided. Over a period of a month, she laments in her diary about the inconvenience of leaving her opulent assets behind. She writes about the loss of her "thick dresses" and a "portrait" of her close family members, all of which she believed were necessary to her lifestyle.⁶⁹ The descriptions in her diary help to explain the lifestyle that elite Virginian women expected in the early 1860s and how they were forced to adapt once these luxuries disappeared. More significantly, understanding what possessions they were forced to live without, while they still contributed to the war effort shows that these women, despite their elite status, pushed aside their self-interest and dedicated themselves to the Confederate cause above their own personal interest.

As the war displaced southerners, they also struggled with encounters with individuals who maintained differing loyalties in their communities. This predicament specifically hindered Virginians as the Union forces ebbed and flowed through their state. Mrs. Henrietta Fitzhugh Barr, a Virginian native who lived in Ravenwood, Virginia, at the time of the war, was frequently inconvenienced by the Union troops who surrounded and occupied her hometown. She documented in her diary, "All secession news is suppressed... This is no longer a free country. We are not allowed an expression of our thoughts. They would suppress the thoughts if only they had the power. We are living under a strict military depression."⁷⁰ Despite the struggle of living in an integrated community, Barr's feelings of loyalty toward the Confederacy persevered and strengthened. Her sharp tongue spit many insults at the Union supporters that

⁶⁹ Maury, *Confederate Diary of Betty Herndon Maury*, 37.

⁷⁰ Maury, *Confederate Diary of Betty Herndon Maury*, 9.

surrounded her; she called them “savages,” and “Yankee trash.”⁷¹ As a response to the names Barr shouted at her Unionist neighbors, they made threats about the Union abilities to end the war quickly and in their favor. Barr learned to ignore and rebut these proclamations because “they have been so frequently made and broken that we cease to fear them.”⁷² Despite the difficulties Barr faced living in a community with both secessionists and Unionists, the Yankees that surrounded her strengthened her loyalty towards her Virginian heritage and her southern identity as she defended the Confederate cause.

In addition to hardships created by displacement and Unionist neighborhoods, the separation from their spouses, sons, and brothers also adversely affected elite Southern women. These women understood the implications of the war and feared for the safety of the men in their lives; Maury witnesses one woman scold others for crying after bidding farewell to soldiers.⁷³ Women, such as Maury, recognized the importance of masking their fears and maintaining a strong image for the sake of their husbands and the Confederate cause. As Drew Gilpin Faust asserts, “Men could evidently be men only with considerable female assistance.”⁷⁴ The importance of strong women demonstrates that the community viewed them as significant actors in the political sphere, and that their neighbors should reflect the same level of strength.

Although the departure of men from local communities introduced hardships for elite Virginian women, it also introduced opportunities for women on economic and social scales. In some cases, women found themselves taking on an increased responsibility in the absence of their husbands, expanding their duties and their participation in the public sphere as necessary. Henrietta Fitzhugh Barr sold her house during the war for \$1,000 to a male resident. She

⁷¹ Maury, *Confederate Diary of Betty Herndon Maury*, 17.

⁷² Maury, *Confederate Diary of Betty Herndon Maury*, 11.

⁷³ Maury, *Confederate Diary of Betty Herndon Maury*, 4.

⁷⁴ Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 15.

explained in her diary, “this is the most expensive business transaction I have ever engaged in.”⁷⁵ This action, which is both economic and social in nature, demonstrates an increased visibility as political actors in the community and allowed elite women to undertake a more prominent role in local, public politics. These occurrences also granted elite Virginian women a communal arena to share their opinions, and as a result, communities recognized women as respectable and important members. This level of respect that communities held for females only augmented the belief that these women were the backbone of the Confederate cause.

Women further maintained their reputations as the backbones of the Confederate cause through domestic acts; these actions were not only patriotic, but were also extremely political in nature. They busied themselves “making tents for the soldiers, and sheets and pillowcases for the hospital” in “sewing societies,” which not only contributed to wartime aid, but also acted as a meeting place for Confederate women to congregate and discuss their ideas.⁷⁶ Maury claims that the women of her social circle dedicated a considerable amount of time to sewing new clothing for the soldiers, but they also united to create the symbols of the Confederacy.⁷⁷ Maury, in August of 1861, organized a group of women to design and construct the “Southern Cross,” a flag of the Confederacy. As President of the committee to design this flag, Maury also encouraged the organization to “petition Congress for a new flag.”⁷⁸ After the women completed the initial flag, it “was hoisted over the gentlemen’s reading rooms where we held our meeting, and was admired by everyone.”⁷⁹ In addition, the committee “printed... a circular letter addressed to the ladies of the Confederacy asking them to hold similar meetings to petition

⁷⁵ Henrietta Fitzhugh Barr, *The Civil War Diary of Mrs. Henrietta Fitzhugh Barr, 1862-1863*, (Marietta, OH: Hyde Brothers Printing Co., 1963), 19.

⁷⁶ Maury, *Confederate Diary of Betty Herndon Maury*, 4.

⁷⁷ Maury, *Confederate Diary of Betty Herndon Maury*, 10.

⁷⁸ Maury, *Confederate Diary of Betty Herndon Maury*, 28.

⁷⁹ Maury, *Confederate Diary of Betty Herndon Maury*, 30.

Congress.”⁸⁰ Although designing and sewing a flag appears domestic in nature, these women harnessed the political potential in this act; not only did they create a visible symbol of the Confederacy, but they also moved to mobilize other women to do the same.

In some cases, when women were not able to physically assist in the care of soldiers, they sought other ways to contribute to their well being and maintain their devotion to the Confederacy. Maury, at a time when her health was not at the highest, sought to raise some extra money to buy “comforts” to send to the wounded soldiers.⁸¹ Although these sewing circles comprised of women provided important services supporting the war on the home front, they also provided an outlet for women to discuss their changing lifestyles and to support one another through the war. While they were demonstrating their devotion to the Confederacy, they were also able to converse with like-minded women.

Elite Virginian women also demonstrated their devotion to the Confederacy through very public domestic acts, such as nursing. Betty Herndon Maury claimed in her diary that any free time women had beyond sewing for the soldiers was dedicated to nursing wounded or dying soldiers in nearby hospitals.⁸² Other elite Virginian women, such as Phoebe Yates Pember, dedicated the entirety of the war to this cause. The Secretary of War offered Pember the superintendence of a large hospital; to this honor, she replied it came as “rather a startling proposition to a woman used to all the comforts of luxurious life.”⁸³ However, to the challenge she responded, “Foremost among the Virginian women, she had given her resources of mind and means to the sick.... The benefit a good and determined woman’s rule could effect in such a

⁸⁰ Maury, *Confederate Diary of Betty Herndon Maury*, 30.

⁸¹ Maury, *Confederate Diary of Betty Herndon Maury*, 34.

⁸² Maury, *Confederate Diary of Betty Herndon Maury*, 10.

⁸³ Phoebe Yates Pember, *A Southern Woman’s Story: Life in Confederate Richmond* (Jackson, TN: McCowat-Mercer Press Inc., 1959), 25.

position settled the result in my mind.”⁸⁴ Despite the challenge nursing presented to many women, they accepted the cause for the betterment of their nation. The female presence in Virginian hospitals quite literally depicted elite women as the caregivers and healers of the Confederate cause in very public displays of loyalty and devotion.

However, not all public displays of female Confederate strength by elite Virginian women were positive; when in mixed company, they expressed how they felt inconvenienced by the presence of Yankees. Some even went as far as disrespecting the Northerners whom they viewed as inconvenient invaders. George Alfred Townsend, a war correspondent from the North, documented his travels throughout Virginia during the first two years of the war. He writes about elite Southern women in Warrenton who “refused to walk under Federal flags, and stopped their ears when the bands played national music.”⁸⁵ Townsend saw these interactions as important enough to document, showing that bystanders not only recognized the actions of these women, but that these witnesses thought of these actions as significant.

The Problems of the Confederacy - Turning of the Tides

As the year 1863 dawned on the Confederacy, Southerners began to doubt the expediency of the war. At the beginning of the war, many from both the North and the South believed the conflict would end quickly and with minimal casualties. As 1863 approached, the war raged more violently than ever, and Southerners started to realize that the fight would continue into the future. A growing desire to end the war stemmed from the many domestic problems plaguing the Confederacy.

⁸⁴ Pember, *A Southern Woman's Story*, 25.

⁸⁵ George Alfred Townsend, *Campaigns of a Non-Combatant and his Romaunt Abroad During the War* (New York, NY: Blelock & Company, 1866), 227.

One of the most pressing issues facing the Southern states at the start of 1863 was a shortage of food and other day-to-day necessities. Because of the enemy's proximity to the Confederate capital through the end of 1862 and into 1863, compromised trade routes ensured that the Confederacy did not have enough supplies to comfortably provide for all the citizens in Richmond. In addition, hundreds of refugees came to Richmond from surrounding areas "when famine and pestilence [were] likely to be added to the other horrors of war."⁸⁶ Specifically, the food shortages were so severe that John B. Jones, a war clerk in the capital, claimed that even the city rats faced starvation; he muses that these household pests became tame and "grateful" pets in order to gain food from their human housemates.⁸⁷ This shortage of food and other resources resulted in lamentations from elite Virginian women who would have never experienced this sort of difficulty prior to the war. Sallie Brock Putnam grumbled about the depreciated quality of life that resulted from the devaluation of Confederate currency and the lack of food, paper, and amusing activities, such as outings to the theater. She wrote, "The curse became so heavy that we groaned and writhed under it."⁸⁸

In order to maintain stability during this resource crisis, the Confederate government tried to control the distribution and prices of food to ensure the fulfillment of its citizens' basic needs, but often did not control the situation to their fullest ability. According to Jones' diary, food speculators who "have defrauded the government" built up stores of provisions, specifically nourishment.⁸⁹ According to Sallie Putnam, these formerly poor hoarders engaged in "purchasing fine estates, driving fine horses, rolling in the finest coaches they could procure, and

⁸⁶ John B. Jones, *A Rebel War Clerk's Diary* (New York, NY: Sagamore Press Inc., 1958), 149.

⁸⁷ Jones, *A Rebel War Clerk's Diary*, 164.

⁸⁸ Putnam, *Richmond During the War*, 173.

⁸⁹ Jones, *A Rebel War Clerk's Diary*, 152.

far as sumptuously as our market would allow.”⁹⁰ As the situation worsened, the government started to seize collections of food from merchants, but often did not bother collecting the stores of the speculators. Jones identified that such inaction by the government could lead to serious consequences on behalf of the starving Richmond citizens, and he wrote to the government to try to correct this inaction. He lamented that acting upon these speculators for the good of the community “would be beneficial and popular” and would “confine the grumblers to the extortioners.” For very obvious reasons, the citizens of Richmond wanted the government to act on these criminals; when the government ignored this plea, the citizens became angered with their representation that failed to fulfill their needs.⁹¹

In addition to the provision shortages and the exploitation by speculators, the city of Richmond faced additional difficulties from a smallpox outbreak. Sallie Putnam reported in her diary that the disease spread throughout the soldiers and the citizens of the city; so many were sick that “they could not tell when, nor where, [they] contracted the disease.”⁹² John B. Jones added in his diary that the disease was “terminating fatally in almost every case.”⁹³ One elite Virginian woman, Kate Rowland Mason, documented that her brother “[has] been in quarantine on account of the smallpox.”⁹⁴ Mason recognized the magnitude of the outbreak, but her mind remained “so absorbed... with the battles, that [the outbreak] has hardly been realized.”⁹⁵ Although the elites faced fewer hardships than the poorer classes, the magnitude of the smallpox outbreak in addition to the existing stress of war, affected even the more prominent Virginians. The outbreak of smallpox devastated the city, but it also opened the door for other diseases to

⁹⁰ Putnam, *Richmond During the War*, 192.

⁹¹ Jones, *A Rebel War Clerk's Diary*, 170-171.

⁹² Putnam, *Richmond During the War*, 207

⁹³ Jones, *A Rebel War Clerk's Diary*, 143.

⁹⁴ Kate Mason Rowland, “The Bloody Battlefield So Near,” in *Ladies of Richmond: Confederate Capital*, ed. Katharine M. Jones (Indianapolis, IN: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1962), 146.

⁹⁵ Rowland, “The Bloody Battlefield So Near,” 146.

appear; Jones wrote, “there are too many people here for the houses, and the danger of malignant diseases very great.”⁹⁶ The introduction of other contagious diseases made an already starving society even more vulnerable.

The End of the War – The Receding Tide of Confederate Nationalism

As the year of 1862 came to a close, the Confederacy’s domestic problems challenged Virginians in new ways. As elite Virginian women neared the end of their patience, they expressed their dissatisfaction in similar methods as when they called for secession and articulated their grievances against the North. These expressions started in 1863, as the Confederacy’s success in battle ebbed and flowed. Initially, these protests manifested in the form of public displays of grievances, such as the Richmond Bread Riot, but later transitioned to more interpersonal correspondence by the end of the war.

The Richmond Bread Riot, the largest display of grievances by elite Virginian women, is crucial for what it can demonstrate regarding life on the Confederate home front during the latter portion of the war. The riot, especially when interpreted outside of just an economic viewpoint, demonstrated the major underlying social and domestic problems that extended throughout the South in 1863. Women who lost the most as a result of the war, those belonging to the upper class, also participated in the Richmond Bread Riot thereby conveying their frustrations with the government. Overall, the Richmond Bread Riot symbolizes the decreasing nationalistic sentiments of these war-weary women within a war-torn Confederate stronghold.

Despite the claim that the female bread rioters bellowed they “wanted bread, and bread they would have or die,” the term “bread riot” is a bit of a misnomer for the event that occurred in Richmond – preconceived notions of starvation drove officials to name the occurrence after

⁹⁶ Jones, *A Rebel War Clerk’s Diary*, 143.

what they believed to be starving rioters.⁹⁷ These disturbers of the peace were not hungry and, instead, directed their plunder to stores of greater luxury: “the cry for bread with which this violence commenced was soon subdued, and instead of articles of food, the rioters to stores containing dry-goods, shoes, etc.,” explains Sallie Putnam.⁹⁸ Accompanying this quote is Putnam’s disbelief that starvation plagued the disturbers. In her opinion, they all appeared to be well fed and healthy. She questioned the patriotism of well fed individuals who were still choosing to rebel against their government and harm their fellow citizens. From her point of view, hunger was the only justifiable reason to act out while the rest of the community suffered severely through the war. Even so, the actions of the rioters were unacceptable and detrimental to the government’s efforts to sustain Richmond through the remainder of the war.

Richmond government officials echoed the sentiments recorded in Sallie Putnam’s diary. Varina Davis, the first lady of the Confederacy wrote, “The fact was conclusive to the President’s mind that it was not bread that they wanted, but that they were bent on nothing but plunder and wholesale robbery.”⁹⁹ Like Sallie Putnam, Varina Davis expresses doubt that starvation motivated this drastic response, since so many of the rioters passed food stores for those of greater luxury and prominence. In her account, Varina Davis also detailed the address her husband, Jefferson Davis, the President of the Confederacy delivered to the crowd involved in the “lawlessness.”¹⁰⁰ In this speech, he asked the crowd to disperse and reminded them “of how they had taken jewelry and finery instead of supplying themselves with bread, for the lack

⁹⁷ Douglas O. Tice, “Bread or Blood – The Richmond Bread Riot,” *Civil War Times Illustrated* Volume 12, no. 10 (February 1974): 15.

⁹⁸ Putnam, *Richmond During the War*, 209.

⁹⁹ Varina Jefferson Davis, *Jefferson Davis: Ex-President of the Confederate States of America: A Memoir by His Wife, Vol. II* (New York, NY: Belford Company Publishers, 1890), 373.

¹⁰⁰ Davis, *Jefferson Davis*, 375.

of which they claimed they were suffering.”¹⁰¹ Although these women (and a few men) claimed they were searching for bread to alleviate their starvation, the stores they targeted indicate that something deeper than just starvation motivated their dramatic actions.

In her work, McCurry argues that the disturbance in Richmond “offers a stunning portrait of poor white women’s mass political mobilization.”¹⁰² While the movement certainly signifies female political mobilization, the targeted stores and profiles of the rioters designate that this disturbance encompassed more than just the lower class. Some women who participated in the demonstration belonged to a higher class and possessed great reputations and maintained stately appearances, even in this time of hardship. For example, Mrs. Mary Woodward faced charges for her participation in the demonstration, but was rescued from jail by her wealthy mother-in-law. Her outward appearance was described as “genteel looking” and “handsomely dressed.”¹⁰³ Another, Kate Ammon, was “handsome and handsomely dressed.”¹⁰⁴ Mary Duke, another rioter, was described in the *Daily Richmond Examiner* as a “finely dressed woman of forty, with a quantity of rouge on her face.”¹⁰⁵ She was charged one hundred dollars for her involvement in the disturbance.¹⁰⁶ Another, Mrs. Frances Kelly, “was a tall, well dressed woman of forty.”¹⁰⁷ Even if these women faced difficulties and financial hardships as a result of the economic strain in Richmond, they still could not be considered women of the lower class because of their appearances, their deportment, and their ability to pay the bail posted by the jury.

¹⁰¹ Davis, *Jefferson Davis*, 375.

¹⁰² McCurry, *Confederate Reckoning*, 187.

¹⁰³ Michael B. Chesson, “Harlots or Heroines? A New Look at the Richmond Break Riot,” *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* Vol. 92, no. 2 (April 1984): 164.

¹⁰⁴ Chesson, “Harlots of Heroines?” 164.

¹⁰⁵ “The Courts,” *Daily Richmond Examiner*, May 28, 1863.

¹⁰⁶ “The Courts,” *Daily Richmond Examiner*, May 28, 1863.

¹⁰⁷ “The Courts,” *Daily Richmond Examiner*, May 13, 1863.

Arguably the most famous of the women who did not belong to the lower class was Mrs. Margaret Adeline Pomfrey. Mr. A. J. Crane, the defender on behalf of Mrs. Pomphrey in court, describes her as a “woman of means,” who was caught in the wrong place at the wrong time; she believed the crowd robbing a store was actually the Young Men’s Christian Association giving away bacon, yet Mr. Pollard, the shopkeeper who accused her of bacon theft, testified that she understood she was stealing from his store. After multiple witnesses testified on behalf of Mrs. Pomphrey, the Commonwealth’s Attorney asserted what he believed to be a respectable fine for her crime. He claimed the suspect in question, Mrs. Pomphrey, was “proved to have been a woman of means and respectability. She had had advantages of moral education.”¹⁰⁸ Because of her position, he wished the jury to inflict the maximum fine upon Margaret Pomphrey for her misdemeanor. Even though her attorney countered that she was a lady “of the first respectability,” and simply got caught in the heat of the moment, she was eventually fined fifty dollars for her involvement and sentenced to a short stint in jail.¹⁰⁹

When historians assign such a political movement only to the lower class, they ignore women of upper classes who were fighting for the same political freedom and faced the same grievances are ignored from this discussion. Assigning the riot to the lower class also designates that class motivated this riot. During this time in Richmond, since everyone was suffering, class was less important than in prior eras, but still features prominently in this instance as individuals realized that those who were acting out were not of the lower class, but instead were of considerable means. What concerned fellow Richmonders was that their equivalent citizens had the audacity to act out against the state in a time of trouble instead of directing their energy to the war effort. Various newspaper editorials expressed their discontent with the rioters and

¹⁰⁸ “The Courts,” *Daily Richmond Examiner*, May 28, 1863.

¹⁰⁹ “The Courts,” *Daily Richmond Examiner*, May 28, 1863.

explained, “those who have examined the sketches of these examinations before the Mayor will have seen that so far from being in starvation, the males and females engaged in this villainy were rioters because of their riotous living; ... that many of them were not only above want, but possessed of ample means to engage, by large fees, the carrion crows of the bar to claw them from the clutch of justice.”¹¹⁰

Understanding the class and condition of these women begs the question of the cause of the riot. In her diary Sallie Putnam offers an explanation as to what she believes incited the riot; the citizens most affected by the “bread riot,” the “real sufferers,” she says, “were not of the class who would engage in acts of violence to obtain bread.” Instead, she asserts, the riots included, “the most worthy and highly cultivated of our citizens, who, by the suspicion of the ordinary branches of extreme inflation and the prices of provisions, were often reduced to abject suffering; and helpless refugees, who, driven from comfortable homes, were compelled to seek relief in the crowded city.”¹¹¹ In Sallie Putnam’s account, those that were creating the loudest ruckus in the streets were the same women who had faced the most drastic lifestyle changes as a result of the war.

Putnam credits the women of the Confederacy for their dedication during the war and says, “how great their necessities must have been can be imagined in the fact that many of our women, reared in the utmost case, delicacy and refinement, were compelled to dispose of all articles of taste and former luxury, and frequently necessary articles of clothing, to meet the everyday demands of life.”¹¹² Not only were these women alone, having sent their husbands and sons off to the war, but they were also losing their former comforts in life and the luxuries that

¹¹⁰ “The reader will perceive in the summary of intelligence from the United States that they story of that ... of the criminal population in this city, commonly known as the riot,” *Daily Richmond Examiner*, April 13, 1863.

¹¹¹ Putnam, *Richmond During the War*, 210.

¹¹² Putnam, *Richmond During the War*, 210.

they had grown used to as women of ample means and respectability. Varina Davis understood their suffering and the exhaustion that plagued the Confederacy, especially in the capital: “The steady depletion of the Confederate forces and the consequent success of the enemy, increased the sufferings of our people; suffering made them querulous, and they looked about to find the person to blame for their misfortune.”¹¹³ Many looked to the government, specifically President Jefferson Davis, as the face of the Confederacy and also the face of their problems.

Jefferson Davis understood his precarious situation as he addressed the settling bread riot crowd. Before threatening to use military force to squelch the rioters, Davis said, “you say you are hungry and have no money. Here is all I have; it is not much but take it,” as he threw the change in his pocket to the tumultuous crowd.¹¹⁴ In addition to discussing the “serious disturbance” of the bread riot, Varina Davis also discusses in her memoirs the horrors of living under military rule. Life was difficult, supplies were scarce, and success at this point was no longer guaranteed. Instead of rioting in frustration for lack of bread, these women formulated a glaring indication that they were exasperated with living conditions in Richmond, and as the government continued to allow them to endure such conditions, their patience with the Confederate cause and their new government was dwindling. The riot instead holds a double meaning – it demonstrates that not only were the elite Virginian women involved in such resistance exasperated with their conditions, but that they also were attempting to regain control as the custodians of the Confederacy. By taking items of greater luxury, these women were securing the means they needed to once again fulfill their role as mothers and caregivers.

Despite her status as First Lady of the Confederacy and a symbol of Southern strength, Varina Davis, in a series of correspondence, also expressed her dissatisfaction and disbelief in

¹¹³ Davis, *Jefferson Davis*, 373.

¹¹⁴ Davis, *Jefferson Davis*, 375.

the success of the Confederacy. In a letter to her friend, General Preston, Varina wrote, “I am going to announce myself a great heretic, but you know I am a revolutionary....”¹¹⁵ The remainder of the letter discusses the Confederacy’s need to achieve peace, and that the Constitution is not strong enough to operate with so many unhappy and disheartened citizens. She writes, “The consent of the masses governed is only accorded to the government which confers at that time large blessings – faith is never displayed by the masses in things hoped for if they chance to be those everyday blessings which we call necessities.”¹¹⁶ As a result of the decreasing belief in the Confederacy, even Varina Howell Davis believed that their new nation could not persevere. This belief resulted from her conviction that the masses were not willing to fight for their cause any longer. For the elite Virginian women who looked to Davis for comfort, Davis’ publically expressed feelings surely dealt a low blow.

As the war neared its end, Richmonders started to notice the difficulties associated with lifestyle changes of the elite class. Sallie Putnam, who observed the bread riots and acknowledged the participation of elite women, documented the struggles of the elite class. In the early months of 1865, Sallie Putnam commented on the department of the elite class and how they handled their changed lifestyle in the wake of the war. She commented that it was not the poor people who were the most affected by the war, and that they were still finding ways to support themselves. She comments that “salaried officers” and the more elite class of Richmonders, “found it extremely difficult, with the constantly increasing prices, and the depreciation of the currency, to bring their expenses within the limits of their income.”¹¹⁷ Putnam

¹¹⁵ Varina Howell Davis, “Pray That As My Day Is, So May My Strength Be,” in *Ladies of Richmond: Confederate Capital*, ed. Katharine M. Jones (Indianapolis, IN: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1962), 167.

¹¹⁶ Davis, “Pray That As...,” 268.

¹¹⁷ Sallie Ann Brock Putnam, “For a Name and for a Ring,” in *Ladies of Richmond: Confederate Capital*, ed. Katharine M. Jones (Indianapolis, IN: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1962), 256.

commented that in addition to the elites of Richmond suffering because of the limited supplies in 1865, they were very vocal about their struggles. Putnam comments that these “mutterings of vexation and disapproval were sometimes heard from a certain class of malcontents, who, when the light of prosperity shone on our arms, were the first to hail the Confederacy,” multiplied, both in complaints and in numbers of those dissatisfied.¹¹⁸

John B. Jones, an outsider to the lifestyles of the elite Virginian women noticed their shift in loyalty and the apathy on the part of the elite class; accordingly, he documented their unwillingness to sacrifice even in the name of the Confederacy. Jones wrote in his diary, “There is some alarm by the opulent inhabitants, some of whom, for the sake of their property, would submit to the invader.”¹¹⁹ Jones’ recollection illustrated the understanding of the community toward the elite women’s skewed attitudes. Even though they once heralded the cause of the Confederacy as proud mothers, sisters, and wives, the war took an exhausting toll on them. Their communities recognized their disillusionment in the Confederacy and their faltering dedication to upholding their sentiments of nationalism when they could no longer maintain their role as “true women.”

The private convictions of these women, despite their quieter nature, effectively swayed the community. As John Goode, a Confederate veteran stated in regards to Southern women, “It is due to the truth of history to say that the women of the Confederacy made the men of the Confederacy what they were.”¹²⁰ When the fatigued women gave up on the cause that drove them at the beginning of the war, their communities noticed the shift in their mindsets. The women who were once the strongest supporters and the “backbone” of the new Confederate

¹¹⁸ Putnam, “For a Name and for a Ring,” 256.

¹¹⁹ John B. Jones, *Rebel War Clerks Diary*, 306.

¹²⁰ John Goode, *Recollections of a Lifetime by John Goode of Virginia* (New York, NY: The Neale Publishing Company, 1906), 67.

nation, halted their support when the trials and tribulations of war weighed down on their society. Because the women of the Confederacy contributed to the formation of the Confederate state at the onset of the war and played an integral part in the realization of Confederate identity, they possessed the ability to tear down what they helped to build up. These women, through their public displays and their written persuasions, helped to build up Confederate nationalism at the start of the war, but also undermine the cause when the heavy weight of its repercussions became unbearable.

CHAPTER THREE

Memorialization Following the Civil War

On May 10, 1866, the Hollywood & Oakland Memorial Societies in Richmond, Virginia, organized a memorial day to honor the death of Southern icon Stonewall Jackson, as well as the other brave soldiers who gave their lives in the American Civil War. According to newspapers accounts of the festivities, the women organized a grand spectacle; in addition to a procession “more than one mile in length,” they held a religious service, outfitted the graves of the soldiers with flowers and other décor, read letters from illustrious Confederate generals, such as Robert E. Lee, and listened to orators to honor the fallen soldiers laid to rest in the Virginian capital.¹²¹ Although this particular memorial society shared membership between both sexes, the “larger majority of the persons present were ladies, and they showed by their conduct how much may be realized from the acuteness, tenderness, and sanctity of feeling which it is to be hoped will ever continue to characterize the women of Virginia.”¹²² Similar societies not only played a critical role in the memorialization of the hoards of Confederate dead, but they also provided an important outlet for Southern females to participate in public political action, especially in Virginia.

Much like their participation in party politics in the antebellum period and the important domestic work performed during the war, the creation of Ladies’ Memorial Associations in Virginia during the postbellum period allowed for female participation in the political sphere through methods that society deemed appropriate for women. For many, participation in Ladies’ Memorial Associations helped them to reclaim the social order that the war had taken away.

¹²¹ *Richmond Dispatch*, May 11, 1866.

¹²² *Richmond Dispatch*, May 11, 1866.

These ladies participated in these associations to memorialize their soldiers, but also to reclaim some control over their families and their society as wives, mothers, and caregivers.

Historians have acknowledged, although succinctly in broader histories of the South, the importance of female participation in the Confederate memory and the important contribution of memorialization societies. Gaines M. Foster introduced the idea of Ladies' Memorial Associations in his book *Ghosts of the Confederacy*. Foster details the importance of Ladies' Memorial Associations and their use of ceremonies and memorials as a bereavement method following the carnage of the Civil War. His explanation of such organizations commences with a clarification that these organizations, although they were not completely composed of women and predominantly relied on men for support, provided an arena for women to become involved in memorializing fallen soldiers. Foster acknowledges the importance of female participation but does not fully elaborate on the political nature of their work; he merely chalks it up as a continuation of their domestic duties into the public. In addition, Foster dwells on the initial role that men played in such groups throughout their formation, and as a result, undermines the role that many of these women played throughout the origins of these groups. By only discussing specific organizations where men controlled the formation and operations of the association, Foster implies that all the organizations were composed in a similar way.¹²³ Other historians, such as David Goldfield, mention the memorialization societies in similar manners; these organizations are viewed as womanly works that merely transcend the work within the home. In this estimation, historians fail to concede the full political nature of the female involvement in Confederate memory.¹²⁴

¹²³ Gaines M. Foster, *Ghosts of the Confederacy: Defeat, The Lost Cause, and the Emergence of the New South, 1865-1913*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 38-43.

¹²⁴ See David Goldfield, *Still Fighting the Civil War: The American South and Southern History* (Baton Rouge, LA: LSU Press, 2013).

Historians also have noted the importance of memorialization and its inherently political nature. David Blight, in *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* details how memorialization in the South started as a civilian act in the absence of an official agency to take on this cause, but soon became political because “it was itself part of the process of determining the meanings of the war.”¹²⁵ As political orators at decoration days assigned meanings to the lives that were lost on the battlefield, it started to shape how Southerners viewed the war and the sacrifices that they made as a nation during that conflict. Especially as ex-Confederate generals, such as Jubal Early, became involved in the process of memorialization, the movement gained more political clout as individuals fought for control. David Blight analytically details the importance of the political role of memorialization, but dedicates very little of his discussion to the important role that elite women played in their process, beyond acknowledging that they started these movements and that elites usually were the only individuals who could afford to pay for monuments.¹²⁶

It was not until Caroline E. Janney’s *Burying the Dead but Not the Past: Ladies’ Memorial Associations and the Lost Cause*, that a major and lengthy scholarly work was dedicated to the research and analysis of Ladies’ Memorial Associations and their relation to the preservation of Confederate memory. Published in 2008, Janney uses stories and correspondence from multiple organizations to create a chronicle of Ladies’ Memorial Associations as a whole and also examines how such organizations contributed to the Lost Cause of the Confederacy. By tracing the stories of multiple organizations from their origins and through their peaks, and analyzing other organizations that resulted from the good work of Ladies’ Memorialization Associations, such as the United Daughters of the Confederacy, Caroline Janney provides the

¹²⁵ David Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2001), 78.

¹²⁶ See David Blight, *Race and Reunion*, 64-97.

most thorough and detailed explanation of the work and reverberations of the women who were involved in Ladies' Memorial Associations. However, Janney pays very little attention to the major struggle between genders to claim responsibility for memorialization activity, which is an important aspect to understanding how these Confederate women grappled for power in the Reconstructionist South.¹²⁷ Janney also fails to acknowledge the faltering motivation of the elite Virginian ladies who led the memorialization movement towards the end of the war.

In 2009, in "'A Strong Force of Ladies': Women, Politics, and Confederate Memorial Associations in Nineteenth-Century Raleigh," Catherine W. Bishir investigates how women used their gender to enter into the political debates that surrounded the creation of Confederate memory in an important North Carolina city. Bishir examines the politics that were interwoven with the work of the ladies, calling these events "sometimes dramatic."¹²⁸ Overall, Bishir argues that the women entered into contested political battles in Raleigh in an attempt to claim power and responsibility for the work that they were doing to memorialize their Confederate dead. Ultimately, Bishir's work faces some limitations by only focusing on one city and one memorial association, but she provides a sound case study for how women faced such contestation through politics.¹²⁹

Caroline Janney's *Burying the Dead but Not the Past* emphasizes how the women involved in Ladies' Memorial Associations were trying to create a meaningful role for themselves in society through their work in these groups.¹³⁰ Catherine Bishir's "'A Strong Force of Ladies'" examines how these women were using politics to do so, but were facing extreme opposition in Raleigh from males who were attempting to claim some of that new found power

¹²⁷ Caroline Janney, *Burying the Dead but Not the Past: Ladies' Memorial Associations and the Lost Cause*, (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 1-14.

¹²⁸ Bishir, "A Strong Force of Ladies," 456.

¹²⁹ Bishir, "'A Strong Force of Ladies'", 455-491.

¹³⁰ Janney, *Burying the Dead but Not the Past*, 4.

for themselves.¹³¹ Each of these secondary sources examines a different piece of the puzzle in the search for how organizations such as Ladies' Memorial Associations searched for ways to create a meaningful role in society for women through the preservation of Confederate memory after the Civil War, but no sources complete a comprehensive view on the subject. This research, in conjunction with various primary sources, demonstrates that the struggle between genders to claim responsibility for the good work of the Ladies' Memorial Associations is a region-wide phenomenon pursued by various organizations throughout the South.

Historians have acknowledged the importance of women to the memorialization efforts in the South, but often do not give them enough credit for the work they started in the South. The action of Southern women, most notably elite women relative to the commemoration of the Confederacy, deserves elaboration. In many cases, once men of the communities understood the implications and the power of the associations' actions, they attempted to take over the work that the women started, showing the inherent political motivations of their work.

Why Virginia and Why Women

The first Ladies' Memorial Association, organized in Winchester, Virginia, started their work just months after the end of the Civil War. The movement commenced from eyewitnesses who noticed that soldiers were improperly buried and there was really no organized method of honoring soldiers. In response to these observations, ladies gathered together to honor the soldiers who died defending their town. Following Winchester's lead, Ladies' Memorial Associations popped up throughout Virginia, in Richmond, Fredericksburg, and Petersburg, to name a few. The rest of the South eventually followed their lead and organizations sprung up

¹³¹ Bishir, "'A Strong Force of Ladies'", 456.

throughout the Southern states.¹³² Much like other political actions in the antebellum period within the Southern United States, Virginia led the charge for memorialization efforts. As Sallie Putnam stated, “Virginia had borne the brunt of the war;” for this reason, Virginia provided the perfect location, not only because of the structural devastation, but also because of the loss of human life that the state experienced throughout the war.¹³³ It also allowed for the perfect opportunity for females to become involved because there was no official state agency to assist with the work, which left it up to the citizens, specifically the females of Virginia, to complete this work.

To outsiders, this was the perfect undertaking for elite Virginian women. One reason why the elite Virginian women were the perfect memorializers was because of their hatred for the Yankees who occupied their homes, destroyed their property, and ultimately dismantled their way of life. By memorializing the South, not only were these women remembering their former lives and the soldiers that fought for their lifestyle, but these women were also fighting against Yankee rule through their commemoration. It was also the perfect activity for the women who dedicated so much domestic energy to the war effort, because it “appeared to be a natural extension of women’s wartime skills.”¹³⁴ Not only did it allude to the caregiving overtones present throughout the war and the antebellum era, but their wartime activities also included raising money for the war effort, which was critical to the memorialization process. Finally, women were believed to be the perfect memorializers because of the mourning rituals prior to the war.

¹³² Caroline Janney, “The Right to Love and Mourn: The Origins of Ladies’ Memorial Associations, 1865-1867” in *Crucible of the Civil War*, edited by Edward L. Ayers, Gary W. Gallagher, and Andrew J. Torget (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2006).

¹³³ Putnam, *Richmond During the War*, 196.

¹³⁴ Janney, “Right to Love and Mourn,” 173.

In the antebellum period, Americans believed that a “good death” was “an art,” and that there were certain rules to guarantee that the dying individual was on their way to such a passing.¹³⁵ It was important for soldiers to die at home, surrounded by their family to ensure that they knew their salvation was coming and that they were willing to accept its arrival. Last words held a significant amount of power, both for the dying individual and the family that was surrounding them to witness the death.¹³⁶ The American Civil War completely changed these concepts when many soldiers were dying away from their homes; many died quite suddenly on the battlefield as well, which robbed many of their opportunity to utter last words to their loved ones. On the battlefield, it was important that “the deceased had been conscious of his fate, had demonstrated willingness to accept it, had shown signs of belief in God and in his own salvation, and had left messages and instructive exhortations to those who should have been at his side.”¹³⁷ Especially for Southern women, failing to surround their loved ones as they died on the battlefield left gaps in their mourning process; as a result, the country as a whole underwent significant changes in the way that they grieved.

Further complicating the matters of grieving was the fact that in both the North and the South, the government and the military departments kept sparse records, and often it was difficult for families to gain information about the whereabouts of their soldiers. As a response to this, charitable organizations took up the cause and attempted to name the soldiers that had perished and relay their information back to their loved ones, who sat in earnest waiting for any information they could find. In the North, organizations such as the Christian Commission and the Sanitary Commission took on this role, but there was a noticeable lag in this development in

¹³⁵ Faust, *This Republic of Suffering*, 6.

¹³⁶ Faust, *This Republic of Suffering*, 15-18.

¹³⁷ Faust, *This Republic of Suffering*, 17.

the South.¹³⁸ In the South, much like memorialization would play out in the future, the efforts to locate and return soldiers to families was largely practiced on a state-to-state basis. In Virginia, predominant individuals took on the charge to find information about lost family members for a fee paid by the families. This largely limited the ability to find lost soldiers to the upper class, and as the war continued and financial hardships mounted, it became increasingly difficult to find information about soldiers' whereabouts. Although the North also used independent agents to acquire this information, they also had the infrastructure that allowed a higher access to this service.¹³⁹ The Northern ability to locate and relay information regarding the wellbeing of a loved one became increasingly important after the fighting had ceased and individuals became desperate for information about their soldier and for the ability to properly memorialize them. In the South, individuals were rarely able to procure the same information; for the women, this demonstrated a potential space for them to intervene and control the situation. The war dismantled the female ability to properly mourn the loss of their husband, brothers, and sons, which not only hurt their ability to move on, but also called into question whether the deceased experienced a "good death." Memorialization associations allowed for these women to commemorate their lost loved ones, while undertaking the socially accepted mourning period, albeit in a different way.

Although these organizations are very significant, what remains more significant are the women who populated their ranks. According to Caroline Janney, "many of the same women who had sewn battle flags, volunteered in hospitals, and snubbed Yankees during the war turn to the LMAs so that they might continue to display their Confederate patriotism through memorial

¹³⁸ Faust, *This Republic of Suffering*, 107.

¹³⁹ Faust, *The Republic of Suffering*, 117.

activities.”¹⁴⁰ Even though many of these women stayed more reserved at the end of the war, and worried about their livelihoods and the future of their families, they still wanted to show their patriotism; they found their chance to do this in memorialization efforts.

The Process of Memorialization

In order to properly bury the fallen sons of Virginia, the first step was often identifying the bodies that were not properly interred following the battles in Virginia. Upon the conclusion of the war, there were still many bodies that had been hastily buried without proper identification and often where the soldier fell. Such a burial did not align with the antebellum idea of a “good death,” and the females of the memorial associations sought to rectify these conditions.¹⁴¹ After all, they believed, “the dead rest better in beautiful places.”¹⁴² They approached such an undertaking by explaining that they were doing so in “the name of every sorrowing mother, wife and sister in the South, now tender with their sincere and heartfelt thanks.”¹⁴³

The first steps in their process of memorialization were to gather and identify the bodies buried in crude graves and rebury them within the community. The first Ladies’ Memorial Association, in Winchester, Virginia, relocated approximately 3,000 fallen soldiers back to their hometown of Winchester. In order to do so, they had to first fundraise for the purchase of a tract of land that was large enough to bury and memorialize all the soldiers.

At the root of the ladies’ work, however, laid the most important factor of all to their memorialization effort: finances. Following the Civil War, Southern cities and infrastructure was decimated, especially so in Virginia due to the magnitude of the fighting that occurred within her

¹⁴⁰ Blight, *Race and Reunion*, 166-167.

¹⁴¹ Faust, *This Republic of Suffering*, 17.

¹⁴² Oakwood Memorial Papers, VAHS.

¹⁴³ *Daily Dispatch*, July 3 1866.

borders. Raising money for memorialization in a time when so many people lived in poverty presented a challenge to the ladies of the memorial associations; however, the memorial associations found great success when raising funds for this cause, since many Southerners admired their efforts. Each individual memorial association approached fundraising from a different angle. The memorial association in Petersburg, Virginia asked each lady who joined to pay dues, in addition to their other fundraising ventures. This organization held concerts and lectures to help raise funds for their efforts. Others reached out to their immediate communities for donation. The methods that these women resorted to raise funds for their associations were extremely similar to the techniques used to collect monetary donations for the statue of Henry Clay and the caregiving efforts during the war, which demonstrates the continuum of these female's activities.

Other organizations, such as the Winchester Memorial Association, sent out pleas for help throughout the Southern states. Through newspapers and pamphlets, Virginian societies begged the other states of the South, "over whom the iron hand of war has passed with less terrible violence, will, in this the hour of our poverty and distress, aid us with generous contributions in preserving *their* husbands, *their* brothers, *their* sons, who fell in Virginia in defense of the South, and now lie beneath the sod."¹⁴⁴ Individual memorial associations dispatched "agents" in each state, whose task was to "take such measures as they thought best to give efficiency to the efforts of all who were disposed to aid us."¹⁴⁵ Such measures proved highly effective for the memorial associations of Virginia, who with these donations, brought in monetary donations, as well as material goods used in fundraising bazaars and auctions. Fortunately, the association received donations from many Southern states, including Alabama,

¹⁴⁴ *Daily Dispatch*, July 3, 1866

¹⁴⁵ *Daily Dispatch*, June 18, 1866

“which lost so many of her sons in the Shenandoah Valley.”¹⁴⁶ Their contribution of \$1,200 helped the Virginian memorial societies achieve their financial goal. In general, the Virginian Associations acknowledged the generous donations of other Southern states; “when we consider the impoverished condition of our people, and the many demands made upon them, their contributions have indeed been liberal.”¹⁴⁷ Their willingness to reach out across the South united the Southern states in their new effort to memorialize the fallen Confederate soldiers and demonstrates the importance of giving Confederate soldiers a proper death, even if it was away from home. For the women who were involved in this trans-Southern effort, it demonstrated their ability to reach beyond their immediate communities to make an impact on the process of Confederate memory.

The Ladies’ Memorial Associations of Virginia could have stopped there, but many went on to honor the soldiers through elaborate memorials and decoration days. Decoration Days provided an outlet for grief and despair for Southerners, and according to historian David Blight, “shaped Civil War Memory as much as any other cultural ritual.”¹⁴⁸ These celebrations of Confederate sacrifice, which would eventually be coined as “Memorial Day,” combined spiritual and political aspects.

The Ladies’ Memorial Association of Winchester organized a decoration day on June 6, 1866 to commemorate the completion of the new cemetery. This, much like the methods the ladies employed to raise funds for the cemetery, was a grand spectacle. A wide variety of prominent speakers performed at the celebration; this was important not only in the memorialization process, but also helped to recognize the women’s work as a serious political

¹⁴⁶ Jonathan A. Noyalas, *Plagued By War: Winchester, Virginia During the Civil War* (Leesburg, VA: Gauley Mount Press, 2003), 168.

¹⁴⁷ *Daily Dispatch*, June 18, 1866

¹⁴⁸ Blight, *Race and Reunion*, 65.

contribution. The prominent speakers were former generals and illustrious politicians, which gave legitimacy to the women's cause.¹⁴⁹ Most importantly, decisions surrounding Decoration Days, such as which day should be recognized as the day of memorial, was often left up to the ladies, which shows their power in memorializing the Southern cause.¹⁵⁰ Because this decision was often left to the nuclear communities, different communities celebrated Decoration Day on varying dates, which led to debates between groups of ladies. Overall, Decoration Day, as a public spectacle, gave a visual representation to the community of the importance and magnitude of the Ladies' Memorial Associations work.

Opposition to Female Work

As Ladies' Memorial Associations gained clout in their respective communities, men slowly realized how much power these largely female groups were procuring. Men targeted especially powerful groups in an attempt to regain some of that power for themselves; because men fought the war, the general sentiment was that men should also be responsible for the memorialization of fallen soldiers and heroic acts upon the completion of the war.¹⁵¹ As Caroline Janney argues in *Burying the Dead but Not the Past*, the women of the Hollywood Memorial Association in Richmond, Virginia experienced pressure from men to release some of their power to males, who in their opinion, were more qualified to exercise it.

In October of 1870, after the death of Robert E. Lee, the majority of the pressure came from Confederate generals, who felt it was their duty, more than the ladies who had experience with memorialization, to remember their beloved leader. Jubal Early, who ironically enough was relieved of command by Lee in the final months of the war, fought steadfastly to steal power

¹⁴⁹ Noyalas, *Plagued by War*, 168-169.

¹⁵⁰ Blight, *Race and Reunion*, 65.

¹⁵¹ Gaines M. Foster, *Ghost of the Confederacy*, 38.

from women involved in Ladies' Memorial Associations.¹⁵² Early, who was regarded as a "misogynist" in many circles, used his high rank as a general to create credibility for him as more qualified than the women who had not been involved in the war effort.¹⁵³ The women of Richmond rallied together to create a memorial association specifically to honor their late and beloved general, which they believed was their duty since they had headed so many memorialization efforts since the end of the war five years prior. Jubal Early, however, felt differently. Early utilized a variety of sabotage techniques against women's associations; from blocking their fundraising to changing their messages to the media, Early fought against women activists with dirty tactics. At moments throughout this conflict between Early and the ladies, Early blatantly refused to acknowledge their efforts and the success they had earned in the process.¹⁵⁴ Early provides a prominent example of how men entered the realm of memorialization, making the issue more widespread than just women gathering together to memorialize the men from their immediate community. For Early, the involvement of females in the political realm represented a threat to him, since they were fulfilling a role that he felt was his to fill. Much like the women who gathered together to honor Henry Clay two and a half decades prior in Virginia, the women of the Ladies' Memorial Associations received pushback from the men who believed that they were stepping too far beyond their bounds of the domestic sphere. However, others believed that they were embarking on important work that was fitting for women, since it employed the same skills as caring for the living.

Ultimately, it was important for these women to be involved in the memorialization process, since it helped them retain their roles as the caregivers for their communities, as well as for the suffering Southern states as a whole. It was their work assigning meaning to death in the

¹⁵² Caroline Janney, *Burying the Dead but Not the Past*, 109.

¹⁵³ Caroline Janney, *Burying the Dead but Not the Past*, 114.

¹⁵⁴ Caroline Janney, *Burying the Dead but Not the Past*, 111.

Civil War eras, though memorialization that helped the nation cope with the loss of so many, change the definition of a “good death,” and most importantly provide important contributions through their politically charged actions as the mothers of the community.

CONCLUSION

The Virginian women's movement throughout the antebellum, Civil War, and Reconstruction periods demonstrate that, despite their inability to hold traditional political powers, women still made powerful contributions to Virginian politics. It was through this work that these women gained reputations as those charged with honoring Confederate dead, which for a grieving community, held a significant amount of weight. The power of these movements reverberated throughout the South, and other states not only contributed to the work of the ladies in Virginia, but started similar societies to honor the dead that fell in their own states. The failure of the Federal government largely spurred these missions, but they continued because it fell within the usual female responsibilities of caring for the nation to ensure that they could properly heal and flourish in the future, which really was not much different than their work as "republican mothers" throughout the antebellum era or as nurses throughout the actual conflict.

The women in Louisiana, John Sacher argues in "The Ladies are Moving Everywhere," contends that the women of Virginia and Louisiana had much in common, and even performed similar actions throughout the war. He goes on to cite Elizabeth Varon's work to demonstrate that the phenomena occurring in Virginia were also influencing other states, far beyond what historians had originally assumed, which demonstrates that by studying Virginia, overall patterns throughout the South can be understood by historians on a smaller scale.¹⁵⁵

A memorial association in North Carolina operated in many of the same ways as the memorial associations in Virginia, both through its' collaboration with men and through the

¹⁵⁵ John Sacher, "The Ladies are Moving Everywhere: Louisiana Woman and Antebellum Politics," *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* Vol. 42, no. 4 (Autumn, 2001): 439-457.

challenges they faced, usually from men. Peter Pescud documented the activity of the Ladies Memorial Association of Raleigh in 1882. He worked closely with the women, and often gave his support when it was needed. The Ladies' Memorial Association was told that they needed to remove their Confederate dead from the local cemetery in order to make room for deceased Yankees, a process in which Pescud assisted the women. Pescud writes that the women were threatened, "that if our dead were not removed by a given day, their remains would be placed in the public road."¹⁵⁶ Thankfully, Pescud reported such an occurrence to the post commandant, and the male who threatened the ladies in charge of removing the Confederate dead was punished for his action.

Pescud also comments on the gruesome work that was needed to ensure their fallen soldiers were properly buried; while women did not directly engage in such work, there were some men who were willing to endure such an experience for both their fallen brothers and the ladies who were invested in the reburial of these soldiers. When many of these coffins were being prepared to be re-interred, they were in poor condition, and many required repairs to properly encase the soldiers' bodies. Pescud remarks, "such was the love of our noble boys for their late companions in arms, and so heartily did they sympathize with the ladies in their work of love, that none flinched or complained."¹⁵⁷ Although this may be a small occurrence, it represents how dedicated these women were to their cause, since it was an extension of their roles as wives and mothers. While some men were ready to block their work, others, such as Pescud and the young men who performed the heavy lifting, were willing to assist them in such ventures.

¹⁵⁶ Peter Pescud, *A Sketch of the Ladies Memorial Association of Raleigh, N.C.: It's Origin and History* (Raleigh, NC: privately published, 1882), 4.

¹⁵⁷ Peter Pescud, *A Sketch of the Ladies Memorial Association of Raleigh, N.C.*, 5.

The political movements of elite Virginian women throughout the mid to late nineteenth century demonstrates how these women were able to influence those around them through political acts, even though their methods were not traditional. Through their domestic power, their relationships with their husbands, and their desire to maintain status and stability in Southern society, elite Virginian women had a meaningful impact on the politics of Virginia from the antebellum period throughout Reconstruction.

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