

Rebel Ladies in a Divided Land: The Impact of War on East Tennessee Confederate Women

Katie Logan

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“How I sigh for independence; my spirits feel crushed. In vain I sigh for peace and find none,” wrote a disheartened Myra Inman in March 1864. Inman, a middle-class native of Cleveland, Tennessee, frequently commented in her diary on her deep desire for Confederate victory. Inman is a perfect illustration of the plight of East Tennessee Confederate women and their changing roles and expectations during the American Civil War.¹

The prevailing image of the ideal middle- to upper-class Southern woman prior to the Civil War is proper and quiet, dependent on her husband and other male relatives. Her reputation had to be unblemished and her participation in the public sphere limited. But with the loss of husbands, brothers, fathers, and sons to the Confederate army during the Civil War, Southern women found themselves taking on new roles and responsibilities to maintain their livelihood, their homes, their families, and their devotion to the Confederate cause. East Tennessee Confederate women were no exception, and the diaries and other records left behind by these women shed light on their perceptions of the war, their many tribulations, and how they reconciled traditional roles with wartime obligations.

At the beginning of the secession crisis in the winter of 1860-61, most people in the upper South state of Tennessee were not convinced they were destined to join the newly established Confederate States of America. Those in the eastern region of the state made their pro-Union position particularly clear. With the outbreak of war following the firing on Fort Sumter, many Tennesseans changed their minds and voted to approve secession. East Tennessee men and women were forced to choose sides, and the minority who opted to support the Confederacy quickly discovered that the battle to preserve their new government would be a very difficult one.

¹ William R. Snell, ed., *Myra Inman: A Diary of the Civil War in East Tennessee* (Macon, 2000), 253.

Initially under Confederate occupation, East Tennessee Confederates were able to openly support the cause. Men joined the Confederate army and women settled into their altered responsibilities as wives, mothers, and daughters in a country at war. However, Confederate women in East Tennessee were in constant proximity to Unionist men and women. Moreover, by 1863 they were forced to confront occupation by the federal enemy. Struggling to get along in a situation steadily growing more desperate, these women drew on whatever resources they had to survive.

The women studied in this thesis found solace in their diaries and other written accounts of their wartime struggles. Ellen Renshaw House, Myra Inman, Eliza Fain, Josephine Hooke, and Margaret Crozier Ramsey were all East Tennessee natives. Kate Cumming, an Alabamian, was introduced to East Tennessee through her work as a nurse for the Confederate Army of Tennessee. Stationed in Chattanooga for a time, Cumming was an outsider commenting on the region.

These six women had different experiences, but they shared a love for the South and a desire to see the Confederacy prevail. Their writings tell similar stories of adjusting to war, dealing with the enemy, initial hope for victory, and ultimately utter despair. Hooke and Ramsey fled East Tennessee upon the Union occupation, and House was expelled from Knoxville by federal officers. Fain and Inman remained in East Tennessee, but both struggled to protect themselves from the enemy. Kate Cumming's time in Chattanooga ended when the hospital nurses fled the advancing Union troops.

While a number of studies on Confederate women during the American Civil War have been published, few discuss the unique situation of those in East Tennessee. Historians George C. Rable, Drew Gilpin Faust, Giselle Roberts, and others have addressed the topic of Confederate

women. Their comprehensive overviews provide very useful background for this thesis. Works on the war in East Tennessee, including Digby Gordon Seymour's *Divided Loyalties: Fort Sanders and the Civil War in East Tennessee*, provide historical context for the Confederate women's diaries.²

William A. Strasser, in his Master's thesis entitled "'Our women played well their parts': East Tennessee Women in the Civil War Era, 1860-1870," addresses the many roles of Unionist and Confederate East Tennessee women during the period. This project deals with a similar issue: how the popular image of Southern womanhood was challenged as a result of war. However, unlike Strasser's, this study will demonstrate the effects of the war on East Tennessee Confederate women through a close analysis of the aforementioned diaries.³

Though the wartime journals of House, Inman, Fain, and Cumming have been edited and published, no significant comparison of them has yet been undertaken. With the inclusion of Hooke's and Ramsey's manuscripts, this work will compare the women's experiences. All were devoted to the Confederate cause, and all sought to justify their evolving roles in an unfamiliar world. This study will illuminate the East Tennessee Confederate woman's place in American Civil War history and broaden historians' understanding of their unique plight. These women felt the deep agony of war, and this thesis will demonstrate the war's painful effect on their lives.

Antebellum Southern women were subject to a set of expectations and restrictions that were dramatically altered by war. East Tennessee women of the middle to elite classes were generally held to the same standards, although their region's lack of a plantation-based economy

² George C. Rable, *Civil Wars: Women and the Crisis of Southern Nationalism* (Urbana, 1989); Drew Gilpin Faust, *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill, 1996); Giselle Roberts, *The Confederate Belle* (Columbia, 2003); Digby Gordon Seymour, *Divided Loyalties: Fort Sanders and the Civil War in East Tennessee* (Knoxville, 1963).

³ William A. Strasser, Jr., "'Our women played well their parts': East Tennessee Women in the Civil War Era, 1860-1870" (M.A. thesis, University of Tennessee, 1999).

created some variation. Women were educated in their responsibilities from an early age and knew what was expected of them.

The antebellum ideal of the Southern woman was embodied in the images of the “belle” and the “matron.” Both roles were significant in the lives of women, and a successful belle would no doubt blossom into a respectable matron later in life. The two idealizations embraced specific requirements, expectations, and goals that collectively defined proper Southern womanhood.

“Belle” was a term applied to “all young, elite, white women.” On coming of age, these women were properly introduced to the genteel citizenry of their community. Trained to be pleasing in areas such as dress, conversation, and music, these young women had highly supervised lives in which courtship was a chief concern. The more beautiful and talented a belle, the more likely she was to find a wealthy, respectable husband, adding to her family’s honor, prestige, and economic security. The acquisition of an acceptable partner was “crucial to [the belle’s] future,” and necessary to advance to the position of Southern matron.⁴

The matron was the successor to the belle, serving as the “Southern wife, mistress, and mother.” She was expected to advance the interests of her family and uphold family honor. Matrons were expected to subordinate themselves to their husbands and other male relatives, a practice they rarely questioned. While matrons managed the household and household slaves, they were expected to defer to their husbands. In this respect, their position was similar to that of slaves.⁵

⁴ Roberts, *Confederate Belle*, 10; Laura F. Edwards, *Scarlett Doesn’t Live Here Anymore: Southern Women in the Civil War Era* (Urbana, 2000), 20.

⁵ Roberts, *Confederate Belle*, 10; Edwards, *Scarlett Doesn’t Live Here Anymore*, 15-16.

All aristocratic young women of the South were expected to marry and “fulfill [their] ‘natural’ destiny.” Most women, despite occasional protests in their younger years, accepted this social mandate. Few options were available for an unmarried woman, and marriage cemented a female’s place in Southern society.⁶

Marriage did not, however, always live up to the hopes of young Southern belles. As these women learned to be mistresses of the household, they quickly discovered that the task was by no means easy. Most middle- to upper-class Southern families had slaves to do their many household chores, but a mistress, no matter her age, was responsible for supervision. Young wives were often unaccustomed to household tasks and struggled to master their new responsibilities. While the ideal Southern matron quietly submitted to her fate, some real women struggled with it. Those who found themselves in an unhappy marriage had little chance to escape, for divorce was nearly impossible to obtain.⁷

Women who managed to navigate the difficulties of married life did gain some advantages. The domestic tasks some found difficult and distressing were empowering to others. Ensuring that the household was effectively managed and children properly raised gave wives and mothers a sense of accomplishment. The typical Southern matron was deeply connected to her husband and his wealth, social position, and goals.⁸

Marriage in the antebellum South was closely tied to the concept of honor. Honor was vital to respectable Southern men and women and the genteel Southern family, and the women were well “educated in [its] principles.” They were in a complex situation, however, for they had

⁶ Roberts, *Confederate Belle*, 17; Rable, *Civil Wars*, 8; Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 151.

⁷ Edwards, *Scarlett Doesn’t Live Here Anymore*, 21, 24.

⁸ Stephen V. Ash, *When the Yankees Came: Conflict and Chaos in the Occupied South, 1861-1865* (Chapel Hill, 1995), 6.

to preserve the honor of both their family of birth and the family they acquired upon marriage to their husband. Women's honor was closely linked to that of their male relatives, and they could affect honor positively or adversely. Women could contribute to their own honor and that of their family through their adherence to the "Southern feminine ideal." By achieving success in their sphere, they staked a claim to honor. Just as easily, however, a woman could tarnish herself and her family through inappropriate behavior.⁹

A woman's education, or lack thereof, could greatly affect her family's status and her marriage prospects. In the antebellum period, education was emerging as a necessity for the ideal Southern belle. Genteel families commonly sent their daughters to boarding schools designed to prepare them for courtship and marriage. Though the time away from home was not always easy on the parents or absent daughter, both parties recognized that such schooling was indispensable. Courses of instruction included not only "dancing, needlework, painting, and music," but also "history, science, mathematics, literature, and classical languages."¹⁰

Moral education and religion were also crucial in the lives of Southern women. Southern belles were brought up in a regular regimen of church attendance and religious training. As they grew older, they became responsible for imparting their knowledge to the younger generations. Since they were already accustomed to obediently submitting to their male relatives, Southern women were considered better suited to the practice of following Christ than Southern men. A belle's religious growth, therefore, increased her gentility and marriage appeal, bringing her ever closer to the goal of the "ideal Southern lady."¹¹

⁹ Roberts, *Confederate Belle*, 4.

¹⁰ Edwards, *Scarlett Doesn't Live Here Anymore*, 18; Roberts, *Confederate Belle*, 24-25.

¹¹ Rable, *Civil Wars*, 13; Roberts, *Confederate Belle*, 21.

The public sphere was limited for most women to religious activities, but the antebellum Southern woman still had some influence in the political arena. Women could make a statement through their work in their church or through their private impact on male relatives. As a rule, however, women exercised authority and expressed opinions only in the home, leaving their menfolk to deal with the public, political sphere.¹²

Genteel women of the antebellum South were raised to emulate the ideal Southern lady. The ideal was narrowly defined, leaving little room for the introduction of new wartime realities. The American Civil War challenged that ideal in many ways, thrusting belles and matrons into a strange new world.

As historian Digby Gordon Seymour has said, “East Tennessee’s part deserves a better fate in the annals of the Civil War.” The region was important to the Confederacy for its valuable resources and strategic location, and the Confederate failure to hold it contributed in some measure to the Union victory. Moreover, the heated conflict among the citizenry created an environment unlike that of any other area of the South.¹³

The women of East Tennessee are particularly significant, especially in an analysis of the challenges to the image of the ideal Southern woman during the Civil War. They experienced situations and grappled with issues unique to their region. While their roles evolved in many ways like those of women in other regions of the South, the distinctive circumstances that influenced their experience are important to assess.

The majority of East Tennesseans continued to support the federal government even after the firing on Fort Sumter and the outbreak of war. This Unionist majority in the region provided opportunities and additional difficulties for Confederate women. Frequently interacting with

¹² Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 10.

¹³ Seymour, *Divided Loyalties*, 181.

Unionist sympathizers, some more vocal than others, Confederate women were able to comment on pro-Union speeches and defend the Confederacy. Crossing paths with Unionists often elicited angry comments in the Confederate women's diaries. Few were as willing to openly criticize the enemy as Ellen Renshaw House, but in their private writings they were not reluctant to insult Union supporters.

Military occupation was a key factor in the experience of Confederate women in East Tennessee. Initially under Confederate occupation, the women were able to voice their opinions and go about their daily lives. They interacted with Confederate soldiers, recording mostly favorable anecdotes in their diaries. The soldiers were not always the most pleasant visitors, but the women were grateful for their service to the new country.

The federal occupation of East Tennessee that began in the fall of 1863 was a very different matter. While the entire Confederate South was affected by the war, historian Stephen V. Ash asserts that "the occupied regions . . . were not just touched but battered." Interactions with Union soldiers elicited angry comments and unflattering descriptions. Confederate women noted their conversations with the enemy, and though they sometimes tolerated the company of the federal soldiers, they rarely had anything nice to say about them.¹⁴

The occupation of East Tennessee, first by Confederate troops and later by Union troops, brought news of battles, commanders, and other wartime developments. The Confederate women studied in this thesis received plenty of information, though what was available may not have always addressed their particular concerns. Speaking frequently with taunting Union soldiers and hopeful secessionists, the women were able to keep up on current developments throughout the war. Unfortunately, Confederate women sometimes mistook rumors for fact. The enemy sought

¹⁴ Ash, *When the Yankees Came*, 195.

to dash their hopes, while friends and fellow Confederates tried to boost their spirits. Women were at times elated to hear news of victory only to be disappointed to discover they had been deceived by a rumor.

East Tennessee Confederate women clearly had a unique experience while struggling with the same “new and sometimes frightening tasks” plaguing all Confederate women. The six women I have studied illustrate the complexities of being a Confederate sympathizer in East Tennessee during the Civil War. Their diaries provide excellent illustrations of the difficult time in which they lived. But while their reactions, opinions, and writing styles are strikingly similar, each of the six women had a distinct personality. Some background on each woman is necessary to fully comprehend their experiences.¹⁵

Myra Inman was born in Cleveland, Tennessee, and remained there during the Civil War. Her father died without a will when she was a child, and Inman’s mother was forced to sell all their property, including a hotel, in order to survive. She made what little money the family had by renting out rooms in their home. While the family was not the wealthiest in Cleveland, they were well off enough to keep several slaves, most notably the couple Ned and Phoebe, whom they treated “like members of their family.”¹⁶

Inman and her family became regular attendees of the Cleveland Baptist Church. She was musically inclined and contributed her talents to worship services. While Myra was initially unwilling to convert to the Baptist faith, she ultimately chose to join her widowed mother, Ann Jarnagin Inman, and became a member of the Baptist Church.¹⁷

¹⁵ Rable, *Civil Wars*, 50.

¹⁶ Snell, *Myra Inman*, xiii, xxiii.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, xix.

During the Civil War, Inman was a teenager. Her future husband, and her sister Darthula's husband at the time, served in the Confederate army. The Union occupation of Cleveland began in 1863, and Myra actually had several serious suitors among the federal troops. She spurned their advances, however, and maintained her loyalty to the Confederacy and Confederate men.

Considerably older than Inman, Eliza Fain was notable for her passionate defense of slavery and the Southern way of life. She was in her late fifties during the war and had fully assumed the role of Southern matron. Fain was a member of an evangelical Presbyterian church and believed devoutly that Southerners were not behaving cruelly by maintaining slavery. She consistently supported the goals and interests of the planter class and firmly believed the Confederacy would be victorious in the conflict.

Living in Rogersville in upper East Tennessee, Fain and her family chose to remain in the area during the Civil War. Fain's family was not the wealthiest in the Rogersville area, but they were certainly members of the slaveholding elite. Her husband, Richard Gammon Fain, was the president of the Rogersville & Jefferson Railroad before the war, and he served as an officer in the Confederate army. Thirteen children were born to Fain and her husband during their union. All but one survived childhood, and several sons served in the Confederate army.¹⁸

Josephine Hooke, unlike Fain, chose never to marry and lived out her life in the company of her sister Lilyan. By the time she would have been considering marriage prospects, the Civil War had already taken its toll on the young male population of the South, changing the marriage outlook for many women in Hooke's age group and social class. Also, unlike Fain and Inman,

¹⁸ John N. Fain, ed., *Sanctified Trial: The Diary of Eliza Rhea Anderson Fain, Confederate Woman in East Tennessee* (Knoxville, 2004), xlv-lvi.

Hooke chose to flee her home in Chattanooga with her family upon the invasion of the Union army.

Born in Fort Payne, Alabama, Hooke moved to Chattanooga with her family when she was a child. When the Union army began bombarding Chattanooga in August 1863, Hooke's father, Judge Robert McGinley Hooke, used his contacts with the railroad and moved his family into a boxcar. They remained away from Chattanooga during the war, stopping wherever they could and avoiding the advancing Union army.

Margaret Crozier Ramsey, wife of James Gettys McGready Ramsey, also fled her home during the Civil War. A native of Knoxville, Ramsey went into exile at the request of her husband, a vocal supporter of the Confederacy who recognized that his prominence posed a danger to his family when Union troops marched on Knoxville. Ramsey was reluctant to leave but understood the gravity of the situation.¹⁹

The Ramsey home was burned by federal soldiers, and Margaret Crozier Ramsey was devastated by the death of her son in the Confederate army. Ramsey's diary chronicles her exile from Knoxville and her anguish over leaving her home. The Ramseys eventually returned to Knoxville, but not until many years later. Their lives were deeply affected by the Civil War, and Margaret expressed bitter hatred for the federal troops who destroyed her home.

Ellen Renshaw House was likewise exiled from her home in Knoxville, but while Margaret Crozier Ramsey left by choice, Ellen was "sent South" by the Union occupiers. House was not afraid to maintain her loyalty to the Confederacy, even in the face of federal threats. Her outspoken hostility provoked the Union officials in Knoxville as she intended.²⁰

¹⁹ Margaret Barton Crozier Ramsey Diary, April 1, 1865, Special Collections, University of Tennessee.

²⁰ Daniel E. Sutherland, ed., *A Very Violent Rebel: The Civil War Diary of Ellen Renshaw House* (Knoxville, 1996), 113-14.

House had several siblings who served the Confederacy. Her brother Will held a government job, while her brothers Sam and Johnnie served in the Confederate army. Sam and Johnnie both spent time in Union prisons but returned home at the end of the war. House began keeping her journal in 1863 as a record of home-front events for her brother Johnnie. His murder outside Nashville in 1865 devastated Ellen. She ultimately returned to Knoxville, but the Civil War had taken its toll on her family and livelihood.

Unlike these five women, Kate Cumming was not a native of East Tennessee. Born in Scotland and immigrating to the United States as a child, Cumming was raised in Mobile, Alabama. She was a member of the Episcopal Church in Mobile and, like Josephine Hooke, chose never to marry.

An overwhelming desire to assist the men she saw marching off to war inspired Cumming to volunteer as a hospital nurse. She had no training in medicine and faced opposition from her family, but nevertheless insisted on emulating her heroine Florence Nightingale. Nursing in the Army of Tennessee hospitals was exhausting and gruesome, but Cumming persevered.²¹

Cumming arrived in Chattanooga in 1862. During her time in the city, she nursed many Confederate soldiers, and in the pages of her diary lamented the deaths of patients. Steadfast in her commitment to the Confederate soldiers, Cumming worried when federal troops were reported to be approaching Chattanooga. She and her fellow nurses eventually fled the city.

Cumming's viewpoint provides an interesting comparison. She was an outsider, brought into the world of East Tennessee women only by her service as an army nurse. As will become evident through the analysis of her diary, her emotions and comments are strikingly similar to

²¹ Richard Barksdale Harwell, ed., *Kate: The Journal of a Confederate Nurse* (Baton Rouge, 1959), xii.

those of the women native to East Tennessee. Though she was a native of the deep South, once immersed in East Tennessee's situation, she coped with the same interactions with the enemy and changing responsibilities as all the women in the region.

The lives of these six East Tennessee Confederate women are notably distinctive, but the similarities that emerge from their writings are even more striking. Each woman saw her life changed by the outbreak of war, and each recorded her shifting responsibilities and expectations. The peaceful antebellum South no longer existed, and these six women struggled to maintain their status as ladies in the midst of a devastating conflict.

In their writings the six manifested a similar style and organization. They all habitually recorded the weather at the beginning of many of their journal entries. On Sunday, January 17, 1864, Ellen Renshaw House noted that the weather was "Clear and pleasant, in fact perfectly delightful, like Spring," before launching into a critique of the Unionist newspaper published by William G. Brownlow of Knoxville. "A lovely day," wrote Kate Cumming on May 1, 1865, while Margaret Crozier Ramsey described April 1, 1865, as "Clear, windy."²²

Recording such minor details no doubt provided comfort and normalcy in the midst of wartime travails. Eliza Fain was relieved on August 2, 1863, to have "peace and quiet" without the noise of war, and she took the time to note the "[l]ovely beautiful morning." Myra Inman's report of her cousin's death in the Confederate army is preceded by a declaration that February 7, 1863, was "[a] rainy day." Josephine Hooke also took time to note what a "dreary, rainy" Saturday was December 12, 1863.²³

²² Sutherland, *Very Violent Rebel*, 90; Harwell, *Kate*, 276; Ramsey Journal, April 1, 1865.

²³ Fain, *Sanctified Trial*, 81; Snell, *Myra Inman*, 137; Miss Josephine H. Hooke's Diary August 30, 1863 – April 29, 1864, Historical Records Project # 465-44-3-115, 1938, December 12, 1863.

Day to day life for these East Tennessee Confederate women underwent many changes during the Civil War. Josephine Hooke and her family had to adjust to their frequent movement and life on the railroad. During a particularly hot spell in September 1863, Hooke remarked, "We receive all our company under the trees, night or day, ladies or gentlemen." She worried about their situation and often wondered when the war would end and where her family would be forced to go next.²⁴

Ellen Renshaw House experienced change at home before she was exiled from Knoxville in 1864. Her three brothers went to war, and she hated the separation, especially from her brother Johnnie. Rarely a day passed when House did not mention a Union soldier or the war, implying a constant search for and access to information. Her life significantly changed, however, when she was forced to abandon Knoxville and go into exile.

During her exile, House traveled for a time with Margaret Crozier Ramsey's daughter Sue. In Eaton, Georgia, she had to attend a Methodist church because her denomination was not represented in the area. House actually expressed a desire not to return to Knoxville following the war, as she did not want to be home among the victorious enemy. She ultimately decided to appease her family and return.²⁵

Margaret Crozier Ramsey was separated from her family when she fled Knoxville in 1864. She mourned leaving Knoxville, fearing she "should never return." She took up residence among friends in North Carolina and continued to pray for the success of the Confederate army and government.²⁶

²⁴ Hooke Diary, September 5, 6, 1863.

²⁵ Sutherland, *Very Violent Rebel*, 129, 138, 163.

²⁶ Ramsey Diary, 1.

Kate Cumming's life obviously underwent a major change when she left her home in Mobile to become an army nurse. Serving as the head matron in a hospital in Chattanooga, Kate went from a privileged life to caring for the sick, wounded, and dying in East Tennessee. "Bread, beef and coffee are all we have to give them," Cumming noted about the food offered to patients.²⁷

The changes for Myra Inman were somewhat different. She did not leave her home, but she certainly had to make adjustments. Many of her friends and relatives joined the army or moved farther south. The turmoils of war and the loss of loved ones took an emotional toll on her. At one point she commented, "My very soul is depressed and weighed down with grief." Myra chose to change her religion during the war, as well, joining her mother in the Baptist Church.²⁸

Eliza Fain also experienced change in her daily life at home during the war. Like Inman, she dealt with depression, and when she tried to go about tasks in the household she "[felt] everything so irksome." She worried constantly about her husband and sons in the army. Fearing for her and her family's safety, she even had to request that a soldier be placed at her home to ward off "ruffian looking men."²⁹

Some aspects of life continued as normal, however. Chores still had to be done, visitors received, and family nurtured. While East Tennessee Confederate women expanded their roles and struggled for survival during the Civil War, they also strove to maintain their lifestyle and position as ladies.

²⁷ Harwell, *Kate*, 85.

²⁸ Snell, *Myra Inman*, 253.

²⁹ Fain, *Sanctified Trial*, 73, 117.

Even with her husband away at war, Eliza Fain insisted on doing her domestic duties and welcoming guests. She and members of her household continued to make clothes and keep the Sabbath. She received her sister-in-law, whom she referred to as “E. Ruth,” in June 1863, and “R. Saunders and Mrs. Wells” stopped by to visit and gossip about the assassination of President Lincoln in 1865. Fain, who had also kept a diary most of her life, used her wartime diary to pour out her frustrations and defend the Southern cause. Maintaining these customary practices no doubt provided comfort in such an abnormal time.³⁰

Josephine Hooke and her family also continued to receive visitors during the war. Even as they traveled by boxcar, rarely knowing where they would go next, friends came to share news and enjoy their company. On September 23, 1863, Hooke reported that the Union troops at Chattanooga were defeated and had fled the city. The next day, however, she received a visit from a man named Taylor who declared the rumor untrue and assured her that federal soldiers still controlled the city. Family friend Captain Clark also came to spend time with the family and even delivered a copy of a Confederate newspaper for their enjoyment.³¹

The Hooke family did their best to continue domestic tasks, as well. Josephine noted in her journal that she sewed, and in 1863 she recorded having to make alterations to clothing. Though her thoughts frequently turned to her family’s plight, she clearly found comfort in putting her activities into writing.³²

While in Knoxville, Ellen Renshaw House continued to perform the same daily tasks she had done before the war. In 1863 she noted playing the piano, and in September she sewed “a

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 73, 319.

³¹ Hooke Diary, September 23-24, 1863, 1.

³² *Ibid.*, October 23, 30, 1863.

shirt for father.” House also enjoyed the company of neighbors and did not neglect to welcome them into her home. In turn, she visited friends frequently for company and gossip.³³

Myra Inman’s mother likewise received guests, even Unionist visitors. Myra was not pleased about welcoming such enemies, but she stayed quiet about it. The Inman family also continued to perform necessary domestic duties such as laundry and sewing. Myra noted giving a “music lesson” in April 1865 as news reached her of Richmond’s capture by the Union troops. Later that month, as the news concerning her beloved Confederacy grew worse, Myra found comfort by occupying herself with sewing.³⁴

The changes experienced by these six women were many and profound, but their continuance of many customary activities helped to make this situation more bearable. All had to make adjustments for the war in some ways, whether they chose to flee or remain in their East Tennessee homes. They found comfort anywhere they could; domestic tasks, receiving visitors, and continuing other familiar practices served that purpose.

East Tennessee Confederate women were comforted by the presence of their families. They clung to parents, siblings, and children to help cope with the perils of war. The loss of male relatives to the Confederate army was deeply painful, however. All six women wrote in their diaries of the depression they felt when relatives went off to war and their agony when their loved ones fell on the battlefield.

Many Confederate male citizens chose to go off to war, and the relatives of East Tennessee women were no exception. “Ma is very sad all day to day Brother Bob left us last night to go to Maj. Bransford,” Josephine Hooke recorded in September of 1863. Her brothers

³³ Sutherland, *Very Violent Rebel*, 3, 12.

³⁴ Snell, *Myra Inman*, 306-308.

had enlisted in the army, and Hooke's melancholy journal entry expressed her fear that "we are done with seeing our brothers or having them with us while the war continues." Hooke was later granted the opportunity to reunite with her brothers, a truly "joyous" occasion, but her spirits fell when she discovered that "orders [had] come for the boys to go to the front."³⁵

Ellen Renshaw House was heartbroken by her separation from her brothers, as well. Her brother Johnnie was especially dear to her, and she reflected on the last day of 1863 that "last year Johnnie was . . . home, the life and light of the house." Her tone grew even sadder as she followed her reflection by lamenting Johnnie's confinement in a Yankee prison, calling him "a stranger among strange people." House also noted her brother Sam's birthday on November 10. "I wonder where he is," she wrote. "How I would love to see him and Johnnie. I hope to before too long."³⁶

Margaret Crozier Ramsey lost her son Arthur, a soldier in the Confederate army, while she was in exile in North Carolina. Another son was confined in a Northern prison. "Heard yesterday from my son Alexander who is a prisoner," she wrote. "I was greatly relieved had been extremely anxious." Moreover, her daughter Sue was expelled from Knoxville because "she sewed Confederate flags" and openly displayed them. Ramsey struggled to cope with her losses, but found little comfort in the unfamiliar environment.³⁷

Women justified their actions and the sacrifice of their men as acts of devotion to the Confederate cause. They were expected "to remain cheerful and patriotic" when writing to their soldiers and performing their household duties, embodying the desired "qualities of sentimentality, patience, and endurance." In reality, they grew anxious and struggled to survive

³⁵ Hooke Diary, September 6, 1863, April 17, 1864.

³⁶ Sutherland, *Very Violent Rebel*, 75, 76, 35.

³⁷ Ramsey Diary, March 12, 1865; Strasser, "'Our women played well their parts,'" 48.

without their menfolk. The image of the ideal woman required them to defer to a man for protection and guidance, so independence frightened them. Confederate women sought to preserve their reliance on their noble providers, while at the same maintaining their dignity and honor.³⁸

Eliza Fain's husband joined the army, leaving his wife to manage the household. While Fain rarely let her worries show, she periodically noted her husband's progress in her diary. "My dear, my loved husband by this time is on his way to Strawberry Plains where his regiment is encamped," she remarked on one occasion. Fain also tracked the movements of her "loved" sons and was thrilled to have two of them safe at home on August 9, 1863.³⁹

Kate Cumming's brother served in the Army of Tennessee. She expressed concern for his welfare, especially when learning of significant casualties. The two corresponded, and he assured her that he was safe. Cumming was constantly faced with injured and dying soldiers, and it pained her to think of their families' suffering. When she learned that one of her patients had already lost two of his brothers, she exclaimed, "May God bless his poor widowed and childless mother!" Accustomed to dealing with the horrors of death from her experience in the hospital, Cumming nevertheless struggled emotionally from time to time.⁴⁰

Religion was a major factor in the lives of East Tennessee Confederate women before and during the Civil War, providing emotional, spiritual, and physical comfort. Even during the height of war, churches made a serious effort to continue providing refuge, hope, and consolation

³⁸ Rable, *Civil Wars*, 55; Jacqueline Glass Campbell, *When Sherman Marched North from the Sea: Resistance on the Confederate Home Front* (Chapel Hill, 2003), 104; Ash, *When the Yankees Came*, 197; LeeAnn Whites, *The Civil War as a Crisis in Gender: Augusta, Georgia, 1860-1890* (Athens, 1995), 53.

³⁹ Fain, *Sanctified Trial*, 78, 81.

⁴⁰ Harwell, *Kate*, 85, 97.

for the faithful. Church attendance was accepted as a necessary and regular event for all six of the women I have studied.⁴¹

Kate Cumming noted her attendance in July 1863 shortly before she evacuated Chattanooga. She met the Reverend Doctor Quintard, discussing her hospital experience and the difficulties that faced the women of Mobile who had become nurses. Going to church with her sister in Knoxville, Ellen Renshaw House expressed some surprise at the Yankees in attendance. "I wonder how much good going to church does them," she quipped.⁴²

Even in North Carolina, Margaret Crozier Ramsey did not let her church attendance falter. She noted the eloquence and speaking ability of Mr. Craig in his "Communion Sermon." Her journal also served as a place to reference the Bible readings that corresponded with the day's sermon, and in April 1865 she acknowledged "Rev. 3rd 17 & 18" as discussed by the minister.⁴³

Myra Inman also recorded the books of the Bible from which the sermon was given. On January 9, 1862, "Mr. Bradshaw preached from Isaiah" for the morning service and from "John, 2nd chapter, 15th, 16th, 17th verses" in the evening. Inman continued to attend church throughout the war. She noted her attendance first at the Presbyterian Church and later the Baptist Church in Cleveland. Even Sunday school continued for Inman in the early years of the war.⁴⁴

Eliza Fain noted her church attendance and her gratefulness that "church privileges still continued" at a time when many churches had to cancel services. Chaplains were needed in the

⁴¹ Ash, *When the Yankees Came*, 97.

⁴² Harwell, *Kate*, 113-114; Sutherland, *Very Violent Rebel*, 13.

⁴³ Ramsey Diary, May 21, April 2, 1865.

⁴⁴ Snell, *Myra Inman*, 137.

army, and ministers who answered the call left their local churches and congregations. When Confederate women were unable to attend church services, they expressed their distress in their diaries.⁴⁵

Josephine Hooke was unable to attend church while her family lived on the road. She was clearly distraught by her predicament and longed to “be at home . . . to attend church, hear Cousin Tom preach, [and] sit in the choir.” The uncertainty of her future and absence of comforting sermons vexed her. In September 1863 she reckoned the time that had passed since she had attended a church service as two months.⁴⁶

Kate Cumming did not always attend Sunday services while serving in the hospital in Chattanooga. One Sabbath in January 1863, she opted to visit with the injured patients in her care instead. Her responsibilities as a wartime nurse outweighed her commitment to religion, and what she lacked in spiritual nourishment she made up for by forming attachments with her patients.⁴⁷

When East Tennessee Confederate women lost hope, they often turned to God to plead for an end to the war and their troubles. Josephine Hooke begged God to intervene, passionately crying, “How long, O’ how long will God permit this cruel war to rage. Are we not humbled. Why do we not forsake our sins and be saved.” In response to news that the Confederate army was on the verge of a battle, Myra Inman wrote, “God have mercy on their souls. If it is Thy good pleasure, let us be caused to rejoice at Thy interposition in our behalf.” Ellen Renshaw House implored God at the end of 1863 to make the forthcoming year more promising and

⁴⁵ Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 184; Fain, *Sanctified Trial*, 145.

⁴⁶ Hooke Diary, September 6, 20, 1863.

⁴⁷ Harwell, *Kate*, 85.

agreeable. Religion offered consolation for the often unpleasant news from the Confederate army.⁴⁸

East Tennessee Confederate women responded to their predicament not only by appealing to a higher power, however, but also by keeping a vigilant eye on events during the war. In their diaries, they recorded battles, victories, and any information they could discern. Eliza Fain took a particular interest in the battles in Tennessee because of her husband's and sons' involvement. In July 1863 she wrote, "A fight at Knoxville but little harm done to either side then they came on up destroying the bridge at Strawberry Plains. . . . After this they were ordered . . . to go to Tullahoma to reinforce General Bragg." Fain regularly documented skirmishes and what she knew about the location of troops.⁴⁹

Myra Inman also talked of the Confederate army in her journal. "Fighting at Chattanooga," she wrote in September 1863, when she also recorded the presence of troops outside Charleston. Ellen Renshaw House wrote of a successful campaign in Chattanooga and Yankee difficulties taking a hill from the Confederates in November 1863. Kate Cumming noted a violent encounter at Murfreesboro, Tennessee, on December 31, 1862, in which the number of casualties was heartbreaking. Concerned with the fate of her home in Chattanooga, Josephine Hooke did her best to monitor the Yankee occupation and Rebel attempts to reclaim the city.⁵⁰

In the midst of this journalizing, the women often recorded their reactions to soldiers, friend and foe. While their feelings towards the Rebels were patriotic and supportive, they obviously had little regard for the enemy. Josephine Hooke called the federal occupiers of

⁴⁸ Hooke Diary, September 9, 1863; Snell, *Myra Inman*, 261; Sutherland, *Very Violent Rebel*, 77.

⁴⁹ Fain, *Sanctified Trial*, 78.

⁵⁰ Snell, *Myra Inman*, 220; Sutherland, *Very Violent Rebel*, 37, 43; Harwell, *Kate*, 84; Hooke Diary, September 9, 16, 1863.

Chattanooga “merciless invaders.” When she heard of the capture of a Tennessean known as a traitor to the Confederacy, she expressed “hope that he will be . . . executed as a spy.”⁵¹

Ellen Renshaw House despised the Yankee presence in Knoxville and, on hearing that more Union troops had arrived to support Rosecrans at Chattanooga, angrily declared, “I hope there won’t be one left.” Concerned that the Union army “would like to exterminate the whole Rebel population of the South,” she gladly seized on rumors of Yankee cruelty to prove her convictions. In late March 1865 she recorded in her diary a rumor that federal troops in Baltimore had “bayoneted thirteen ladies for speaking to rebel prisoners.”⁵²

Eliza Fain never faltered in her praise of the Confederate soldiers. She referred to them as “heroes,” “the brave and noble who have stood shoulder to shoulder in defense of right.” Kate Cumming praised leaders such as “Lee, Jackson, Longstreet, Hill, and a host of others in Virginia,” and hailed their armies as “invincible.” They were laudable for their sacrifice and in her eyes they could do little wrong.⁵³

Margaret Crozier Ramsey noted a conversation she had with a Yankee invader in Knoxville. When Ramsey demanded to know “how he would like for his mothers and sisters to be so treated,” he responded that he would approve if his mother and sisters were “rebels.” She was sorely disappointed in his response and retorted that the man had no idea “what he was fighting for.” His attitude and ignorance only served to reinforce Ramsey’s negative feelings toward the enemy.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Hooke Diary, September 9, 1863, 7.

⁵² Sutherland, *Very Violent Rebel*, 20, 37, 157.

⁵³ Fain, *Sanctified Trial*, 119, 314; Harwell, *Kate*, 82.

⁵⁴ Ramsey Diary, 4.

Faced with suitors in the occupying enemy army, Myra Inman barely gave them the time of day. She noted about one Yankee suitor named Lieutenant Simmons, "He loves me. I dislike him. He is a Yank." Confederate soldiers, who happened to include her future husband, she called "gallant, brave heroes." On hearing a rumor of General James Longstreet's demise, Inman called him a "brave and noble chieftain."⁵⁵

The issue of slavery, a major factor in the outbreak of the Civil War, is curiously not mentioned in most of the diaries studied for this thesis. Eliza Fain asserted in July 1863 that the "Bible will never fail and if as a nation we are right in the holding of the African in bondage it matter not whether we be a nation or nations." She said a little more on the topic and discussed her conviction that slavery is not morally wrong, but no similar discussions are present in the writings of the other five women. While many families of the higher classes had slaves in East Tennessee, the total slave population was much lower than the Middle and Western regions of the state. The relatively small number of slaves no doubt contributed to the East Tennessee women's lack of comments on the subject. The lack of emphasis placed on slavery in East Tennessee Confederate women's diaries demonstrates how much they differed from women in other areas of the South. The threat to the institution of slavery posed by the Northern enemy was a major issue in the lives of all other Confederate women, indicating that the rebel ladies of East Tennessee were unique in their experience.⁵⁶

As the failures of the Rebel army became apparent to East Tennessee women, they began to despair. The morale of Confederate citizens suffered as the army reeled from defeat. Even in their anguish and despair Confederate women desired to remain true to their traditional

⁵⁵ Snell, *Myra Inman*, 261, 265.

⁵⁶ Fain, *Sanctified Trial*, 78.

antebellum roles, a practice threatened by the invading enemy. They longed for an end to the war, but abhorred the thought of losing to the Yankee armies and being forced to rejoin the Union.⁵⁷

Josephine Hooke began to lose hope for the war effort in 1863; “I think now our chance of getting . . . home is poor,” she wrote, “in fact our hope is almost gone.” Ellen Renshaw House, however, refused to acknowledge defeat and revealed her confidence in the Confederacy when she exclaimed, “We are not whipped, and never will be if the people of the South are true to themselves.” Eliza Fain also struggled to believe that the Rebel army was not unconquerable. “We have received news this evening that our troops have been repulsed at the Gap We do not believe yet,” she wrote.⁵⁸

Margaret Crozier Ramsey maintained hope that the Confederacy would prevail. She appealed to a higher power, crying out, “O! My Heavenly Father will thou protect us for Jesus Sake Thou has said if we come shall be accepted if we ask shall receive.” Myra Inman was devastated when a visitor at the Inman household expressed his lack of faith in the Confederate States. Like Ramsey, Inman turned her pleas towards Heaven. “Humble the hearts of all the people in the Southern State; cause them to feel that with Thy help alone we can gain the battle and establish our independence,” she prayed. Inman never ceased to believe that God would not abandon the faithful Southern people.⁵⁹

The death of President Abraham Lincoln was reported in several of the East Tennessee Confederate women’s diaries, as was the assassination attempt on Secretary of State William H. Seward. Myra Inman recorded President Lincoln’s time of death as “7:30 o’clock Saturday

⁵⁷ Roberts, *Confederate Belle*, 116, 118; Edwards, *Scarlett Doesn’t Live Here Anymore*, 84.

⁵⁸ Hooke Diary, September 26, 1863; Sutherland, *Very Violent Rebel*, 161; Fain, *Sanctified Trial*, 257.

⁵⁹ Ramsey Journal, April 16, 1865; Snell, *Myra Inman*, 307-308, 261.

morn” after being shot at the theater the night before. She noted that Seward survived being “stabbed whilst in bed.” Ellen Renshaw House offered a similar description of the events but mistakenly assumed Seward had died. Even more poorly informed, Eliza Fain testified that Seward and Lincoln were both “returning from the theatre that night after a day of rejoicing over the downfall of Richmond and were assassinated.” She did not pretend to know what the event would mean for the cause of the Confederacy, however.⁶⁰

General Lee’s surrender was initially met with disbelief, and rumors of recognition by foreign countries ran rampant through the South before defeat was acknowledged. On April 22, 1865, Kate Cumming reported that the Confederate government “had been recognized by France, England, Spain, and Austria.” The rumor was revealed to be untrue several days later and Cumming exclaimed, “I can not believe that we are subjugated, after enduring so much.” Ellen Renshaw House was utterly devastated and abstained from writing in her diary for a week before acknowledging that the Confederacy was, in fact, not being recognized and that the South would be forced back into the United States.⁶¹

Myra Inman’s spirit was crushed when she learned that the “great leader, General Robert E. Lee [had been] rendered powerless.” Eliza Fain, like Ellen Renshaw House, was unable to write for several days because she was overpowered by shock. She could not fathom what life would be like once she was again subject to the laws of the Union government. Margaret Crozier Ramsey also sadly reported General Lee’s surrender. She was somewhat consoled, however,

⁶⁰ Snell, *Myra Inman*, 306-307; Sutherland, *Very Violent Rebel*, 162; Fain, *Sanctified Trial*, 319.

⁶¹ Harwell, *Kate*, 275; Sutherland, *Very Violent Rebel*, 163.

when she was told by soldiers that “Gen. Lee was treated with great respect” by the victorious enemy.⁶²

The Confederate women’s last hopes for the survival of the Confederacy were dashed upon the capture of the fugitive president of the Confederate States of America, Jefferson Davis, by Union forces. Kate Cumming noted the reward offered by the Union for the capture of Jefferson Davis and hoped that he would not be captured. Cumming argued that Davis only “did what he felt his duty when he found the right of his country imperiled.” Myra Inman received word of his capture on May 15, but Ellen Renshaw House did not record it in her diary until May 25; “Our last hope is gone, Pres Davis is a prisoner.”⁶³

Ellen Renshaw House, Myra Inman, Kate Cumming, Eliza Fain, Margaret Crozier Ramsey, and Josephine Hooke knew the war was over. Though there would be no more battles, the lives of these East Tennessee Rebels were changed forever. The war forced women to expand their traditional female roles, leaving a lasting impression on their roles as daughters, wives, and mothers.

The end of the Civil War came as a shock to Confederate women, and many harbored feelings of resentment and frustration. The military failure was met with fear of the Union enemy but also relief. With an end to fighting and the return of surviving soldiers, women were finally able to return to a more normal existence and their pre-war feminine roles.⁶⁴

While the war challenged many of the traditional roles of the ideal Southern woman, most women did not question the Southern way of life or their place in it. Former Confederate

⁶² Snell, *Myra Inman*, 309; Fain, *Sanctified Trial*, 323; Ramsey Diary, April 20, 1865.

⁶³ Harwell, *Kate*, 282; Snell, *Myra Inman*, 310; Sutherland, *Very Violent Rebel*, 165.

⁶⁴ Campbell, *When Sherman Marched North from the Sea*, 109

women demonstrated a tendency to hold the North responsible for all their troubles instead of admitting fault in the Southern system. Men also reaped the benefits of the female attitude towards the end of the war because they were reassured by feminine reluctance to accept defeat.⁶⁵

Though Confederate women became more flexible and independent during the war, they returned, for the most part, to their antebellum position and occupations when the fighting ceased. Women sought to do justice to the memory of the Confederacy and moved optimistically into the future, all the while aspiring to remain the ideal Southern lady. The clear majority of elite women sympathetic to the former Confederacy had no desire to be perceived as feminists. When their patriotism necessitated an expansion into traditionally masculine roles and an element of self-sufficiency, they obliged, but when their sacrifice was no longer necessary, they eagerly settled back into their own sphere.⁶⁶

East Tennessee Confederate women were deeply affected by the war. Many lost friends, family members, and homes to the cause. Their lives were forever marked by the numerous challenges to their livelihood and status as respectable Southern women.

The diaries of Ellen Renshaw House, Myra Inman, Eliza Fain, Josephine Hooke, Margaret Crozier Ramsey, and Kate Cumming are invaluable resources for evaluating the challenge to the traditional ideal of a Southern woman created by the Civil War. All felt the pressure to preserve their honor and way of life while struggling to survive in a period of conflict and change. Each woman's unique story provides evidence that the sentiments of frustration, hope, and despair were shared by all East Tennessee Confederate women. All felt the agony of war close to home.

⁶⁵ Edwards, *Scarlett Doesn't Live Here Anymore*, 84; Rable, *Civil Wars*, 227.

⁶⁶ Rable, *Civil Wars*, 228.

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