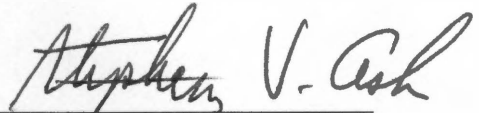


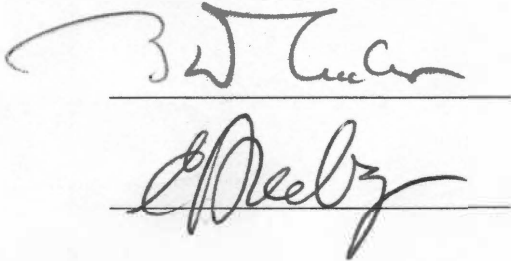
To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Steven Bradley Davis entitled "From Death, Life: An Economic and Demographic History of Civil War Era Knoxville and East Tennessee." I have examined the final paper copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in History.

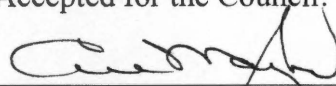


Stephen V. Ash, Major Professor

We have read this thesis
and recommend its acceptance:



Accepted for the Council:



Vice Chancellor and
Dean of Graduate Studies

Thesis
2006
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**From Death, Life: An Economic and Demographic History of
Civil War Era Knoxville and East Tennessee**

**A Thesis
Presented for the
Master of Arts
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville**

**Steven Bradley Davis
August 2006**

Dedication

This work is dedicated to the men and women of Civil War Era Knoxville and East Tennessee who fought so hard, and suffered so intensely, in defense of their homeland. May this humble thesis serve to perpetuate their memory, for theirs is a story too seldom told.

Acknowledgements

There are so many people deserving of my thanks that it may take me several pages to acknowledge them. But I fully intend to do so, for without them, I could not have completed this thesis.

I would first like to thank God for his love, guidance, and willingness to subject me to constructive discipline. Thank you for always remembering me, Lord, even in those moments when I forget about you.

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I would like to thank my father, Woody Davis, for his unwavering support. If ever I am able to believe in myself and my abilities as much as he does, I will be well on my way to success. Truly he is an inspiration in my life and a man among men; in the event that I am fortunate enough to have children of my own, I will do well to emulate him in every way. Thank you, Dad. I love you!

I would like to thank my mother, Linda Davis, for her patience and empathy during four very difficult years. She was always willing to listen, and helped me through many a dark hour. Like my father, my mother is truly an inspiration in my life; she has always been there to prop me up, and for that I am grateful in ways that cannot be expressed in mere words. Thank you, Mom. I love you!

I would like to thank my brother Brian Davis, for being my best friend. Like my mother and father, he listened patiently while I vented my frustrations, offered advice when he thought it useful, and did his best to distract me when the troubles of graduate school became overwhelming. He also taught me a valuable lesson that I will remember for the rest of my life: if one is to do their best, one must first realize that it is acceptable to fail. Thank you, Bubba. I love you!

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I would like to thank my friend Erin Lawrimore for serving as my unofficial editor, sounding board, and source of much-needed distraction. Her unceasing good-cheer, even in the face of my rampant negativity, pulled me back from the edge more times than I care to count. She is a true friend, and one without whom none of this would have been possible. Thank you, Erin. You were right--everything turned out alright in the end!

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new way of thinking about the world; my friend and colleague, Angela Frye Keaton (and her husband, Kevin Keaton), for home-cooked meals, mountain dancing, and untiring support; my friend and colleague, Will Bolt, for his unceasing good humor and his staunch protectionist politics; and my friend Kira Dietz, who understands the correlation between good food, good beer, good music, and good conversation as well as anyone I have ever known. To all of you, I owe a debt of gratitude!

If I have overlooked anyone, please forgive me. Know that I am grateful to you, and that I will make a point of thanking you in person.

Abstract

This thesis seeks to understand the economic/demographic impact of the American Civil War on Knoxville, Tennessee and the greater East Tennessee region. It is the contention of this work that the Civil War served as an economic/demographic catalyst, accelerating (although certainly not completing) the process by which both city and region were transformed from a rural, pre-modern economy based predominantly on subsistence agriculture to a more modern, industrializing economy based on manufacturing, resource extraction, and limited commercial farming.

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Introduction

On an oppressively hot day in August 1838, Henry Ruffner, a Presbyterian minister from Lexington, Virginia, guided his horse up a dusty dirt road and into the center of downtown Knoxville, Tennessee. Ruffner was, by his own admission, excited to be visiting the “chief town of East Tennessee,” and hoped that it would compare favorably with the bustling industrial/commercial centers of the Midwest and Northeast. But his hopes were quickly dashed. So far as he could tell, for his visit was cut short by an “unusually severe” malaria epidemic, Knoxville was little more than an isolated hamlet, consisting of a small college, a handful of industries (mostly grain mills), and “something more than three hundred houses scattered over the hilly ground.” What few residents that he encountered were, in his estimation, “moral, sociable and hospitable, with all the essentials of true politeness”; but then, they were also lacking in the “refinement of mind and manners . . . found in some older towns.” And so, convinced that Knoxville had little to offer the visitor, either now or in the immediate future, a disappointed Ruffner got back on his horse, turned northeast towards Virginia, and disappeared into the countryside. Considering his lack of enthusiasm for the town, one might easily conclude that he had no intention of ever returning.¹

Ruffner’s commentary expresses the thoughts of one man, but it is probably representative. Antebellum Knoxville would have impressed few nineteenth-century

¹ Eugene L. Schwaab and Jaqueline Bull, Travels in the Old South: Selected From Periodicals of the Times (Lexington, 1973), 358-59; Samuel Joseph Platt and Mary Louise Ogden, Medical Men and Institutions of Knox County, Tennessee (Knoxville, 1969), 78; Digby Gordon Seymour, Divided Loyalties: Fort Sanders and the Civil War in East Tennessee (Knoxville, 1963), 10.

visitors, particularly those who, like Ruffner, had traveled extensively.² The first thing one would have noticed on entering the town was its shabbiness. Residents tossed food scraps and human waste into the narrow, muddy streets, creating a noxious stew attractive to swine, rats, dogs, and clouds of emerald-green blowflies. The second thing one would have noticed, aside from the overpowering stench, was the town's near-complete lack of commercial and industrial development. Other than a few small grain mills, foundries, and wholesale firms, there was little indication that Knoxville was tied to the larger regional or national economies. Boosters' dream of bringing steamboats to the city had been only partially fulfilled at the time of Ruffner's visit, thanks to treacherous shoals on the Holston/Tennessee River system that prohibited year-round shipping; and their enthusiasm for railroad building, which led them to forego participation in the state's 1836 and 1838 turnpike subsidization programs, had accomplished nothing, other than to deny the city macadamized roads. If Ruffner's commentary seems harsh to the modern reader, it is only because he was being honest. Knoxville was going nowhere fast in 1838, a fact that was as obvious to frustrated boosters as it was to their disappointed guests.³

Let us now consider the opinions of a second visitor, Methodist Episcopal minister J. M. McTeer, who traveled to Knoxville in December 1869. Having been to the city only once before, in 1837, McTeer expected to find the sleepy, ramshackle town of

² Prior to his arrival in Knoxville, Ruffner visited Cincinnati, Ohio, Louisville, Kentucky, and Nashville. See Schwaab and Bull, Travels, 341-52.

³ Platt and Ogden, Medical Men, 78-82; Michael J. McDonald and William Bruce Wheeler, Knoxville, Tennessee: Continuity and Change in An Appalachian City (Knoxville, 1983), 19-20; Mary U. Rothrock, ed., The French Broad-Holston Country: A History of Knox County, Tennessee (Knoxville, 1946), 84-112.

Ruffner's experience. Instead he found a commercial/industrial boomtown, smaller in scale perhaps, but no less dedicated to economic growth and the promotion of technological innovation than Chicago, Philadelphia, or Pittsburgh. "I knew Knoxville was favored with railroads and steamboat navigation," he wrote to the Knoxville Weekly Whig, "but I did not know that the city had assumed such vast proportions. The broad, well-improved streets--the large number of new and elegant residences--the music of the trowel and the hammer--the clatter of new and improved machinery of various kinds--the hurry in commercial circles--all these and other things interest the stranger who visits your city."⁴

Truly there was much to be seen. A quick walk to north Knoxville would have revealed a bustling rail depot, crowded with trains transporting coal, iron, zinc, and timber into the city from outlying East Tennessee counties.⁵ Although much of the coal continued south and east to Georgia and the Carolinas, a significant amount was retained locally for use by industrialists and homeowners. The city's largest coal consumer, Hiram S. Chamberlain's Knoxville Iron Works, was also the catalyst for a recent housing boom.⁶ Carpenters had erected some four hundred houses between 1866 and 1868, most of which were situated in close proximity to the factory (and most of which were inhabited by Chamberlain's employees). Equally impressive was the city's commercial

⁴ Knoxville Weekly Whig, 1 December 1869.

⁵ By 1868, four railroads had termini in Knoxville: the East Tennessee & Georgia and East Tennessee & Virginia lines, completed in 1855 and 1858 respectively, and the unfinished Knoxville & Charleston and Knoxville & Kentucky lines. See Knoxville Press and Messenger, 5 November 1868.

⁶ On Chamberlain and his iron works, see Silas Emmett Lucas, Jr., History of Tennessee From the Earliest Time to the Present (Nashville, 1887), 857.

district, for here truly was the crossroads of East Tennessee. Farmers, many of them residents of the region's rugged geographic margins, guided clattering wagonloads of grain and vegetables down Gay Street, headed for Market Square. There they sold the produce to Knoxvilleians or to purchasing agents from neighboring states. Before leaving, many of these farmers visited the city's wholesale houses, searching for good deals on groceries, furniture, clothing, and agricultural implements. "They all speak well of our wholesale houses," wrote the Knoxville Press and Messenger proudly, "and admit that it is no longer worth the expense of a trip to the Eastern cities, when they can get what they want just as cheap at Knoxville."⁷

Ruffner's and McTeer's observations are fascinating, not only because they provide photograph-like "before" and "after" views of Knoxville's history, but because they differ so much in their descriptions. Ruffner's Knoxville was a ramshackle, isolated town, seemingly devoid of positive prospects for the future; McTeer's Knoxville was a thriving city, replete with the commercial outlets and transportation infrastructure necessary for long-term growth. And yet, for all of their usefulness, these "word pictures" raise more questions than they answer. For example: How does one account for nineteenth-century Knoxville's profound transformation? What factors, be they internal, external, or both, contributed to this transformation? Did any one factor stand out as the preeminent agent of change? And finally, were the results of this transformation localized, affecting only Knoxville, or did they radiate outward into the city's hinterland, translating into a broader regional transformation? The goal of this

⁷ Knoxville Press and Messenger, 5 November 1868, 14, 28 April 1869.

study, simply stated, is to answer these four questions. Doing so promises to enrich our knowledge of Knoxville's past, as well as shed light on the city's role as a guiding force in the economic/demographic life of greater East Tennessee.

Before we proceed, however, let us return once more to Knoxville, this time in 1870. Let us, in particular, walk west down Cumberland Avenue to the base of "College Hill," and from there climb north to the top of a nearby ridge. In Ruffner's day, this ridge was little more than a grassy pasture, covered here and there by scrubby second-growth cedar trees. If Knoxvillians came here at all, it was to gather stray livestock, cut firewood, or simply to have a look around. And yet, like everything else in Knoxville, the ridge had since been transformed. Strolling along the summit, even the most casual observer would have noticed the remains of a massive earthwork fort. Known locally as Fort Sanders, the fort had, on November 29, 1863, been the scene of a short but intense battle that pitted Knoxville's beleaguered Union garrison against a Confederate besieging force. The Yankees won the battle, much to the delight of the region's Unionist majority, but their victory ultimately proved costly to the citizens. Unable to withdraw south to Georgia, the defeated Confederates instead marched northeast around Knoxville, settling into winter quarters near Russellville. For the next five months, the two armies dueled for control of upper East Tennessee, consuming what remained of the region's food supplies and provoking a famine. As refugees streamed into Knoxville or over the Cumberland Mountains into Kentucky and Middle Tennessee, many doubtless considered

the irony of their plight. Salvation had given way to devastation, and there was little anyone could do.⁸

For the moment, however, Fort Sanders stood silent, seemingly forgotten by the local population. Save for the occasional band of small children digging through the ruins in search of bullets, buttons, and other souvenirs, few Knoxvilleians appear to have paid it much heed. Promotional literature published in the 1890s reveals that residents' disregard for the fort was actually quite intentional; a sort of willful collective memory loss (at least among boosters), aimed at distancing their city from the racial strife, violence, and poverty associated with the defeated postwar South. Its very title, for example, reveals that Knoxville, Tennessee: A City Unsectional and Cosmopolitan by the Varied Industries of Her People; Climate; Scenery; and Modern Progress sought to soothe fears of lingering sectionalism among potential investors. The pamphlet's authors assured readers that "to-day, the events of the war have been so entirely buried with the things of the dead past, that they are never mentioned or thought of, except in a remniscental way." Likewise, the 1892 pamphlet Knoxville, Tennessee described the city's population as "existing in the present and unmindful, if not oblivious, to the dead and buried past." Knoxvilleians, it seems, viewed (and hoped that investors would view) the Civil War as one might view a natural disaster: a tragedy, to be sure, but little more than a temporary halt in the march of human progress.⁹

⁸ On the East Tennessee campaign of 1863-64, see Seymour, Divided Loyalties, and William Marvel, Burnside (Chapel Hill, 1991), 264-343.

⁹ John Watkins to Sarah, 16 September 1895, Watkins Letters, Special Collections, University of Tennessee, Knoxville; Knoxville Tennessee, a City Unsectional and Cosmopolitan by the Varied Industries of Her People; Climate; Scenery; and Modern Progress (Park Place, New York, 1889), 3; Knoxville, Tennessee (St. Louis, 1892), 4.

More often than not, historians have followed boosters' lead when constructing narratives of nineteenth-century Knoxville's transformation. That is, their tendency has been to treat the war as an interesting aberration in the city's historical landscape, rather than as a potential agent of economic/demographic change.

In Mary U. Rothrock's anthology The French Broad-Holston Country: A History of Knox County, Tennessee, for example, little effort is made to integrate the Civil War into discussions of pre- and post-war economic/demographic development. Two essays on "Knox County in Wartime" are sandwiched between such pieces as "Farming From the Beginning to 1860" and "Commercial and Industrial Trends since 1865," an arrangement that leaves readers with the impression that "peacetime Knoxville" and "wartime Knoxville" were separate, irreconcilable entities. Sadly, the content of these essays does little to diminish this sense of historical dissonance. In "The Transition Period, 1864-1876," Polly Creekmore insists that "the [Civil] war had a pronounced effect on the municipal development of Knoxville," without then explaining how or why. The reader is left to wonder whether (if at all) demographic changes arising from the war, such as emancipation or the flight of white refugees, contributed to the city's rapid postwar growth. Furthermore, in "Farming from 1860 to 1900," C. E. Allred points out that the Civil War devastated the agricultural economy of East Tennessee, resulting in some "out-migration [of bankrupt farmers] to the western states." He does not, however, address the degree to which this rural exodus proved helpful (if at all) to Knoxville's emergent industrial economy.¹⁰

¹⁰ Mary U. Rothrock, ed., The French Broad-Holston Country (Knoxville, 1946), especially xi-xii, 143-44, 146, 186.

A second, similar work is Lucile Deadrick's Heart of the Valley: A History of Knoxville, Tennessee. Although heavier on analytical content than Rothrock--William J. McArthur's "Knoxville's History: An Interpretation," is particularly useful--the essays in this work likewise marginalize the Civil War as an agent of economic/demographic change. In "Transportation Development," Edwin P. Patton says virtually nothing of the Civil War or its impact on East Tennessee's road and rail systems. Likewise, in discussing the contrast between Knoxville's pre- and post-war industrial development, Aelread J. Gray and Susan F. Adams state simply that "the boom which had started in the 1850s continued [into the post-war years]." Even McArthur's essay leaves the reader wanting more, for he offers only the vague assertion that "the Civil War is too important an event not to be considered as something of a watershed in the history of the city. . . . In the thirty years or so after the war modern Knoxville . . . came into being." True, he does acknowledge the link between the Civil War and emancipation, and hence the postwar surge in Knoxville's black population. But he says nothing of black East Tennesseans' contribution to the city's emergent industrial economy, other than to note that they "participated significantly in the political, business, and cultural life."¹¹

More useful, and yet no less prone to marginalize the Civil War, is Michael J. McDonald's and William Bruce Wheeler's Knoxville, Tennessee: Continuity and Change in an Appalachian City. According to McDonald and Wheeler, Knoxville's meteoric postwar growth may be attributed to a number of factors: a high birthrate among rural white East Tennesseans that strained the region's limited supply of arable

¹¹ Lucile Deadrick, ed., Heart of the Valley: A History of Knoxville, Tennessee (Knoxville, 1976), especially 28, 83, 178-236.

land (and thereby contributed to a postwar rural-to-urban migration of landless, jobless whites); the emancipation of East Tennessee slaves (who, along with freed slaves from the Deep South, migrated to Knoxville in search of industrial work); the city's railroads (built in 1855 and 1858), which linked it to the "dynamic regions to the north and west"; the city's access to industrially-valuable natural resources (particularly Anderson County coal and Roane County iron); a post-war political climate friendly to northern investors; the arrival of said investors, beginning in the late 1860s; and of course, a long-standing enthusiasm for industrial development among the city's economic/political elite. "In some ways," McDonald and Wheeler assert, "Knoxville was in a perfect position to take advantage of the New South movement. . . . Indeed, to Knoxvilleans and interested outsiders, it seemed that the once-sleepy town possessed all the ingredients necessary to become a major city."¹²

McDonald and Wheeler are, by their own admission, applying a classic model of urban development to Knoxville. "Urban absorption of hinterland labor," they insist, "is one of the characteristics inherent in the transformation of premodern to modern societies in Western Europe and Britain and the nineteenth century. It is applicable to Knoxville because industrial Knoxville absorbed . . . Appalachian [white] and southern black labor, both of which groups came from what could be termed 'premodern' environments, or at least 'transitional' ones between premodern and modern."¹³

¹² Michael J. McDonald and William Bruce Wheeler, Knoxville, Tennessee: Continuity and Change in a Southern Appalachian City (1983), 3-31.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 4.

Rodney White and Joseph Whitney explain this model more thoroughly in their essay “Cities and Environment: An Overview,” arguing that cities tend to pass through two distinct stages on their way to maturity. The first or “Pre-Modern Quasi-sustainable Settlements” stage is characterized by a community of small cities surrounded by a large, self-sufficient rural population. Because cities in this stage are dependent on natural transportation (particularly rivers) for the importation of foodstuffs and other bulky commodities, they are unable to support large urban populations or heavy industry. Thus, no one city in the community is able to establish itself as a “nodal point” of economic/demographic power, although certain natural advantages such as deep water ports and level farmland (or the lack thereof), may lead to size discrepancies among community members. During the second or “Colonial/Industrial Revolution” stage, railroads, canals, and other transportation technologies reduce the “traditional effects of distance,” increasing the profitability of commercial farming and initiating a rural land-scramble. Subsistence farmers and tenant laborers are pushed aside by their wealthier neighbors, creating a pool of cheap labor beneficial to emergent urban industries. For a variety of reasons, one city may emerge from this transitional period as a dominant economic/demographic power. Neighboring communities may stagnate or even decrease in size, further empowering the regional hegemon.¹⁴

¹⁴ Rodney White and Joseph Whitney, “Cities and Environment: An Overview,” in Richard Stren, Rodney White, and Joseph Whitney, eds., Sustainable Cities: Urbanization and the Environment in International Perspective (Boulder, 1991), 8-51. Environmental historians have used similar models when constructing narratives of Chicago and New Orleans. See William Cronon, Nature’s Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West (New York, 1991) and Ari Kelman, A River and Its City: The Nature of Landscape in New Orleans (Berkeley, 2003).

Historiography provides support for Wheeler's and McDonald's argument, verifying that antebellum East Tennessee was ripe for an economic/demographic transition. In his History of Agriculture in the Southern United States to 1860, Lewis Cecil Gray reveals that ruinous agricultural practices, particularly an overdependence on corn cultivation and livestock droving, exacted a terrible toll on East Tennessee farmland prior to the Civil War. Entire valleys had, by 1860, been stripped of their fertility, leaving subsistence farmers with little choice but to clear and cultivate marginal lands.¹⁵ Ruinous agricultural practices were, however, only part of the problem. Antebellum East Tennessee, writes Robert Tracy McKenzie in his essay "'Oh! Ours is a Deplorable Condition': The Economic Impact of the Civil War in Upper East Tennessee," suffered from a higher degree of landlessness than did the Deep South, giving lie to the notion that the region was the domain of a self-sufficient yeomanry. The chief culprit was a burgeoning rural population that exceeded the region's ever-diminishing supply of arable land. Noel C. Fisher in War At Every Door: Partisan Politics and Guerilla Violence in East Tennessee, 1860-1869 and W. Todd Groce in Mountain Rebels: East Tennessee Confederates the Civil War, 1860-1870 insist, ironically enough, that the arrival of railroads in 1855 and 1858 propelled the region even further toward the demographic precipice. Increased market connections fueled a wheat boom in East Tennessee, and

¹⁵ Lewis Cecil Gray, History of Agriculture in the Southern United States to 1860, 2 vols. (Washington, D. C., 1933), 840. For more on nineteenth-century East Tennessee agricultural practices, see H. J. Benser and C. C. Mantle, Agricultural History of Knox County, Tennessee, Volume II (Knoxville, 1945), especially 1, 12; Robert Tracy McKenzie, One South Or Many: Plantation Belt and Upcountry in Civil War Era Tennessee (Cambridge, 1994), especially 37; Donald Edward Davis, Where There Are Mountains: An Environmental History of the Southern Appalachians (Athens, Georgia, 2000), especially 108; and Margaret Lynn Brown, The Wild East: A Biography of the Great Smoky Mountains (Gainesville, Florida, 2000), especially 30-42. For a general study of nineteenth-century Southern agricultural practices, see Albert E. Cowdrey, This Land, This South: An Environmental History (Lexington, 1996).

hence a rural land-scramble among wealthy landholders. Small landholders and tenant laborers were pushed aside, leaving them in precarious economic circumstances.¹⁶

It should therefore come as no surprise that post-bellum Knoxville developed into what White and Whitney term a “nodal point” of economic/demographic power in East Tennessee. After all, the city possessed the transportation technologies needed to overcome the “friction of distance” when importing foodstuffs and natural resources (enabling it to support both a large urban population and heavy industry), was surrounded by a demographically unstable rural population in need of work, and was attractive to Northerners as a locus of investment. It doubtless helped that Knoxville had long-dreamed of establishing their city as an economic/demographic capital, and were thus willing to embrace change. As early as 1847, the Knoxville Register had insisted that “it is . . . the interest of our division of the State to build up in our midst a commercial emporium, where a ready market may be found for the products of the surrounding country. . . . By position . . . by weight of capital, Knoxville is eminently the site for that emporium.” Twelve years later, C. S. Williams’s Williams’ Knoxville Directory, City Guide, and Business Mirror echoed the Register’s sentiments: “Manufactories of different kinds are prospering and more must and will spring up. . . . Our town is destined to become a large manufacturing place.”¹⁷

¹⁶ Robert Tracy McKenzie, “‘Oh! Ours is a Deplorable Condition’: The Economic Impact of the Civil War in Upper East Tennessee,” in The Civil War in Appalachia, Kenneth W. Noe and Shannon H. Wilson, eds., (Knoxville, 1997), 199-226; Noel C. Fisher, War At Every Door: Partisan Politics and Guerilla Violence in East Tennessee, 1860-1869 (Chapel Hill, 1997), 19-20; W. Todd Groce, Mountain Rebels: East Tennessee Confederates and the Civil War, 1860-1870 (Knoxville, 1999), 4-13, 18-20.

¹⁷ C. S. Williams, Williams’ Knoxville Directory, City Guide, and Business Mirror (Knoxville, 1859), n.p., 14.

But then, where does this leave the Civil War? Should we dismiss the conflict as a mere interruption between two otherwise peaceful periods of development, or should we examine it as a potential agent of economic/demographic change in nineteenth-century Knoxville (and East Tennessee)? Before we answer this question, let us get a feel for the historiographical trends.¹⁸ Among the myriad causative factors that McDonald and Wheeler identify as agents of economic/demographic change in nineteenth-century Knoxville and East Tennessee, emancipation alone may be attributed directly to the Civil War. The rest were already influencing the pace and direction of development before the war (such as railroads and rural demographic stress), or began doing so soon after the conclusion of hostilities (Northern investment and rural-to-urban migration). Based on their decision to forego a lengthy discussion of pre-war and wartime history, one may infer that McDonald and Wheeler view the Civil War as having had a minimal impact on Knoxville and East Tennessee, at least as it regarded long-term economic/demographic development. If anything, the war served in their opinion to retard the city's and the region's transformation by consuming resources, stealing away labor in the form of military enlistments, and temporarily disrupting commerce.¹⁹

McKenzie offers an analysis of the war's profound economic impact in East Tennessee, noting that it amounted to a loss of nearly three-fifths of the region's pre-war wealth. He also mentions the privation and demographic upheaval experienced by civilians during and after the winter of 1863-64, which McDonald and Wheeler fail to do.

¹⁸ I will, at this time, forego further discussion of Rothrock and Deadrick, as their failure to make useful connections between pre-war, wartime, and postwar Knoxville have already been noted.

¹⁹ McDonald and Wheeler, Knoxville, Tennessee, 4.

Still, even he largely dismisses (or at least marginalizes) the war as an agent of long-term economic/demographic change in nineteenth-century East Tennessee. “Despite the extensive military destruction visited upon the region during the Civil War,” he insists, no one factor served to influence postwar economic/demographic development more than the “inexorable pressure of population growth against the region’s increasingly rigid land constraint.” And so, while he says nothing of Knoxville’s post-war transformation or of the rural-to-urban migration that made it possible, McKenzie is more or less in agreement with McDonald and Wheeler. The Civil War, they suggest, was of profound significance to Knoxville and East Tennessee in the short-term, but had little impact on the city’s or the region’s long-term economic/demographic development.²⁰

I contend that the Civil War has been underestimated as an agent of economic/demographic change in nineteenth-century Knoxville and East Tennessee. In fact, I believe that the war served as an economic/demographic catalyst, accelerating (although certainly not completing) the process by which both city and region were transformed from a pre-modern economy based primarily on subsistence agriculture to a more modern industrializing economy based on manufacturing, natural resource extraction, and limited commercial farming.

Consider for a moment the scope of economic/demographic upheaval caused by the Civil War in East Tennessee. Tens of thousands of civilians (likely in excess of one hundred thousand) were displaced, either by force (political persecution and hunger) or

²⁰ McKenzie, *Civil War in Appalachia*, 203-19. As with Rothrock and Deadrick, I have decided to forego further discussion of Fisher and Groce. Their studies are, after all, intended primarily to explain the causes and consequences of Unionist and secessionist political support among East Tennesseans, rather than to trace long-term economic/demographic developments in the region.

by choice (military enlistment); entire towns were partially or fully destroyed, including large portions of Knoxville; and the region's agricultural economy was all but obliterated by Union and Confederate soldiers. Losses in railroad and industrial property were equally catastrophic: hundreds of cars and locomotives were damaged or destroyed by soldiers and guerillas, as were numerous depots, machine shops, and miles of railroad track; and iron-making equipment was stolen from the region's foundries for use in munitions production or, if required by military expediency, simply destroyed.²¹

But then one must also consider the ironically positive consequences of this upheaval: many of those rendered homeless and/or destitute had faced precarious economic circumstances prior to the war, making them ideal candidates for urban industrial jobs (assuming that such jobs became available); the destruction of East Tennessee cities diminished competition among the region's urban community, thereby speeding Knoxville's post-war ascension to the position of regional economic/demographic hegemon; Union soldiers rebuilt and actually improved the region's railroads, replacing soft, Southern-made rails with more durable rails of Northern manufacture (a blessing enjoyed by few Southern sub-regions or cities); and the chance existed that the region's farmers might be persuaded to abandon ruinous agricultural practices when resuscitating their lands, thereby reversing the decades-old

²¹ Edward Everett, Account of the Fund for the Relief of East Tennessee: with a Complete List of Contributors (Boston, 1864) 6-7, 28, 33; Thomas W. Humes, Report to the East Tennessee Relief Association at Knoxville: With Tabular Statements from the General Agent, etc. (Knoxville, 1865), 7, 17; Knoxville Whig and Rebel Ventilator, 24, 31 August 1864 and 22 March 1865; LeRoy P. Graf, Ralph W. Haskins, and Paul Bergeron, eds., The Papers of Andrew Johnson (16 vols., Knoxville, 1967-2000), 7: 286-87; Joseph Wheeler, Campaigns of Wheeler and His Cavalry, 1862-1865 (Atlanta, 1899) 251-55; Shelby Foote, The Civil War, a Narrative: Volume III, Red River to Appomattox (New York, 1974), 519-20; J. B. Killebrew, Introduction to the Resources of Tennessee (Spartanburg, South Carolina, 1974) 477-78, 481, 493-94, 609; John Watkins to Friend John, 23 March 1864, Watkins Letters.

cycle of soil exhaustion. Furthermore, residents' staggering capital losses (a short term hindrance, to be sure) would force them to seek lucrative outside investment if they wished to rebuild (or would at least encourage them to do so). With slavery gone, the odds that Northerners (particularly those who opposed the "Peculiar Institution" on conscientious grounds) would respond to their entreaties were greatly improved.²²

Metaphorically speaking, then, one might compare the Civil War in East Tennessee to a great conflagration; terrible in its fury, and yet life-giving in the sense that it made way for new growth and development. In four short years, the region's conservative, agrarian order was more or less toppled, making way for an infusion of outside capital, ideas, and technologies. That this new order brought with it a host of social and economic problems, or that it never quite measured up to boosters' expectations, is beside the point; the new order came, and the Civil War had a significant hand in speeding its arrival.²³

My intention is not, however, to imply that the war was the preeminent agent of economic/demographic change in Knoxville and East Tennessee's profound postbellum transformation. To ignore the myriad factors that contributed to change in both city and region before and after the war, including topographical features that encouraged or discouraged trade and transportation (particularly the high mountains that bordered the region to the north, east, and west), technological innovations that enabled East Tennesseans to overcome these topographical barriers, attempts by boosters to influence

²² War of the Rebellion, Series Three, 5: 933-1005; Silas Emmett Lucas, Jr., History of Tennessee: From the Earliest Time to the Present (Nashville, 1887), 850; Knoxville Whig and Rebel Ventilator, 22 February 1865.

²³ Groce, Mountain Rebels, 153-59; McDonald and Wheeler, Knoxville, Tennessee, 18-19, 21, 24-27.

the economic habits of their rural neighbors, resistance by rural East Tennesseans to boosters' machinations, intra-urban competition between Knoxville and other East Tennessee cities, or even pure blind luck would be as mistaken as ignoring the war itself. My goal is to craft a seamless, cause-and-effect narrative history of the city and the region, demonstrating that economic/demographic decision-making by antebellum East Tennesseans affected the course of the war (making it more destructive than it might otherwise have been), which in turn affected the course of postwar economic/demographic developments.

Chapter One:

“None Live So Far From Market as Those Who Have Nothing to Sell”: Economic and Demographic Change in Nineteenth-Century East Tennessee

As dawn broke on October 25, 1854, a large crowd began to move through the streets of Knoxville, Tennessee, headed for the city’s newly constructed fairgrounds. The first annual Eastern Division of the Tennessee State Fair was scheduled to commence that morning at nine o’clock and visitors, many of whom had traveled long distances to attend the festivities, wanted to arrive on time. Among the crowd that day were representatives of nearly every social and occupational class in East Tennessee. Well-heeled “gentleman farmers” steered carriages down Gay Street, jostling for position amid the wagons of their highland neighbors. Foundry operators walked side by side with village blacksmiths, while Knoxville merchants, eager to entice passers by with the latest retail goods, threw open their showroom doors. The crowd also reflected East Tennessee’s geographic diversity: twenty-three of the region’s thirty-one counties sent judges to oversee the numerous agricultural and mechanical competitions. Farmers from the rugged Cumberland table land mingled freely with those living in the foothills of the Unaka Mountains, all the while under the watchful eye of their wealthier Great Valley neighbors.²⁴

For many, the trip to Knoxville had been a long and difficult journey. After all, nature and neglect had combined in East Tennessee to produce a thoroughly inefficient transportation network. Famous for the soaring mountains that constitute its northwestern and southeastern borders, East Tennessee is more properly characterized as

²⁴ Knoxville Whig and Independent Journal, 28 October 1854; Knoxville Register, 13 October 1854.

a succession of steep, parallel ridges. These ridges run generally northeast to southwest, and may go unbroken for fifty miles or more. Although passable on foot or horseback, these ridges presented an all but insurmountable barrier to wagon traffic. Consequently, most roads followed the intervening valleys in the same northeast to southwest direction, except where gaps permitted an east-west passage. To make matters worse, county governments left road maintenance in the hands of private citizens, few of whom took an active role in their care. In Knox County, for example, residents were assessed an annual road maintenance tax of seventy-five cents, payable either in currency or labor. Most simply paid the tax and looked the other way as nature reclaimed the roads. As historian Mary U. Rothrock points out, Knox County's frightful roads became something of a local legend, spawning tales of sinkholes so deep "that horses and wagons had fallen into them and never been seen again."²⁵

Still, the difficulty of the trip depended on fairgoers' starting point relative to Knoxville. Those living in Loudon, for example, needed only to take a ferry across the Holston River and then follow the stage road thirty-five miles north to the fair site. Better yet, they could have boarded a steamboat at Loudon's bustling wharf, avoiding the overland trip altogether. In either case, the trip took less than one day, and could have been completed at minimal expense.²⁶ Compare this to the difficulties encountered by

²⁵ In their enthusiasm to bring railroads to the region, East Tennesseans forewent participation in the state's 1836 and 1838 turnpike construction programs. East Tennessee had few or no macadamized roads until after the Civil War. See Rothrock, French Broad, 92-93, 236-37, and Schwaab and Bull, Travels, 352.

²⁶ East Tennessee & Virginia and East Tennessee & Georgia Railroad Company, Guide To the Summer Resorts and Watering Places of East Tennessee (Memphis, 1879), map insert; John Edward Benhardt, Jr., "Capitalism, Regional Development, and Place Formation: An Analysis of the Upper East Tennessee River Valley, 1860-1900" (Ph.D. diss., University of Tennessee, Knoxville, 1995), 53.

fairgoers departing from Tazewell. Lacking a direct water route to Knoxville, Tazewell residents had to cross the Clinch River and then head southeast toward Bean's Station through a gap in Clinch Mountain. Twenty years after the fair, J. B. Killebrew described the abysmal road connecting these two points, noting that "for a greater part of the distance [the road] passes up hill and down over great limestone masses as large as a man's head, and almost impassable for wheeled vehicles." Had their wagon survived this leg of the journey unscathed, our travelers would have likely spent the night in one of Bean's Station's hotels before turning southwest toward Knoxville. Assuming that they got an early start the following morning, they would have completed the remaining fifty-eight miles on relatively good roads, perhaps arriving in Knoxville by dusk.²⁷

Given the difficulty of overland travel, it is a wonder that so many made the trip to the fair. And yet travel they did, such that by midmorning on October 25 the fairgrounds were alive with activity. As the day began, thousands gathered to watch the region's top livestock breeders display their finest horses, cattle, mules, and donkeys. Describing the scene two days later, the Knoxville Register boasted that "here on this lot we beheld more fine . . . horses, than at all the . . . grounds we ever visited." Although a slight mishap occurred when a horse bolted into the crowd, all but one of the spectators used their "activity and agility" to avoid being trampled. When the excitement died

²⁷ East Tennessee & Virginia and East Tennessee & Georgia Railroad Company, Guide, insert. Tazewell, the county seat of Claiborne County, was located sixty-five miles north of Knoxville. See Killebrew, Introduction, 356, 473; Bean's Station, in Grainger County, stood fifty-eight miles northeast of Knoxville. As an important stopping point for merchants and drovers traveling between Virginia, Kentucky, the Carolinas, Georgia, and Alabama, Bean's Station gained a reputation for its fine hotels. See the Bean's Station Improvement Company, Bean's Station: Past, Present and Future (Knoxville, 1893), 1-3, 5. Although it is unclear how many Claiborne countians attended the fair, the Knoxville Whig and Independent Journal noted that at least one female resident took home a prize for domestic manufactures. See the Knoxville Whig and Independent Journal, 28 October 1854. For a description of the road that connected Bean's Station with Knoxville, see Schwaab and Bull, Travels, 358-59.

down, fairgoers turned their attention to the Domestic Manufactures tent, where women displayed quilts, baked goods, “trinkets, [and] nicknacks.” Young bachelors swarmed around a certain Miss Shipley of Bean’s Station, praising the quality of her work and, given the chance, complimenting her for her physical beauty. As noon approached spectators ceased examining the “ponderous pumpkins, multitudes of mammoth ears of corn, and turnips innumerable,” and gathered around the speakers stand. There, Frederick S. Heiskell, president of the Knox County Agricultural Association, prepared to address the crowd.²⁸

Before beginning, Heiskell perhaps took a moment to ponder the significance of this gathering. Arrayed before him, figuratively speaking, stood all of East Tennessee. Prior to the advent of regional rail service, such gatherings were rare, if not altogether unheard of, in East Tennessee, for the rugged topography and poor roads discouraged East Tennesseans from engaging in long-distance travel except when absolutely necessary. Even in Knox County, which was relatively well-developed, rural residents seldom encountered many of their neighbors. According to Killebrew, the county’s numerous ridges fragmented human communities so that “the inhabitants of one valley would be as completely cut off from intercourse with those of a neighboring valley, only a few miles away, as if hundreds of miles intervened.” This is not to suggest that East

²⁸ Knoxville Register 27 October 1854. Frederick Steidinger Heiskell (1786-1882) had a colorful career that included stints as a newspaper editor, planter, state senator, and board member of the East Tennessee Female Institute. Born in Hagerstown, Maryland, he spent time in Virginia before moving to Knoxville in 1814. There, he and his brother-in-law founded the Knoxville Register, in addition to operating a successful printing business. Heiskell retired from the newspaper trade in 1837, relocating to an estate west of Knoxville known as Fruit Hill. After serving one term as a state legislator in 1847, he returned to East Tennessee, where he remained until his death. See F. S. Heiskell, Address Delivered to the State Fair for the Eastern Division of Tennessee at Knoxville (Knoxville, 1854), and Rothrock, French Broad, 76, 111, 422-23.

Tennesseans lived in a state of pure isolation, for as historian W. Todd Groce points out, farmers, merchants, and drovers carried on a bustling trade with markets in the Deep South and along the Atlantic seaboard. Still, only a handful of East Tennesseans actually accompanied produce shipments beyond the region's borders. An intrepid few made annual flatboat trips to Knoxville, Chattanooga, and points beyond, but most small farmers sold crops directly to livestock drovers, rather than risk the hazardous overland journey to urban markets.²⁹

The fair thus represented a turning point in the region's history. For the first time, East Tennesseans had gathered en masse, in a central location, for the purpose of improving the region's agricultural and industrial economies. To be sure, Knoxville had long served the region as an important economic, social, and political hub, playing host to visits from drovers, merchants, religious associations, politicians, and travelers. Such gatherings, however, were of little use to boosters interested in developing a region-wide economic strategy. Drovers herding livestock into Market Square, or highland farmers selling chestnuts from the backs of wagons, had little meaningful contact with one another, much less with boosters. On completing their sales and purchasing supplies, most of these visitors simply returned to their respective valleys, taking with them no more than needed to ensure a modest level of comfort and success. What Knoxville boosters needed was a platform from which to communicate their vision of the region's economic future to a broad audience. The fair offered just such a platform, for it provided material incentives, namely the promise of cash premiums, to lure rural

²⁹ Killebrew, Introduction, 559. Groce points out that East Tennesseans exported enormous quantities of grain and livestock (particularly corn and hogs) to cities as far away as Richmond, New York, New Orleans, Savannah, and Charleston. See Groce, Mountain Rebels, 1-5.

residents into the city. Moreover, hosting the fair enhanced Knoxville's regional economic prestige, further solidifying the city's symbolic position as a center of commerce and prosperity.³⁰

Heiskell began his address by chiding the region's farmers for their lack of formal education. Likening the human mind to a depleted field, he insisted that education held the key to "vivifying the dormant seeds of genius and virtue, and redeeming . . . the neglected wastes of human intellect." Farmers, Heiskell pointed out, were the region's largest occupational group and were therefore capable of tremendous political influence. Should farmers unite behind a common cause, such as pressuring the state government to fund transportation improvements, the entire region, including fledgling manufacturing interests, stood to benefit. Unfortunately for boosters, few East Tennessee communities offered public education in 1854, much less specific agricultural training. Existing schools, such as Kingston's Rittenhouse Academy and East Tennessee University in Knoxville, offered curriculums of only marginal use to aspiring farmers. Recognizing this deficiency, Heiskell insisted that the state "make liberal appropriations towards

³⁰ Groce, Mountain Rebels, 2; Gray, History of Agriculture, 840; A Randolph Shields, The Cades Cove Story (Gatlinburg, Tennessee, 1977), 23. Killebrew suggests that East Tennesseans, particularly those living in the more isolated counties surrounding Knoxville, exhibited a frugality that inhibited the flow of retail goods; see Killebrew, Introduction, 557. As the host city, Knoxville received an appropriation of \$1,000 from the state, most of which went towards the construction of a fairgrounds. Once in place, these facilities provided boosters with an argument for permanent hosting duties. The state legislature, however, forbade any one city from hosting the fair in two consecutive years. Consequently, Loudon was scheduled to host the fair in 1855, creating consternation among those eager to bring about regional economic unity. Still, boosters maintained high hopes that the fair, no matter where it was held, would usher in an age of regional prosperity. Lucrative prizes promised to not only lure rural residents into the city, but to "bring about real competition which is . . . the life of improvement." See Heiskell, Address, 4, and Knoxville Register, 12 April 1855.

building up an institution for the more general diffusion of information for the particular advantage of the farming interest.”³¹

Still, it seems unlikely that East Tennesseans would have embraced such programs, even had they existed. The region’s farmers were hesitant to adopt any technique perceived as “book farming,” choosing instead to rely on traditional techniques shaped by generations of practical experience. Agricultural boosters had long complained of this “stubbornness,” often using the region’s newspapers to castigate farmers. In 1849, the Register delivered this stinging admonition: “No man is excusable who, closing his eyes against the bright light which science and improved agriculture shed around him, plods on, careless and unconcerned, in his system of ruinous cultivation. . . . Farming according to rational principles never did impoverish a farm.” Although puzzled by this disdain for agricultural education, Heiskell admitted to a degree of bias in his own right, stating, “we think that those who write, cannot instruct others, unless they are practical farmers.” He nonetheless insisted that most agricultural scientists were themselves practical farmers, and thus worthy of emulation.³²

Having emphasized the importance of agricultural education, Heiskell moved to the heart of his address. Looking out over the sea of faces before him, he pleaded with farmers to abandon the ruinous system of corn monoculture that predominated in the region and replace it with a more diversified program of crop rotation and livestock

³¹ Heiskell, Address, 4-9. Kingston’s Rittenhouse Academy offered a variety of courses, including orthography, reading, writing, arithmetic, astronomy, trigonometry, Latin, Greek, philosophy, and the natural sciences. See J.C. “Babe” Parker, 200 Years of Kingston, Tennessee History, 1799-1999 (Kingston, Tennessee, 1999), 27-28.

³² Heiskell, Address, 15-16; Knoxville Register, 25 July 1849.

husbandry. "It is much better to raise stock than corn to sell," Heiskell insisted, because "the former will enrich while the latter will impoverish your soil." Throughout the nineteenth century, corn and corn leaves served as the primary source of nutrition for East Tennesseans and their livestock. The crop required relatively little cultivation and could be grown in rocky soils and on steep hillsides. Soon after settling on a piece of land, highland farmers would cut down trees to create new fields, remove the downed timber, and scatter seed corn between the stumps. If plowing was necessary, farmers used the bull-tongue plow, characterized by a long, narrow moldboard, to create shallow furrows amid the numerous rock outcroppings. As late as 1874, Killebrew marveled at the ability of East Tennessee farmers to raise corn under the most difficult of circumstances, stating that "we have seen fields of corn upon steep slopes, where the limestone rocks almost sheeted the surface, that would yield from fifty to seventy bushels per acre."³³

Although much of the annual harvest went to feed livestock, particularly hogs, cattle, and poultry, East Tennessee farm families consumed enormous quantities of the grain. In fact, historian Donald Edward Davis estimates that an average family of seven consumed 162 bushels of corn per year. Fresh corn on the cob added welcome variety to meals of chicken, pork, and wild game while cornmeal, more so than wheat or rye flour, served as a family's primary bread-making ingredient. Corn also provided farm families with important construction materials and a crude form of currency for use in local barter. According to Davis, "[corn] husks and leaves were woven into hats, dolls, mops, and chair bottoms." Farmers "purchased" plows and other implements with surplus grain,

³³ Heiskell, Address, 18. Davis, Where There Are Mountains, 108; Killebrew, Introduction, 355.

and hired hands could expect to receive several bushels in exchange for their labor. Corn culture was in fact the very heart of the regional agricultural economy, at least prior to the advent of rail service in the mid-1850s.³⁴

For all of its blessings, however, excessive corn cultivation exacted a terrible price on the region's soils. Although less destructive than cotton or tobacco, corn is a "hungry" plant that leaches nitrogen, phosphoric acid, and potash from the soil. Farmers may, with careful crop rotation and the cultivation of cover crops, curb soil depletion and preserve fertility. In East Tennessee, however, land scarcity led many farmers to plant corn in the same fields year after year, thereby destroying the very basis of their livelihood. After several years of such abuse, even the most fertile soils lost their ability to sustain food crops. Devoid of ground cover, hillside soils gave way quickly to erosion, leaving behind a barren landscape of parched soil and deep gullies. As Albert Cowdrey points out, "nature, lacking special purposes, does not demand wheat where only thistles will grow." Such was certainly the case in East Tennessee. Hardy plant species soon invaded depleted fields, creating thick tangles of underbrush that were difficult to remove. Persimmon trees, sassafras bushes, and briars all diminished the value of agricultural land. Broom sedge, perhaps more so than any other "pest species," proved particularly galling to East Tennessee farmers; once established, it was difficult to remove, requiring that farmers destroy the entire plant or face recurring infestations. To

³⁴ On corn and its many uses, see Davis, Where There Are Mountains, 136-41.

make matters worse, broom sedge released seeds into neighboring fields, damaging grass and wheat.³⁵

Solving the problems associated with corn monoculture, Heiskell argued, would necessitate a complete reorientation of regional agricultural patterns. Under this new system, farmers could continue to grow corn, provided they fed it directly to their livestock, thus returning valuable organic material to the soil in the form of manure. Better yet, farmers could curb corn production in favor of clover and grasses, thus creating verdant pastures capable of sustaining purebred livestock. Favoring the latter course, Heiskell encouraged the crowd to plant “perennial grasses . . . timothy and herds-grass, as well as the grasses of that class, [which] will grow and make good meadows . . . on highlands.” According to Killebrew, timothy produced fine hay crops, in addition to providing ground cover vital to the prevention of soil erosion. Herds-grass, though less reliable than timothy as a source of hay, has the advantage of extreme adaptability. As Killebrew pointed out, herds-grass “produces a deep, tough sod of roots, that make a firm surfacer. . . . In fact, it will yield good crops where other crops would fail altogether.” Because both of these grasses were well-suited to East Tennessee’s limestone soils, farmers could expect a quick return on their investment. As a bonus, the manure produced by grazing cattle would further enrich the soil, restoring depleted fields.³⁶

While promising, Heiskell’s plan was in some respects an impractical solution to the region’s agricultural woes. Transportation difficulties encouraged continued corn

³⁵ K. L. Hatch and Charles A. Keffer, Elementary Agriculture of Tennessee with Practical Arithmetic (Chicago, 1914), 62; Cowdrey, This Land, This South, 3; Killebrew, Introduction, 105, 454.

³⁶ Heiskell, Address, 18; Killebrew, Introduction, 54-70, 114, 117, 431.

monoculture, even as East Tennesseans watched arable farmland disappear before their eyes. Prior to the advent of rail service, East Tennesseans depended on rivers as the primary avenues for shipping bulky commodities out of the region. Each fall, farmers living near navigable watercourses loaded produce aboard shallow-draft flatboats, which were then floated downstream to markets in Knoxville, Chattanooga, Decatur, Alabama, and even New Orleans. Although convenient for some, this mode of transportation suffered from limitations. First, the region's rivers flowed generally northeast to southwest, funneling flatboat traffic south into northern Georgia and Alabama. Second, the region's rivers were, with the exception of portions of the Clinch and Holston/Tennessee Rivers, far too shallow and rock-infested to support steamboat traffic. Consequently, while farmers and merchants found it relatively easy to transport goods out of the region, they found it hard to return home. Those with produce to export were thus forced to weigh the potential benefits of a downstream journey against the time and cost of returning. Unless one lived close to a navigable stream and produced crops of sufficient quality and quantity to bring top dollar in regional markets, the trip would not have been worth the effort.³⁷

The alternative, shipping produce overland, was likewise too costly and hazardous for many small farmers. The region's poor roads strained wagons and draft animals, both of which were prone to break down on the steep, rocky grades. Dependent on animal power for plowing, harvesting, and transportation, small farmers were loath to subject horses, mules, and oxen to unnecessary risk. Consequently, those living in the more

³⁷ On East Tennessee river traffic, see Groce, Mountain Rebels, 1-4, and Gray, History of Agriculture, 882.

isolated counties, particularly in upper East Tennessee, sold their crops directly to passing livestock drovers, rather than undertake the difficult journey to distant urban centers.

This practice gave rise to a droving business that, while a pragmatic solution to transportation difficulties exacerbated the negative consequences of corn monoculture. “Before the Civil War,” historian Lewis Cecil Gray points out, “valleys along the line of travel were suffering from soil exhaustion due to the exclusive production of grain for sale to drovers.” Each year, drovers herded thousands of cattle, hogs, sheep, and horses from the foothills of the Cumberland and Unaka mountains to cities and towns in Kentucky, East Tennessee, the Carolinas, Alabama, and Georgia. Along the way, enterprising farmers pooled their resources to establish corn feeding stations, some of which fed over 150,000 animals per season. Although this mobile market provided isolated farmers with a convenient means to move their crops overland, droving did them more harm than good, for the animals devoured underbrush and root systems along their line of travel, thus intensifying erosion.³⁸

Thus, internal isolation and the problems emanating from it had profound economic/demographic consequences for the region, particularly with regard to urban growth. To borrow from Rodney White and Joseph Whitney’s model, East Tennessee cities existed in a “pre-modern, quasi-sustainable” stage of development, characterized by the inability of any one urban center to achieve economic primacy. During this stage, cities depend on natural transportation corridors such as rivers and valleys for the importation and exportation of goods. Those on navigable rivers possess an advantage

³⁸ Gray, History of Agriculture, 840-41; Killebrew, Introduction, 356.

over landlocked rivals, and are thus able to develop larger hinterlands. For sustainable urban growth to occur, however, these cities must also have access to land capable of producing agricultural surpluses. After all, urban residents, particularly those engaged full-time in industrial or commercial pursuits, depend on rural production. Should an urban population exceed the production capabilities of its hinterland (henceforth referred to as its carrying capacity), the city must correct its agricultural deficiencies, import foodstuffs, or suffer demographic loss.³⁹

To be sure, Knoxville's situation was conducive to long-term economic/demographic growth.⁴⁰ The city's residents enjoyed access to relatively flat farmland and broad, navigable watercourses, both rare commodities in a region characterized by rugged terrain and shallow, rock-strewn rivers. Traveling near Knoxville in 1839, Henry Ruffner described the landscape: "towards Knoxville, the hills were less . . . barren, the lands between them more spacious and fertile. A few miles below Knoxville, I was at length gratified by the sight of the Holstein [sic], the chief branch of the Tennessee. . . . The Holstein has a clear and lively current, winding among hills, and bluffs, and low grounds." As Killebrew pointed out, thick beds of Magnesian limestone underlay much of this "spacious" country, giving rise to durable soils that, given proper care, were capable of maintaining their fertility for generations. As an added benefit, the Holston River and its numerous east-west tributaries created a lattice-

³⁹ White and Whitney, *Sustainable Cities*, 9-11.

⁴⁰ Borrowing from geographer Peirce Lewis, Ari Kelman defines situation as "what we commonly mean when we speak of a place with respect to neighboring places." Knoxvilleans, like the New Orleanians discussed by Kelman, believed that their city possessed the natural advantages needed to compete successfully with rival urban centers. See Kelman, *A River and Its City*, 6.

work of valuable bottomlands throughout Knox County. “The agricultural value of the river . . . great as it is,” Killebrew insisted, “is exceeded by the value of its many tributaries. These are swift and clear creeks, taking their rise in several instances outside of the county and flowing through long narrow valleys, fed on either side by . . . branches that swell them into considerable volume.”⁴¹

Although Ruffner said little about the agricultural activity he witnessed, he would have passed numerous farms as he traveled north toward Knoxville. The owners of these farms, whether they were wealthy planters or families with smaller holdings, took advantage of the valley’s fertile soils to produce a variety of crops. Looking to either side of the road, Ruffner would have noticed enormous stands of corn interspersed with smaller fields of wheat, oats, rye, and tobacco. He might also have observed the occasional cotton patch, cultivated by local farmers for home clothing manufacture. Wandering amid these fields, and kept at bay by sturdy split-rail fences, were thousands of cattle, hogs, sheep, and horses. A small number of farmers maintained hay and clover lots for purebred livestock, but most simply turned their animals out to graze on the county’s open range. Census data reveal that Knox County farmers produced enormous quantities of food crops and livestock in 1850, more than enough, it seems, to meet the nutritional needs of Knoxville’s population. As Robert Tracy McKenzie points out, much of this surplus produce went to the residents of larger Southern cities, particularly Savannah, Charleston, Atlanta, and Richmond.⁴²

⁴¹ Killebrew, Introduction, 64, 550-63; Schwaab and Bull, Travels, 358.

⁴² McKenzie, One South Or Many, 37; J. D. B. DeBow, Seventh Census of the United States: 1850 (Washington, 1853), 588-89.

Still, Knoxville boosters were confident that transportation improvements, particularly railroads, would allow them to command local resources and transform the city into the region's premier economic power. As early as 1847, the Register boasted that "it is undoubtedly the interest of our division of the State to build up in our midst a commercial emporium, where a ready market may be found for the products of the surrounding country, and where may flow the comforts of commerce to all around. By position, by prescriptive usage and by weight of capital, Knoxville is eminently the site for that emporium." Such statements proved true, even if those making them strayed occasionally into exaggeration. By 1854 Knoxville was a regional livestock market of some importance. Each year, drovers herded thousands of cattle, pigs, horses, and sheep into the city, there selling them to local grain farmers or to purchasing agents from the Deep South. Knoxville residents also enjoyed access to some forty industrially valuable minerals, as well as vast stands of timber. Given these advantages, it is little wonder that the Register boasted that "the scope of country through which [the railroad] will pass, abounds in resources whose development would not only increase the wealth . . . of our state, but also tend to add to the welfare of our common country."⁴³

Despite such boasts, Knoxville's future as the hub of the region's economy was by no means secure. Surrounding Knoxville were a number of smaller communities that vied for control of the region's lucrative agricultural trade. To the northeast, Bean's Station stood at the confluence of the region's two most important overland roads, from which point it diverted agricultural traffic away from Knoxville. Each year, drovers from

⁴³ Knoxville Register, 5 May 1847; Rothrock, French Broad, 18, 75.

upper East Tennessee, Kentucky, Virginia, and the Carolinas passed through Bean's Station, often stopping to rest in one of the town's hotels. Although many of these drovers continued southeast toward Knoxville, significant numbers turned east or west at Bean's Station and headed to markets in Kentucky and North Carolina. In 1893, the Bean's Station Improvement Company offered this assessment of the town's importance to drovers: "There were annually more persons at Bean's Station--Knoxville not excepted--large numbers of whom were entertained, than at any place in this entire . . . region." Before dismissing this statement as shameless boosterism, one must also consider the following description, offered by Killebrew in 1874: "During the whole of the first half of the present century, [Bean's Station] was the most 'public place' in the country. We doubt whether Knoxville, during that period, was visited by as many strangers."⁴⁴

Loudon, thirty-five miles south of Knoxville, represented an even greater threat. The town stood amid farmland similar to that surrounding Knoxville, and was thus able to draw on abundant agricultural surpluses. According to Killebrew, the land surrounding Loudon was "perhaps not surpassed by any district of equal extent in the productive capacity of its soil." Moreover, Loudon's location relative to natural and manmade transportation networks gave the city a decided advantage in the race to capture regional agricultural trade. As the northernmost terminus of the uncompleted East Tennessee & Georgia Railroad, Loudon siphoned marketable produce southward away from Knoxville. Many farmers, eager to take advantage of high extra-regional market

⁴⁴ James T. Shields, Jr., and John M. Goldrick, Bean's Station: Past, Present and Future (Knoxville, 1893), 1-5; Killebrew, Introduction, 493.

prices, hauled their produce to Loudon rather than sell it to Knoxville buyers.

Steamboats arrived daily at the town's bustling wharf, laden with produce transported down the Holston River from Knox, Blount, and Sevier Counties, from Kingston on the Clinch River, and from as far north as Clinton in Anderson County. According to geographer John W. Benhardt, "traffic was so heavy that steamboats had to lay over several days to discharge cargo."⁴⁵

Heiskell understood the dynamics of this intra-regional competition all too well. Nevertheless, his intent was to rally East Tennesseans against a common threat, rather than to engage in the partisan promotion of Knoxville's economic interests. Though he lacked the perspective afforded modern scholars, Heiskell demonstrated a sophisticated understanding of rural-urban interactions, particularly the relationship between agricultural production and urban growth. Should the ecological degradation arising from corn monoculture continue, he reasoned, the region stood to lose its arable land, and hence its ability to produce surplus foodstuffs. The result would be a region of stunted towns and depleted, weed-choked fields, not unlike the over-farmed districts then springing up in the wake of Deep South cotton planters. "With our natural advantages," Heiskell argued, "we may boast at least an equality with the most favored portion of the hospitable globe. Surrounded, then, with everything we need . . . shall we not be open to

⁴⁵ East Tennessee & Virginia and East Tennessee & Georgia Railroad Company, Guide, insert; Killebrew, Introduction, 575; Benhardt, "Capitalism," 51-53; Groce, Mountain Rebels, 10.

the severest reproach from our posterity, and from our surrounding neighbors, if we persist in doing nothing?”⁴⁶

Heiskell concluded his remarks with an appeal to his audience’s strong sense of place. East Tennesseans, he insisted, should develop “[their] fertile soil, [their] numberless water-courses; [their] springs of pure and limpid water,” so as to “incline those who may come after us to remain in the land where their fathers had lived.” If contemporary historian and prominent Knox County judge Oliver P. Temple is to be believed, these words likely had a strong impact on fairgoers. Writing long after the Civil War, he argued that East Tennesseans “love their country --their own locality-- because it is their home and their possession. Each man feels that the country is, in part, his own.” Personal sentiments aside, however, Heiskell wished to stem the tide of ecological destruction before it ruined the region’s economic potential. “Soon,” he reminded the crowd, “our State will be over-spread with an iron net-work of railways. . . . With our railroads so near completion, we are doomed to a woeful disappointment unless we be up and doing. . . . Let us go to work or we will find the old aphorism verified that none live so far from market as those who have nothing to sell.”⁴⁷

Following Heiskell’s remarks, fairgoers returned to the business of enjoying themselves. As the Whig pointed out, there was much yet to do and see, including “the exhibition of manufactures, agricultural implements, and the produce of the field, the garden, the orchard; the dairy . . . and the poultry yard. . . . There was much of interest,

⁴⁶ Heiskell, Address, 12; Gavin Wright, Old South, New South: Revolutions in the Southern Economy since the Civil War (New York, 1986), 19-26.

⁴⁷ Oliver P. Temple, East Tennessee and the Civil War (Cincinnati, 1899), 57-58; Heiskell, Address, 13.

even greater than we can describe.” That evening, the women present worked together to prepare a grand feast. The bachelors in attendance were, once again, delighted by the opportunity to mingle with so many single women. “The young men seemed to be enjoying themselves to the brim,” stated the Register, “some of them in fact were running over with delight--we suppose they were intoxicated--with the beauty ensconced behind the counters.”⁴⁸

Attendance declined somewhat the following day, although the Register assured readers that a “vast concourse” greeted organizers as they prepared to open the gates. After watching a plowing competition, fairgoers gathered once more at the speaker’s stand, this time to listen to the address of prominent Knox County judge William G. Swan. Most, however, were far more interested in the day’s main business, namely the awarding of cash premiums to the winners of the numerous agricultural and mechanical competitions. As one might predict, valley farmers captured the majority of the prizes, a fact that led to no small amount of grumbling among those from highland counties. Still, the lopsided results do not appear to have dampened the mood of fairgoers. At the conclusion of the days events, the Register noted, “‘the living stream’ turned towards town, every visitor wearing the appearance of a man fully satisfied with the whole affair.”⁴⁹

If fairgoers were satisfied, Knoxville boosters were ecstatic. “Nothing that has occurred here in our memory,” boasted the Register, “is so well calculated to infuse new

⁴⁸ Knoxville Whig and Independent Journal, 28 October 1854; Knoxville Register, 27 October 1854.

⁴⁹ Knoxville Register, 27 October 1854. On William G. Swan (1821-1869) see Rothrock, French Broad, 493-94.

life into every branch of industry as such exhibitions as the one which has just closed and which has been but a foreshadowing of the future.” Heiskell’s emphasis on agricultural improvement touched on but one facet of organizers’ overall development program. Boosters also wished to exploit the region’s abundant timber and mineral resources, in the hope of transforming Knoxville into a regional industrial center. The fair thus presented the city’s economic elite with an additional economic opportunity, for it gave mine owners and factory operators a chance to display their wares to a regional audience. Less than one month before the fair began, the Register stated optimistically that “our judgment is much at fault if the news of such valuable deposits in our hills, does not spread from one end of the Union to the other, bringing on its reflux a tide of capital eager to share in the rich rewards of these now mountain locked resources.”⁵⁰

Despite such optimism, however, little appears to have changed in the immediate aftermath of the fair. Corn monoculture continued unabated, except in those areas enjoying access to the Loudon railhead. Here began a gradual shift in agricultural patterns as farmers, eager to take advantage of extra-regional markets, abandoned corn in favor of wheat. In much of the region, however, transportation difficulties continued to inhibit agricultural development. Poor roads limited the importation of Northern-made agricultural implements, leaving farmers with little choice but to rely on local manufacturers. As Lewis Gray points out, “the efficiency of the implements of a neighborhood was largely dependent on the skill of its blacksmith, a quality sadly frequently lacking.” Even in Knox County, where regular steamboat service permitted

⁵⁰ Knoxville Register, 30 August, 27 October 1854.

the importation of bulky goods, farmers faced difficulty acquiring the latest agricultural machinery. Some implements, such as the Page or disc harrow, saw little or no service in Knox County until after the Civil War, despite having been patented in 1847. True change, it seems, would have to wait, at least until the arrival of the railroads less than one year later.⁵¹

On July 4, 1855, East Tennesseans gathered once more in Knoxville, this time to cheer the arrival of the East Tennessee & Georgia Railroad. Although the first train had steamed into the city on June 22, boosters sought to increase publicity by staging a joint Independence Day celebration/railroad “Jubilee” on the Fourth of July. Event organizers sent notices to East Tennessee newspapers, promising those who attended a fun-filled day of brass bands, parades, speeches, and fireworks. Unfortunately, the celebration failed to live up to its billing. On the appointed morning, between five and ten thousand people eagerly crowded into Knoxville, only to discover that boosters had done a poor job of planning the event. “We had an immense concourse of people here,” lamented the Whig on July 7, “but we lacked organization--all was confusion.” For reasons that remain unclear, boosters failed to secure speakers for the event, leaving spectators with little to do but mill about and examine the trains. To add insult to injury, a heavy downpour began late that afternoon, forcing the cancellation of the Independence Day fireworks. “Out and out,” commented the Whig, “the thing was rather a humbug.”⁵²

For Knoxville boosters, the failure of the “jubilee” was of little importance. The railroad had at long last arrived, ending East Tennesseans’ comparative geographic

⁵¹ Gray, History of Agriculture, 792; Benser, Mantle, and Allred, Agricultural History of Knox County, Part I, 28-29.

⁵² Rothrock, French Broad, 106; Knoxville Whig, 30 June, 7 July 1855.

isolation and alleviating the worst of the region's internal transportation difficulties. To the delight of men like Heiskell, the railroad had an immediate impact on regional agricultural patterns, instigating a shift away from corn monoculture and toward the production of market crops, particularly wheat. Like corn, wheat required little in the way of soil preparation or manual labor; each fall, farmers simply scattered the grain over freshly plowed fields, covered the seeds using a harrow, and then ignored the crop until the plants matured in spring. In some cases, farmers sowed wheat amid the dried stalks of recently harvested cornfields, which provided valuable ground cover during the wet winter months. Though harvesting the crop proved somewhat difficult (rugged terrain inhibited the use of mechanized threshers and reapers on all but the most level farms), East Tennesseans relied on their own strength, and that of their draft animals, to produce abundant yields. Farmers owning the most fertile lands routinely produced fifteen bushels per acre, although the regional average was closer to eight.⁵³

In addition to being easy to grow, wheat provided East Tennessee farmers with a valuable export commodity. The region's flour exceeded that produced by Midwestern and Northeastern farmers in terms of quality and timeliness, and was soon a bread-making staple in households throughout the United States, the Caribbean Islands, and South America. Quoting political economist Henry C. Carey, Killebrew argued that "A barrel of strictly southern flour will make twenty pounds more bread than Illinois flour, because, being so much dryer, it takes up more water in making up. . . . [Also,] there is a peculiarity in the flour which enables it to resist damp, and it will remain fresh and sweet when flour made from northern grown wheat will become sour, lumpy and worthless."

⁵³ Groce, Mountain Rebels, 10-12; Benser, Mantle, and Allred, Agricultural History, Part II, 23.

As an added advantage, East Tennessee wheat matured faster than that produced in New York, giving East Tennesseans a decided edge in the race to fill market demand. By Carey's estimation, "'southern flour, raised in . . . Tennessee . . . brings from three to five dollars more per barrel than the best New York Genesee flour.'" It is thus little wonder that East Tennessee farmers, accustomed as they were to frugality and isolation, rushed to take advantage of this opportunity for personal enrichment. Wheat production soared throughout the region between 1855 and 1860, leading to an increase in cultivated acreage and a concomitant rise in land values. Wheat soon wore "the crown in the Tennessee Valley," a fact that was no doubt gratifying to agricultural boosters.⁵⁴

During this period, valley farmers also took the first tentative steps toward reorganizing the region's livestock industry. Perhaps influenced by Heiskell's advice, landowners increased the pasturage on their farms while simultaneously importing purebred livestock from the bluegrass regions of Middle Tennessee and Kentucky. In Knox, Roane, Sullivan, Greene, and McMinn, all valley counties, hay production increased 64 percent between 1849 and 1859. Still, farmers produced less pasturage than boosters would have preferred. According to historian Edward Hagerman, the average horse, properly cared for, consumes approximately twenty-six pounds of food each day. In 1859, the five sample counties produced 23,786 tons, or 47,572,000 pounds, of hay. If each of the 23,020 horses living in these five counties consumed twenty-six pounds of hay per day (or 598,520 pounds), the hay supply would have been depleted in just seventy-nine days. Excluded from these figures, of course, are the 264,947 donkeys,

⁵⁴ According to Groce, wheat production and land values in East Tennessee increased 384 and 193 percent, respectively, between 1849 and 1859. See Groce, Mountain Rebels, 10-11; Killebrew, Introduction, 96, 433-434.

mules, cattle, sheep, and hogs then present in the five sample counties, all of which placed additional demands on pasturage.⁵⁵

Knoxville received an economic/demographic boost from the railroads as well, particularly after workers completed the East Tennessee & Virginia line in June 1858. This line, which entered the region near Bristol, Virginia, ran generally southwest through Elizabethton, Greeneville, Morristown, and New Market before connecting with the East Tennessee & Georgia in Knoxville. For the first time, foodstuffs could be shipped the length of the Great Valley in less than one day--northward as well as southward--easing the subsistence burden from the shoulders of Knox County farmers and expanding the city's carrying capacity. With each passing train, produce and livestock from heretofore inaccessible communities of upper and lower East Tennessee arrived in the city's already substantial agricultural market. According to Williams's 1859 Knoxville Directory, urban residents in search of foodstuffs needed only to stroll among the myriad farm wagons parked around market square: "Our market is good and we have plenty to eat--fat beef, mutton and fowl, eggs and butter, the year round." As the food supply increased, rural migrants flocked to the city. Among them were doctors, lawyers, teachers, and merchants who sought a central location from which to conduct

⁵⁵ The horse/fodder ratio that I have adopted for this study is borrowed from Edward Hagerman's The American Civil War and the Origins of Modern Warfare (1988). It should be pointed out that East Tennessee farmers fed horses a variety of crops in addition to hay, including corn, corn leaves, oats, wheat stalks, and rye. This standard is, therefore, intended only as a means to demonstrate the relative dearth of cultivated pasturage on East Tennessee farms. See Edward Hagerman, The American Civil War and the Origins of Modern Warfare: Ideas, Organization, and Field Command (Bloomington, Indiana, 1988), 44; DeBow, Seventh Census, 588-89; Joseph C. G. Kennedy, Agriculture of the United States in 1860: Compiled from the Original Returns of the Eighth Census (Washington, 1864), 588-89.

region-wide business. Knoxville's population more than doubled between 1850 and 1860, increasing from 2,076 to 5,300.⁵⁶

There is no doubt that many East Tennesseans benefited from the advent of regional rail service. Increased market connections brought unprecedented wealth to valley farmers, and the free flow of agricultural and retail goods allowed Knoxville to expand its commercial hinterland, and hence its carrying capacity. Still this accounts for only a small minority of the region's inhabitants. What of those East Tennesseans who possessed little or no land, or who lived too far from a depot to benefit from the railroad? According to McKenzie and Groce, these East Tennesseans faced precarious economic circumstances during the late 1850s, a situation ironically made worse by the arrival of railroads. As large landholders scrambled to increase their cultivated acreage, tenant and subsistence farmers had little choice but to work less-profitable land on the region's geographic margins and continue the ruinous cycle of corn monoculture. Thus, on the eve of the Civil War, the majority of East Tennesseans found it increasingly difficult to feed their own families, much less produce marketable surpluses.

Although antebellum East Tennesseans touted their region as a utopia of independent white farmers, recent scholarship suggests that this was simply not the case. In fact, McKenzie reveals that white East Tennesseans suffered from a much higher rate of landlessness than did their neighbors in the Deep South, despite the scarcity of large-scale, slave-based agriculture in Appalachia. Based on a sampling of three East Tennessee counties, McKenzie concludes that by 1860, 43 percent of the region's white

⁵⁶ Rothrock, French Broad, 109; East Tennessee & Virginia and East Tennessee & Georgia Railroad Company, Guide, insert; Williams, Williams' Knoxville Directory, 14; Groce, Mountain Rebels, 15.

farm families owned no land. Compare this to the Georgia Piedmont, Mississippi Delta, and Alabama Blackbelt, all significant slaveholding areas, where landless rates were, respectively, at 37, 25, and 19 percent. Of the remaining 57 percent of East Tennessee farm families who owned land, only about three-fourths possessed sufficient improved land (fifty or more acres) for self-sufficiency. Thus, by 1860 well over half of all East Tennessee farm families were dependent on landlords, neighbors, or local produce markets for at least part of their subsistence.⁵⁷

If landless whites faced an uncertain future, so too did many of the region's small landholders. Ironically, the reorganization of rural and urban spaces instigated by railroads diminished rather than improved their economic prospects. To understand why, let us return for a moment to White and Whitney's model. According to these two authors, nineteenth century transportation improvements had a number of important consequences, most notably reducing the "friction of distance." In other words, railroads reduced shipping costs and travel time, allowing for an increased emphasis on market agriculture and a corresponding increase in land values. Initially, small landholders benefited from this new arrangement. However, as land values continued to increase, large planters, particularly those already holding the most productive acreage, gained a decided advantage in the race to acquire additional lands. Small landholders, unable to compete with their wealthier neighbors, were left with three choices: maintaining the

⁵⁷ McKenzie, Civil War in Appalachia, 211-17.

status quo (with little hope of acquiring new lands), migrating west, or purchasing cheaper marginal lands far from a rail depot.⁵⁸

This is precisely what occurred in East Tennessee during the late 1850s. In the valley, small landholders and white tenant farmers were pushed aside as wealthier neighbors, eager to take advantage of the wheat boom, scrambled to increase their cultivated acreage. Rather than leave the region, however, many small farmers purchased land or sought agricultural employment in the region's fringe (here defined as the Cumberland table land and the Unaka foothills). The white population of non-valley counties increased 20 percent between 1850 and 1860, far outstripping the 12 percent growth in the most fertile agricultural districts. To make matters worse, planters imported large numbers of slaves during the late 1850s, further diminishing the prospects of small farmers and landless whites. Region-wide, the slave population increased 18 percent between 1850 and 1860, with five counties (Meigs, Monroe, Polk, Sullivan, and Rhea) experiencing 30 percent growth. Although the slave population remained relatively small (never exceeding 10 percent of the region's population), it was nonetheless sufficient to reduce the availability of agricultural jobs for the landless. As white farm families became increasingly concentrated in the least productive areas, East Tennessee edged towards a full-blown demographic crisis.⁵⁹

As population pressure increased, farmers attempting to eke out a living on the highland rim found it increasingly difficult to feed their families. According to historian Noel C. Fisher, there was simply not enough arable land in East Tennessee to meet the

⁵⁸ Groce, Mountain Rebels, 41-45; White and Whitney, Sustainable Cities, 11, 15.

⁵⁹ Groce, Mountain Rebels, 6-7, 12, 41-42, 45.

nutritional needs of the burgeoning population.⁶⁰ In Scott, Claiborne, Anderson, Cocke, and Johnson Counties, for example, the population increased from 30,217 to 35,656 between 1850 and 1860, a growth rate of 18 percent. These five counties contained just 3,162 farms in 1860, meaning that each landowner, on average, had to produce foodstuffs sufficient to feed eleven people. However, only 59 percent of those farms possessed at least fifty improved acres, the minimum for self-sufficiency. This is not to suggest that a state of near-famine existed in these five counties. After all, residents possessed some eighty-four thousand hogs, and were able to supplement their diets with wild game, berries, and other naturally available foods. But these figures do demonstrate the precarious balance that existed between human beings and available foodstuffs in much of antebellum East Tennessee.⁶¹

Unfortunately, farmers in these five counties were, in their very attempt to produce foodstuffs, pushing the geographic margins of East Tennessee ever closer to wholesale demographic collapse. Lacking rail connections, those wishing to sell marketable produce had little choice but to continue the pragmatic but ecologically harmful cycle of corn monoculture and livestock droving. To be sure, those farmers owning land adjacent to navigable waterways participated in the wheat boom, floating grain downstream to railheads at Knoxville, Kingston, Loudon, and Chattanooga. For most, however, the only option was shipping wheat overland, which remained an impractical and even dangerous undertaking well into the 1870s. As we have seen, even

⁶⁰ Fisher says that only about one-half of the territory designated East Tennessee is flat enough to support large-scale market agriculture. The remainder is either too steep or too rocky to sustain anything larger than small subsistence farms. See Fisher, *War At Every Door*, 16-17.

⁶¹ Killebrew, *Introduction*, 406-407; Kennedy, *Agriculture of the United States*, 132-39.

short trips, such as the sixty-mile circuit between Tazewell and Morristown, placed wagons and draft animals at considerable risk. According to Killebrew, "It would be worth a load of corn, or hay, oats or wheat to haul it over the road between these two points."⁶²

For much the same reason, farmers living in these five fringe counties did little to correct existing agricultural deficiencies. Lacking rail connections, these farmers had neither the ability nor the economic incentive to import purebred livestock and cultivate soil-preserving pasturage. As Killebrew pointed out, purebred cattle must be fattened on pasturage if they are to be of any market value. They must then be moved to the nearest railhead, preferably over well-maintained roads. As we have seen, however, highland farmers preferred to graze their livestock on "the luxuriant growth of wild grasses and succulent vines and shrubbery that clothe the mountain sides and tops." Highland farmers also continued to rely on native livestock which, while smaller and less profitable, were hardy enough to withstand long trips over the region's poorly-maintained roads. Thus, while valley farmers produced an abundance of hay in 1860, those of the five sample mountain counties produced just 6,088 tons. If each of the 8,683 horses in these five counties consumed twenty-six pounds of hay each day, they would have exhausted the forage supply in just fifty-four days (of course, this would not have occurred under normal circumstances, for farmers supplemented their horses' diets with oats, corn, and corn leaves). Once again, this figure fails to account for the 62,440

⁶² Killebrew, Introduction, 480.

donkeys, mules, cattle, hogs, and sheep which, to some extent, placed additional demands on the hay crop.⁶³

On the eve of the Civil War, East Tennessee was a highly unstable region, caught in the early stages of a great economic/demographic transition. At the risk of resorting to fanciful metaphors, the region may be compared to a giant centrifuge, centered in Knoxville, which rotated on an axis of railroads. Between 1855 and 1860, railroads set this centrifuge in motion, throwing existing economic, social, and cultural institutions into a state of flux. The degree to which East Tennesseans experienced this instability, however, depended on their location relative to the new axis of rotation. Like children on a merry-go-round, those near the axis were shielded, by and large, from the negative effects of centrifugal force. In fact, merchants, large landholders, and budding industrialists used their access to improved transportation, arable land, and investment capital to emerge more prosperous, if somewhat dizzy, from this period of rapid change.

As the centrifugal forces unleashed by the advent of market capitalism increased, small landholders and tenant farmers were borne indelibly towards the region's geographic margins. Here, the force of economic/demographic change held them firmly in place, leaving them to choose between two rather unattractive options: cling to ruinous agricultural methods in the vain hope of achieving economic independence, or relinquish their grip and be tossed from the region. Of these two choices, only the latter offered a truly viable solution. According to agricultural economists H. J. Benser, C. C. Mantle, and C. E. Allred, the period between 1850 and 1860 saw a massive out-migration

⁶³ Ibid., 128, 131, 435; Kennedy, Agriculture of the United States, 132-39.

from East Tennessee as landless whites succumbed to the siren-song of cheap western land. If O. P. Temple is to be believed, however, this decision represented something of a last resort for the region's farm families. Attached as they were to the hills and valleys of their birth, many East Tennesseans were loath to abandon homes, cultural institutions, and agricultural methods, even as they watched their economic prospects diminish with each passing year. By 1860, one thing was abundantly clear: those living on the region's geographic margins possessed neither the economic wherewithal nor the transportation infrastructure to return to the relatively stable center.⁶⁴

Given sufficient time, this transition would have worked itself out naturally. The economic/demographic pressure building on the highland rim, while great, was unlikely to result in a state of permanent, grinding poverty. It is reasonable to assume that the construction of an east-west railroad, particularly the proposed Knoxville & Kentucky line, would have stabilized the region by providing a second axis of rotation. Figuratively speaking, this railroad would have created a smaller, less powerful centrifuge on the highland rim, capable of counteracting the overwhelming forces then emanating from the valley. This would not have been a painless process; those owning the best lands stood to consolidate their holdings as land values increased, further diminishing the economic prospects of landless whites. Still, White and Whitney suggest that urbanization and industrialization (both trends then underway in East Tennessee)

⁶⁴ Benser, Mantle, and Allred, Agricultural History, Part II, 1, 12.

would have relieved some of this pressure by providing homes, jobs, and increased access to foodstuffs.⁶⁵

Unfortunately for East Tennesseans, other events intervened. In June 1861, less than six years after residents gathered to celebrate the completion of the East Tennessee & Georgia Railroad, Confederate troop trains clattered into Knoxville, bringing the vanguard of a large occupation force. Given its demographic fragility, East Tennessee could ill afford a sudden population spike, and yet this is precisely what occurred beginning in 1861. Drawn by the region's railroads, as well as by the agricultural abundance of the central valley, Confederate forces took control of the region, creating new vortices of instability. Before long the centrifuge that was East Tennessee was spinning wildly out of control, threatening to propel the entire region into demographic collapse.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Rothrock, French Broad, 109-112; White and Whitney, Sustainable Cities, 11, 15.

⁶⁶ Seymour, Divided Loyalties, 6-7, 16-19.

Chapter Two
“Secession . . . has been the ruin of this place”:
East Tennessee and the Confederate Occupation

In late January 1861, a small band of secessionist militia camped atop College Hill, less than one mile west of downtown Knoxville. Few among the city's residents appear to have noticed these “soldiers.” Militia activity was a common sight in antebellum East Tennessee, and thus unlikely to raise many eyebrows. College Hill was otherwise deserted, the students of East Tennessee University, most of whom hailed from the Deep South, having abandoned their studies to return home. Newspaper editors, even the staunch Unionist William G. Brownlow of the Knoxville Whig, were far more interested in the upcoming Tennessee secession referendum, to be held on February 9, than in the actions of a rag-tag militia unit. Besides, with the nation edging ever closer to war, armed men might well be needed to defend the city against attack. Predominantly Unionist in their political sentiments, East Tennesseans made it clear that they would brook no violation of their Constitutional rights by the forces of either the U. S. or Confederate government. “Parson” Brownlow, the region's most outspoken anti-secessionist, threatened to “join the South in a war of extermination” should incoming president Lincoln renege on his promise to protect slaveowners' rights.⁶⁷

Who were these men who aroused so little attention from the citizens of Knoxville? And why did a band of secessionist militia occupy College Hill more than four months before Tennessee withdrew from the Union? The first question is difficult to answer. Save for vague references to their being a mixture of local men and men from elsewhere in the state, their identities have disappeared from the historical record. The

⁶⁷ Seymour, Divided Loyalties, 10; Knoxville Whig, 2 February 1861.

answer to the second question is more clear. According to historian Digby Seymour, these men represented a preemptive strike by the state's secessionist governor, Isham G. Harris, against his political enemies in East Tennessee. Soon after the Tennessee General Assembly approved the February 9 referendum, whereby voters would be allowed to approve or disapprove the calling of a secession convention, East Tennessee Unionists sprang into action. O. P. Temple wrote: "Not being . . . intimidated by the inflammatory appeal of the governor, the loyal people of East Tennessee at once organized for the approaching contest. The ablest and strongest men were selected in every county as candidates for the convention." Faced with this challenge, Harris dispatched the militia in an attempt to intimidate voters and disrupt Unionist rallies. In one instance, Knoxville's would-be Confederates blared "Dixie" from a Gay Street hotel, drowning out Andrew Johnson as he delivered a speech. Armed men then scattered the audience. Bloodshed was avoided by only the narrowest of margins.⁶⁸

To the delight of Unionists, Harris's scare-tactics did little to sway the electorate; the referendum failed by a vote of 69,387 to 57,978. The crisis having passed, at least for the moment, boosters returned to the more mundane business of regional economic promotion. The Whig expressed confidence that the Knoxville & Kentucky Railroad would be completed as far north as the rich coal fields of Anderson County by the coming fall. On March 30, Brownlow editorialized: "Success to this road, for it will contribute greatly towards building up our city, and furnishing employment to mechanics." Brownlow also encouraged East Tennesseans to invest in a proposed Cincinnati, Cumberland Gap, & Charleston Railroad. If built, the road would provide

⁶⁸ Temple, East Tennessee, 161-71; Seymour, Divided Loyalties, 10-11.

much-needed market connections for the region's geographic fringe, Thus allowing alternatives to corn culture and slowing soil depletion. Moreover, such a road promised to catalyze urban growth in the region's northeastern counties, particularly near Morristown, where the road would bisect the East Tennessee & Virginia line. "[The railroad] will build up quite a town [at Morristown]," the Parson reasoned, "and call for one or two large Hotels. The Hotels ought to be under way now, so as to be ready when needed."⁶⁹

Try as they might, however, East Tennesseans were unable to remain aloof from escalating sectional tensions. Deep South secessionists, angered by Tennesseans' pro-Union stance, threatened to restrict inter-state trade. In March, the Georgia legislature placed a 25 percent export tax on groceries purchased by Tennessee buyers. Incredibly, many Deep Southerners began importing grain and livestock from the Midwest, rather than do business with traitorous "border state submissionists." Eager to preserve lucrative market relationships, East Tennessee boosters reminded their secessionist neighbors that the bread served on their tables, the corn fed to their slaves, and the hams hanging in their smokehouses owed their existence, by and large, to the efforts of East Tennessee farmers. "See if we can't live without your money as long as you can do without meat and bread," the Whig boasted, adding that "you are now getting your supplies from Illinois, Ohio, and Indiana, via Nashville. Are these States more friendly to Secession . . . than Tennessee?"⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Seymour, Divided Loyalties, 6; Knoxville Whig, 30 March, 6 April 1861.

⁷⁰ Knoxville Whig, 16 February, 2 March 1861.

As if to prove East Tennesseans' point, communities across the Deep South soon ran short of foodstuffs. On March 30, the Whig expressed tongue-in-cheek regret that that charitable organizations in the "boasted Southern Confederacy" were subjecting themselves to "the humiliation . . . of . . . going into Black Republican States, and soliciting charities in the shape of bread, corn, and socks." Perhaps Brownlow overstated the severity of this subsistence crisis. Recent scholarship demonstrates that Black Belt planters produced an abundance of grain and livestock for local consumption. Still, by spring 1861 food shortages forced leaders in the Deep South to acknowledge one simple, galling fact: feeding their citizens without the benefit of East Tennessee produce would require a substantial reordering of agricultural priorities. To the Whig's delight, editors in Georgia and Alabama began urging planters "to reduce their crops of Cotton, and to plant CORN, so as to become independent of the grain-growing . . . border States and the Republicans of the North-Western states."⁷¹

Sectional tensions increased through the spring of 1861, casting a shadow of uneasiness across East Tennessee. Economic concerns were soon relegated to secondary importance as boosters stopped to consider their perilous geopolitical circumstances. From his desk at the Whig, Parson Brownlow reminded readers that "fighting is to be done, and that at no distant day, and the battle ground is to be along the line of the border States of Maryland, Virginia, Tennessee, Kentucky, and Missouri." Thus caught between the two sections, both physically and politically, East Tennesseans tried in vain to steer a neutral course. In a speech to the Committee for Workingmen of Philadelphia, Unionist

⁷¹ Ibid., 9 February, 30 March 1861.

Horace Maynard attempted to explain his region's seemingly contradictory political stance. He first vouched for East Tennesseans' deep devotion to the Union, insisting that "it is not in the pluribus, but in the unum of our national motto that our national strength lies." Maynard nevertheless made it clear that his fellow highlanders believed in state sovereignty, particularly as it applied to slavery. If Northerners disliked slavery, he insisted, "such is their right to not have it."⁷²

Unfortunately, East Tennesseans were not to have their wish. On April 12, 1861, Confederate forces opened fire on Fort Sumter in Charleston, South Carolina, plunging the nation into civil war. Like many of their countrymen north as well as south, East Tennesseans were "amazed, staggered, and bewildered" by the news. More astonishing, however, was the political reversal that swept the state in the aftermath of the bombardment. On April 15, Lincoln called for 75,000 volunteers to "put down 'combinations' in seven states 'too powerful to be suppressed by the ordinary course of judicial proceedings.'" Tennesseans, even those who had voted no in the February referendum, responded coolly to the President's request. In an effort to shore up Unionist sentiment, East Tennessee political leaders urged their constituents to hold fast. Temple denounced the bombardment, insisting that "it constituted another and higher reason for standing by the government." Unionists were forced to watch helplessly, however, as secessionism swept the state. "Conditional Unionists," among them many East Tennesseans, withdrew their tenuous support of the Lincoln Administration, and reluctantly embraced the Confederacy. Taking advantage of this shift in public opinion, Harris entered the state into a military league with the Confederacy on May 7, 1861.

⁷² Ibid., 2 February, 9 March 1861.

Though Tennessee would remain in the Union formally until June 8, its course had been set; the state was committed practically to the cause of Southern independence.⁷³

Soon after Tennessee's entry into the military league, Confederate soldiers became a common sight on the streets of Knoxville. On May 29 the Register reported "some eighteen or twenty-one companies (some of them not full) in camp . . . near Knoxville, and a number of other companies in different portions of East Tennessee . . . sufficient to compose . . . three regiments." These soldiers were, at first, local men, recruited from the towns and farms of East Tennessee. Soon, however, these troops were joined by units from the Deep South on their way to reinforce the Confederate army in northern Virginia. By August an estimated 12,000 soldiers camped in Knoxville's public spaces, more than doubling the city's prewar population. Residents were awed by the number of soldiers in their midst. On August 27 a Register reporter offered this humorously exaggerated report: "A train of cars, which seemed to have no end to it, and loaded down with troops, arrived here Saturday evening from Georgia, and from various estimates made of their number, we suppose there were a million, more or less, of them."⁷⁴

⁷³ Temple, East Tennessee, 220; Richard N. Current, Lincoln and the First Shot (Prospect Heights, Illinois, 1963), 157; Groce, Mountain Rebels, 30-31. On June 8, 1861, Tennesseans voted overwhelmingly to secede from the Union, 104,913 to 47,238. For a discussion of the June referendum, see Seymour, Divided Loyalties, 7.

⁷⁴ The East Tennessee & Virginia and East Tennessee & Georgia Railroads, which met in Knoxville, provided the Confederate government in Richmond, Virginia with an unbroken, single-gauge rail route to Chattanooga, Tennessee, and hence to the Deep South. Consequently, the two roads carried a high volume of military traffic as Confederate authorities shipped troops, ammunition, foodstuffs, and other supplies from the Mississippi Valley to northern Virginia. Troop trains often stopped in Knoxville for several days to replenish fuel and other supplies. See Seymour, Divided Loyalties, 18; Knoxville Register, 29 May, 27 August 1861.

Not surprisingly, the sudden influx of Confederate soldiers into this divided region sparked political violence. Rambunctious young soldiers clashed repeatedly with Unionist civilians, threatening to transform communities along the region's railroads into war zones. One such incident occurred at Strawberry Plains, a depot town seventeen miles northeast of Knoxville. On May 5 a crowd of 800-1,200 Unionists gathered for a political rally on a farm adjacent to the East Tennessee & Virginia Railroad. As the rally began, a troop train laden with Alabama Confederates steamed slowly by, affording two soldiers perched atop the cars an opportunity to fire pistol shots at the crowd. Enraged Unionists fired back, and as the train sped away, the crowd swarmed over the tracks, threatening to burn the 1,600 foot Holston River trestle. Though no one was hurt and no damage was done, the incident heightened the animosity between Unionists and their Confederate "guests." Those in attendance issued a defiant message, assuring military authorities that "we can never be driven or coerced into abject or unmanly submission."⁷⁵

Political violence aside, however, the onset of Confederate occupation does not appear to have had a substantial impact on valley residents. Military authorities and Unionist leaders maintained an uneasy *détente* through the summer of 1861. General Felix Zollicoffer, appointed commander of the Confederate District of East Tennessee on July 26, extended an olive branch to Unionists. A longtime Knoxville resident, Zollicoffer understood the region's political divisions. Consequently, he sought to reassure Unionists that "the Military authorities are not here to offend or injure the people, but to insure peace in their homes, by repelling invasion and preventing the

⁷⁵ Temple, East Tennessee, 192-94.

introduction of the horrors of civil war.” Brownlow, for one, responded warmly to Zollicoffer’s overtures, praising him as “a man of fine sense, of great fairness of character, and of true courage.” Moreover, the Whig encouraged readers to obey the new commander, insisting that “he is really desirous of avoiding any collisions with the people of East Tennessee--and if he is not successful, it will not be his fault.”⁷⁶

Agricultural production continued unabated, with valley farmers producing more than enough grain and livestock to feed the newly expanded population. For his part, Zollicoffer attempted to curb foraging, forbidding his soldiers to seize provisions arbitrarily. On August 3 the Whig reported that “the corn crop was never more promising . . . the wheat harvest is over, and nearly all accounts agree that the yield is good. . . . Hay was never better, and never more abundant.” A reports one month later was equally optimistic: “We are pleased to say that never in all our life, have we seen so fine a crop of corn. . . . There will be more corn raised . . . than will supply the country for two years.” Unfortunately, torrential October rains brought heavy flooding to the region’s principal rivers, destroying some crops not yet harvested. According to the Whig, rising waters on the French Broad, Holston, Nolichucky, and Watauga rivers inundated farms, sweeping away “corn, fodder, oats, pumpkins, fence-rails, mills, stables, and all manner of farm buildings, including some houses.” Still, Temple insisted that the 1861 harvest “was a fair one,” sufficient, at least, to ensure demographic stability.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Seymour, Divided Loyalties, 9; Knoxville Weekly Whig, 10 April, 17 August, 14 September 1861.

⁷⁷ Fisher, War At Every Door, 46; Knoxville Weekly Whig, 3 August, 7 September, 12 October 1861; Temple, East Tennessee, 455.

If valley residents felt the impact of occupation at all, it was in their pocketbooks. Commercial activity and industrial development were severely curtailed as Confederate authorities used railroads, machine shops, foundries, and raw materials in military production. Economically speaking, it was as if the region had reverted in time to 1854, prior to the advent of rail service. Confederate troop and supply trains monopolized the railroads, leaving precious little room for civilian traffic. On October 12 the Whig complained that “hundreds of car-loads of sugar, salt, molasses, fuel, meat, and all kinds of provisions” sat idly in the region’s depots, “unable to reach their destination, by reason of . . . those in charge of the roads.” To make matters worse, Confederate quartermasters impressed civilians’ wagons, further inhibiting the flow of commercial goods. According to the Reverend Thomas Humes, “many articles in frequent or habitual use . . . could not be had at any price, or if at all, only in the smallest quantities. Coffee, which formerly could be bought at from 14 to 16 cents a pound . . . sold at one dollar a pound. Salt, almost a necessity of life, could only be obtained with difficulty, and its price of 2 ½ and 3 cents a pound, rose to 30 cents or more.”⁷⁸

As commerce and industry declined, jobs, particularly in the skilled trades, grew scarce. “If any one of the Mechanics of [Knoxville] has a job on hand, or one in prospect,” the Whig observed, “we have not heard the case.” Confederate authorities encouraged those engaged in militarily useful pursuits (and who expressed secessionist

⁷⁸ Knoxville Weekly Whig, 12 October 1861. Captain H. McD. McElrath, Confederate A. Q. M. for the Department of East Tennessee issued a call for “one hundred wagons and teams,” insisting that civilians “bring them on and save me the necessity of impressing.” See Knoxville Weekly Register, 8 July 1862; Thomas William Humes (1815-1892), a lifelong East Tennessean, was best known for his work as rector of St. John’s Episcopal Church in Knoxville. See Rothrock, French Broad, 431-32; Thomas Humes, Loyal Mountaineers of East Tennessee (Spartanburg, South Carolina, 1974), 176.

sympathies) to expand their operations, thus providing a limited number of manufacturing jobs. Knoxville machinist A. L. Maxwell did a bustling wartime business, producing weapons and repairing army wagons in his newly renovated facilities. Tanners thrived as well, owing to the demand for leather goods created by the occupation force. Like Maxwell, tanner J. S. Van Gilder took advantage of this unique opportunity for personal enrichment, establishing a near-monopoly over the East Tennessee leather trade. Van Gilder provided a degree of relief for the unemployed, hiring boot and shoemakers with the promise of “liberal wages.”⁷⁹

This economic downturn disturbed Knoxville boosters who had devoted time and energy to establishing trade routes and encouraging outside investment. Particularly galling was the flight of “industrious and enterprising citizens,” most of whom were skilled Northern immigrants seeking to escape Confederate rule. Unable to stem this exodus of labor and capital, boosters vented their frustrations in local newspapers. On July 6, the Whig lamented the rapid decay of Knoxville’s once-booming economy: “Secession may have been a great blessing to some of the towns in the Cotton States, but it has been the ruin of this place. It has destroyed business of every kind, reduced the price of real estate fully one half, and thrown almost every laboring man out of employ.” By September, few among the city’s merchant and laboring classes could afford to pay peacetime rents, and a wave of foreclosures swept the city. To the chagrin of boosters, Knoxville and hence the region, seemed poised to lose all that it had achieved economically and demographically since 1855. “Our once- growing town,” the Whig

⁷⁹ Knoxville Whig, 6 July 1861; Seymour, Divided Loyalties, 13-14, 16; Rothrock, French Broad, 134; Knoxville Weekly Whig, 14 September 1861.

observed darkly, "has received a backset, from which . . . it will not recover in the next ten years."⁸⁰

Despite their suffering, valley residents enjoyed a reasonable degree of demographic stability through 1861. If anything, the onset of Confederate occupation created conditions not unlike a severe economic depression; disappointing to boosters, perhaps, but of no real consequence to a people accustomed to frugality and self-sustenance. Valley farmers raised more than enough grain and livestock to feed the civilian and military population. As of 1859, 150,914 individuals inhabited the eleven counties traversed by the East Tennessee & Virginia and East Tennessee & Georgia Railroads. Together they produced 256,275 hogs or 1.7 per consumer; 88,286 cattle, or 0.5 per consumer; 1,476,140 bushels of wheat, or 9.7 bushels per consumer; and 6,683,301 bushels of corn, or 44.2 bushels per consumer. Although the number of Confederate soldiers occupying these counties fluctuated throughout the war, contemporary sources agree that between 2,000 and 4,000 guarded the railroads at any given time. If we add 4,000 soldiers to the existing civilian population, foodstuff/consumer ratios scarcely waver. The hog/consumer ratio drops to 1.6, the cattle/consumer ratio remains at 0.5, the wheat/consumer ratio drops to 9.5, and the corn/consumer ratio drops to 43.0. So long as valley farmers maintained normal production levels, there was little danger of soldiers or civilians experiencing food shortages.⁸¹

⁸⁰ Knoxville Whig, 6 July 1861; Knoxville Weekly Whig, 14 September 1861.

⁸¹ Killebrew, Introduction, 406-407; Kennedy, Agriculture of the United States in 1860, 588-89.

The same could not be said for residents of the rugged Cumberland tableland, particularly those in Anderson, Scott, Claiborne, Campbell, and Union Counties. It was here, ironically, amid the hardscrabble farms of the region's most demographically fragile sub-region, that Confederate authorities in Knoxville chose to station the bulk of their troops early in the war. The reasons for this were simple. Viewed from above, these five counties form an inverted triangle, the point of which rests on the Clinch River adjacent to Knox County, and the base of which constitutes the entire East Tennessee-Kentucky border. To the north, the Cumberland Mountains provided Confederate strategists with a natural redoubt from which to repel Union invaders. Few roads--and no railroads other than that which connected Clinton with Knoxville--traversed this five-county area. These few that did were exceedingly poor, ill-suited to withstand the rigors posed by artillery, supply wagons, and the tramp of thousands of feet. Moreover, these roads entered the state through a series of narrow, easily defensible gaps, chief among them Big Creek Gap in Campbell County and the Gibraltar of East Tennessee, Cumberland Gap in Claiborne County. Union invaders seeking to enter the region from Kentucky would be funneled through one of these gaps, straight into the rifle sights of waiting Confederates.⁸²

As we have seen, agricultural production on the tableland suffered from serious limitations prior to the Confederate occupation. Decades of corn monoculture had

⁸² The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies, 70 vols. in 128 (Washington, 1880-1901), Series One, 10 (1): 355. In 1874, Killebrew offered the following description: "Cumberland Gap . . . is the great pass from the blue-grass region of Kentucky to the cotton states of Georgia and Alabama. . . . On either side of the gap, high, rocky, weatherstained ramparts, rising to a perpendicular height of 1,500 feet above the valley, fill the mind with awe and sublimity." See Killebrew, Introduction, 475.

depleted the soil, resulting in ever-diminishing crop yields. Land scarcity and overcrowding had compounded the problem, particularly after 1855, producing a zone of demographic fragility. Surprisingly, foodstuff/consumer ratios in the five tableland counties differed little from those in the central valley, except as regards wheat. As of the 1860 census, 33,059 people lived in these counties, producing a total of 68,810 hogs, or 2.0 per consumer; 23,016 cattle, or 0.6 per consumer; 130,414 bushels of wheat, or 3.9 bushels per consumer; and 1,416,286 bushels of corn, or 43.0 bushels per person. The problem, then, was one of logistics. In the valley, Confederate soldiers had access to railroads and navigable rivers, and hence to supply depots in the Deep South and Virginia. Those stationed on the tableland had neither, forcing them to depend on slow-moving wagons trains for foodstuffs and equipment. Faced with constant shortages and surrounded by a hostile population, Confederate soldiers on the tableland were quick to pillage local farms.⁸³

Zollicoffer attempted to curb indiscriminate foraging, ordering that none other than quartermasters and commissary agents be allowed to impress civilian goods and livestock. Evidence suggests, however, that isolated units often ignored such orders. A soldier en route to Cumberland Gap described his comrades' tendency to do so. "I saw nothing strange on the route," he insisted, "except the remarkable fondness for chickens and fresh meat which began to manifest itself among the troops." It is difficult to imagine either of these men shying away from the occasional, illicit foraging expedition. Nathaniel E. Harris of the 63rd Tennessee noted in his memoir that he "did not approve of

⁸³ Kennedy, Agriculture of the United States in 1860, 588-89.

foraging, but found it was impossible to keep such a feeling in mind. . . . Very scant rations were issued. . . . We generally tried to supplement them by buying provisions . . . and when this failed we resorted to foraging.”⁸⁴

Despite the myriad problems arising from the occupation, a peculiar calm descended over East Tennessee during the summer of 1861. On June 14, Unionists convened the Greeneville Convention, the goal of which was to formulate a plan of resistance to Confederate rule. Though some in attendance advocated the use of force, specifically “the formation of military companies . . . in every county and civil district,” the Unionists voted instead to pursue a peaceable course of action. Delegates were dispatched from Greeneville to Nashville, there to request that the General Assembly allow the thirty-one counties composing East Tennessee, as well as “such other counties in Middle Tennessee as desire to cooperate with them,” to secede from the state. The request was promptly denied. Still, Oliver P. Temple insisted that the convention succeeded, primarily because it discouraged East Tennesseans from taking up arms against the Confederate government. “On the adjournment of the Convention,” he pointed out, “there was a short lull in the stormy excitement among the Union people. . . . They at once began to resume their usual and peaceful avocations. . . . Many were willing . . . to remain at home in peace, quiet spectators in the great conflict in which they could not follow their patriotic instincts.”⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Fisher, *War At Every Door*, 46; “Service With the Twentieth Tennessee Regiment,” *Confederate Veteran* 33 (1925): 15; Nathaniel E. Harris, *Autobiography: The Story of an Old Man’s Life with Reminiscences of Seventy-five Years* (Macon, 1926), 45, 68-69.

⁸⁵ For a thorough discussion of the Greeneville Convention, including resolutions passed and delegates in attendance, see Temple, *East Tennessee*, 340-67.

Unfortunately, a series of ill-conceived Confederate policies shattered this calm, precipitating a wave of partisan violence and civilian flight that shook the region to its foundations. On August 14, Confederate President Jefferson Davis issued a proclamation ordering all male U. S. citizens over fourteen years of age to leave Confederate territory within forty days. The region's secessionist minority took this as their cue to persecute Unionist neighbors, creating "quite an excitement" among the civilian population. Eager to restore calm, Brownlow urged Unionists to ignore the order and remain at home. After all, East Tennesseans qualified as Confederate citizens, regardless of their political affiliations. Zollicoffer joined Brownlow, insisting that "no act or word will be tolerated calculated to alarm . . . those who heretofore advocating the Federal Union . . . now . . . submit to the Government of the Confederate States." Unconvinced, several thousand Unionists dodged Confederate patrols and escaped to Kentucky. As of September 28, an estimated 2,000 East Tennesseans--most of whom intended to don Yankee blue and return home as liberators--were encamped at Camp Dick Robinson, a Union military base near Danville, Kentucky.⁸⁶

Those Unionists who remained soon discovered that Zollicoffer's promises meant little to their secessionist neighbors. The more rabid of the region's Confederate sympathizers had long since lost patience with the commander, citing his decision to deal kindly with Unionists as a sign of weakness. In September, Confederate general Albert Sydney Johnston ordered Zollicoffer and the bulk of his troops north to Cumberland Gap, there to repel an anticipated Union invasion from Kentucky. Taking advantage of his

⁸⁶ Knoxville Weekly Whig, 24 August, 28 September, 1861; Temple, East Tennessee, 367-70.

absence, secessionists and ill-disciplined soldiers unleashed what Temple termed a “reign of terror” against Unionists, subjecting them to interrogation, false arrest, and imprisonment. Zollicoffer’s subordinates in Knoxville were unable, if not in fact unwilling, to curb secessionist excesses. Thomas Humes placed Col. William Wood among the chief culprits, insisting that “his zeal . . . did not leave room enough in his mind for the exercise of discretion, which is said to be the better part of valor.” Among other incidents, soldiers under Wood’s command brawled repeatedly with Knoxville policemen, driving the “frightened guardians of the municipality” from the city. Rather than punish his wayward charges, however, the colonel flooded the city with soldiers in an attempt to intimidate Unionists.⁸⁷

Unbeknownst to East Tennesseans, one of the many Unionist refugees, Rev. William B. Carter, intended to put an end to this persecution.⁸⁸ Soon after fleeing the region in July, Carter traveled to Washington D. C., in the hope of securing military aid for his beleaguered homeland. President Lincoln, Secretary of State William Seward, and Gen. George B. McClellan agreed to a private meeting, during which Carter proposed a daring scheme for liberating East Tennessee. The first phase of his plan called for Unionist partisans to destroy bridges on the East Tennessee & Georgia and East

⁸⁷ Seymour, Divided Loyalties, 26. Soon after the Civil War began, Confederate president Jefferson Davis appointed Albert Sydney Johnston to command the Western Department of the army of the Confederate States of America. Johnston thus had the responsibility of defending a line stretching from eastern Kentucky to what is now Oklahoma. See Shelby Foote, The Civil War, a Narrative Volume I: Fort Sumter to Perryville (New York, 1958), 168, 176; Temple, East Tennessee, 367-72; Humes, Loyal Mountaineers, 131-32.

⁸⁸ A Presbyterian minister from Carter County, Unionist William B. Carter became enmeshed in the fierce internecine politics of Tennessee long before the advent of the American Civil War. In 1834 he served as president of the state’s constitutional convention, during which he and other Middle and East Tennessee delegates tried unsuccessfully to pass an amendment outlawing slavery. See Seymour, Divided Loyalties, 32, and Temple, East Tennessee, 111-12.

Tennessee & Virginia Railroads, thereby disrupting Confederate supply lines. The second phase called for Union troops in eastern Kentucky to invade the region, defeating the paralyzed rebels and capturing Knoxville. Having sought for some time to relieve East Tennessee's loyalist population, Lincoln approved the scheme at once. Seward and McClellan offered their support as well, with "Little Mac" pledging to "keep the Confederate army in Virginia so busy that it could not send troops to East Tennessee to aid in defending the lines of communication." His mission thus accomplished, Carter set out for home. With luck, the Union flag would, by Christmas, fly once again over his beloved East Tennessee.⁸⁹

On the night of November 8, 1861, Carter and an unknown number of Unionist partisans sprang into action. The conspirators converged on railroad bridges throughout the central valley, destroying two on the East Tennessee & Virginia line between Knoxville and Bristol, as well as two more over Chickamauga Creek just south of Chattanooga. They attempted to burn the 1,600-foot trestle at Strawberry Plains, but were thwarted by the determined resistance of a lone Confederate sentry. Still, the attack had been remarkably successful. Just as Carter had expected, Confederate authorities panicked, expecting at any moment to be overrun by armed Unionist bands. Moreover, the loss of the railroad bridges served to cut rebel supply lines, preventing them from rushing troops into the region from southwest Virginia and north Georgia. The deed thus

⁸⁹ Temple, East Tennessee, 370-71.

accomplished, Carter and his fellow bridge-burners turned their eyes expectantly toward Kentucky, and to the blue-clad columns poised just north of the border.⁹⁰

Unfortunately for the conspirators, General William T. Sherman had postponed the invasion on November 5, three days before the bridge burnings. To Sherman, sending unseasoned troops through the Cumberland Mountains, with the bulk of Zollicoffer's forces occupying Cumberland and Big Creek Gaps, seemed a recipe for disaster. Although written nearly two years later, a report issued by Union colonel Samuel Gilbert, in which he discussed the logistical support needed for a 5,000-man attack on Cumberland Gap, sheds light on Sherman's reluctance to invade East Tennessee. According to Gilbert, the nearest Union supply depot lay at Nicholasville, Kentucky, 120 miles north of the gap. The farms between these two points having been depleted by foragers, the invaders would have to transport foodstuffs, fodder, ammunition, and other supplies via mule train over abysmal roads. Given these conditions, Gilbert estimated that he would need 924 wagons and 5,544 mules, traveling in sixteen-day circuits, just to move the small army to Cumberland Gap. Accumulating a supply surplus would require an additional 924 wagons, not to mention the draft animals needed to pull them. Moreover, Gilbert would need extra wagons and mules to replace those that broke down, as well as a cavalry force to guard the long supply line. Feeding and re-supplying this force would require yet more wagons, ammunition, and fodder, further diminishing the operation's practicality.⁹¹

⁹⁰ Ibid., 377; Seymour, Divided Loyalties, 32; Humes, Loyal Mountaineers, 133.

⁹¹ Fisher, War At Every Door, 53; War of the Rebellion, Series One, 23(2): 344-46.

East Tennessee Unionists were thus left to the mercy of their Confederate occupiers, and mercy was in short supply. From his camp near the Kentucky border, Zollicoffer made it clear that the Unionist/secessionist détente was at an end. “[Unionist] leaders,” he insisted, “should be seized and held as prisoners. The leniency shown them has been unavailing. They have acted with duplicity and should no longer be trusted.” With this, military authorities in Knoxville moved to crush what they assumed was a region-wide uprising. Col. William Wood declared martial law in Knoxville, ordering his men to search Unionist homes for weapons and other contraband. According to Humes, “the people’s houses were arbitrarily entered day and night . . . and their guns and pistols demanded.” Soon after, General William H. Carroll arrived with reinforcements from Georgia, Middle Tennessee, and West Tennessee, which he dispatched to suspected trouble spots throughout the region. Soldiers arrested those suspected of partisan activity, seized foodstuffs, and, in extreme cases, executed “saboteurs.” In all, the rebels hanged four suspected bridge-burners and confined an additional 1,200 “conspirators” in squalid Southern prisons.⁹²

In the aftermath of the bridge burnings, the centrifuge that was East Tennessee accelerated rapidly. Valley residents, once shielded from the centrifugal forces emanating from the Confederate occupation, now found it difficult to maintain their grip on hearth and home. Among those who fled the region that autumn was Parson Brownlow, outspoken editor of the Knoxville Whig. Brownlow abruptly went off to Sevier County several days before the bridge-burnings, arousing suspicion among

⁹² Seymour, Divided Loyalties, 34; Humes, Loyal Mountaineers, 135; Fisher, War At Every Door, 56-57; Temple, East Tennessee, 408.

secessionists that he had participated in the plot. Eager to clear his name, the parson returned secretly to Knoxville, met with Carroll, and received permission to seek asylum in the north. Before he could leave, however, secessionists acting under the authority of Confederate district attorney John Crozier Ramsey arrested him. Lacking evidence, Ramsey released Brownlow several weeks later, whereupon he was promptly re-arrested by military authorities. Fortunately for the parson, Carroll's successor, Maj. Gen. George B. Crittenden, sympathized with his plight and ordered him escorted to Union lines.⁹³

Meanwhile, the subsistence/demographic crisis on the Cumberland tableland intensified with each passing day. Zollicoffer's 4,000-man force had been poised on the Tennessee-Kentucky border (mostly in Claiborne and Campbell counties), since September. During that time, foragers made regular excursions into the countryside, impressing hogs, chickens, cattle, horses, wagons, and grain from local farmers. Per Zollicoffer's orders, foraging parties issued farmers vouchers in exchange for "purchased" goods. With winter fast approaching, however, civilians needed food for their families and animals, not Confederate scrip. Adding to the subsistence burden were 8,000 Union soldiers under the command of Gen. George H. Thomas, stationed just south of Barbourville, Kentucky. Although they benefited from supply depots in Lexington and Danville, Thomas's troops doubtless supplemented their rations by purchasing or pilfering produce from highland farmers. Cavalrymen and teamsters proved particularly burdensome to civilians. U. S. army regulations stipulated that horses and mules get half

⁹³ Seymour, Divided Loyalties, 36; Fisher, War At Every Door, 59

of their daily nutrition from local sources, forcing horsemen to make daily excursions, sometimes covering fifty miles or more, in search of hay and grain.⁹⁴

Into this chaotic situation stepped Confederate general Edmund Kirby Smith, a Floridian who, as an outsider, possessed only a vague understanding of the region's volatile social and political climate. Predisposed to distrust East Tennesseans, even those professing secessionist sympathies, he nonetheless attempted to curb military depredations, halt the exodus of Unionist refugees, and stabilize the region. Smith had his work cut out for him. Arriving in Knoxville on March 8, 1862, the new commander found the region in a state of utter disarray. Confederate operations in the region had suffered a major setback when, on January 19, Zollicoffer was killed and his army routed at the battle of Mill Springs, Kentucky. Following the battle, the battered rebels returned to East Tennessee, whereupon individual units dispersed throughout the region and began acting independently of higher authority. Zollicoffer's immediate successors, including the hard-drinking Crittenden, had done little to restore order. Smith, however, acted decisively, moving to reestablish control over isolated units and ordering them to concentrate at railroad bridges and geographic strong-points. He then ordered East Tennessee units, many of which had participated in the Mill Springs debacle (and whose loyalty he thus questioned), sent beyond the region's borders.⁹⁵

Having regained control over Confederate forces in the region, Smith moved to stem the tide of Unionist refugees. First, he increased cavalry patrols on the Cumberland tableland and in the Holston River Valley, the two most popular avenues of escape. He

⁹⁴ Foote, Civil War, Volume I, 173; Hagerman, American Civil War, 44.

⁹⁵ War of the Rebellion, Series One, 10(1): 308; Groce, Mountain Rebels, 84-85; Fisher, War At Every Door, 104-10.

then declared a blanket amnesty for Unionist refugees, Union military personnel included, who were willing to return home and resume their occupations. Still, Smith made it clear that there were limits to his generosity. Unionist exiles had to return home within thirty days; the families of those who failed to do so would be expelled from Confederate territory. Furthermore, those who fled north following the issuance of the proclamation could expect to have their families sent immediately to Kentucky. Though Smith made good on his threat in certain cases, expelling the families of exiled Unionists Andrew Johnson, Horace Maynard, and Parson Brownlow from the region, he stopped short of wholesale deportation. No doubt Smith restrained himself because, as Humes remarked, marching “an army of women and children from East Tennessee over mountains and rivers into Kentucky . . . would have sent a thrill of amazement akin to horror throughout enlightened Christendom,” and would thus have been counterproductive to his cause.⁹⁶

To curb excess foraging, Smith attempted to revamp the region’s supply system. Given the poor state of transportation infrastructure, however, this proved a daunting task. Like most other Southern railroads, the East Tennessee & Virginia and East Tennessee & Georgia deteriorated badly during the occupation. According to historian John Clark, soft iron rails and wheels, the products of imperfect iron-making techniques, warped under the stress of heavy military traffic. Smith could thus do little to effect long-term repairs. Southern foundries produced just 16,072 tons of iron in 1860, far less than the estimated 50,000 tons needed annually to repair railroads in the region.

⁹⁶ Temple, East Tennessee, 425, 445-49; War of the Rebellion, Series One, 10(1): 640-41; Humes, Loyal Mountaineers, 174.

Production increased during the war, but never exceeded 20,000 tons in any year.

Consequently, East Tennessee railroad maintenance often took the form of stop-gap efforts, such as those witnessed by Isaac L. Thomas of the 25th Virginia Cavalry. After traveling from Bristol to Knoxville in 1862, Thomas wrote: "our horses were put in the cars and we on top to make the trip to Knoxville. We had a tedious trip. The railroad was bad and the cars old and worn, so repairs had to be made at nearly every station."⁹⁷

Ultimately, Smith's efforts would be in vain. On April 16, 1862, the Confederate Congress approved conscription, destroying what little goodwill remained between East Tennesseans and military authorities in Knoxville. Under the provisions of this act, all males aged eighteen to thirty-five were subject to military service, regardless of their political affiliations. No longer, it seems, would Unionists be allowed to sit out the conflict in peace, firm in their determination to "never under any circumstances . . . fire a hostile shot at the flag of their country." East Tennessee men (including, ironically, a large number of secessionists) thus faced a difficult decision: accept their fate and don Confederate gray, or flee the region, possibly to enlist in the Union army. According to Temple, the vast majority chose the latter course. He wrote: "Now began a general exodus of Union men. . . . Immediately, the minds of almost the entire male population, of age for military duty, were turned toward Kentucky. As fast as they could procure guides and companions, they silently slipped away on their perilous journey." In some cases, communities lost nearly their entire adult male population. Five hundred men

⁹⁷ John E. Clark, Jr., Railroads in the Civil War: The Impact of Management on Victory and Defeat (Baton Rouge, Louisiana, 2001), 48, 66; Isaac L. Thomas, "On the Move," Confederate Veteran 29 (1921): 105.

reportedly fled New Market in one night, leaving wives, children, and the aged to fend for themselves.⁹⁸

It is difficult to determine the exact number of East Tennesseans who left the region, either as soldiers or refugees, between 1861 and 1862. Confederate military authorities kept imperfect records of enlistees, and scholars disagree on how many East Tennesseans served in the Union ranks. Complicating matters are the tens of thousands of refugees and political prisoners who fled during this period, leaving no record of their departure. What we do know is this: approximately 25,000 East Tennesseans joined, or were conscripted into, the Confederate army, while between 30,000 and 40,000 donned Union blue. An additional 4,000 noncombatants were imprisoned by Confederate authorities (some of whom subsequently died). As for refugees, Humes insisted that by the spring of 1863 “more than one-eighth of the entire population were withdrawn . . . from tilling the soil.” Humes’s figure, however, is much too low. One-eighth of East Tennessee’s prewar population (291,514) amounts to just 36,439 individuals, only slightly higher than the most conservative estimate of Union volunteers alone. It is therefore possible that as many as 70,000 to 75,000 East Tennesseans left the region, and thus withdrew their labor from agricultural production, between 1861 and 1863.⁹⁹

Smith’s successors also attempted to stem the tide of refugees and ensure continued agricultural production. On assuming command of the Department of East Tennessee in October 1862, Gen. Sam Jones sought to suspend conscription, at least long

⁹⁸ Edward Everett, Account of the Fund for the Relief of East Tennessee; with a Complete List of the Contributors (Boston, 1864), 23; Temple, East Tennessee, 366, 421, 424.

⁹⁹ Groce, Mountain Rebels, 75; Humes, Loyal Mountaineers, 166, 302.

enough to allow farmers time to complete the fall harvest. Besides, recruiting efforts were at last bearing fruit: two new East Tennessee regiments composed entirely of volunteers were by then ready to be mustered into active service. Although Jones expressed little sympathy for Unionists who dodged conscription, he was convinced that “men who are so averse to entering the military service that they flee their homes and conceal themselves in the mountains to avoid it would be far more serviceable to the Government in the corn and wheat fields . . . than in the ranks.” Despite the general’s repeated appeals to Secretary of War George W. Randolph, however, the Richmond government refused to rescind conscription in East Tennessee. Hard-pressed for manpower, the Confederate Congress actually broadened the Conscription Act, raising the upper age limit from thirty-five to forty-five years.¹⁰⁰

Consider also the policies of General Simon Buckner, who arrived in Knoxville on April 27, 1863. In a letter to Confederate adjutant general Samuel Cooper, Buckner insisted that conscription had accomplished little in East Tennessee, other than to create a vicious cycle of hunger and partisan violence threatening to his command. He told Cooper: “Large numbers of [Unionists], to avoid conscription, have fled their homes and are lurking in the mountains, the woods, and the caves. . . . Many of these men, rendered desperate by their situation, are infesting the roads . . . and, urged by necessity and a spirit of revenge and bitterness, are stealing horses and destroying the cattle, hogs, and products within their reach.” Like Jones, Buckner sought clemency for those willing to return to their farms, as well as a six-month suspension of conscription. The new commander

¹⁰⁰ War of the Rebellion, Series One, 16(2): 954-55; Groce, Mountain Rebels, 91.

made it clear, however, that he would tolerate no further acts of rebellion against Confederate authority in the region. “To such as refuse to avail themselves of these privileges,” he suggested, “a severe policy should be pursued. . . . They should be considered as enemy aliens . . . and when captured regarded as prisoners of war.”¹⁰¹

Evidence suggests that these efforts met with a startling degree of success, at least in the central valley. According to Temple, “the . . . crops of 1862 and 1863 were unprecedented in quantity. They were simply enormous. . . . Nothing like it had been known for a long time. The fields literally groaned with the teeming abundance of wheat and corn.” Still, Temple’s assessment of these two harvests must be viewed with caution. Travel restrictions would have prevented him from conducting a region-wide agricultural survey, thus limiting his perspective to the relatively stable communities of the French Broad and Holston/Tennessee River valleys. Surrounded as he was by verdant stands of wheat and corn, it would have been easy for Temple to overlook the demographic chaos occurring on the Cumberland tableland.¹⁰²

In truth, the summer of 1863 saw East Tennessee teetering on the brink of economic and demographic collapse. Men by the tens of thousands had fled the region, creating a labor shortage crippling to agricultural production. It was, quite literally, as if the combined human population of Campbell, Claiborne, Anderson, Union, Scott, Hancock, Johnson, Meigs, Polk, Sequatchie, and Bradley counties had disappeared, leaving farms abandoned. In their place, an estimated 12,000 to 25,000 Confederate soldiers impressed grain and draft animals at an alarming rate while contributing little, if

¹⁰¹ War of the Rebellion, Series Four, 2(1): 563-64.

¹⁰² Temple, East Tennessee, 455, 498.

anything, to the regional food supply. Though farm women and children made Herculean efforts to continue production, their prospects for success diminished with each passing day. Lacking physical strength and draft animals, they were unable to prepare the land adequately for planting. Observers thus expected a small harvest, amounting to “not over one-third the usual product.” With human foodstuffs expected to be in such short supply, East Tennesseans had little choice but to withhold nutrition from their remaining livestock. Across the region, food animals and draft animals decreased in weight, diminishing their reproductive capabilities and limiting their effectiveness as a source of agricultural labor.¹⁰³

As fall approached, exiled Unionists pleaded with Military Governor Andrew Johnson to help secure an immediate invasion of East Tennessee. Should Confederate forces be allowed to seize the upcoming harvest, they reasoned, the region might well experience famine. Writing from London, Kentucky, on June 11, 1863, Robert A. Crawford informed Johnson that “the wheat crop is better than it has been for five years before.” He then asked angrily, “are the damed [sic] Rebels to have this wheat crop?” Johnson himself could do little to influence Union military operations in Tennessee. Still, help seemed on the way when General William S. Rosecrans’s Army of the Cumberland set forth from Murfreesboro on June 24, intent on driving General Braxton Bragg’s Confederate Army of Tennessee from the state and capturing Chattanooga. By

¹⁰³ Killebrew, Introduction, 406-40; Chickens require a diet high in albumen, a substance found primarily in wheat, to be effective egg-layers. A 1,200-pound horse may consume in excess of twenty-six pounds of fodder per day when performing heavy labor. Cattle and hogs, while capable of fending for themselves, must be fed corn and other grain crops if they are to achieve optimum weight. See Knoxville Whig, 15 June 1861, Killebrew, Introduction, 135, 356; Gray, History of Agriculture, 840-41; Hagerman, American Civil War, 44; and War of the Rebellion, Series One, 23(2): 346.

July 2, the Yankees had moved as far south as Tullahoma, raising Unionists' hopes of a quick liberation. However, Rosecrans's meticulous nature, as well as his desire to rest his men, stalled the army. It was not until August 16 that "Old Rosy" renewed the advance, much too late to save the fall harvest in East Tennessee. For the second time in as many years, farmers watched helplessly as the fruits of their labor disappeared into Confederate forage wagons.¹⁰⁴

Still, East Tennesseans had reason to be hopeful. On June 14, ten days before Rosecrans set out for Tullahoma, a raiding party of 1,500 Union cavalymen commanded by Col. William P. Sanders swept southward into the region from Kentucky, disrupting Confederate supply lines and paving the way for a general invasion. The raiders were remarkably successful. Between June 14 and 26, they captured the Confederate garrison at Wartburg in Morgan County, tore up the East Tennessee & Georgia Railroad north of Loudon, and engaged the Knoxville garrison in a spirited artillery duel. Unable to capture the city, the raiders continued northeast up the Holston River Valley, burning railroad bridges and tearing up track. In all, the Yankees destroyed three trestles along the East Tennessee & Virginia line, including the 1,600-foot span at Strawberry Plains. Their work completed, Sanders and his men returned to Kentucky, leaving civilians and their Confederate "guests" to ponder the implications of the raid. Although fearing retribution similar to that which followed the bridge burnings, Knoxville Unionists

¹⁰⁴ Graf, Haskins, and Bergeron, Papers, 6: 244; For a detailed summary of the Tullahoma campaign, see Shelby Foote, The Civil War, a Narrative: Volume II, Fredericksburg to Meridian (New York, 1963), 663-75.

remained outwardly calm. "When the excitement . . . passed," Humes insisted, the city "returned to its former quiet condition and remained so for two months."¹⁰⁵

This "quiet condition" would not last. On August 16, Union general Ambrose Burnside and his 15,000-man Army of the Ohio embarked on the much-anticipated invasion of upper East Tennessee. Heading south from Camp Nelson, Kentucky, the Yankees discovered quickly why Sherman had once balked at the prospect of invading the region. Road conditions deteriorated rapidly as the army entered the Cumberland Mountains, slowing the advance to a crawl. Corporal John Watkins of the 5th Ohio Battery wrote: "Such a road as we came over I have never heard of before or want to hear of again. I don't believe there is another such road in the Confederacy. If there is, it ought to be blocked up forever." Teamsters and artillerymen were forced to help mules and horses drag supply wagons and caissons over the steep grades. Hundreds of exhausted animals died in their traces, or were killed when wagons tumbled into ravines. The men fared little better. Razor-sharp rock outcroppings cut away shoe soles, leaving many of the soldiers barefoot. To make matters worse, the farms of the Cumberland tableland offered little in the way of food or forage, forcing Burnside to place the army on half-rations. Not surprisingly, the hungry soldiers responded much as their Confederate predecessors had to similar command decisions, stealing livestock and grain from farms.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ Marvel, Burnside, 249, 251-52; Seymour, Divided Loyalties, 77-78.

¹⁰⁶ John Watkins to Friend John, 25 September 1863, Watkins Letters, Special Collections, University of Tennessee, Knoxville; Marvel, Burnside, 272.

Confederate authorities in Knoxville panicked as word of Burnside's advance trickled into the city. According to Temple, "a little after the middle of August, [the rebels] commenced shipping Southward, in great haste, all their supplies of every description. Everything that could be transported to another place was moved." Seeking to position himself between the two advancing Union armies, Buckner abandoned Knoxville and moved the bulk of his forces south to Kingston. The remainder (approximately 4,000 men) were sent to Bristol and Cumberland Gap, leaving Knoxville defenseless against bandits and partisan raiders. Residents soon discovered that governmental structure, even when provided by one's enemies, is often preferable to anarchy. Temple wrote: "For the first time in my life I realized the importance of government--of an ever-present power capable of giving protection. There was, for nearly a week . . . no one in Knoxville with authority to . . . enforce an obedience to law. . . A straggling band of Scott's Louisiana Tigers remained behind. . . . These were the only soldiers in Knoxville during these days of anxiety. . . . No one went out on the streets unless forced to do so. The days were as the stillness of the Sabbath."¹⁰⁷

As the Army of the Ohio struggled through the rough country northwest of Knoxville, East Tennesseans held their breath. The Yankees had all but disappeared after entering the Cumberland Mountains, leaving Unionists and secessionists alike to wonder when, where, or even if they would emerge in the central valley. Given the disproportionate suffering they had endured during the Confederate occupation, it is perhaps fitting that Unionist farmers living on the Cumberland tableland were the first to

¹⁰⁷ Temple, East Tennessee, 471-72; Marvel, Burnside, 271-72.

greet the advancing columns. According to Temple, “women and children and old men . . . flocked to the roadside to see the army, bringing with them such food as they had on hand. Shouting and rejoicing . . . weeping and sobbing, and enthusiastic praise to God for the great deliverance, everywhere greeted the army.” Those in the valley, however, had little other than rumors to sustain them. Having felt the sting of disappointment often since 1863, they worried that the Yankees might abandon the advance and return to Kentucky. As the sun set on August 31, there was nothing they could do but wait, watch, and hope.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸ Temple, East Tennessee, 472-73.

Chapter Three
“The Rebels robbed them, the Federals devoured them”:
Union Occupation, Combat, and Demographic Collapse in East Tennessee

On September 1, 1863, Unionist O. P. Temple made his way carefully through the deserted streets of downtown Knoxville, arriving at the East Tennessee & Virginia Railroad depot just before 3:00 p.m. There he sat down to talk with J. B. Hoxie and John R. Branner, the railroad’s superintendent and president, respectively, hoping to gather information about the Union Army of the Ohio’s whereabouts. Unfortunately, the two men had little to offer, leaving Temple “anxious, restless, and sick at heart.” His dejection would be short-lived. From down the street, the drumming of hoof beats rose in a gradual crescendo until it pounded like thunder against the walls of the depot. Rushing outside, Temple was nearly trampled as Union cavalymen, the lead element of the Army of the Ohio, galloped past him and into the center of town. After two and a half years of Confederate occupation, Knoxville had been liberated without a shot being fired. Union general Ambrose E. Burnside would arrive with the army’s main body two days later, setting off a wave of jubilation.¹⁰⁹

Burnside’s entry into Knoxville was like something out of an epic novel. The scene was more befitting Caesar or Alexander than the bewhiskered commander responsible for the Union debacle at Fredericksburg, Virginia.¹¹⁰ As the general led his blue-clad troops into the city, Unionists thronged the streets by the thousands, hoping to catch a glimpse of their deliverer. Describing the joyous moment in his memoirs, Thomas Humes wrote that Unionists “hailed [Burnside] as . . . the representative of their

¹⁰⁹ Temple, *East Tennessee*, 473-74.

¹¹⁰ On Burnside’s bloody defeat at Fredericksburg in December 1862 see Craig L. Symonds, *Battlefield Atlas of the Civil War* (Baltimore, 1983), 54-55.

beloved nation, clothed with its authority and armed with its sword. . . . In the overflow of their emotions they could have . . . drawn him in a carriage with their own hands all over town, that everybody . . . might look upon him.” Temple concurred. “All day long,” he wrote, “the people poured in a constant stream in the direction of his headquarters, in order that they might have the chance of shaking hands with him.” Adding to Unionists’ glee were the hundreds of East Tennessee soldiers found in the army’s ranks. In a poignant scene, “mothers, fathers, wives and sisters” smothered the returned exiles with hugs, all the while shouting “Glory to God! glory to God! The army has come.”¹¹¹

Unionists had good reason to celebrate, or so they thought at the time. All around them Union troops were on the move, scattering the hated Confederates and restoring federal control to the region. On September 9, Burnside captured Cumberland Gap, opening a direct, albeit inefficient, overland supply route between Lexington, Kentucky and Knoxville.¹¹² Later that day, Union general Thomas Crittenden led a corps of Union general William S. Rosecrans’ Army of the Cumberland into Chattanooga, giving Union forces control over one of the most important railroad hubs in the Confederacy.¹¹³ From Washington, Union general-in-chief Henry Halleck greeted the news with cautious optimism; although congratulatory, he warned the two commanders to remain vigilant,

¹¹¹ Humes, Loyal Mountaineers, 211-12; Temple, East Tennessee, 473, 476-77.

¹¹² At the time of Burnside’s invasion, 2,500 Confederates commanded by Col. John W. Frazer occupied Cumberland Gap. The Army of the Ohio was consequently unable to enter East Tennessee via this route. Instead, the Yankees advanced southward down the Clinch River Valley until they reached Kingston, from which point they followed the road northeast to Knoxville. On capturing Knoxville, Burnside marched north with a combined cavalry/infantry force, compelling Frazer to surrender without a fight. See Marvel, Burnside, 270-79.

¹¹³ War of the Rebellion, Series One, 31(1): 261.

lest one or both fall prey to a Confederate counterattack. Burnside, he insisted, should “hold the gaps of the North Carolina mountains, the line of the Holston River, or some point . . . to prevent [Confederate] access from Virginia, and connect with General Rosecrans, at least with your cavalry.” Rosecrans, meanwhile, was to push on towards Dalton, Georgia, cutting the Western and Atlantic Railroad at “some point” south of Chattanooga and threatening Atlanta. “This being done,” Halleck informed them both, “it will be determined whether the movable forces shall advance into Georgia and Alabama or into the valley of Virginia.”¹¹⁴

Burnside moved quickly to comply. First, he sent an expedition into the Holston River valley, the purpose of which was to seize control of the East Tennessee & Virginia Railroad as far north as Bristol. Doing so would, as Halleck suggested, provide the Army of the Ohio with an outpost against rebels in southwest Virginia.¹¹⁵ It would also allow Burnside to protect the farmers of the French Broad-Holston River country, on whom his army would have to depend for subsistence--at least until Union engineers repaired the East Tennessee & Georgia Railroad.¹¹⁶ Certain that his northern, or left flank, was secure, Burnside turned his attention south. Again following Halleck’s orders, he sent troops, among them most of his cavalry, to establish garrisons in Kingston, Loudon, and

¹¹⁴ Foote, Civil War, Volume II, 688-93; War of the Rebellion, Series One, 30(3): 555; Clark, Railroads, 79.

¹¹⁵ The Bristol expedition met with disaster. Confederates surprised and captured the 100th Ohio regiment near Jonesborough, forcing Union Col. John W. Foster to withdraw the expeditionary force to the vicinity of Morristown. See Marvel, Burnside, 277.

¹¹⁶ I have borrowed the term French Broad-Holston River country from historian Mary U. Rothrock to describe the rough triangle of land between Knoxville, Rogersville, and Leadvale, Tennessee. See Rothrock, French Broad, and East Tennessee & Virginia and East Tennessee & Georgia Railroad, Guide, insert.

Athens. These troops were to guard and repair the East Tennessee & Georgia Railroad between Knoxville and Chattanooga, as well as maintain contact with the Army of the Cumberland. Although he had yet to devise a plan for securing the Tennessee-North Carolina border, "Old Burnie" saw no reason to hurry. As historian William Marvel points out, "the loyalists of East Tennessee had been liberated; the rebellion here seemed over."¹¹⁷

Rosecrans, meanwhile, threw caution to the wind. Convinced that the Confederate Army of Tennessee was in full retreat, he pushed his divided forces deep into the mountainous country of northwest Georgia. The only message that he sent to Burnside was penned by Crittenden, and gave no indication of danger. It stated simply that "the enemy has retreated in the direction of Rome, Ga. . . . The General commanding the department requests that you . . . move down your cavalry and occupy the country recently covered by Col. Minty." Confederate deserters, a number of whom entered Union lines as the Army of the Cumberland advanced, served only to quicken Rosecrans' pace. These "butternut scarecrows," as author Shelby Foote describes them, told graphic tales of Confederate general Braxton Bragg's "demoralization," persuading Old Rosy that his opponent was "in no condition to resist an attack if one could be thrown at him." Thus it was that Rosecrans pressed on towards Dalton, without bothering to stop and concentrate his forces. The road to Atlanta--perhaps even to the end of the war--lay just to the west, and time was of the essence.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷ Marvel, Burnside, 279.

¹¹⁸ War of the Rebellion, Series One, 31(1): 261; Foote, Civil War, Volume II, 685-89.

Back in Knoxville, life soon resumed a pace not unlike that of the early days of the Confederate occupation. The period of anarchy following Buckner's retreat had come definitively to an end, and the city once again stood at the heart of a vast, highly-regimented military camp. Everywhere civilians looked, it seemed, there were soldiers, wagons, draft animals, and the ubiquitous white army tents; the only noticeable difference between the camps' new occupants and the rebels, aside from their Midwestern and Northeastern accents, was the color of their uniforms.¹¹⁹

Economically speaking, Knoxvilleians were no better off--but certainly no worse--in the early days of September 1863 than they had been under Confederate rule. In fact, the presence of so many Union soldiers served to stimulate the local market, for most of the Yankees carried at least a few federal greenbacks and were willing to exchange them for supplemental rations. Those civilians fortunate enough to possess surplus foodstuffs or consumer goods, and who were willing to part with them, sold them to soldiers at highly inflated rates. According to Union corporal John Watkins, soldiers routinely paid as much as \$1.00 for a bushel of potatoes, \$2.00 for a bushel of onions, sixty-five cents for a pound of sugar, and twenty-five cents for a pound of butter. In some instances, the soldiers' rations were more valuable than their currency. Coffee, in particular, was a coveted commodity among Knoxvilleians, and for the soldier willing to trade his away, a sure means of acquiring foodstuffs. "The people around here," Watkins wrote to his fiancée, "have neither coffee and but little tea since the war broke out and till we came here. . . . You go to a man's house and ask him if he has any potatoes to sell or bacon and

¹¹⁹ Daniel E. Sutherland, A Very Violent Rebel: The Civil War Diary of Ellen Renshaw House (Knoxville, 1996), 4-19.

he will say no. then ask him if he has any to trade for coffee and he will say yes right away if it is the last bushel he has got. . . . A person can get any thing they have got with a little coffee.”¹²⁰

It would be a mistake, however, to assume that the onset of Union occupation brought with it a general, region-wide restoration of economic and demographic stability. Quite the contrary was true. The great centrifuge continued its wild rotation that September--perhaps even sped up a bit--tossing East Tennesseans into neighboring states and further diminishing the region's agricultural labor force. The most obvious victims of this continuing centrifugal force were, of course, secessionists; according to historian W. Todd Groce, “hundreds, perhaps thousands” fled to Georgia, Virginia, and the Carolinas, abandoning their farms. And yet Unionists continued to leave the region as well, albeit now for much different reasons. Convinced that the Union conquest of East Tennessee represented a permanent state of affairs, and that military authorities would protect their families from guerillas, bandits, and Confederate raiders, Unionist partisans emerged from hiding that fall and enlisted in the army *en masse*. Approximately 8,000 East Tennesseans donned Union blue between September and December 1863, most of whom were subsequently sent north to Kentucky for equipping and training.¹²¹

To make matters worse, an untold number of Unionist refugees huddled in miserable poverty just north of the Kentucky border, refusing to return home despite the restoration of Federal rule. Their reason for doing so was simple: although Union soldiers controlled the larger communities of the central valley, they were too far away,

¹²⁰ John Watkins, to Sarah, 8 November 1863, Watkins Letters, Special Collections, University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

¹²¹ Groce, Mountain Rebels, 121; Graf, Haskins, and Bergeron, Papers, 7: 385-91.

and too few in number, to be of much help to those living on the region's rugged geographic margins. Guerillas, bandits, and Confederate raiders continued to prowl these areas with impunity, providing an effective check against repatriation. And then there was the matter of food. On entering eastern Kentucky between 1861 and 1863, many refugee families had squatted on abandoned farms. Since that time they had worked diligently to cultivate small plots of corn and vegetables, and they were now able, barring a major disaster, to survive the coming winter. Returning to East Tennessee in September, well after the conclusion of planting season (and with little hope of Union military protection), would have made no sense. And so they remained where they were, at least for the time being, hoping against hope that the spring of 1864 would bring better days.¹²²

Given this state of affairs, Burnside faced a truly daunting problem: feeding his 15,000-man army in the midst of a mounting demographic/subsistence crisis. Union soldiers consumed food just as quickly as had their Confederate predecessors, and may, in fact, have done so at a faster rate. Recall that the Confederate occupying force possessed a railroad network that, while highly inefficient, connected them to supply depots in Virginia, the Carolinas, the Deep South, and, prior to the fall of Vicksburg in July 1863, the Trans-Mississippi west. The rebels were thus able to import foodstuffs and supplies from outside the region, limiting (although certainly not eliminating) their need to subsist at the expense of East Tennessee farmers. The Yankees in Chattanooga and Knoxville were, by comparison, nearly bereft of functioning railroads. Confederate

¹²² Thomas H. Parker, History of the 51st Pennsylvania Volunteers and Veteran Volunteers, from its Organization, at Camp Curtin, Harrisburg, Pa., in 1861, to its Being Mustered out of the United States Service at Alexandria, Va., July 27th, 1865 (Philadelphia, 1869), 398.

forces burned bridges on the Louisville & Nashville and East Tennessee & Georgia Railroads (chief among them the trestles at Bridgeport, Alabama and Loudon, Tennessee) during their August retreat, paralyzing both lines. Until these bridges could be repaired, Union forces in East Tennessee would have to depend almost solely on local sources for subsistence.¹²³

The only other ways to import foodstuffs were to haul them over the Cumberland Mountains from eastern Kentucky or ship them upriver from Chattanooga aboard steamboats. Neither of these options was, however, feasible. The Army of the Ohio's march from Kentucky to Knoxville had demonstrated the enormous difficulty of moving supplies over the Cumberland Mountains; the steep, rocky roads were in many cases more than a match for mules and wagons, and the route had all but been abandoned.¹²⁴ The river option was rendered unfeasible by the Confederates and nature. During their August retreat, Buckner's rebels burned numerous steamships moored on the Tennessee and Hiawasse Rivers, leaving only a few small vessels. Dangerous shoals on the Tennessee River--particularly the infamous Muscle Shoals at Florence, Alabama, 188

¹²³ In truth, the logistical problems faced by the Army of the Ohio were far more severe. Thanks to poor management, the entire line of railroads extending from Louisville to Nashville to Chattanooga (and thence to Knoxville) was functioning well short of expectations. See Seymour, Divided Loyalties, 83; War of the Rebellion, Series One, 30(1): 184, Series Three, 5(1): 934.

¹²⁴ Anticipating the logistical crisis before he began his advance into East Tennessee, Burnside had authorized the construction of a military railroad between Nicholasville, Kentucky and Knoxville. However, Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton refused to authorize expenditures for the project and construction was halted. See War of the Rebellion, Series One, 30(2): 564, 30(3): 93, 786-87, 39(3): 774-75.

miles west of Chattanooga--negated the possibility of transferring boats to East Tennessee from Paducah, Louisville, Nashville, or other northern ports.¹²⁵

And so it fell on East Tennesseans to feed the Army of the Ohio, at least until Union engineers had had time to repair the railroad bridges between Nashville and Knoxville.¹²⁶ Fortunately, despite the mounting demographic/subsistence crisis there was plenty of produce and livestock remaining in upper East Tennessee (particularly in the French Broad-Holston River country) to sustain the combined military and civilian population for a few months. According to the Union Assistant Commissary of Subsistence of the First District of Tennessee, Capt. John M. Orr, whose territory included Hancock, Hawkins, Sullivan, Carter, Johnson, Washington, Greene, Jefferson, Cocke, and Granger Counties, "from 5,000 to 8,000 barrels of flour [from the 1863 wheat crop] can be got from this district and the contiguous counties." There was, furthermore, "a large amount of old wheat not reached [by the Confederates]," as well as "600 to 800 head of cattle" and "10,000 to 12,000 pounds of bacon" that could be purchased or impressed by Union quartermasters and shipped back to Knoxville. Orr added that "the crops of corn and potatoes are said to be unusually great. I believe that the greater part of 1,000,000 bushels [of] corn can be got out of the district . . . besides potatoes, vinegar, and hospital stores."¹²⁷

¹²⁵ Moreover, the Tennessee River north of Chattanooga would not enter its winter flood stage until late December 1863 or January 1864, thus limiting Chattanooga-Knoxville river traffic for the time being to keel boats, barges, and other small, shallow-draft vessels. See Deadrick, Heart of the Valley, 179, 182, War of the Rebellion, Series One, 30(3): 525, 31(3): 346.

¹²⁶ It would be January 14, 1864, before the first train ran unimpeded from Nashville to Chattanooga. See War of the Rebellion, Series One, 30(1): 184 and Series Three, 5(1): 934.

¹²⁷ Other commanders reported the presence of supplies around Loudon and in Sevier County. See *ibid.*, Series One, 30(3): 359, 474.

Much as he needed the foodstuffs for his army, however, Burnside sought to strike a balance between feeding his soldiers and respecting civilian property. His solution to the problem was to sternly punish illicit foraging, even if it left his soldiers on short rations.¹²⁸ More than one looter in the Army of the Ohio was subjected to the “medieval” punishment of cheek-branding during the march from Kentucky to East Tennessee. This technique, as humiliating as it was painful, left the victim permanently scarred (usually with a “T” signifying “thief”) and subject to public disgrace. Although Burnside abandoned such inhumane punishments on reaching Knoxville, he was no less determined to enforce discipline. In a September 18 letter, John Watkins described the “severe punishment” of a convicted looter: “On Tuesday morning. . . . All the troops marched down to town to see a fellow belonging to Woford’s Cavalry drummed before his regiment . . . with ½ of his head s[h]aved his hands tied behind him and large placard pinned on his breast with the word thief printed on it in large letters. for robbing a home and setting it on fire. and besides all that he is sent to Johnson’s Island for the rest of his term of service without pay.”¹²⁹

Anti-looting policies applied to civilians as well, particularly those Unionists bent on victimizing their secessionist neighbors. On one occasion, a group of Unionists approached Burnside near Cumberland Gap, seeking his permission to “go down . . . into the valley, and carry off the hogs and cattle we find there.” The general, not wishing to encourage an escalation of the region’s fierce internecine feud, refused their request.

¹²⁸ Burnside codified this policy on September 17 in his General Field Orders No. 10. See *ibid.*, 718-19.

¹²⁹ Marvel, *Burnside*, 272; John Watkins to Sarah, 18 September 1863, Watkins Letters.

Undaunted, the Unionists reminded him that secessionists had plundered their farms during the Confederate occupation, and insisted that they would “carry off only the cattle and hogs of the rebels.” At this, Burnside had had enough. Fixing the would-be looters with a stern gaze, he informed them that thievery violated the tenants of civilized warfare. He then turned his horse and rode away, leaving the would-be looters “very much disappointed.”¹³⁰

So it passed that for two and a half weeks following the Union conquest of East Tennessee the region’s civilians did their best to adjust to the new circumstances. Surprisingly, after all that had occurred during the Confederate occupation, political violence was not widespread, although there were isolated incidents of personal reprisal.¹³¹ Unionists were, for the most part, content to leave their secessionist neighbors in peace, and Union soldiers did little to alarm the region’s secessionist population, save for engaging in acts of petty thievery and property destruction.¹³² Some secessionists, eager to ingratiate themselves with the region’s Unionist majority, disavowed their ties to the Confederate government and collaborated openly with federal authorities.¹³³ Long after the war, Thomas Humes recalled the sight of repentant secessionists lining up at Provost Marshal General Samuel P. Carter’s office, hoping “to take the oath of allegiance” and “carry home . . . an official certificate of their title to the protection . . . of

¹³⁰ Humes, Loyal Mountaineers, 229; Seymour, Divided Loyalties, 85.

¹³¹ For an example see William B. Hesseltine, ed., Dr. J. G. M. Ramsey, Autobiography and Letters (Nashville, 1954), 120.

¹³² Daniel E. Sutherland, A Very Violent Rebel: The Civil War Diary of Ellen Renshaw House (Knoxville, 1996), 5; Hesseltine, Ramsey, 108.

¹³³ For an example see Groce, Mountain Rebels, 109, which discusses the abrupt conversion of prominent Knoxville secessionist Joseph A. Mabry.

their persons and property.” A few enterprising Unionists made a lucrative business out of catering to their penitent neighbors. According to Humes, “citizens who had influence with the military authorities were kept busy in service of their Confederate friends. . . . Instances occurred, if rumor be true, of ten dollars each being charged for introducing people to General Carter.”¹³⁴

Had secessionists only known of the Confederate government’s determination to reclaim East Tennessee, they might well have exhibited more loyalty. Unionists would certainly have viewed it as cause for concern, and perhaps been less bold in revealing long-hidden political sympathies. And yet neither group appears to have noticed events then transpiring in far-away northern Virginia--or if they did, spent precious little time pondering their implications.

East Tennessee, the Richmond Examiner had remarked in 1861, represented the “Keystone of the Confederate Arch”; to lose its two major railroads (together the most direct link between Richmond and the Deep South), not to mention its remaining agricultural stores, would badly hurt the Confederacy. Thus it was that on September 9 (the same day that Union forces seized Cumberland Gap and Chattanooga) 13,000 men of General James Longstreet’s First Corps, Army of Northern Virginia, began boarding railroad cars at Orange Court House, Virginia. Their destination was the north Georgia railroad depot of Ringgold. On arriving there, they would join forces with Bragg’s Army of Tennessee and together counterattack Rosecrans’s Army of the Cumberland. With

¹³⁴ Humes, Loyal Mountaineers, 230-31.

luck, they would catch the Yankees by surprise, routing them and recapturing Chattanooga.¹³⁵

The plan, as it happened, worked beautifully--at least in the short term. Bragg ambushed an unwary Rosecrans on September 19, pinning the Army of the Cumberland in place long enough for Longstreet's force (which had traveled approximately 950 miles in the last ten days) to reach nearby Ringgold. When five of Longstreet's nine brigades entered the fray the following afternoon, their presence proved decisive; the battle-hardened veterans of Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia smashed through Rosecrans's thinly-stretched battle line, routing the Army of the Cumberland and sending it in a panicked flight towards Chattanooga.¹³⁶

Decisive action on Bragg's part might well have turned the initial rout into a major victory--and, more importantly, forced open East Tennessee's southern gate. But it was not to be. The overly-cautious Bragg, fearful of a Union counterattack, moved the Army of Tennessee tentatively north; Rosecrans took advantage of the respite to recover his senses, gather his scattered forces, and entrench them in Chattanooga. The initiative lost, Bragg had little choice but to besiege his foe. By September 30 the rebels occupied a six-mile-long semicircle of steep ridges south of town, pinning the Yankees against the Tennessee River and, with the exception of one muddy, sixty-mile-long path that

¹³⁵ Seymour, Divided Loyalties, 10, 17-18. For a detailed discussion of the planning and execution of the First Corps's movement by rail, see Clark, Railroads, 88-126.

¹³⁶ On the battle of Chickamauga, see Foote, Civil War, Volume II, 691-94, 718-19, 728-36, 745-57; Bruce Catton, This Hallowed Ground (New York, 1956), 340-47; Symonds, Battlefield Atlas, 72-73; Longstreet, From Manassas to Appomattox: Memoirs of the Civil War in America (Bloomington, 1960) 437-39; and Clark, Railroads, 121.

connected Chattanooga to Bridgeport, Alabama, severing their connections with Nashville.¹³⁷

Many East Tennesseans apparently viewed the battle of Chickamauga as little more than a temporary Union setback. Eight days after the battle, with the Army of the Cumberland fighting for its life in Chattanooga, Knoxville Unionist Horace Maynard made a startling declaration to Military Governor Andrew Johnson. "I am satisfied we are going to hold East Tennessee," he wrote from Cincinnati, "and in that point of view. . . I think I had better take my family to Knoxville, & make some temporary provision for them before returning to Nashville."¹³⁸ Parson Brownlow returned to Knoxville as well, bringing with him a carriage-load of newspaper type. On reaching the city, he resumed limited publication of his newspaper, using it to resume public castigation of "the more rabid secessionists"¹³⁹

Maynard's and Brownlow's faith in Union arms was not necessarily misplaced. On September 24, U.S. Secretary of War Edwin Stanton met with Lincoln, Halleck, and Secretary of State William Seward, proposing, and winning support for, a railroad expedition of his own. In a remarkable feat of logistics, Union planners removed the Army of the Potomac's 11th and 12th Corps from their positions north of Richmond, Virginia, placed them aboard trains, and had them heading toward Chattanooga on the morning of September 25.¹⁴⁰ Although slower to respond, Union forces in the west had,

¹³⁷ Seymour, Divided Loyalties, 92-93, 96; Foote, Civil War, Volume II, 757-60, 837.

¹³⁸ Graf, Haskins, and Bergeron, Papers, 6: 387.

¹³⁹ Parker, History of the 51st Regiment, 396-411; Seymour, Divided Loyalties, 117.

¹⁴⁰ Foote, Civil War, Volume II, 761, 808-809; Clark, Railroads, 141-212.

by late October, also undertaken to relieve the Army of the Cumberland. On the 18th of that month, Gen. Ulysses S. Grant assumed command of the Union Military Division of the Mississippi, whereupon he promptly replaced Rosecrans with Gen. George H. Thomas. He then set out for Chattanooga, ordering Gen. William T. Sherman to take two divisions (approximately 10,000 soldiers) from Vicksburg, Mississippi, and rush to Thomas's aid. Burnside, meanwhile, had been reinforced by the 6,000-man Union Ninth Corps, and was confident that he could hold Knoxville. And so Grant ordered him to stay put, subsisting his men as best he could on foodstuffs gathered in the East Tennessee countryside.¹⁴¹

This, of course, was more easily said than done, what with the large number of troops (both Union and Confederate) then competing with the Army of the Ohio for foodstuffs. Excluding Sherman's forces, which would not reach Chattanooga until mid-November, there were approximately 147,000 soldiers occupying East Tennessee as of October 1863. The bulk of them, about 133,000, occupied positions stretching from Knoxville to Chattanooga, placing tremendous pressure on the farms and communities of lower East Tennessee.¹⁴²

Hardest hit was the fertile Sequatchie Valley, which stretched 125 miles from the Alabama border to Cumberland County.¹⁴³ Standing as it did between Chattanooga and Bridgeport, Alabama (the nearest Union railhead able to receive supplies from

¹⁴¹ Seymour, Divided Loyalties, 93-94; William Tecumseh Sherman, Memoirs of General William T. Sherman, by Himself: Two Complete Volumes in One, Volume I (Bloomington, Indiana, 1957), 347; Humes, Loyal Mountaineers, 222; Marvel, Burnside, 296.

¹⁴² Marvel, Burnside, 291-94, War of the Rebellion, Series One, 31(1): 801, 811, 30(4): 733.

¹⁴³ War of the Rebellion, Series One, 30(3): 928-29.

Nashville), this once-isolated valley was soon overrun. Union foraging parties traversing the valley engaged in an orgy of looting that was as thorough in its destructiveness as it was shocking to its Unionist victims. "When [the soldiers] discover a henroost, sheep, or hogs," Col. John Beatty wrote on October 14, "they do not stop to inquire the sentiments of the owner; neither does it concern them if they are about to take the last sheep or hog belonging to the family. They take them or it as they choose, and perhaps insult the owner if he or she urges loyalty or poverty and protests against the robbery." Appalled, Beatty attempted to curb the destruction by arresting offenders-- including regimental officers--and ordering quartermasters to adhere to strict guidelines when issuing receipts. By then, however, he was too late to salvage the situation. "Almost every garden is found stripped," he wrote dejectedly, "and one will hardly discover a chicken or hog."¹⁴⁴

Further north, Union soldiers in the vicinity of Loudon unleashed a similar torrent of destruction in the Tennessee River valley.¹⁴⁵ As the southernmost outpost of Burnside's zone of occupation, Loudon stood at the end of a very long supply line. Shipments arriving there from the French Broad-Holston River country or eastern Kentucky had often been picked over by thousands of soldiers along the way, leaving quartermasters little choice but to issue half or quarter rations to their men. For a time, the soldiers adhered to Burnside's strict anti-foraging orders, purchasing foodstuffs from civilians and harvesting wild game. But as the supply of greenbacks (and rabbits) dwindled, so too did the men's respect for authority. Troops routinely poached livestock,

¹⁴⁴ War of the Rebellion, Series One, 30(4): 366-69.

¹⁴⁵ In this, they were mimicked by their Confederate counterparts. Hoping to procure supplies in the Tennessee River Valley, Bragg sent his cavalry north to strip fields and ambush Union supply trains. See Foote, Civil War, Volume II, 761; Parker, History of the 51st Regiment, 429.

despite knowing that such behavior was “strictly forbidden.” As October waned, even these sources began to dry up, and the soldiers at Loudon grew fearful and pessimistic. Captain Thomas Parker of the 51st Pennsylvania Infantry perhaps spoke for all the soldiers stationed in the area when he wrote: “if we stay six weeks here . . . it will be enough to kill one-half of the regiment off.”¹⁴⁶

For civilians living in the Tennessee and Sequatchie valleys, the presence of so many hungry soldiers proved catastrophic. It could be argued that the siege of Chattanooga created a second centrifuge in East Tennessee, hurling tenant farmers, small landholders, single mothers, the aged, and others too destitute to feed both soldiers and family outward in all directions. Not surprisingly, the Unionists among them headed toward Knoxville (or Nashville) and the safety of Union lines. There, at least, they would be among friends, and (they hoped) subject to less intense centrifugal forces.¹⁴⁷

Ever the optimist, Burnside remained calm in the face of the growing subsistence crisis. For those who had been wronged by his forces, he offered hope of eventual if not immediate restitution, insisting that “when the war is over, everybody will be paid.”¹⁴⁸

Yet even Burnside had to admit that this was a predicament. The influx of Unionist refugees posed a threat to the Army of the Ohio; each new arrival competed directly with Burnside’s soldiers for foodstuffs, thereby increasing the subsistence pressure on the army’s foraging territory. And that territory began to contract rapidly in late October. On the 28th, Confederate incursions south of Loudon compelled Burnside

¹⁴⁶ Parker, History of the 51st Regiment, 424-25, 431-32, 438, 444.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 431-32.

¹⁴⁸ Humes, Loyal Mountaineers, 229-30.

to evacuate that town and destroy everything of military value in it, including foodstuffs and railroad facilities.¹⁴⁹ The foodstuffs south and east of the Tennessee River--what remained of them anyway--were thus given over to the rebels, who showed no mercy in seizing them for their own use. To make matters worse, news from Washington indicated that a sizable Confederate force (about 16,000-strong) was gathering in Abingdon, Virginia, preparatory to invading northeastern Tennessee. Should this occur, and should his forces, few of whom had combat experience, prove incapable of stopping them, Burnside stood to lose access to the entire French Broad-Holston River country. By the end of the month, "Old Burnie's" once-glowing optimism had given way to fear--fear that he might have to evacuate Knoxville and withdraw south to Kingston for want of supplies. "If it becomes necessary," he informed Grant and Halleck, "we hold ourselves ready . . . although it would be a sad thing for this country."¹⁵⁰

To Burnside's great surprise, the anticipated Confederate invasion of East Tennessee came not from the northeast but from the south. On November 4, Longstreet's 13,000-man Confederate First Corps withdrew from its position outside Chattanooga and advanced up the eastern side of the Tennessee River, heading for Knoxville. Although slowed by a lack of railroad transportation, supply wagons, and foodstuffs, the rebels made good time. Longstreet and his soldiers crossed the Tennessee River at Loudon on

¹⁴⁹ The Loudon garrison pushed three locomotives and approximately seventy-five cars into the Tennessee River. Arriving in the town over a month later, Union general O. O. Howard discovered to his shock that the river channel was "completely filled with the rubbish of locomotives, cars and their contents." See Parker, History of the 51st Regiment, 426-28; War of the Rebellion, Series One, 31(2): 346, 352.

¹⁵⁰ War of the Rebellion, Series One, 31(1): 701-702, 756-57; Humes, Loyal Mountaineers, 229-30; For an account of the refugee crisis in lower East Tennessee, see Parker, History of the 51st Regiment, 431-42.

November 14 and, after engaging in a foot race with the Yankees--one that very nearly saw Burnside and 5,000 of his soldiers captured --laid siege to Knoxville on November 17.¹⁵¹

As word of the Confederate invasion filtered north, the civilians of upper East Tennessee panicked. Unionists were, of course, terrified; having emerged from hiding in the months since Burnside's arrival, reveling openly in the restoration of federal governance, they now feared retribution at the hands of a vengeful foe. But secessionists were likewise fearful. In addition to known collaborators, there were hundreds, perhaps thousands, of Confederate deserters residing quietly in the communities surrounding Knoxville. Should these less-than-fire-eating "mountain rebels" be discovered by Longstreet's forces, they faced court-martial or, at the very least, a return to active duty. As Thomas Humes would later state, "men whose active locomotion may deliver them from imprisonment that might end in death, are to 'stand not on the order of their going, but go at once.'" Scores of prominent Unionists, among them O. P. Temple and the recently-returned Parson Brownlow, fell in with Yankee cavalymen and headed to Union-occupied Kentucky. The others who decided to flee--Unionists and secessionists alike--were left to struggle alone through the agricultural wastes of the Cumberland tableland, where they were assailed by hunger, cold, and the ever-present guerillas.¹⁵²

Those unfortunate enough to be trapped inside the city witnessed seventeen days of chaos and destruction unprecedented in the city's long history. Ragged Confederates

¹⁵¹ On Longstreet's advance from Chattanooga to Knoxville, see Seymour, Divided Loyalties, 103-38.

¹⁵² Marvel, Burnside, 294; Groce, Mountain Rebels, 106-108; Humes, Loyal Mountaineers, 245-46; Graf, Haskins, and Bergeron, Papers, 6: 503-504.

and emaciated Yankees burrowed into the earth north, east, and west of town, the former attempting to strangle the city into submission, the latter fighting desperately to halt their progress.¹⁵³ When Confederate pressure in a given sector became too great, the Yankees set fire to everything in reach and then withdrew further into the city. Scores of private houses and shops disappeared in this manner, as did the city's railroad depot. Conditions behind the front lines were scarcely better. Union soldiers, their respect for private property dissipated by fear, hunger, and exposure, pillaged homes and businesses with impunity. Secessionists railed against the intruders, convinced that their property was being singled out by Union troops; and yet, Unionists' property was plundered as well, often with the tacit approval of provost guards charged with its protection.¹⁵⁴

Unionists living northeast of city, fearful that the Army of the Ohio might be captured or destroyed, did their best to sustain the garrison. It was, in fact, their effort to move foodstuffs into the city--often at the peril of their lives--that likely saved the Yankees from starvation. For reasons that remain unclear, Longstreet failed to interdict the French Broad River northeast of Knoxville, leaving Burnside in possession of a water supply route. Each night, the farmers of the French Broad-Holston River country sent produce-laden flatboats downriver to the besieged city. In this manner, Temple wrote, "the loyal people . . . poured to this point their supplies of all kinds, such as corn, wheat, flour, bacon, pork, beeves, potatoes, hay, and even lard and chickens and turkeys." "The

¹⁵³ For a thorough discussion of the siege of Knoxville, including photographs of Union and Confederate earthworks, see Seymour, Divided Loyalties, 151-89.

¹⁵⁴ Parker, History of the 51st Regiment, 450, 452; William H. Brearly, Recollections of the East Tennessee Campaign, Battle of Campbell Station, 16th Nov., 1863; Siege of Knoxville, 17th Nov.-5th Dec., 1863 (Detroit, 1871), 33; Elizabeth Baker Crozier Diary, Special Collections, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, 15 November 1863.

supplies thus furnished,” he boasted, “were nearly half sufficient to support the army and the people.”¹⁵⁵

The siege of Knoxville culminated on November 29 with Longstreet’s well-known, and disastrous, attack on the earthwork fortification known as Fort Sanders. In twenty horrifying minutes, Union soldiers manning the fort killed or wounded 813 rebels while losing just 13 of their own number.¹⁵⁶

Incredibly, Longstreet considered sending a second assault until he was dissuaded by a message from Jefferson Davis: the Army of Tennessee had been driven from its works around of Chattanooga, leaving the Army of the Cumberland in full possession of the city. A second message, received later that day, stated simply that Bragg “had retired as far as Dalton” and that the First Corps should henceforth “depend upon [its] own resources.” Uncertain of what to do, Longstreet held his position; the Army of the Ohio, he reasoned, was as battered and hungry as his own, and might well break at any moment. It was, however, not to be. On December 1, Longstreet received word that Sherman was headed north with two divisions, more than enough reinforcements to render his position untenable. His options exhausted, his supplies used up, Longstreet had no choice but to abandon the siege of Knoxville. In the pre-dawn darkness of

¹⁵⁵ Seymour, Divided Loyalties, 164; Temple, East Tennessee, 498-502; Knoxville Whig and Rebel Ventilator, 30 January 1864.

¹⁵⁶ On the battle of Fort Sanders, see Longstreet, From Manassas to Appomattox, 505-507; Seymour, Divided Loyalties, 191-203; War of the Rebellion, Series One, 31(1): 469; and John Watkins, to Friend John, 15 December 1863, Watkins Letters.

November 5, the soldiers of the First Corps abandoned their works, marched northeast around the city, and disappeared into the Holston River valley.¹⁵⁷

With the siege lifted, Unionists breathed a sigh of relief. To celebrate, they combed the countryside in search of turkeys, fresh bread, and other culinary delights, presenting them to Burnside and his staff for use in a Thanksgiving feast. Unfortunately, not all of the Union commanders present for the meal appreciated this gesture. Sherman, who had arrived in the city on December 6, was appalled. “There was a regular dining table,” he wrote in a tone of incredulity, “with clean table-cloth, dishes, knives, forks, spoons, etc., etc. I had never seen anything of this kind in my field experience, and could not help exclaiming that I thought ‘they were starving.’” Sherman’s words left Burnside somewhat crestfallen, but they did little to dampen his subordinates’ celebratory mood. In an after-action report, the Army of the Ohio’s chief engineer, Col. Orlando Poe, posed a question: “Is there any man of . . . the Army of the Ohio . . . who would exchange his nineteen days of service [in Knoxville] for any other of the achievements of his life?” Perhaps not, although the soldiers’ behavior gave little indication that they cared one way or the other. On hearing that the Confederates had withdrawn, many of them scrounged up bars of soap and hurried to the river to take a bath. One Massachusetts wag, however, had far simpler plans. “‘Thank God!’ he proclaimed to his comrades, ‘now I can have a good snooze!’”¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁷ Longstreet, From Manassas to Appomattox, 509-11; Seymour, Divided Loyalties, 203, 208-13; Marvel, Burnside, 329-31.

¹⁵⁸ Sherman, Memoirs, Vol. 1, 368; War of the Rebellion, Series One, 31(1): 302; Seymour, Divided Loyalties, 210-11, 215.

Although no one knew Longstreet's precise whereabouts most believed that that he was "skedaddling" back to Virginia.¹⁵⁹ Sherman certainly thought so, but he had no intention of finding out. He was convinced that East Tennessee was a worthless prize and saw no point in pursuing a beaten enemy through the guerilla-infested valleys northeast of Knoxville. Union forces should strip the region of foodstuffs, destroy its railroad and industries, and then abandon it (save perhaps for a garrison at Cumberland Gap), insisted the red-haired Ohioan. Thus it was that, on December 7, Sherman bid farewell to Burnside, turned his two divisions around, and headed back to Chattanooga. Along the way, his soldiers fulfilled their commander's wishes for the region, stripping farms of produce, burning grain mills, and otherwise creating havoc for the hard-pressed civilians who remained in the Tennessee River valley.¹⁶⁰

Having twice liberated East Tennessee, and in the process restored a measure of his reputation, Burnside, too, saw little reason to linger in what now seemed a strategic backwater. Besides that, he had his health to worry about. A lingering intestinal illness, acquired during his service in the Mexican War and aggravated by the stress of the siege, precluded his further service in East Tennessee. Union authorities acquiesced to his request for a transfer and, on December 11, Burnside turned over command of the Army of the Ohio to General John. G. Foster.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁹ War of the Rebellion, Series One, 31(1): 313.

¹⁶⁰ War of the Rebellion, Series One, 31(3): 296-97, 31(2): 345-355; John Beatty, Memoirs of a Volunteer, 1861-1863 (New York, 1946), 264; Seymour, Divided Loyalties, 213, 215.

¹⁶¹ War of the Rebellion, Series One, 31(1): 757; Seymour, Divided Loyalties, 217; Marvel, Burnside, 334-37.

Had Longstreet simply “skedaddled” back to Virginia, all might have been well for the Union. But the rebel commander had no intention of abandoning the East Tennessee, much less his goal of capturing Knoxville. So long as he threatened the city, Grant would be forced to divert men and materiel from Chattanooga. Georgia might thus be spared the ravages of a federal invasion, at least long enough for Bragg to reorganize the Army of Tennessee and prepare to defend Atlanta. Then, too, Longstreet had his own citizens to think about. With foodstuffs running short throughout the Confederacy, he thought it better to halt his small army in the fertile French Broad-Holston River country and let it subsist at the expense of East Tennessee Unionists rather than throw the burden on the loyal Virginians. Thus it was that he established his winter quarters in the vicinity of Russellville, a railroad hamlet fifty-three miles northeast of Knoxville.¹⁶²

Russellville offered Longstreet an ideal base from which to launch a second assault on Knoxville. Large farms (few of which had been plundered by foragers) surrounded the town on all sides, providing an abundance of provisions for the hungry rebels. More important than Russellville’s proximity to foodstuffs, however, was its distance from Knoxville; the town lay well beyond the Army of the Ohio’s reach. Being very short of wagons, Union quartermasters could hardly gather and distribute rations to the soldiers in and around Knoxville, much less provide logistical support for a lengthy offensive up the Holston River valley. So dire was this transportation shortage, in fact, that the soldiers stationed at Strawberry Plains (a mere fifteen miles northeast of Knoxville) suffered intensely from hunger and cold for want of supplies. According to

¹⁶² War of the Rebellion, Series One, 31(1): 500.

historian Robert Meinhard, those who survived their stay at the “Union Valley Forge” did so with the most pitiable of rations: one pint of cornmeal per man, per day, and when available, the marrow stripped from discarded cattle bones. Even if Union quartermasters had had sufficient wagons, however, they would have been largely unable to move them. The army’s horses and mules, emaciated and exhausted by weeks of overwork and starvation, were utterly unfit to haul heavy loads¹⁶³

Russellville offered Longstreet one final advantage seldom enjoyed by Confederate commanders: railroad superiority. Unlike his Union counterparts in Knoxville, Old Pete controlled a relatively sturdy section of the East Tennessee & Virginia Railroad, allowing him to move soldiers and supplies quickly from point to point, and to procure shoes, uniforms, and equipment from depots in Virginia. Recalling the events of that winter, Longstreet wrote that “we were beginning to think ourselves comfortable and happy. . . . We were receiving a hundred pairs of shoes a day of our own make . . . promises from Richmond were encouraging, and we were prepared to enjoy rest that we had not known for a twelvemonth.” His soldiers, few of whom had eaten a full meal since leaving Virginia in September, shared their commander’s enthusiasm. “We lived like fighting cocks,” one of them wrote,” adding that “for the next two months we had the best time of our soldier lives.”¹⁶⁴

¹⁶³ Longstreet, From Manassas to Appomattox, 520; Robert W. Meinhard, “Strawberry Plains, 1863-1864: The Union Valley Forge,” Commemorating the 125th Anniversary of the Siege of Knoxville and the Battle of Fort Sanders, 1863-1988 (Knoxville, 1988), 15-17; War of the Rebellion, Series One, 32(2): 359.

¹⁶⁴ Longstreet, From Manassas to Appomattox, 525; John Cox, “The Siege of Knoxville,” Confederate Veteran 30 (1922): 342.

Strategically, then, Longstreet's decision to spend the winter in upper East Tennessee made perfect sense. There was little danger of an attack on his position--at least not in the short-term--and there was plenty of food. However, his presence had a disastrous effect on the civilian population, shifting upper East Tennessee's axis of rotation away from Knoxville and into the French Broad-Holston River country.

So great were the centrifugal forces emanating from the vicinity of Russellville--the Confederates had little incentive to deal fairly with civilian political enemies and were thus prone to strip civilians of every vestige of property--that thousands of East Tennessee civilians were hurled into eastern Kentucky, Middle Tennessee, and points beyond. Nine thousand Unionists (a number equivalent to Sevier County's entire population in 1860) arrived in Union-occupied Nashville between January 1 and February 28, 1864, where they were housed by military authorities in temporary shelters. Many more continued on to Louisville, Cincinnati, Cairo, and other Midwestern towns, where they often received a cool reception from northern hosts. "Many old anti-slavery Midwesterners," writes historian William C. Harris, "resented the influx of a large number of Southerners into their midst," regardless of their political loyalties. Store owners, steamboat pilots, and railroad conductors often refused to accept Confederate currency for their services, or if they did, charged the refugees exorbitant exchange rates.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁵ Humes, Loyal Mountaineers, 298-300; William C. Harris, "The East Tennessee Relief Movement of 1864-65," Tennessee Historical Quarterly 48 (1989): 88; William C. Harris, "East Tennessee's Civil War Refugees and the Impact of the War On Civilians," Journal of East Tennessee History 64 (1992): 13-15; Graf, Haskins, and Bergeron, Papers, 7: 6, note 3.

An increasing number of refugees chose, however, to stay in Knoxville.

Although the reasons for this are unclear, it is likely that a number of factors, most notably the threat posed by guerillas and Confederate raiders, served to deter many would-be émigrés. In a February 5 letter to Andrew Johnson, Unionist John W. Taylor described his own harrowing escape across the Cumberland tableland. “The Rebles run me so fare up into Ky,” he wrote, “that they Came within twenty miles of Danville. . . . I tore all of my Clothes by running through the Mountains and timber, So when I got into Danville, i was almost naked.” Faced with such risks, it is little wonder that many refugees decided to stay put. Union authorities in Knoxville were, they assumed, just as capable of providing them with food, shelter, and protection as those in far-away Nashville. More importantly, Knoxville was closer to home, allowing refugees to maintain contact--however tenuous--with their farms, families, and businesses. Thomas Humes agreed: “As confidence in the security and certainty of rest which Knoxville offered . . . increased, the tide of immigrants rose.” Knoxville thus traded in its pre-war status as the region’s unofficial economic capital, assuming instead the mantle of caretaker and provider.¹⁶⁶

By January the city bulged at the seams. “The stream of new, homeless, hungry population,” Humes wrote, “filled vacant tenements, and flowed into the University buildings not already occupied by soldiers.” Those unable to find housing lay huddled “all night . . . uncovered . . . [and] exposed to the inclemencies of the weather.” Although Knoxville sympathized with their neighbors’ plight, they were nevertheless alarmed

¹⁶⁶ Graf, Haskins, and Bergeron, Papers, 6: 608; Humes, Loyal Mountaineers, 298; Thomas Humes, Second Report to the ETRA at Knoxville (Knoxville, 1866), 14.

by the sudden influx of refugees. Crime proliferated as the dispossessed, their respect for private property dulled by hunger and exposure, stole from homes and businesses. On January 25, the Whig reported that there were “gangs of thieves in the city. . . . Digging under smoke-houses, robbing corn cribs, breaking into stores, and stealing clothes off of lines.” More alarming than crime, however, was the threat the refugees posed to the city’s carrying capacity. Union quartermasters, their supply network still a shambles, were unable to acquire foodstuffs for their own soldiers, much less the crowds of hungry civilians. Fearing that the Army of the Ohio might well abandon Knoxville for want of supplies, prominent Unionists urged General Foster to expel the refugees from the city. Foster, mercifully, refused to do so, but not before ordering his provost marshal, General Samuel P. Carter, to cease all charitable handouts.¹⁶⁷

Desperate to alleviate the demographic pressure building in Knoxville, Foster made an ill-fated attempt to reclaim the French Broad-Holston River country. Between December 7 and February 12, the Army of the Ohio clashed repeatedly with Longstreet’s forces only to be repulsed time and again by the better-fed, better-equipped rebels. With each loss, the Yankees’ supply crisis grew worse. Retreating units, their horses and mules too exhausted to move, left wagonloads of ammunition, rations, clothing, tents, and other vital equipment strewn along the roadsides of northeastern Tennessee. Recognizing the futility of the situation, Grant decided to suspend further operations in the region, at least until the East Tennessee & Georgia Railroad could be repaired. He

¹⁶⁷ Humes, Report, 7-8; Knoxville Whig and Rebel Ventilator, 25 January 1864; Longstreet, From Manassas to Appomattox, 521; Humes, Loyal Mountaineers, 325.

thus ordered Foster's replacement, General John M. Schofield, to "give your men all the rest you can preparatory to early operations in the Spring."¹⁶⁸

Foster's attempt to liberate the French Broad-Holston River country not only failed militarily but also inflicted additional hardships on the civilian populace. Lacking supplies of their own, the Yankees acquired most all of their foodstuffs from the inhabitants; and when the inhabitants were less than forthcoming, the soldiers were not above stealing. Sgt. Isaac Gause of the 2nd Ohio Cavalry, who patrolled the Jonesborough turnpike near Morristown, described a typical foraging expedition: "Parties were sent into the unfrequented neighborhoods to bring in what they could carry. . . . Each trooper collected a half-dozen chickens, a sack of corn, and two bundles of fodder. . . . This had come to be a common thing for us." So adept were Gause and his men at foraging, in fact, that they stole entire beehives from unsuspecting farmers. Recalling one such raid, during which he and his comrades were stung repeatedly by "winged campaigners" bent on protecting their hive, Gause noted that "the spoils repaid us for our wounds, which were all healed inside of two or three days." Thievery may have amused Yankee troopers, but it provoked outrage among Unionists. "Seizures of private property," Knoxville David Anderson Deadrick wrote in his journal, "have been . . . extended under Federal rule. . . . They take what is yours, even some of those who

¹⁶⁸ J. W. Minnich, "The Cavalry at Knoxville," Confederate Veteran, 32 (1924): 11-13; Minnich, "Dandridge," 294-97. General John M. Schofield replaced Foster as commander of the Army of the Ohio on February 9, 1864. See Longstreet, From Manassas to Appomattox, 534-38.

claim to be gentlemen, with an indifference and callousness as to your rights . . . [and] exhibiting a total want of moral principle.”¹⁶⁹

Distressed at their plight, their faith in Union authorities waning, East Tennesseans took matters into their own hands. On February 8, prominent Unionists met in Knoxville to form “an Association to receive contributions for the relief of the needy people of the region.” The first act of the East Tennessee Relief Association (ETRA) was to send agents into the northern states, there to solicit money and supplies for charitable distribution. These efforts met with immediate success. G. M. Hazen and Nathaniel Taylor collected \$43,636 from donors in Massachusetts, Maine, New York, and Ohio, more than half of which was used to purchase foodstuffs in Cincinnati. Women’s sewing circles in Boston and Philadelphia rallied to the cause as well, producing thirty-four boxes and five barrels of clothing for destitute Unionists. Union authorities in Nashville offered assistance in the venture, transporting the goods insofar as they could aboard military trains. The first shipment arrived in Knoxville on March 26 and, according to Humes, “furnished for some weeks a sufficiency to meet urgent wants of the people.”¹⁷⁰

It was not until April 1864 that Longstreet, his services needed elsewhere, at last led the Confederate First Corps back to northern Virginia. By then, however, the once-fertile French Broad-Holston River country--the region’s last and most abundant storehouse of foodstuffs--had been reduced to a wasteland of barren fields and ransacked

¹⁶⁹ Isaac Gause, Four Years with Five Armies: Army of the Frontier, Army of the Potomac, Army of the Missouri, Army of the Ohio, Army of the Shenandoah (New York, 1908), 186-190; Samuel L. Williams, ed., “Journal of Events (1825-1873) of David Anderson Deadrick.” The East Tennessee Historical Society’s Publications 9 (1937): 106.

¹⁷⁰ Humes, Report, 4, 5, 10-12.

homes. Union corporal John Watkins, himself a farmer back in Ohio, was shocked by the destruction. "Of all the God forsaken countries any body ever saw I think this is it. From Knoxville up as far as the Army has been. . . . Was that it was good grain country. and last year it was all planted to corn. but this spring I don't think there will be anything put in. for there is not a fence of any description left in sight. . . . And no . . . animals to plow the land with[.] what we have not got the rebels have and going back and forth the armies . . . have left it pretty well stocked with dead horses and mules." Also devastated were numerous towns, most notably Bean's Station. Standing between Knoxville and Russellville, Bean's Station was occupied and re-occupied by troops on numerous occasions during the winter of 1863-1864. By war's end, all that remained of this once-bustling entrepot was, in the words of J. B. Killebrew, "a sad, silent scene of devastation."¹⁷¹

Unfortunately for East Tennesseans, the Union high command responded to the Confederate withdrawal not by strengthening its position in the region, but by turning its attention, and its resources, elsewhere. In March 1864, Gen. William T. Sherman had assumed command of the Union Military Division of the Mississippi, giving him control over, among other things, the armies of the Ohio and the Cumberland. Convinced that the Union war effort would be best served by advancing against Atlanta, "Uncle Billy" set out immediately to concentrate all available troops and supplies in Chattanooga. The general's ambitions were, however, more grandiose than his material means. By his own admission, "the capacity of the railroads from Nashville forward to . . . Chattanooga

¹⁷¹ Seymour, *Divided Loyalties*, 217-18; Longstreet, *From Manassas to Appomattox*, 547-48; John Watkins, to Friend John, 23 March 1864, Watkins Letters; Killebrew, *Resources*, 493-94.

[was] so small, especially in number of locomotives and cars, that . . . they were barely able to supply the wants of the armies then dependent on them, with no power of accumulating a surplus in advance.” Undaunted, Sherman met with his subordinates (Schofield included) in Chattanooga, instructing them to “make immediate preparations for . . . regulating the distribution of supplies that were coming up by rail from Nashville as equitably as possible.”¹⁷²

To their dismay, East Tennesseans soon discovered that, in Sherman’s vocabulary, equitable distribution meant a massive reduction in the volume of foodstuffs being shipped to Knoxville. On April 6, the general forbade his railroad operators to transport anything other than “the essential articles of food, ammunition, and supplies for the army proper” aboard military trains. This decision provoked a howl of protest from East Tennessee Unionists. Having sent tens of thousands of their fathers, brothers, and sons into the Union ranks, as well as sustained the Army of the Ohio during its darkest hour, Unionists felt that the federal government owed them some protection and material support. Sherman, however, would not be swayed, even when the President sought to intervene. Asked by Lincoln if it might be possible to “modify” the order and divert humanitarian aid towards Knoxville, Sherman replied simply that “a great campaign was impending, on which the fate of the nation hung; that our railroads had but limited capacity, and could not provide for the necessities of the army and the people too.” Although deeply troubled by the thought of abandoning East Tennessee loyalists, Lincoln agreed to Sherman’s plan and withdrew his request. With carte blanche to operate as he

¹⁷² William Tecumseh Sherman, Memoirs of General William T. Sherman, by Himself: Two Complete Volumes in One, Volume Two (Bloomington, Indiana, 1957), 5-10.

wished, the general began stripping soldiers from East Tennessee, adding them to his rapidly-growing army in Chattanooga.¹⁷³

First to go were the 15,000 soldiers of Schofield's 23rd Corps, who departed their miserable camps at Strawberry Plains and began marching south in early April. They were joined soon thereafter by Gen. George Stoneman's 4,000-man cavalry corps, the only mounted force of any consequence stationed north of Chattanooga. Of the 7,856 Union soldiers who remained in upper East Tennessee, only 3,854 were deemed "present for duty equipped" as of April 10. Moreover, approximately 1,500 of them were assigned to posts in the Clinch River valley, leaving just 2,406 (mostly heavy artilleryists and thus incapable of offensive action) to protect Knoxville and oppose Confederate incursions originating in southwest Virginia. With no one left to oppose them, guerillas, bandits, and small bands of Confederate regulars roamed the countryside northeast of Knoxville, plundering with impunity. "This is to be the ruin of our people," Unionist John Netherland lamented, "as our people in a great measure, depend on this harvest for their means of living."¹⁷⁴

Sherman had his soldiers and supplies and he would soon have Atlanta as well. The city fell to Union forces on September 2, 1864, proving to Sherman, at least in his own mind, that abandoning East Tennessee had been the correct move.¹⁷⁵ The general's "friends" in upper East Tennessee, however, might well have disagreed with this

¹⁷³ Ibid., 10.

¹⁷⁴ John M. Schofield, *Forty-six Years in the Army* (Norman, Oklahoma, 1998), 119-20; Sherman, *Memoirs, Volume 2*, 20-21, 24-25; Graf Haskins, and Bergeron, *Papers*: 6: 707.

¹⁷⁵ Symonds, *Battlefield Atlas*, 97.

assessment. The cessation of civilian railroad traffic, necessary though it may have been to the Union war effort, had paralyzed the ETRA.¹⁷⁶ As of June 4, approximately eight months after the humanitarian crisis began in earnest, ETRA representatives in Knoxville had received from Northern donors a paltry 40,277 lbs. of bacon, 1,646 bushels of corn, 1,151 barrels of flour, and 1,224 lbs. of beef--less than one county's worth of pre-war agricultural production. To make matters worse, the Army of the Ohio's small remnant had been rendered immobile, and therefore incapable of protecting distribution agents wishing to travel to the more remote counties. "It was therefore thought advisable," Humes wrote, "that twice the quantity of supplies originally apportioned to several accessible counties . . . be issued to them. This was done in . . . Knox, Sevier, Rhea, Roane, Campbell, Claiborne, Scott, and Morgan." Those living beyond the ETRA's reach faced a hard choice: remain at home and risk starvation, or undertake the dangerous journey to Knoxville. Hundreds chose the latter course, further swelling the city's population and forcing Union authorities to erect temporary shelters on the south bank of the river.¹⁷⁷

Anxious to get the refugees out of Knoxville and back to their farms, Schofield actively promoted a resumption of agricultural production. With Grant's permission, he purchased seed corn from Nashville merchants and had it shipped to Knoxville aboard military trains. On receiving the grain, Union quartermasters sold it to landowners in five bushel allotments--a small amount, perhaps, but more than enough to meet the immediate

¹⁷⁶ This proved particularly galling to ETRA agents because Union engineers completed a temporary trestle over the Tennessee River at Loudon--and thus completed the Nashville to Knoxville railroad circuit--on April 13, 1864. See War of the Rebellion, Series Three, 5(1): 941.

¹⁷⁷ Knoxville Whig and Rebel Ventilator, 4 June 1864; Humes, Report, 6, 8.

needs of farm families. This accomplished, Schofield next attempted to compensate for the regional draught animal shortage, ordering his quartermasters to loan all horses and mules deemed “unfit for service” to farmers residing within Union lines. Thanks in large part to the general’s efforts, valley farmers had, by mid-August, succeeding in producing modest amounts of corn. Encouraged by the “extensive cultivation” that he witnessed while taking a train from Loudon to Chattanooga, Parson Brownlow reassured Whig readers that “our people are not to starve as we have all feared.”¹⁷⁸

Unfortunately, this would be yet another bitter harvest for East Tennesseans. In early August, Confederate general Joe Wheeler led 4,500 cavalymen into the region from Georgia, plundering farms, seizing livestock, and demonstrating the impotence of Union forces stationed in the vicinity of Knoxville. The raiders first appeared near Cleveland where on August 8 they were driven off by Union troops. Undaunted, the rebels descended on nearby Athens, burning the railroad depot, seizing food and clothing from helpless civilians, and robbing storekeepers. Continuing north, the raiders rode unopposed into Sweetwater on the morning of September 9. They set fire to the town’s depot, burned numerous bridges, and destroyed 420 bales of hay. In their most daring move, the rebels stormed into Maryville on August 15, routing a fifty-man Union garrison and setting fire to the town. Lost in the conflagration were scores of houses and stores and, tragically, a warehouse packed with ETRA supplies. Leaving the town in cinders, Wheeler and his men crossed the Holston River near Strawberry Plains and continued south down the Clinch River Valley. On September 10, the rebels rode

¹⁷⁸ Knoxville Whig and Rebel Ventilator, 4 June 1864; Humes, Report, 6, 8.

triumphantly into Tuscumbia, Alabama, bringing with them 1,000 horses, 1,200 cattle, and 200 wagons stolen from East Tennessee farms.¹⁷⁹

Battered but not beaten, East Tennessee farmers returned to their fields, racing against time to save what remained of their crops. In this they were moderately successful, a fact attested to by the Knoxville Whig. On September 7, editor Brownlow reported that “the [growing] season has been unusually fine in East Tennessee.” There had, of course, been a labor shortage to contend with, as well as “a want of horses and mules with which to plow.” And yet he insisted that “the crops have proven very abundant, so far as they have been cultivated.”¹⁸⁰

Tragically, it was not to be. Two months after Wheeler’s devastating raid, 6,000 Confederates under Gen. John C. Breckenridge crossed into East Tennessee from southwest Virginia, routing a small Union force under Union general Alvin C. Gillem near Morristown and pursuing the beaten Yankees as far south as Strawberry Plains. Unlike Longstreet, Breckenridge had no intention of capturing Knoxville. Rather, his goal was to seize produce and livestock from East Tennessee civilians, a task that his men took to with a zeal born of deprivation. Disgusted by the sight of yet another battered Union force limping into the city, and by the thought of rebel soldiers once again living at the expense of East Tennesseans, Knoxvilleian Laura Ann Maynard vented her frustrations in a letter to Andrew Johnson. “Since the occupation of Knoxville,” she wrote on November 14, “our forces have gone as far as Jonesborough & in some instances farther,

¹⁷⁹ Knoxville Whig and Rebel Ventilator, 24, 31 August 1864; Graf, Haskins, and Bergeron, Papers, 7: 286-87; Wheeler, Campaigns, 251-55; Shelby Foote, The Civil War, a Narrative, Volume III: Red River to Appomattox (New York, 1974), 519-520; Humes, Report, 7.

¹⁸⁰ Knoxville Whig and Rebel Ventilator, 7 September 1864.

six times, & as often have fallen back. . . . At this very moment, our hearts are sickened, while the resident rebels are rejoicing.”¹⁸¹

Not surprisingly, a fresh wave of refugees followed closely on Gillem’s heels. “It is sickening to the heart,” recently-appointed Federal Treasury Agent William G. Brownlow wrote to Andrew Johnson, “to stand here and look at one thousand men, women, and children, coming in through the mud and rain, leading their stock, and driving cows . . . to save what they can, as they are driven from their homes. And to add to my . . . anguish . . . I have no houses . . . no any thing else to give them shelter. The picture is wors[e] than I make it.”¹⁸²

For once, however, Union forces were prepared to respond. On December 10, General George Stoneman set out from Knoxville with 5,500 cavalrymen, determined to drive the rebels out of northeastern Tennessee once and for all. As the Yankees moved up the Holston River valley they encountered little resistance; Breckenridge, having gathered much East Tennessee produce, had long-since withdrawn to Wytheville, Virginia. Thus unopposed, Stoneman’s troopers moved quickly through Kingsport and Bristol, tearing up railroad track and burning rolling stock as they went. They next

¹⁸¹ Events then transpiring in Middle Tennessee aggravated East Tennesseans’ collective misery. On November 4 Confederate cavalry raided Johnsonville, Tennessee, a Union supply depot on the Tennessee River west of Nashville, seizing or destroying \$6,700,000 worth of property. Unfortunately for East Tennesseans, \$12,000 worth of ETRA-purchased woolen goods was among these stores. Sixteen days later, Confederate general John B. Hood led what remained of the Army of Tennessee into Middle Tennessee. The disastrous campaign that followed had little effect on East Tennessee, militarily speaking, but Hood’s presence acted to sever the Nashville & Chattanooga Railroad. For nearly two months, Union authorities were unable to send trains, and hence ETRA supplies, to Knoxville. See Foote, Civil War, Volume III, 619-20, 654-55; Symonds, Battlefield Atlas, 98-99; Samuel W. Scott and Samuel P. Angel, History of the Thirteenth Regiment Tennessee Volunteer Cavalry, U.S.A. (Philadelphia, 1902), 209-11; Graf, Haskins, and Bergeron, Papers, 7: 286-87; Knoxville Whig and Rebel Ventilator, 23 November 1864.

¹⁸² Graf, Haskins, and Bergeron, Papers, 7: 308.

descended on Saltville, Virginia, where they brushed aside Breckenridge's small force before destroying one of the Confederacy's last viable saltworks. To complete their handiwork, the raiders rode north into Wytheville, burning the railroad machine shops--and in the process most of the town--to the ground. Their mission accomplished, Stoneman's troopers turned their horses around and headed back to Knoxville. All told, they had destroyed thirteen trains, burned four towns, and captured 3,000 horses and mules. "The whole thing was a complete success," Stoneman boasted, adding that "East Tennessee is free from any organized enemy."¹⁸³

Successful as it had been, however, even this raid failed to solidify Union control over the counties northeast of Knoxville. Less than one month after Stoneman returned in triumph to Knoxville, the Whig reported "portions of two or three rebel regiments . . . between Rogersville and Bristol . . . robbing Union men." Refugees from these counties poured continually into Knoxville, placing an ever-increasing strain on ETRA resources. Even in the Tennessee River valley, where Union forces conducted regular patrols of the East Tennessee & Georgia Railroad, guerillas and bandits wreaked havoc on agricultural production. On February 8, 1865, the Whig informed readers that "Bradley County is literally overrun with rebel guerillas and bushwhackers. . . . They cut telegraph wires, captured a lot of horses and [ran] them off to . . . Georgia, where they make headquarters." The citizens of Philadelphia fared badly too. In March secessionist partisans descended on the town, burning the railroad depot and stripping residents of horses, mules, and leather goods. Although Union troops intercepted the guerillas shortly

¹⁸³ Knoxville Whig and Rebel Ventilator, 11 January 1865; Foote, Civil War, Volume III, 721-22; War of the Rebellion, Series One, 41(1): 808, 819-23.

thereafter, killing six and recapturing the animals, the raid's initial success served as a grim reminder of the region's continuing instability.¹⁸⁴

In April 1865, the guns of the Civil War at last began to fall silent. On the ninth of that month, Confederate general Robert E. Lee surrendered the Army of Northern Virginia to Grant, signaling the end of combat operations in Virginia. Over the next few weeks the remaining rebel armies likewise laid down their arms.¹⁸⁵

By May, Confederate soldiers were once again a common sight on the streets and by-ways of East Tennessee. This time, however, they came not as conquerors but as rag-tag refugees in search of food and shelter. Although most of them wanted nothing more than to return home to their farms and businesses, there to rebuild their lives amid friends and family, there would be little mercy shown these ex-rebels. Egged on by Parson Brownlow, East Tennessee Unionists engaged in what W. Todd Groce terms "a campaign of both private and public terrorism and vengeance" in the postwar months, the purpose of which was to ruin secessionists financially and, if possible, force them to leave the region. In this they were often successful. Using the courts, their fists, and on occasion, loaded guns, Unionists stripped hundreds of secessionists of their lands and other property and forced many others into hiding. Memphis, Atlanta, and other pro-Confederate areas were soon choked with dispossessed East Tennessee secessionists--the

¹⁸⁴ Knoxville Whig and Rebel Ventilator, 25 January, 8 February, 8 March 1865.

¹⁸⁵ Catton, This Hallowed Ground, 475-486; Foote, Civil War, Volume III, 1002-13, 1018-23.

last wave of refugees propelled outward by the region's wildly-spinning wartime centrifuge.¹⁸⁶

Union veterans returned as well, although theirs too was a bittersweet homecoming. Unlike their comrades from the Midwest and Northeast, East Tennessee Union soldiers enjoyed little of the pomp and circumstance associated with victory. Instead of parades and hearty handshakes, they found bread lines and bitter stares; instead of brightly lit homes and prosperous farms, they found empty larders and weed-choked fields. Here truly was one of the cruelest ironies of the American Civil War: East Tennessee Unionists suffered as much in victory as their secessionist neighbors did in defeat. As they wandered the devastated landscape, searching for friends and loved ones, many doubtless wondered what it was that they had fought so hard to protect.¹⁸⁷

As spring gave way to summer--and for Unionists, the great centrifuge began to slow--the tide of refugees flowing into Knoxville at last began to reverse itself. Dispossessed civilians trickled out of the city singly or in small groups, returning to homes, businesses, and farms that had stood vacant for over a year. Those fortunate enough to possess horses and mules (and who lived in close proximity to a garrisoned town) set immediately to putting in a crop, hoping against hope that the coming harvest would see them through the winter.¹⁸⁸ For those living in the region's geographic

¹⁸⁶ Knoxville Whig and Rebel Ventilator, 17 May 1865. For a thorough discussion of postwar Unionist-secessionist relations, see Groce, Mountain Rebels, 127-51.

¹⁸⁷ Fisher, War At Every Door, 172-77; Temple, East Tennessee, 525-28.

¹⁸⁸ In March 1865, General George H. Thomas, then in command of Union forces in Knoxville, ordered that "the thousands of condemned horses and mules [owned by the army] . . . be sold out at different points in Jefferson, Sevier, and other counties . . . so as to enable farmers to . . . plough and raise crops." See the Knoxville Whig and Rebel Ventilator, 22 March 1865.

margins, however, there would be no draft animals, no military protection, and no crop--at least not in the immediate future. "The war in East Tennessee," historian Noel Fisher points out, "went on unabated" long after the cessation of formal hostilities. Guerillas and bandits prowled the countryside north, east, and west of Knoxville, disrupting agricultural production and preventing the restoration of demographic stability. It was, in fact, not until the summer of 1866 that the ETRA ceased charitable distributions to impoverished civilians in these areas, and then only because the organization lacked the "means to protract it." What little remained of the relief funds was channeled into the construction of a hospital for the "indigent sick" in Knoxville, to be named after ETRA founder Edward Everett.¹⁸⁹

And so, in the end, the Union occupying force had merely completed the cycle of economic/demographic upheaval begun by Confederate forces in 1861. Tens of thousands of civilians (likely in excess of one hundred thousand) had been displaced, entire towns lay partially or fully destroyed, and the region's agricultural economy, once the great hope of boosters, had been ravaged to the point of near obliteration. The railroads, at least, were in good shape, thanks to the efforts of Union engineering crews; but the losses in civilian railroad property had been economically catastrophic. Hundreds of cars and locomotives had been damaged or destroyed by the soldiers of both armies and guerillas, as had numerous depots, machine shops, and other railroad infrastructure.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁹ Fisher, War at Every Door, 154; Thomas W. Humes, Third and Fourth Report to the East Tennessee Relief Association, at Knoxville (Knoxville, 1868), 3-4, 14.

¹⁹⁰ On wartime property losses in East Tennessee, see McKenzie, The Civil War in Appalachia, 203-19.

To make matters worse, East Tennesseans, both black and white, were unprepared for the stunning social changes--and attendant violence--unleashed in the region by emancipation. For former slaves, the war's end meant freedom, and with it the opportunity to seek political and economic opportunities. Thousands of black troops now patrolled East Tennessee's larger communities as members of the U. S. army. Many other blacks made their way to Knoxville and other towns, where they settled down in hopes of finding work. Unfortunately, whites in East Tennessee were no more willing to accept the new social order than were those in the Deep South. Racial violence, often perpetrated by gangs of Union veterans against black garrison soldiers, swept the region in 1865-1866. So bitter were the confrontations, and so frequent the murders, that former secessionist Ellen Renshaw House insisted that: "the Devil seems to be walking at large in East Tenn."¹⁹¹

Still, East Tennesseans were not without hope. The Civil War had swept over the region like a great conflagration, destroying the old order and ushering in a period of profound economic/demographic instability. But the modern observer need only look forward a few years to the Great Chicago Fire of 1871 to see that such disasters, while crippling at the time, may ultimately invigorate a community. Knoxville boosters had long sought to diversify East Tennessee's agricultural economy, as well as persuade outside investors to develop the region's natural resources. With so much to rebuild, and with so little investment capital remaining in the region, the time for seizing such

¹⁹¹ Humes, Loyal Mountaineers, 298-300. References to racial violence in postwar East Tennessee can be found in Sutherland, Very Violent Rebel, 183-84, 186, 195.

opportunities--perhaps, even, for realizing the dream of a unified regional economy, centered in Knoxville--had come.

Conclusion

On February 22, 1865, the Knoxville Whig and Rebel Ventilator published a letter from East Tennessee Unionist Nathaniel G. Taylor that, to readers, must have seemed laughable in its optimism. Writing from the safety of Longacoming, New Jersey, far from (but not unaware of) the chaos then gripping his homeland, Taylor insisted that the Civil War would see East Tennessee, and Knoxville in particular, “fulfill in ever growing grandeur, the sublime destiny that awaits her in the future.” The “destiny” that Taylor spoke of differed little from that envisioned by pre-war boosters: namely, that East Tennesseans could (and should) work to create a unified regional economy, centered in Knoxville, that revolved around manufacturing, natural resource extraction, and diversified market agriculture. But the circumstances under which Taylor and his fellow boosters would now labor to realize this destiny were now considerably (if not utterly) different from what they had been prior to the as yet unfinished Civil War.¹⁹²

By all appearances, East Tennessee was in no condition that February to pursue lofty dreams of postwar development. Entire towns had been reduced to ash (or at least partially destroyed), farms had been devastated, countless homes had been burned, and thousands of civilians had been driven from the region, many of them never to return. A perceptive traveler, passing through the countryside, might even have noticed a conspicuous silence; there were too few farm animals left in the region to produce the cacophony of grunting, clucking, and lowing normally associated with rural life. Given this sad state of affairs, most East Tennesseans were content simply to have a roof over

¹⁹² Knoxville Whig and Rebel Ventilator, 22 February 1865.

their heads and food in their bellies. Economic development, if, in fact, such a notion could ever be spoken of again, would have to take a back seat to the more mundane tasks of recovery and rebuilding.¹⁹³

And yet appearances can be deceiving. Consider: the region's railroads had survived the war intact (they were, in fact, in better shape than they had been prior to the war, thanks to Union construction crews replacing soft, Southern-made rails with more durable rails of Northern manufacture); East Tennesseans' scant capital resources (a short term hindrance, to be sure) would force them to court long-coveted outside investment if they wished to rebuild (or would at least encourage them to do so); slavery, which Taylor denounced as an "incubus" that repelled "the intelligent enterprise, industry, and capital of the non-slaveholding States," had been removed; and those rendered homeless and/or destitute by the war (including landless tenant farmers and the freed slaves) might be compelled to seek industrial work in one of the region's larger towns, or more specifically Knoxville, assuming that such jobs became available. Even the region's agricultural economy--devastated to the point of near-nonexistence by Union and Confederate armies--had the potential to thrive in the postwar world. With a bit of coaxing, boosters might well convince farmers to adopt scientific, economically-sound practices when resuscitating their lands and livestock herds--a move that stood to benefit

¹⁹³ Everett, Account, 6-7, 28, 33; Humes, Report, 7, 17; Knoxville Whig and Rebel Ventilator, 24, 31 August 1864 and 22 March 1865; Graf, Haskins, and Bergeron, Papers, 7: 286-87; Wheeler, Campaigns, 251-55; Foote, Civil War, Volume III, 519-20; Killebrew, Resources, 477-78, 481, 493-94, 609; John Watkins to Friend John, 23 March 1864, Watkins Letters.

the entire region. Simply put, the conditions and timing were right to foster a wave of rapid, perhaps even revolutionary economic development in postwar East Tennessee.¹⁹⁴

Taylor saw it coming. So too, apparently, did Northern investors. On February 27, 1864, less than three months after Burnside's brush with disaster at Knoxville, the Whig informed readers that "gentlemen, farmers, mechanics and manufacturers, as well as professional men, are writing to us from the loyal States, making a great many inquiries about Eastern Tennessee . . . with a view to permanent settlement here."

Pleased by the opportunity to promote his region, editor Brownlow responded by touting East Tennessee's largely untapped industrial and agricultural potential. "There is no better watered country on the continent," he insisted, "and wherever well watered, it is equally well timbered, adapted to the age of progress in which we live, and to the enterprises of men of genius and energy. When this war is over, [East Tennessee] will become what nature intended it should be--the garden spot of all the border states."¹⁹⁵

That Northerners showed a sudden interest in East Tennessee should come as no surprise. The East Tennessee campaign of 1863-1864 had, after all, garnered national attention, particularly from people with fathers, sons, and husbands serving in the region. By February 1865, surely every Northerner prone to read newspapers, or who otherwise kept up with war news, had heard of Knoxville Tennessee and its plucky Union garrison. Many might well have encountered an ETRA agent at church or on the public square, pleading with them to remember, and contribute to the relief of, "the dismembered

¹⁹⁴ War of the Rebellion, Series Three, 5: 933-1005; Lucas, History of Tennessee, 850; Knoxville Whig and Rebel Ventilator, 22 February 1865; McDonald and Wheeler, Knoxville, Tennessee, 16.

¹⁹⁵ Knoxville Whig and Rebel Ventilator, 27 February 1864.

families, the brokenhearted widows, [and] the orphaned children” of East Tennessee Unionists.¹⁹⁶

Helping to fuel this sudden interest were, of course, the thousands of federal troops who served in the region and described it in letters home to their families and friends. Private Charles W. Abel, a New Yorker who marched from Chattanooga to Maryville in December 1863, praised the region’s fertile, well-watered agricultural lands. “It was lovely,” he wrote, adding that “fair fields . . . and pleasant villages adorned the roads on both sides [and] the soil . . . would raise abundant crops. . . . [The] corn stalks grew to a height that with fixed Bayonet a man could reach as high as he could with his gun and not reach the top.” And while he found East Tennesseans’ cultural habits repellent, particularly the tendency of women and young children to chew tobacco, Ohioan John Watkins could not but concur with Abel’s assessment. “There is plenty of apples in this country,” he wrote, “and I never saw corn grow so tall in my life as some I have seen here.”¹⁹⁷

Others, such as Captain Thomas H. Parker, were intrigued by East Tennessee’s latent industrial potential. As he marched south from Barboursville, Kentucky, to Knoxville in October 1863, the Pennsylvanian marveled at the veins of bituminous coal visible among roadside rock outcroppings. “There is ample mineral wealth,” he wrote to his hometown newspaper, “to induce capitalists to invest largely in developing the hidden

¹⁹⁶ The October 24, 1863, edition of Harper’s Weekly featured a picture of Union general Ambrose Burnside and the liberation of Knoxville on its cover. See Seymour, Divided Loyalties, 81; Everett, Account, 8.

¹⁹⁷ Mark H. Dunkelman, “Blood Marked Their Tracks: A Union Regiment’s Hard March to the Relief of Knoxville in 1863,” Tennessee Historical Quarterly, 64 (Spring 2004), 8; John Watkins to Sarah, 18 September 1863, Watkins Letters.

treasures that are known to exist here. . . . It wants a few enterprising Pennsylvanians out here to show them how fortunes are made.” Knoxville boosters would certainly have appreciated his impressions of their city, for he referred to it as “the most beautiful city that I have seen in the Southern States.” Its “several banks, schools, machine shops, foundries, several furnaces for smelting iron, and various other works that employ a large number of hands” were, to him, a reflection of residents “enterprising” spirit, and proof that the city would make an outstanding locus of postwar economic activity.¹⁹⁸

If the Yankees were impressed by East Tennessee, East Tennesseans were, in return, impressed by the Northerners’ mechanical aptitude. In particular, they heaped accolades on the Army of the Ohio’s adjutant quartermaster, Colonel Hiram S. Chamberlain, and his crew of military engineers. On February 22, 1864, the colonel and his men completed a 1,000-foot wagon/pedestrian bridge over the Holston River at Knoxville, the first such structure to link the city with south Knox County. Awestruck by the speed with which the structure was completed (it was done in just five weeks), editor Brownlow offered this assessment of the Northern visitors: “the Yankees are a wonderful people for energy, skill, and endurance. Whatever they undertake they accomplish, and that quickly. . . . Let them settle among us, and in a few years we will have one of the best and most prosperous sections of the nation.” Chamberlain, for one, accepted the boosters’ offer, as did his close friend (and former Army of the Cumberland general) John T. Wilder. Pooling their money after the war, the two entrepreneurs

¹⁹⁸ Parker, History of the 51st Pennsylvania, 399, 402.

purchased coal lands in Roane and Anderson counties, and then used the coal to fuel iron foundries in Knoxville and Chattanooga.¹⁹⁹

For entrepreneurs such as Chamberlain and Wilder to succeed however, they would need a cheap, semi-skilled labor force, concentrated in a central location. Fortunately for them, the demographic chaos unleashed by the Civil War had the (ironically) positive effect of depositing destitute civilians in Knoxville, the largest town in upper East Tennessee.

The most visible of these newcomers, and the ones most likely to view Knoxville as a permanent home, were freed slaves. The city's black population more than tripled between 1860 and 1870, increasing from 752 individuals to 2,609. Hiram Chamberlain, who praised the freedmen for their strong work ethic as well as their desire to better themselves both economically and intellectually, was only too happy to employ them in his newly founded Knoxville Iron Works (1867). Others followed his lead, and in a few short years, black East Tennesseans could be found working in the railroad yards, marble quarries, and wholesale houses of the rapidly-growing industrial city.²⁰⁰

The Civil War had a similar impact on the region's white population. As we have seen, tens of thousands of white East Tennesseans left their homes (either by force or by choice) between 1861 and 1865, and many of them were residing in Knoxville at war's end. Although the vast majority returned to their homes and farms at the first possible

¹⁹⁹ Knoxville Whig and Rebel Ventilator, 5 March 1864; Lucas, History of Tennessee, 857; Govan, Gilbert E., and James W. Livingood, The Chattanooga Country, 1540-1976: From Tomahawks to TVA (Knoxville, 1977), 286, 295.

²⁰⁰ Francis A. Walker, Ninth Census--Volume I: The Statistics of the Population of the United States (Washington, 1872), 265; Rothrock, French Broad-Holston Country, 313-14; McDonald and Wheeler, Knoxville, 24-31.

moment, it is reasonable to assume that some of them, perhaps even a significant number, remained in Knoxville long enough to find jobs in the city's industrial sector. The exact number who did so is impossible to know; let us focus, then, on what is known.

Knoxville's white population more than doubled between 1860 and 1870, increasing from 2,952 to 6,073. This indicates a significant rural-to-urban shift among white East Tennesseans, even when we subtract the 632 foreign-born whites known to reside in the city in 1870, or the unknown number of Northern migrants who doubtless arrived after 1865. Given the region's overwhelmingly rural character, not to mention residents' staunch adherence to tradition, it is unlikely that landowners, no matter how impoverished or how badly damaged their property, would have sought industrial work without having first attempted to resuscitate their farms. And so, the majority of these new urbanites were likely farm laborers, tenants, or other landless rural folk for whom the wartime economic crunch had been too severe to withstand.²⁰¹

It may well be that these new Knoxvilleans (and even those who returned to their farms) were better equipped to make the rural-to-urban transition than they had been in 1861, particularly the Union army veterans. "Going abroad," O. P. Temple wrote, "was [for Union veterans] the revelation of a new world. . . . They saw . . . new methods in farming, in living, in architecture, in dress, in education. . . . They talked with men from Maine, from Ohio, from Minnesota, from Kansas. By this daily contact . . . they were enlarged and broadened." He insisted, moreover, that the Union army acted as a "great university," introducing East Tennesseans, many of whom "had never before crossed the

²⁰¹ Walker, *Ninth Census--Volume I*, 265.

state line,” to the ethic of market capitalism. “To the ambitious, honor waved her garlands from above, and he struggled upward to grasp them. . . . Life had a new motive, a higher object to be attained--a grander and a wider horizon” than heretofore.²⁰²

Temple perhaps painted an overly positive picture of veterans’ wartime experience, to say nothing of its impact on their lives. For in addition to his own limited perspective (Temple, though politically important, was hardly in a position to speak on behalf of thousands of veterans), he was biased, and prone to portray his fellow East Tennesseans in an almost mythic light. Still, there is an element of truth to his assertions. Under no circumstances other than the Civil War could tens of thousands of East Tennessee have been picked up from their homes, transported thousands of miles through (and meeting people from) numerous neighboring states, in so short a period of time, only to be returned to their point of origin. This alone would be a demographic phenomenon worth noting; and yet, many thousands more Confederate veterans, as well as refugees of both political stripes, had similar wartime experiences. In the end, one can only assume that such a profound demographic scattering, however tragic in its origins, had the effect of broadening East Tennesseans’ worldview. The possibility existed, at least in theory, that boosters and industrialists would now have a more receptive, more economically progressive audience than they could have expected in years past.

And so, the conditions were right and Knoxville was propelled suddenly and rapidly forward, riding high on a wave of economic development unprecedented in its long history. Among the most noticeable manifestations of the city’s sudden growth was

²⁰² Temple, East Tennessee, 526.

the boom in its housing market. Entrepreneurs and their employees needed a place to live, after all, and thus new suburbs began springing up north, east, and west of the city. At least as impressive was Knoxville's startling commercial and industrial growth, which transformed it seemingly overnight from a comparatively sleepy place into what the Richmond Whig termed "the widest awake and liveliest town, of its population, not only in Tennessee, but in the Southern States." Walking about Knoxville in 1870, one would have noticed saddlery shops, brickyards, furniture factories, breweries, tailor shops, a slaughter house, and even a company that manufactured cigars. One would also have encountered numerous small wholesale firms--the seeds of a larger wholesaling/jobbing industry that, in decades to come, would earn the city a reputation as one of the leading retail centers in the Southeast. For those who had spent a lifetime promoting the city, Knoxville's meteoric rise must have seemed a dream come true. Although rapid urbanization undeniably brought with it a host of new problems, such as pollution, crime, and racial strife, there were no regrets among the boosters: Knoxville had arrived, and the time to seize the future was now.²⁰³

Boosters in neighboring communities doubtless saw things differently, but then, what could they have done to compete? To borrow from urban analysts Rodney White and Joseph Whitney, Knoxville accrued "disproportionate amounts of wealth and power" in the five years after 1865, allowing it to "appropriate the hinterlands of neighboring centers, causing the centers to contract or atrophy." Add to this the fact that Knoxvillians held the lion's share of political power in the postwar East Tennessee (voters elected

²⁰³ Knoxville Press and Messenger, 5 November 1868, 14 April 1869; Knoxville Weekly Chronicle, 13 April 1870; McDonald and Wheeler, Knoxville, 18-19, 21, 24-27; Rothrock, French Broad-Holston Country, 222.

William G. Brownlow, Knoxville's most powerful and outspoken Unionist, as governor of Tennessee in 1865); that they controlled the region's most widely-circulated newspaper, the Knoxville Whig and Rebel Ventilator; and that the city stood in close proximity to an abundance of natural resources (particularly coal, which was funneled directly into the city aboard the newly-completed Knoxville & Kentucky Railroad), and one thing became abundantly clear: upper East Tennessee was destined to have one center of gravity in the coming years, and that center of gravity would be Knoxville.²⁰⁴

For those who made a go of farming in the immediate postwar years, the future looked considerably less rosy. The Civil War had, after all, done nothing to halt the region-wide rural economic/demographic crunch; it had, in fact, exacerbated its negative effects. Recall that on the eve of the war, East Tennessee farmers were, on the whole, becoming less self-sufficient. Forty-three percent of farm families owned no land, and of the remaining 57 percent who did, only about three-fourths owned sufficient improved land (fifty acres or more) to be self-sufficient. The situation deteriorated further in the aftermath of the Civil War (although the cause of this deterioration was a steadily growing rural population that forced farm families to divide their holdings, rather than the war itself). By 1870 the landless rate among East Tennessee farm families had risen to 47 percent. Of the remaining 53 percent who did own land, less than one half could claim fifty or more improved acres. Thus, only one-quarter of all East Tennessee farm

²⁰⁴ White and Whitney, Sustainable Cities, 11; Rothrock, French Broad-Holston Country, 145-46, 228-29.

families owned enough improved acreage as of 1869 to be self-sufficient. The image of East Tennessee as a land of independent yeoman farmers had become just a myth.²⁰⁵

To make matters worse, agricultural production across the region had yet to resume prewar levels. Census data reveal that in 1869 East Tennessee farms produced 815,399 bushels of corn (as opposed to 1,416,286 in 1859); 102,599 bushels of wheat (as opposed to 143,755); 405,309 hogs (as opposed to 565,501); 67,697 dairy cattle (as opposed to 69,031); and 99,703 beef cattle (as opposed to 115,522). There were, moreover, fewer horses and working oxen to go around, a fact which affected farmers' ability to prepare the land for planting. Of course, there were plenty of signs that the region's agricultural economy would recover. The region's sheep actually increased in number between 1859 and 1869 (from 235,032 to 262,890), as did the hay crop (from 3,388 tons to 3,901). And the region enjoyed a sudden boom in oat production (from 1,423,041 to 2,154,885 bushels) as well, probably because Union authorities encouraged oat cultivation during the latter stages of the occupation. Still, the implications for the short term were clear: there was too little food being produced to support the region's rural (and demographically unstable) population, much less provide surplus foodstuffs for the booming industrial city then growing near its center. The current arrangement was, in the words of White and Whitney, "unsustainable."²⁰⁶

²⁰⁵ McKenzie, Civil War in Appalachia, 211-18; Francis A. Walker, Ninth Census--Volume II: The Statistics of Wealth and Industry of the United States (Washington, 1872), 362.

²⁰⁶ Joseph C. G. Kennedy, Agriculture of the United States in 1860; Compiled From the Original Returns of the Eighth Census (Washington, 1864), 132-39; Walker, Ninth Census--Volume II, 242-49; McKenzie, Civil War in Appalachia, 211-18; Knoxville Whig and Rebel Ventilator, 9 January, 12 March 1864, 22 March 1865; White and Whitney, Sustainable Cities, 11.

Fortunately for everyone involved, Knoxville had the potential to serve as a corrective mechanism for much of upper East Tennessee. First and foremost, the city's emerging industrial/commercial sector promised to siphon off excess population from its rural hinterland, an arrangement that stood to benefit industrialists and agriculturalists alike. Fewer farmers meant a greater (potential) urban workforce, as well as a more demographically stable and commercially productive rural workforce (assuming, of course, that boosters could break their rural neighbors of their ruinous agricultural practices). Second, the "disproportionate amounts of wealth and power" enjoyed by Knoxville's commercial/industrial class would allow them to establish subsidiary extractive industries in neighboring communities, thereby creating work opportunities for landless individuals. This was already occurring to an extent in Roane County, with the Roane Iron Company (1867), in Anderson County, with the Coal Creek mines (1867), and in Carter County, with Clark, Quaife & Company's iron mining operations (1867), all firms that were owned and operated by Knoxville industrialists. And this trend looked to continue, for there were more than enough untapped resources in the region--particularly marble, timber, iron, and coal--to attract investors and foster development for decades to come.²⁰⁷

At this point, it seems only fair to pose the following question: would these sweeping economic/demographic changes have occurred in East Tennessee without the Civil War? Perhaps yes, although to say as much requires one to engage in speculation. It is safe to assume that Knoxville was on its way to regional economic dominance prior

²⁰⁷ White and Whitney, Sustainable Cities, 15; Lucas, History of Tennessee, 856-57.

to the Civil War, for the city had long since used its railroad connections to undercut Loudon, Bean's Station, and other regional rivals. It is also safe to assume that the economic/demographic crunch occurring in the city's rural hinterland would have continued unabated regardless of the war, resulting eventually in either a significant rural-to-urban shift among landless East Tennesseans (which is what occurred) or a slow drain of the region's human resources. And yet, who is able to predict the future? Loudon might well have rallied in a war-free environment, taking advantage of its own railroads, waterways, farmland, and close proximity to Chattanooga (itself an important transportation and industrial hub) to lay claim to at least a share of the title. Or, alternatively, Greeneville might have used its railroads and position as the halfway point between Knoxville and Virginia to establish a wholesale/jobbing industry of its own.²⁰⁸

In the end, however, such counterfactual questions are moot. The Civil War did occur, accelerating (although certainly not completing) the process by which nineteenth-century East Tennessee was transformed from a rural, pre-modern economy based predominantly on subsistence agriculture to a more modern, industrializing economy based on manufacturing, resource extraction, and limited commercial farming.

In conclusion, let us take one final trip to the epicenter of this transformation, Knoxville, during the spring of 1870. Let us, in particular, take a moment to stroll along the city streets, pondering the Knoxville that had been, the Knoxville that was, and the Knoxville that soon might be. Gone forever were the sleepy, isolated village of 1838, the awaking town of 1854, and the sense that boosters' dreams for their city (and by

²⁰⁸ Graf, Haskins, and Bergeron, Papers, 1: xix-xxx.

extension the region) were just that--dreams. One needed only to visit the city's crowded wharf, where "up-country" flatboat pilots unloaded "every species of produce known to our markets," the commercial district, which boasted "one of the largest . . . wholesale businesses in the State of Tennessee," the rail yards, where "long trains of wagons" stood waiting to unload cargo for shipment, or to the suburbs, where carpenters worked feverishly to keep up with the demand for new housing, to realize that the Knoxville of 1870 was a place where dreams were realized, at least for those fortunate enough to have a stake in its growth. True, the city was rough around the edges, often straddling the line between up-and-coming eastern metropolis and wild-west boom town. But then, Knoxville at least had the potential to be great, which was more than could be said for it in the all-too-recent past.²⁰⁹

That, perhaps, was enough.

²⁰⁹ Knoxville Weekly Chronicle, 13 April 1870.

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