

"PETTICOAT GUNBOATS": THE WARTIME EXPANSION OF CONFEDERATE
WOMEN'S DISCURSIVE OPPORTUNITIES THROUGH LADIES' GUNBOAT SOCIETIES

A Thesis

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Abstract

This study represents a feminist historiographical recovery of the discursive practices of Confederate women in Ladies' Gunboat Societies in the Civil War South, with particular attention to the rhetoric of club formation, epistolary writing, and networking through national newspapers. A turn toward an examination of process-oriented rhetoric as supported in the work of Andrea Lunsford and Robin Jensen provides a robust framework for the methodology of recovery of non-traditional rhetorical texts in this project. As we explore these process-oriented texts, we discover the material motives Confederate women had for contributing to the war effort in an unprecedented way: the construction of weapons of war. This thesis also discusses the mantle of virtuous nationalism and Republican Motherhood Confederate women appropriated in order to participate in new public and political discursive territory. Contrary to some historiographers' view that these discursive breakthroughs were only temporary and that Southern women did not hold the discursive gains allowed during war time, this thesis maintains that new important gains gave Southern women new rhetorical skills that they would use in the formation of postbellum organizations like Ladies' Memorial Associations.

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INTRODUCTION

Context

In December of 1860, former Governor Adams, one of Charleston's commissioners, sent an ominous dispatch to the city's leaders. It read: "Guard you harbor well- Hasten your preparations for war." Unfortunately for the Confederate States of America, those naval preparations presented an extraordinary challenge to the new nation's vastly limited abilities concerning "transportation of raw iron, plating, and other crucial items to the various naval facilities; the acquisition and retention of competent and adequate labor; the development of shipyards and related facilities" (Still 75). As maritime historian Angus Konstam explains, "the strategic situation was bleak, as the Confederacy had a long, exposed coastline with inadequate coastal defenses, and numerous inlets and rivers that pierced the interior of the new nation. She [The Confederacy] also had no navy to undertake its defense" (3). Contemporary texts produced within the South even note the country's naval shortcomings despite its various rivers and tributaries, an admission inconsistent with the South's typical wartime propagandist texts. Mrs. M.B. Moore's *The Geographical Reader, for the Dixie Children*, a text published in Raleigh in 1863, notes that, "This country [the Southern Confederacy] is well watered by large rivers, and has many fine harbors. On some of these harbors, are large cities; but the Confederate States possess few ships and her cities do not grow so fast as if there was more commerce. But we have reason to hope that in a few years we shall not fall behind any nation in point of commerce, or ships to carry it on" (14).

Despite these seemingly dismal beginnings for ship construction in the South, the early success of the *C.S.S. Virginia* (formerly the *U.S.S. Merrimack*), coupled with civilian realizations of massive coastal vulnerabilities, sparked a gunboat mania in the South which began in the

spring of 1862 and lasted for more than a year. After the Battle of Hampton Roads, Confederates knew that they didn't just need to build gunboats, but ironclad gunboats, capable of withstanding the superior might of the Union Navy, which was determined to build its own ironclad warships. This mania to manufacture extraordinarily expensive ironclad gunboats arguably produced the most fascinating and powerful women's organizations that the South had ever seen: Ladies' Gunboat Societies.

Ladies' Gunboat Societies were called by a variety of names, as John Coski explains in his "The Women of Civil War Richmond"(21). Also known as Ladies' Aid and Defence Associations or simply National Defence Associations, these groups of Confederate women were most popularly and consistently known throughout the South as Ladies' Gunboat Societies. These organizations impressively organized themselves to orchestrate fundraisers, coordinate funds, stir Southern morale, and, of course, spur the building of gunboats for their particular coastal towns. In an impressive show of resolve, the Confederacy commissioned twenty-two ironclad vessels into its navy by the war's end (Konstam 4). Of these twenty-two, there is some primary evidence that up to six: the *Virginia II*, the *Fredricksburg*, the *Lady Davis*, the *Palmetto State*, the *Ladies Ram* (Mobile, Alabama), and the *Georgia*, were either fully or partially funded by Ladies' Gunboat Societies.

All of these gunboats are recognized by present day experts in the field (and contested by others) with the exception of the *Ladies' Ram* of Mobile. However, an official naval correspondence from the *U.S.S. Gunboat Gertrude* states that during the week of October 27, 1863, "The *Colorado* and the *Genesee* had an engagement with the *Ladies' Ram*, a vessel presented by the ladies of Mobile to the rebels." Two James River Squadron historians, John Coski and William Still, disagree as to whether the *Fredericksburg* or the *Virginia II* was the

Ladies' Gunboat in Virginia. However, there is primary evidence supporting both claims, and the most plausible explanation is that the women of Richmond gave generously to the construction of more than one vessel to defend the Confederate capitol. Of these six ships that are acknowledged as Ladies' Gunboats, the *Virginia II*, the *Palmetto State*, and the *Georgia* are most widely accepted (and historically remembered) as the Ladies' Gunboats, likely because they were the ships that Gunboat Society members funded entirely and also the ships with which the women widely identified discursively.

Purpose

Ladies' Gunboat Societies comprise a truly fascinating, yet largely overlooked, chapter in Civil War history. However, many works over the past three decades have thoroughly explored women's activities in the Civil War that were merely an extension of their domestic skills, including nursing, sewing, and meal preparation. Total war made women perform these socially accepted duties on a much larger scale outside of the home. One such work, George C. Rable's *Civil Wars: Women and the Crisis of Southern Nationalism*, explains how "domestic skills became public assets" in describing how women hurriedly sewed countless Confederate flags to present to departing local troops. Rable puts particular emphasis on the subsequent flag presentation ceremony, where women were expected to remain completely silent and anonymous (47). Yet, Ladies' Gunboat Societies are markedly different from those benevolent societies that merely institutionalized roles that were generally accepted for women. Indeed, Ladies' Gunboat Societies' aims could be considered outright malevolent, with an ultimately violent mission that violated wartime notions of genteel Southern ladyship.

Gunboat Societies represent women in an extraordinarily different realm: the coordination of the building of weapons of war. Though the Gunboat Societies have not yet been explored in depth, the history of the Ladies' Gunboats has seen some discussion by contemporary

historians. John Coski briefly mentions the Ladies' Defence Association of Richmond in his book *Capital Navy: The Men, Ships and Operations of the James River Squadron*. In it, he attempts to refute claims that the *Fredericksburg* was the Ladies' Gunboat and present evidence that it was actually the *C.S.S Virginia II*. However, the goal of this thesis is not to say definitively which of those ironclads were or were not partially or entirely funded by women's fundraising efforts. Rather, this thesis aims to examine the texts that those Societies left behind in order to better understand the expanding rhetorical opportunities that Confederate women's organizations granted Southern women during the Civil War. This thesis examines texts produced by Ladies' Gunboats Societies that revolve around three of the most well known of the many alleged Ladies' Gunboats: the *Palmetto State*, the *Virginia II*, and the *Georgia*. These ironclad vessels were selected as the primary focus of this thesis due to the dozens of editorials, newspaper clippings, letters, and club records that were able to be recovered concerning women's direct efforts for and discourse surrounding their construction.

Organization

Through an examination of the wartime discursive practices of Ladies' Gunboat Societies in the Confederate States, this thesis traces three main threads: club formation, epistolary rhetoric, and networking through national newspapers. The thesis begins with a chapter that offers an introduction of feminist historiographical recovery and a discussion of methodological choices and challenges. Additionally, it addresses the rhetorical and discursive activities necessary for club formation as an example of process-oriented rhetoric. Chapter two discusses the importance of epistolary rhetoric, examining the communication among Society women and the blurring of the public and private in regards to their business correspondence. The second chapter transitions from private correspondence with a discussion of the multi-purpose circulated

Letter to the Editor, which allowed women a voice in a public discursive realm that had been almost entirely populated by men. This in-between discourse leads to the ways in which Confederate women used newspapers to solicit donations, stir support for their cause, praise those who had contributed, and network with other Societies of women who were often separated by hundreds of miles. This thesis attempts to examine how valuable epistolary writing and discourse published in newspapers were to club formation and fundraising among women of the wartime South, who had been limited in their capacity to organize because of the very real physical limitations of distance which compounded existing ideological barriers. This discourse shows how women drew upon tropes of Republican Motherhood and patriotic sacrifice in order to justify their occupation of new significant public roles. The conclusion of this thesis will discuss how, despite the eventual demise of their ships, Ladies' Gunboat Societies created a lasting legacy, ultimately expanding Southern women's discursive roles and laying the foundations for Ladies' Memorial Associations. Such Memorial Associations would, in large part, be responsible for constructing the public memory of the Civil War in the South.

CHAPTER I: HISTORIOGRAPHY AND METHODOLOGY

"From her has flowed the music of our revolution. To be sure, some of the women, like some of the men, have been behind the times, weak, wavering in the time of trial, illustrating selfishness rather than patriotism, but tens of thousands of them have borne witness for right and liberty at every hazard."

"The Women of the Revolution," Richmond Enquirer, September 1, 1862

Male Ventriloquism and Confederate Women's Wartime Narratives

Over the past two decades, Confederate women's historiographers have made tremendous strides in recovering the actual wartime experiences, roles, and identities of the highly mythologized white women of the planter and yeoman classes.¹ Recovering the history of these groups of Confederate women has proven difficult for those historiographers that have attempted to complicate women's wartime narratives, at least in part, because they were so showered by their male contemporaries with endless praise to their seemingly untiring devotion to country and penchant for sacrifice.² Yet, no matter how flowery or flattering the words of their contemporaries became, "they did not speak to the need for action and occupation; flattery did not provide women much to do" (Faust 22). In her "Altars of Sacrifice: Confederate Women and the Narratives of War" Drew Gilpin Faust discusses the honorific discourse that can complicate the recovery of Confederate women's experience. Faust describes the Civil War as especially complicating underlying gender assumptions because of its designation as the first "total war" that involved women in unprecedented ways. Although Faust's exploration of the "rhetorical force...of the attendant ideology of sacrifice as part of a larger scheme of paternalistic assumption" is certainly valid, she tends to discount Confederate women's agency and

¹ Scholars such as George Rable, Anne Sarah Rubin, Lee Anne Whites, and Drew Gilpin Faust have worked to complicate Confederate women's identities by examining them alongside complex interactions of race, culture, and class.

² Such selfless constructions of Confederate womanhood by Confederate politicians and newspaper editors served as much to set a definitive example of what was expected of the Southern woman during wartime as to actually praise her efforts. In Anne Sarah Rubin's *Shattered Nation: The Rise and Fall of the Confederacy*, she identifies this discourse as a sort of "political ventriloquism" (218).

motivations aside from that "story designed to ensure her loyalty and service" in their acceptance of their self-sacrificial role ("Altars of Sacrifice" 1204).

Faust implies that Confederate women's discourse and activities were a reflection of how they played to the part prescribed to them by Confederate leaders because of their "sense of a moral economy of gender in which they traded self-abnegation for care and protection" ("Altars" 1220). While she does review aberrations from this narrative, she does not adequately credit the many reasons an abundance of Confederate women chose to make genuine sacrifices for the war effort, aside from the obvious effect of wartime propaganda, which swayed both Southern men and women. Consequently, Faust criticizes these uncomplicated narratives of Confederate women's contributions through sacrifice as partial products of "emergent twentieth-century feminist historiography eager to explore women's contributions to past events previously portrayed from an exclusively male point of view" (1204).

Criticizing feminist recovery efforts of Confederate women's wartime experiences on the grounds that those women's motivations were *solely* a product of patriarchal control or an adherence to wartime gender assumptions fails to acknowledge the complexity of female agency throughout the nineteenth century. It also fails to take into account that, rather than being the absolute product of something I would name *male ventriloquism*, many Confederate women shaped their public discourse according to a complex combination of nineteenth century Southern propriety *and* their own personal feelings that sacrifice was necessary for the material success of a cause that deeply concerned them (for the same reasons it so concerned Confederate men). Mrs. Mary Rhodes of Alabama characterizes the constant struggle that women faced to keep their public (and even private epistolary) discourse cheerful, so as not to dampen the spirits of the departing soldiers. She writes:

As long as it was only the dress parade, barbeques, balls, and presentations of honors, it was well enough; but when the time came *to do...* the reality of the thing that was upon us made many a poor woman's heart stop its regular beat--the sickening dread that today the call might come! None were willing that husband, son or brother should not obey the call, but still the dread of it made the days miserable and banished sleep at night. We were ashamed of it, and tried to hide the feeling from others, but we could not help it. (*Our Women in the War* 273)

This excerpt expresses the complex ways in which women's own conflicted discourse contributed to the public memory that was formed around their supposed penchant for sacrifice and their seeming stoicism in the face of tremendous loss.

Thus, Faust's opinion of overly eager recovery efforts by feminist historiographers seems an over-simplified explanation. The continued work of feminist historiographers has helped to recover motivations for female participation in the Civil War aside from a desire to play a predetermined role and follow the demands of propagandist texts. George C. Rable's *Civil Wars* explains that "women seldom considered war as an abstraction" and even perceived the depth and length of material sacrifices required of war more realistically than men. In a letter dated November 10, 1860, Emmie Holmes of Charleston wrote her childhood friend Lizzie Greene that she had "no doubt that the southern states w[ould] have to pass through a serious struggle before a Southern Confederacy w[ould] be formed." In contrast to those depictions of the blind devotion of Southern women's nationalism, Emmie reveals an intimate knowledge of Charleston's position in the war, describing in amazing detail the forts, batteries, harbor defenses, and deployed units. Emmie even criticizes the South Carolina's current Governor, Mr. Pickens, for his ignorance of the state's military operations, which she claims has resulted from his extended absence from

Charleston. Additionally, Emmie, like most women in Confederate coastal towns, was acutely aware that the only way for the Confederacy to protect against the Union's ironclad fleet, was to build ironclads of their own.³

In reality, although Confederate women read and surely often followed the suggestions of the Confederate propagandist material that motivated their sacrifices (as surely as their men did), they had many of the same reasons as their male counterparts to mobilize for war: fear of losing their way of life, their homes, their livelihood, and even a love for their new country. Civil War historian Catherine Clinton makes similar observations about "the obsessive hyperbole that Southern womanhood elicited" (139). Southern fireeaters constructed innumerable speeches about Confederate women's sacrifices, often going so incredibly far as to name Confederate soldiers' sacrifices as "mild inconveniences" when compared to those of the women. Nevertheless, historiographers cannot overlook the fact that Confederate women were *material stakeholders* in the success or failure of the Confederate cause. It is imperative that women historiographers, though they should be aware of false narratives of women's unquestioning sacrifice, are not deterred by the Confederate *male ventriloquism* when recovering women's voices and experiences and writing those back into Civil War history.

Methodology

In this thesis, I take very seriously Faust and Clinton's warnings about the role of the cult of sacrifice in the narratives and collective memory of Confederate women's wartime involvement. Indeed, this paper attempts to recover women's wartime experiences, voices, and activities by examining texts that can better help us recover the organic motivations that caused Confederate women to write their own wartime discourses as rhetorical agents capable of

³ Emmie Holmes to Lizzie Greene, November 10, 1860

organizing themselves (in the case of Ladies' Gunboat Societies, for immediate protection from the enemy). In contrast to those socially accepted domestic activities that were institutionalized in order to aid in the war effort (and through which service women were expected to remain silent and anonymous), Ladies' Gunboat Societies mark a distinct development in Southern women's discursive practices by encouraging club organization, public and business epistolary writing, and networking through various newspapers. Such discourse was produced to meet very specific and material goals that women created for themselves. Thus, it necessarily blurs the line between the prescriptive and descriptive nature of Confederate women's sacrificial role.

Rable explains that any public credit women received in regards to the externalization of domestic skills for the war effort only tended to perpetuate antebellum gender narratives. An event such as a presentation of a flag sewn for Confederate troops produced a "syrupy romanticism [that] inevitably oozed into the speeches men made." These speeches largely "expressed common expectations that war would only reinforce traditional social values" (47). In stark contrast, Ladies' Gunboat Societies produced vast amounts of texts for and about their own distinct contributions. This discourse crossed into territory that had been forbidden to women, that of public, business, and political concern. These contributions are marked by activities requiring women to explore new discursive territory beyond the confines of the private, domestic sphere.

As Catherine Clinton explains, the war did not only provide physical dislocations where women's service outside of the home was absolutely necessary, it also provided a new ideological atmosphere that, according to Southern contemporaries, was quite like the Republican Motherhood that emerged during the Revolutionary War. Confederate women could take an active role in fostering the new nation and "the emergence of Confederate nationalism

offered Southern ladies unprecedented opportunities to serve" (Clinton 79). Although the women of Ladies' Gunboat Societies broke new discursive ground, they were able to do so by operating under acceptable ideological mantles, including a superior, virtuous sensibility. Of course, the popular concept that women were innately more virtuous, sacrificial, and morally pure than men had existed well before the nineteenth century. This "model of piety, compassion, and generosity--a role generally ascribed to women" has traditionally been used to keep women out of the public and the political sphere (Shaver 49).

However, in several cases throughout history, women have successfully used such ideas about their moral superiority in combination with the adoption of an appropriate institutional mantle (religion, nationalism etc.) to expand their discursive roles and interactions in the public sphere. The most famous examples of women using notions about their virtue in order to band together for collective action in the public sphere were the postbellum Temperance and Suffrage movements. In the case of Suffrage, Jean Bethke Elshtain explains that women skillfully leveraged arguments concerning women staying out of the public sphere due to their delicate, virtuous nature. They refused to let men use notions of women's elevated virtue as a means of simply writing them back into the domestic pedestal role. Instead, Suffragists argued that the immoral political sphere was in dire need of women's superior virtue because, though men "had made something nasty out of politics...woman was purer and more virtuous--look at the way she had enobled the private sphere" (231).

It is not surprising, then, that the Confederate woman had her nationalism constructed as a purer, non-political devotion that fit nicely with her prescribed elevated virtue. In fact, this poetic celebration of her unchecked love of and sacrifice for country cannot be seen as a novel development, but must be explored as a mere extension of a century old tradition that helped

patriarchal forces limit women through exaggerated flattery and celebration of the very roles and traits that restricted them. As I will later explain, Confederate women were able to turn this narrative into an opportunity to explore expanding roles outside the accepted private sphere. In addition to expanding their roles, Ladies' Gunboat Societies would also complicate questions of women's virtuous, non-violent attitudes, the very narratives which they appealed to as the basis for their actions (they were, after all, building very large and powerful weapons of war). Like the Suffragists, Confederate women appropriated the mantle of virtuous nationalism to expand activities and discursive opportunities by calling for the opportunity to actively show their proclaimed patriotism in their country's hour of need.

Considerations Concerning Historical Circumstance

I would also like to briefly discuss the distinct set of challenges that come with recovering the discourse of individuals whose values and motivations are, at times, disturbing or offensive to a researcher's own morals or sensibilities. I encountered more than one moment of conflict as I pursued and attempted to recover the voices of those whose core beliefs I so vehemently disagreed with. Historiographers attempting to recover the experiences of those individuals on the wrong side of history face an entirely different set of personal challenges separate from those challenges of research in the archive. Liz Rohan discusses these challenges in "The Personal as Method and Place as Archives: A Synthesis," which provides some insight into her methodology while she researched and wrote the history of nineteenth century female missionary Janette Miller. Rohan explains her concern for "representing Janette's writing and life with empathy and respect, even though at times [she] neither understood nor respected her" (232). Indeed, recovering the voices of individuals whose opinions, motivations, and discourses are difficult to comprehend can be a daunting task as a researcher must not only work through

her own prejudices, but often the prejudices of the academy as well (233). Certainly, when piecing together the story of a group of women who willed the continuity of the abhorrent system of slavery and the destruction of the Union, I found myself wondering whether I had the will to recover their dedicated efforts and extraordinary discursive and organizational breakthroughs.

Confederate-authored texts indicate women's primary motivation in the construction of gunboats was to escape what an 1863 session of Confederate Congress called "cruel outrages and that dishonor which is infinitely worse than death": rape (*Hearts at Home* 25). While I could empathize with these women's fears, I was also simultaneously reading in African-American women's antebellum and wartime accounts, and was only too familiar with the enormous amounts of sexual brutality that the slavery system promoted and supported each day. It was at these points that recovery became most difficult, and I developed a resentful attitude toward recovering these overtly racist voices from the past.

This was when Rohan's suggestions about visiting the physical spaces that your subject inhabited became so vital. Rohan correctly suggests that "sharing the physical context of a subject by visiting the places where a subject lived and worked allows researchers to strengthen a bond with the subject" (233). In an effort to overcome personal anger or disappointment with the primary subjects of my recovery efforts, white, upper-middle class women in the Confederate South, I visited the White House of the Confederacy, historic Tredegar Ironworks, and the site of the Broad Street Methodist Church where the Ladies' Defence Association regularly met. Surprisingly, the discovery I made there that most closely made me empathize and connect with my subjects was one of physical proximity, and, though I never could agree with their loyalties and ultimate goals, I could appreciate some of the sentiments that produced them. I walked from the site of the Broad Street Methodist Church to the site of Tredegar on the James River, and was

surprised to find that the walk was less than a mile. I encountered a researcher at the Museum of the Confederacy whose work in the field of digital humanities centered around reconstructing the landscape of wartime Richmond based on existing maps. He assured me that the women who lived around the areas of the church would have had a direct view of the James River, which flowed directly through the heart of the hugely vulnerable city. I had known that the obsession with building gunboats that grasped coastal Confederate cities in the spring of 1862 was due to the acute realization that harbor cities were desperately vulnerable to attacks from the much larger and well-equipped Union Navy. However, I wrongly believed that women in these coastal towns had been moved further inland, the way many women were evacuated as the front lines moved further and further South in the last years of the war.

It was then that I realized that women in coastal cities, from all walks of life, lived, for the large majority of the war, beside their own different, but no less dangerous, kind of front line. In May of 1861, Emmie Holmes explains just how close she is to Charleston harbor and its meager fortifications when she says, "The celebrated Floating Battery is lying in front of my window at Wappon Creek." She even adds a criticism of Confederate naval strategy, stating, "I think it had better be sent in pursuit of the Niagara."⁴ This proximity, in combination with Confederate propaganda concerning the brutalities of the invading Union Army, must have contributed to the sheer "mania for constructing gunboats" that seized women of almost entirely undefended coastal cities (Sterkyx 102). As will be discussed at another point in this thesis, a female slave in Alabama is recorded among the list of those who donated money to construct a gunboat for the defense of the coast of Mobile. Such a contribution does capture the idea that

⁴ Emmie Holmes to Lizzie Greene, May 19, 1860

varied classes of women who lived within a stone's throw of the coast were convinced that gunboat construction was their only hope of protecting themselves.

Primary evidence for this material interest in self-protection can be seen in the phrase "our coast" that is repeated in minute books, resolutions, letters, and newspaper advertisements. Firebrands say much about how selflessly the women of Ladies' Gunboat Societies behave in striving to build Confederate gunboats. In accordance with men's contemporary descriptions of these remarkable women's behaviors, their efforts are a product of their unblemished patriotism to bring the Southern Cause to victory. Yet that phrase, "our coast," points to wholly different motives. The women of Charleston wanted a gunboat for the purposes of defending Charleston's harbor, women in Savannah proclaimed that their *Georgia* would dutifully protect their inlets, and the ladies of Richmond resolved that their Virginia would defend from the Union Navy invading by way of their own beloved James' River. Women rarely, if ever, wrote discourse about any hopes they had for distant or offensive exploits for their vessels.

As William Still explains in his book *Confederate Shipbuilding*, "The Confederate Navy made no serious effort to challenge Union naval superiority at sea. Its primary objectives were simply to prevent the capture of key points within the Confederacy and to hold or re-open the major ports to foreign commerce" (xi). The women of Gunboat Societies all speak of *their* ship, being constructed to protect *their* coasts, and safeguard *their* own lives. Indeed, each of the Ladies' Gunboats was constructed and met her ultimate end in the city she was intended to protect.⁵ Thus, while the larger hopes and beliefs of many of the women of the Confederacy are utterly indefensible, a trip to the physical location of these coast lines that the women called

⁵ The *Virginia II* was built and later burned in Richmond, the *Palmetto State* constructed and would be scuttled at Charleston, and the *Georgia* was made and eventually destroyed protecting Savannah (Konstam). Smaller societies that sprang up in towns all over the South nearly always contributed their funds to the Society of the port city nearest them, the city that they had the largest personal stake in protecting from Union invasion.

home would help me understand how they viewed their contribution of funds for weaponry as an imperative. This understanding would subsequently help me proceed in recovering and contextualizing their discourses in a way "that was fair to their historical circumstances" (239).

The challenge of recovering agents whose actions and motivations aren't always in accordance with one's own is only one challenge of recovery in this thesis project. Attempting to apply feminist historiographical principles at a time when those principles are under debate and in flux is another challenge I faced as a researcher. A feminist historiographer in the field of rhetoric faces an additional and, at times, daunting challenge: finding nineteenth century rhetorical texts authored by women that have been preserved. The scarcity of such texts reflects the longstanding historiographical tradition of "privileging spaces where men tended to perform, such as the presidential debating platform, the pulpit, law court, or public lecture hall, but not the spaces where women performed rhetoric, such as the parlor or classroom." In breaking with this tradition, feminist historiographers began a methodological sea-change so as to "reinvent rhetorical methodologies in order to research non-traditional subjects" (Jack 287).

However, as many researchers in the field soon found, non-traditional rhetorical texts authored by women had not been valued as traditional rhetorical texts, and thus, had not been preserved. Feminist historiographers' job of recovery became as physical as it was ideological as researchers returned to the archives with a new eye toward rhetoric as process (like club formation), rather than product (Jensen 102). Examining process-related rhetoric, Robin Jensen claims that such an emphasis "is particularly helpful in illuminating how traditionally marginalized groups such as women and minorities created themselves as speaking subjects at different points in history" despite the fact that such groups had very few "opportunities to give great speeches or to publish influential writings" (Jensen 102). As feminist historiographer

Andrea Lunsford has explained, "the realm of rhetoric has been almost exclusively male not because women were not practicing rhetoric--the arts of language are after all at the source of human communication--but because the tradition has never recognized the forms, strategies, and goals used by many women as 'rhetorical'" ("On Reclaiming Rhetorica" 6). This thesis attempts to survey a wide range of such "forms, strategies, and goals" in rhetorical texts produced by or in concert with Ladies' Gunboat Societies.

In the vein of Nan Johnson, this thesis places a historiographic focus on rhetoric due to the idea that rhetoric is "a revealing cultural site where tensions and priorities are played out" and an "institution of such remarkable force that profound bargains about cultural power are constantly being struck in its name." Johnson categorizes the cultural realm of women's rhetorical activity in the nineteenth century as "parlor-rhetorics," and many texts discussed in this thesis fall into the parlor-rhetoric category, including private epistles and minute books produced by the Ladies' Gunboat Societies. However, these Societies also authored texts that expanded their discursive realm outside of the parlor. These texts included newspaper advertisements for fund subscriptions and letters to the editor. Such discourse provided women from all over the South with specific directives on how they could aid the war effort that was raging on the front lines. Despite the never-ending stream of praise for Confederate women's great feats, it seemed to Confederate women that their male counterparts, suddenly absent from the heads of households and women's lives in general, did not provide them with close guidance as to what, exactly, would be expected of them during wartime. Tasked with discovering useful ways to contribute to the war effort, women relied on their own observations and the encouragement and guidance of organizations such as the Ladies Gunboat Societies in discerning those activities that would give the best expression to their love of country and desperation to aid their fathers,

brothers, husbands, and friends. Very early in the war, it would become apparent that these activities sometimes complicated or overtly challenged those roles that had been prescribed as appropriate for antebellum Southern women.

The Women of the South Wage Total War

In *Civil Wars: Women and the Crisis of Southern Nationalism*, George Rable argues that, as the struggle called upon women to make more extreme sacrifices of their loved ones and material comfort, Confederate women's discourse reflected a narrative of doubt and insecurity concerning the abilities of the Confederacy to protect them from advancing Union troops. By 1864, Rable chronicles how many women were inundating commanding officers with pleas to transfer loved ones from the front or dismiss them from duty. Else, especially in the case of more desperate women of the yeoman class, they began explicitly encouraging their men to desert (89). However, although Rable recognizes the role of women's discourse in the deterioration of Confederate morale, he fails to acknowledge the influence of women's discourses of Southern Nationalism in the halcyon days of the Confederacy. An analysis of discourses of women belonging to Ladies' Aid Societies from the spring of 1862 to the winter of 1863 reveals an influential network of women who used a newly discovered public agency to materially advance the Confederate war effort. The discourse of women who participated in Ladies' Gunboat Societies provides an especially fascinating site for analysis, as these Confederate women created public discourse in a category quite different from those usual benevolent spheres deemed appropriate for women. Though Rable concludes that forming such aid societies and "attending public meetings...kept women on the fringes of politics, where they could do little more than applaud and sustain decisions made by men," I argue that, at least in the case of

Gunboat Societies, women assumed a materially significant discursive role in the formerly prohibited category of military development.

In *The Civil War as a Crisis in Gender*, Lee Anne Whites argues that, early in the war, Confederate women's roles were forever altered by a distinctive expansion of domestic duties into the public sphere. Suddenly, traditional duties like sewing, care giving, and cooking were done on a massive scale to support not merely a family, but the entirety of the Confederate army. The great feat of mobilization required not only an extension of domestic tasks into the public arena but also "directing previously privatized economic resources of the household" in an effort to "establish control over the sources of funds and raw materials necessary to support their work" (56). Whites's discussion of how fundraising efforts inherent in organizing the home front offered Confederate women the opportunity to become philanthropic agents in the public sphere during wartime reveals how traditional tasks were used to expand women's possibilities for interaction with various other women's groups. Whites solely addresses fundraising efforts in the context of those domestic duties that underwent externalization and expanded organization during wartime.

Yet, in the case of women's groups like Ladies' Gunboat Societies (also known as Ladies' Defence Associations), women did not only transform those domestic duties they had been performing on a smaller scale in the antebellum South, but also undertook a task that was entirely new: directly facilitating the construction of war vessels for the protection of their new nation's coasts. Although Whites's discussion of Confederate women's movement into the public sphere of the mobilized home front does not include an explicit treatment of the resulting expansion of women's discursive possibilities, Ladies' Aid Societies like the numerous Ladies'

Gunboat Societies that appeared in the spring of 1862 offered Confederate women new rhetorical possibilities, allowing them a voice in the public arena that they hadn't had before the war.

Dawning the Mantle of Republican Motherhood

Although women's efforts to care for the sick and wounded are well-chronicled in several works, this material contribution did not require women to step out of their traditional role as a caregiver and provided an opportunity for Confederate women to act both patriotically and in accordance with the expectations of their gender. However, women's discursive activities in Gunboat Societies offered them a unique opportunity: a very public philanthropy project, chaired, directed and executed by women, that was responsible for building physical weapons of war. Lisa Shaver captures the importance of women's charitable works in creating new and valuable rhetorical possibilities outside of the traditional domestic sphere in her "Stepping outside the 'Ladies' Department': Women's Expanding Rhetorical Boundaries." Shaver argues that charitable "religious activities enabled women to emerge from the domestic sphere and to engage in social activism that contravened traditional gender norms" (49). I believe that the medium of philanthropy, through which the women of Shaver's piece "step outside" traditional gender roles and assume more public roles as social agents, was also a major factor in the formation of Ladies' Gunboat Societies. Unlike the charitable Christian women whose "efforts were pursued under a religious mantle," I argue that Confederate women belonging to Gunboat Societies were able to expand their acceptable rhetorical range of possibilities to include a new discursive role as the "benefactor and public spokesperson" of a traditionally masculine cause under the mantle of patriotism (Shaver 49,50).

Of course, this patriotic trope was implemented alongside appropriate representations of maternal and filial devotion. Nan Johnson recognizes the significance of these representations in

her *Gender and Rhetorical Space in American Life*, discussing ways in which postbellum women were able to appropriate their traditional roles as mothers, sisters, and wives and, in so doing, were "presenting themselves at the apex of their social significance" (26). The women of Ladies' Gunboat Societies were able to combine these "mantles" to form an identity of Republican Motherhood that cast them "as the nurturers of the new, godly, and moral Confederate Nation" (Rubin 53). Dawning the appropriate "mantle" of Republican Motherhood, Confederate women in Gunboat Societies expanded their discursive possibilities to include managing associations responsible for facilitating the development of military weapons and acting as social agents at fundraising events and ceremonies.⁶ Ladies' Gunboat Societies used Southern newspapers as a forum for discussing the immediate importance of their goals in terms of necessary patriotic sacrifice, preservation of the domestic sphere, and familial love, thereby unifying women's efforts from varying classes and regions across the Confederacy toward a shared goal.

Confederate Women's Class Distinctions

The Ladies' Defence Association of Richmond sought the advice of naval experts as to the best course to take in constructing a gunboat. Rather than overseeing the activities of the women's group, high ranking officers like "Capt. Maury would give his views to the Ladies what would be the best course in reference to building the gunboat".⁷ Powerful men such as Maury (including the Secretary of the Navy and President Jefferson Davis himself) collaborated with the Gunboat Society, offering expert knowledge to help the directresses make up their minds as to how they could best go about collecting funds and raw materials necessary for their endeavor. However, the opportunity to fraternize with the Confederacy's elite political and military figures over the concerns of the Ladies' Defence Associations was a privilege extended to these women

⁶ Such events included an enormous amount of fairs, auctions, bazaars, hot suppers, musical performances, and the sometimes controversial tableaux vivants.

⁷ Minute Book of the Ladies' Defence Association of Richmond, April 3, 1862

largely because they belonged to an elite class. Rable's assertion that, "although women of modest means made notable contributions to wartime benevolence, aristocratic women still dominated the large public events," is certainly consistent with the class divisions inherent in Ladies' Gunboat Societies (141).

Discursive forays into those formerly prohibited public spheres remained largely limited to the elite women of urban coastal towns. For instance, after the baptism of the contentiously named *Palmetto State*, the *Charleston Mercury* reported:

A few minutes before noon - the hour appointed for the ceremony - the orator, Col. RICHARD YEADON... arrived on board the steamer, where he was received by Capt. D. N. INGRAHAM. The upper deck of the gunboat was already occupied by quite a number of privileged persons, among whom were several ladies, who were to have a share in the performance of the ceremony, Rev. Dr. GADSDEN, Rev. Dr. SMYTH, Capt. RUTLEDGE, C.S.N., and several officers of the Army and Navy.⁸

In the introduction of *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War*, Drew Gilpin Faust revisits the challenges of recovering Confederate women's wartime discourses and argues for the benefits of analyzing that "especially articulate and introspective group of women: those of the privileged and educated slave owning class of the Confederate South" (5). Indeed, although women's Gunboat Societies would come to involve women from various regions and classes (largely due to the groups' creation of a unified discourse through newspaper correspondence), the richest evidence of the expansion of women's rhetorical possibilities through the Ladies' Gunboat Societies comes from the writings of the largest and

⁸ CM, October, 13, 1862

most elite gathering of this sort, comprised of elite slaveholding women in Richmond. In the Confederacy's bustling capital, elite women did not have to face challenges like traveling large distances in order to gather. However, I think it important to note that the women whose discourse is recovered in this thesis went about "building Confederate weapons" in far different ways than women of lower classes. While elite women in Gunboat Societies wrote letters for subscription, organized bazaars and concerts, and broke high price champagne on the prows of the ships they helped build, another class of women was working to build Confederate weapons in a starkly different and more direct way.

In the spring of 1863, the *Richmond Examiner* reported a severe explosion "at the Confederate States Laboratory Works on Brown's Island, across the James River and the killing and maiming of between fifty and sixty human beings, mostly females and employees at the works."⁹ The names of the females that died (31) and those who were wounded (25) are published below the announcement, and outnumber the killed and wounded men 8:1. In a letter home, Jacob Smith writes of the tragedy, revealing an even sadder aspect of the explosion. He explains, "The last disaster took place at the Cartridge factory The powder it is supposed by accident of through carelessness caught [fire] killing thirty women and little girls who were engaged in making cartridges."¹⁰ Another article in the *Richmond Examiner* describes the terrible scene in more detail, explaining that many of the women were blinded from the blast or burned beyond recognition. The article reads, "Mothers rushed wildly about, throwing themselves upon the corpses of the dead, and the [illegible] of the wounded trying to recognize in the disfigured features the lineaments of a daughter and calling out their names."¹¹ Although this thesis does not explicitly treat the discourse of women engaged in the physical manufacture of Confederate

⁹ *Richmond Daily Examiner*, March 16, 1863

¹⁰ Jacob Smith to G.W. Hutchinson, March 14, 1863

¹¹ *Richmond Daily Examiner*, March 14, 1863

weapons (indeed, the lack of discourse from such a group would make such a project an impossibility), it does strive to recover the experiences of other Confederate women across varied classes that made contributions to Confederate defenses in a variety of ways.

Ladies' Gunboat Society Formation and Discourse

As early as the winter of 1861, women in New Orleans had begun to express dissatisfaction with the state of the Confederate Navy and concern that a lack in Confederate vessels made their cities vulnerable to attacks and invasion from the better equipped Federal Navy (Coski 82). By the spring of 1862, arguments for the development of more ironclad vessels that might enjoy success similar to that of the famous *Virginia* became popular in large coastal cities like Richmond, Charleston, and Savannah.¹²

The women of these cities expressed a particularly keen interest in the speedy formation of the Confederate fleet. This was due partly to the fact that, like many women across the Confederacy, these women felt vulnerable after most of the able-bodied men had left for the war (Rable 112). Beyond more practical motives of self-preservation, Confederate women inhabiting coastal towns were, like many other Confederate citizens, enamored with the idea of gunboats as the vessels that would deliver them from Federal usurpers and help to mark their validity as a new, permanent nation ("The Ladies' Defence Association--Progress and Prospects").¹³ The Confederate public, in part due to misleading reports from various newspapers, believed that ironclads in particular would be instrumental in breaking the crippling blockade of Charleston (Still 84).¹⁴ A writer for the *Mobile Tribune* discussed the vital place that gunboats would inhabit in the future identity of the Confederacy, explaining that "these boats are not for temporary

¹² *Charleston Mercury*, (hereafter cited as *CM*) March 20, 1862.; *Augusta Chronicle and Sentinel*, (hereafter cited as *ACS*) April 3, 1862; *Richmond Dispatch*, (hereafter cited as *RD*) April 21, 1862.

¹³ *Richmond Dispatch*, April 12, 1862.

¹⁴ *Macon Daily Telegraph*, March 20, 1862

service...When we shall have achieved our independence they will be a part of the necessary flotilla of the Confederate States. We shall have to maintain an efficient navy, though it may be small ; and these gunboats are just the very thing we need" ("More Gunboats").¹⁵ The elite women of Richmond took a particularly avid interest in the construction of a ladies' gunboat and by March 27, 1862, "The Ladies of Richmond and visitors were called together for the purpose of forming a Society for the Defence of the City and other places."¹⁶ Their efforts would ultimately culminate in the construction of the *Virginia II*, the plan and a modern rendering of which can be seen in Figures 1 and 2.

Shaver discusses the formation, organization, and successful pursuit of philanthropic goals of women's organizations as valuable and significant rhetorical activities in and of themselves. Shaver says that philanthropic women's groups "acquired skills in grassroots organization, compiling minutes, submitting reports, keeping financial accounts, and fundraising" (63). A letter written by a Mrs. N. McFarland to Mrs. Clopton on March 26, 1862 reveals that public participation as an officer in these organizations likely required a sizeable commitment in regards to time and effort. Mrs. McFarland does not find that she has the time to dedicate to help publicly run the Association. She writes, "I feel myself obliged to decline the office of Treasurer in your Society. I am afraid I would not be able to do justice to it, and Mr. McFarlands numerous engagements make me unwilling to devolve it upon him. My heart is in the cause, and I will gladly further it in any way that I can privately. With best wishes for the success for your scheme, believe me."¹⁷

¹⁵ ACS, March 12, 1862

¹⁶ The Minute Book of The Ladies' Defence Association of Richmond, VA.

¹⁷ N. McFarland to Maria Clopton, March 26, 1862

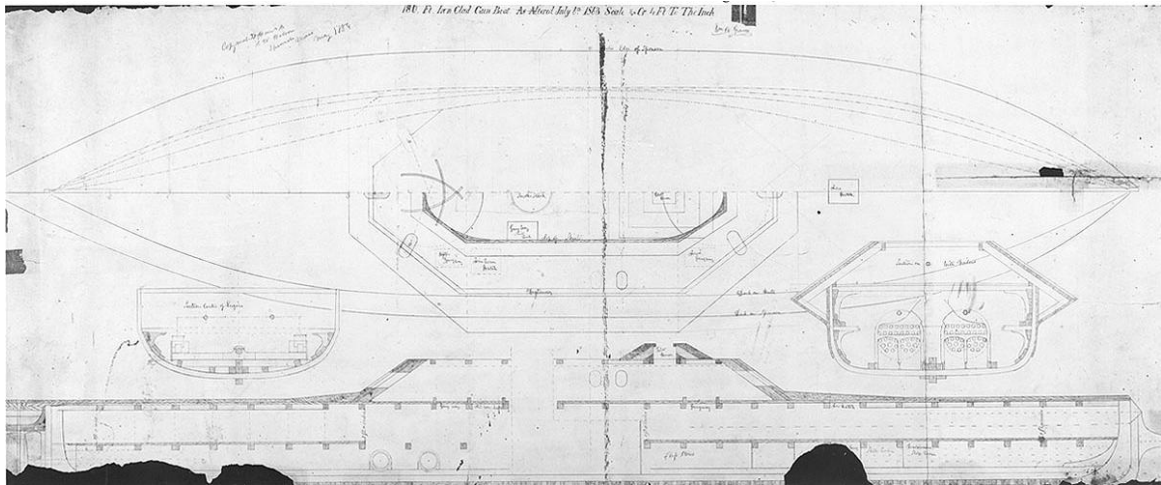


Figure 1. Plans for the C.S.S. Virginia II. Sketch by William A. Graves, 1863.

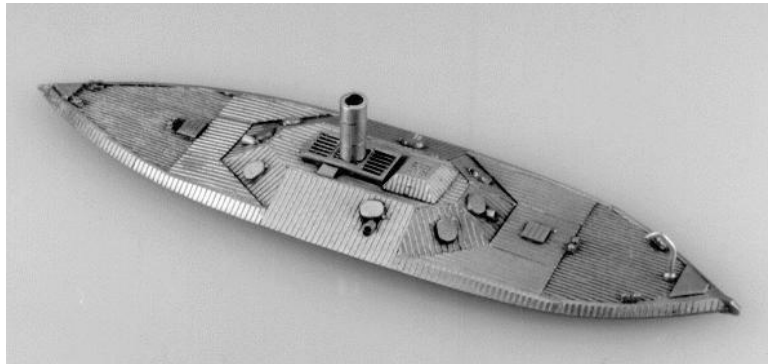


Figure 2. Pewter miniature of the C.S.S. Virginia II. Photo by T.R. Barrett.

The minute book of the Ladies' Defence Association of Richmond and the success of their fundraising efforts reveals a high level of organizational sophistication demonstrated through the appointment of women in charge of distinct wards for fund collection. The Ladies' Defence Association of Richmond also reflected an expansion into new discursive practices by independently drafting the society's Constitution, the resolutions of which included an eloquent description of the society's intentions and exigence:

...we will give such ornaments of gold, and articles of silver, as are our private personal property. For should it be our sad fate to become slaves, ornaments would ill become our state of bondage; while if God in his infinite mercy shall crown our efforts with success, we will be content to wear the laurel leaves of victory, and point our children to our civil and religious liberty so gloriously achieved and say "These be thy jewels."

Mrs. Vernon, the secretary of this Ladies' Defence Association, maintained a minute book detailing meetings, resolutions, and the ultimate goal of the Association: the construction of a gunboat that could protect the harbors and inlets of the capitol of the Confederacy. The resolutions of war time women's organizations in the South were often decided upon collectively, voted on by members, and recorded in the minute books of groups. The resolutions of these organizations are fascinating elements of discourse that reveal both how these women felt about their groups as well as how they wanted to present those groups to the public. One such set of resolutions was written by the Ladies of Mobile, a women's wartime aid organization that seems to be a contingent organization of the *Society of Loyal Confederates* (most likely a men's group). The document reveals how other Confederate women's groups defined themselves

through discourse in the wake of war. This particular set of resolutions appears to be published, although no date or published information is included. However, these resolutions are remarkable in that they are quite bold for a Confederate women's group. The fourth states that the Ladies of Mobile will not socially recognize a soldier neglecting his duty, a loafer reluctant to return to service, or an able-bodied man who has refused to enlist because he is "of leprous soul--and as unworthy of the respect of a woman, whom they have not the manhood to defend." However, as can be seen in Figure 3, the Ladies of Mobile, much like Ladies' Gunboat Societies, are careful to represent themselves as in line with gender expectations by placing their stern and public resolutions under the mantle of Republican Motherhood. Indeed, the last resolution firmly states, "let the world know that Southern women can dare the responsibilities of the hour, as inheriting the blood and spirit of those who suffered in Old Virginia and the Carolinas in the war of 1776."

The Ladies' Defence Association's resolutions carry the same poetic language and appropriate mantles, although they remained unpublished. The minute book reveals the complex, democratic way in which the representative identity of the group was discursively constructed. In an entry on March 27, 1862, Mrs. McCord Vernon, the society's corresponding secretary, records that "the Constitution of the Society was then read and on each article a vote was taken, and a motion was adopted subject to the action of the next regular meeting." The Constitution laid out how many officers, and term durations that women could serve. We know that a close personal bond likewise existed between the members.¹⁸ Following Mrs. Vernon's death in May

¹⁸ Despite my focus on business and political correspondence among the women of Ladies' Gunboat Societies, many personal letters were also recovered through my research. Such intimate correspondence mixed with business matters further argues for the convoluted nature of categorizing epistles based on public or private content.

of 1862 distant Gunboat Society chapters sends their condolences.¹⁹ In addition, the Ladies' Defence Association papers include a small envelope that is marked "Mrs. Clopton, President." Inside is a lock of curled brunette hair. Although Mrs. Clopton received countless letters filled with gratitude from women whose sons, fathers, or brothers were cared for in one of the hospitals that she founded and served in, the fact that her title of President appears on this certain envelope marks it as an affectionate gesture from one of the Society's fellow members.

The minute book, the opening of which can be seen in Figure 4, also reveals complex levels of organization and the creation of various forms of collaborative discourse between members of the Association and high ranking officers of the Confederate Navy (and even President Davis himself). From its very beginnings, Mrs. Vernon, reveals how the Gunboat society showed significantly more autonomy than those groups that operated in more domestic categories when she reports that, at the start of the Association first official meeting, Mrs. Maria Clopton was called to the Chair and subsequently opened the meeting with prayer. Volunteer associations like sewing or nursing societies were most often opened and led in prayer by a male superintendent or minister (Whites 56). The Ladies' Defence Association at Richmond was remarkably independent of male influence and, though males were not prohibited from attending meetings and were frequently involved in the facilitation of the ship's construction, the society's directors were comprised entirely of women and women took an active role in nearly every stage of the ship's production.

¹⁹ In her diary, Mary Chesnut proclaims that Mrs. McCord Vernon, a proslavery journalist, was "more Confederate than the Confederation (361). As can be seen by a remembrance pictured in Figure #, Mrs. Vernon was beloved as a Confederate activist and writer throughout the South.

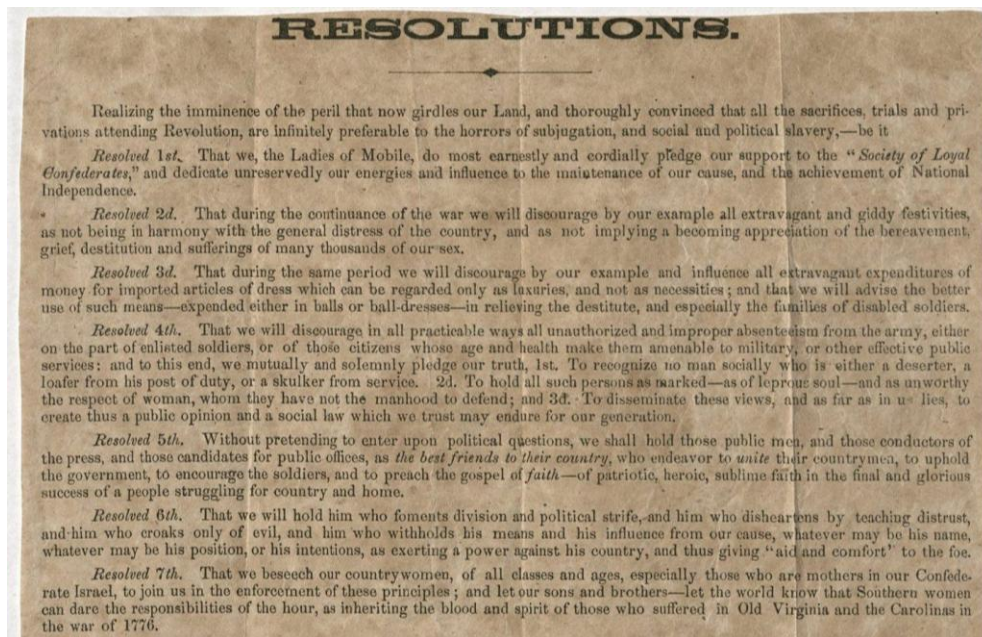


Figure 3. Resolutions of the Ladies of Mobile.

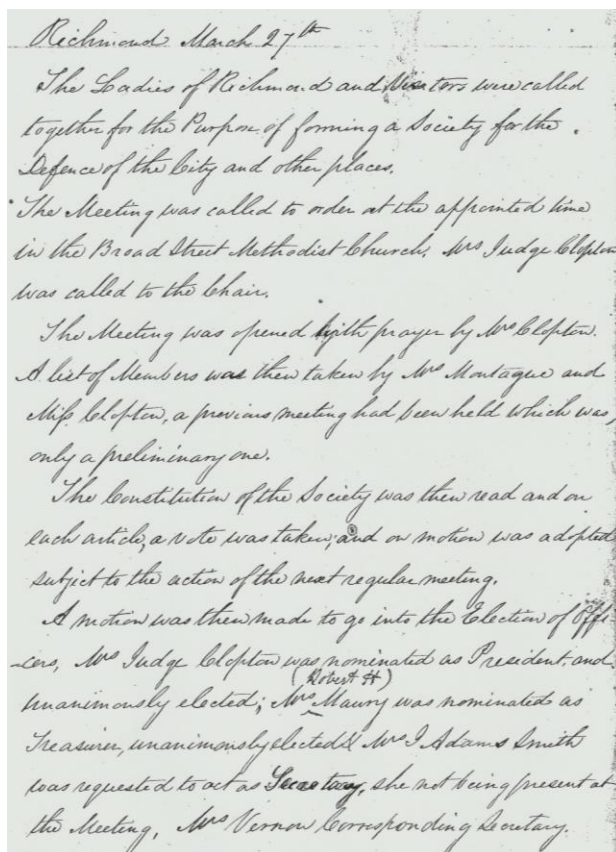


Figure 4. The first page of the Minute Book of the Ladies' Defence Association of Richmond, VA.



Figure 5. A remembrance of Mrs. McCord Vernon printed in the *Macon Daily Telegraph*, May 19, 1862

These Confederate women wished to mark the gunboats that they had had such a large role in manufacturing as truly their own. The Ladies' Defence Association of Richmond was resolved "that the work and contributions [toward a gunboat] may be more peculiarly ours as women" and demonstrated a real desire to be recognized for and in partial control of their contributions to Confederate weaponry. The Ladies Defence Association Minute Book reports that Captain Maury, an unofficial mentor of the women's group, "advised that a committee be appointed to have an interview with the President [Davis] and see if he couldn't let the Society have the first Gunboat that was built in the city under the direction of the Confederate government, the members promising to raise the funds." The *Charleston Mercury* reported that "Mrs. McCord Vernon has established a 'National Defence Association Bazaar' in the gunboat interest. The ladies want to name their gunboat, and make Catesby Jones its captain," although the correspondent states that "the President says they shant do it" ("Richmond News and Gossip").²⁰ Women of this elite class did demonstrate a direct involvement with military concerns, perhaps the most masculine realm of all, through their desire to name their own ships and, more importantly, suggest the officers who might man them.

A woman named Lucy Mayo from Powhatan County, Virginia, wrote to Mrs. Clopton in the summer of 1863 to make a request that the Society select an officer of her acquaintance to serve on their newly constructed gunboat. She writes, "Hearing that the Ladies Gunboat would soon be completed, and supposing they will have the privilege of choosing its Commander as the Ladies of other places have always done, I would beg leave to earnestly recommend to your notice, and that of the Directors, Commander [Charles F.] Spotswood, of the Ladies Gunboat, Georgia." Lucy explains that because Spotswood "is a Virginian, of the highest character as a

²⁰ *CM*, April 14, 1862

gentleman, and stands very high, as naval officer, having been engaged for over 25 years" he is fit for the commission.²¹ Thus, women's public discourse over those gunboats that they considered to be their own included a public debate over naming the vessels as well as the selection of which ships they would choose to construct and who might command them once they were built. A letter written in March of 1863 by Confederate Officer David M. Kenzer indicates that women of Ladies' Gunboat Societies did choose the men who would command their vessels. Kenzer writes Mrs. Clopton, "I beg most respectfully to tender to you, as Chairman of the Ladies Gunboat Association the sincere thanks of the men now stationed on this [Drewery's] Bluff for the high opinion entertained by your Society of them by wishing us to man your Boat the Lady Davis." All of this discourse reflected an unprecedented expansion of women's discourse into matters of military and public policy.²²

However, women were sure to explore these new rhetorical possibilities while simultaneously reflecting the acceptable feminine expressions of Republican Motherhood. The Ladies Defence Association only resolves "to build a gunboat for the defence of James' River" after they have made the resolution "That we, as the weaker sex, being unable actively to join in the defence of our country, will encourage the hearts, and strengthen, the hands of our husbands, brothers, fathers and friends by all means within our power." In appropriating this mantle of filial and maternal love with sacrificial patriotism, the women perform in "the noble-maid and mother-of-the nation roles" and were only exerting influence outside of their acceptable domestic sphere "from the moral authority of their roles as wives and mothers" (Johnson 97).²³

²¹ Lucy Mayo to Maria Clopton, May 12, 1862

²² David M. Kenzer to Maria Clopton, March 31, 1863

²³ Although here Johnson is speaking of neither Southern women nor women who lived during the antebellum or wartime periods, her assessment of how women used tropes of maternity and patriotism to extend rhetorical influence into otherwise prohibited public spheres (in *Gender and Rhetorical Space in American Life*) is extremely applicable to Ladies' Gunboat Societies' uses of republican motherhood to expand their rhetorical possibilities.

This debate concerning desire for public recognition can be seen in the discourse surrounding the naming of the *Palmetto State*. Naming vessels according to those women's groups who had raised funds for their construction marked an entirely new opportunity for women's discourse in a matter of public and military policy. An entry in Mary Chesnut's diary for April 23, 1862 recalls that "We are fighting a battle over the new gunboat's [the *Palmetto State*'s] name. Dr. Gibbes, Mrs. Picken's Knight Errant wants to call it *Lucy Holcombe* for her... but if we are to have a female name I say let it be: '*She Devil*' for it is the devil's own work it is built to do." Women across the Confederacy showed remarkable unity in the discourse surrounding the naming of the newly baptized *Palmetto State*, considering the vessel as much their own as did the ladies of that state. One such woman, who refers to herself by the name of "Nemesis," appealed to her own sensibilities as a Carolinian and a woman when she wrote to the editor of the *Charleston Mercury* and informed him that "No true Carolinian" would have decided on the name *Palmetto State* and though:

it is a very good name for a boat, it is no name for *ours*. I, therefore, propose that we resign [*MS. blotted*]avor of the "Gentleman's Gunboat" and choose something more *significant* and *striking*. I do not mean a pun, but only that, as the gentlemen can, with *hard blows*, give *tangible* proof of their spirit, the women may be allowed the use of their only weapon, by giving to their boat a name that will strike terror into their enemies.

"Nemesis" then offers her own pseudonym as a most fitting title for the ladies' own gunboat as it was the name of the Roman goddess of vengeance whose job it was to "defend the relics and the memory of the dead from insult" ("What Shall Be the Name of the Ladies' Gunboat?").²⁴

²⁴ *CM*, March 15, 1862

"Nemesis" and other women across the region took advantage of their involvement in such a materially significant public philanthropy project, extending their discursive possibilities as critics and commentators on matters that directly affected the ships they funded. "Nemesis," ends her letter with by stating that the editor will find "enclosed (\$10) to our gunboat, whatever the name may be." Such a statement enhances the woman's ethos as a contributing member of the Gunboat Society whose material contribution qualifies her to speak on such matters. In this case, the editor responds in accordance with the Confederate woman's claims, saying that "it is only just that those that pay for the gunboat should christen it. The name is a matter for the exclusive consideration of the ladies."

However, as can be seen by continued analysis of newspaper discussions of Ladies' Gunboat Society efforts, newspapers oftentimes facilitated or produced direct criticism of the women of Gunboat Societies for their involvement in fundraising tactics or allocations of funds that they or male readers found to be questionable. Despite this intermittent criticism, Ladies' Gunboat Societies expanded their fundraising discourses into the public arena via the Southern press by celebrating their own triumphs, publicly recognizing those who gave generously to their cause, and criticizing those who were reluctant to realize the immediate value inherent in the development of a Confederate Navy. Collaboration between the Ladies' Association and the newspapers will be treated at length in the final chapter of this thesis.

CHAPTER II: EPISTOLARY RHETORIC

"Old letters, the words are simple, but magic in their influence and meaning."

Emmie Holmes to Lizzie Greene, December 19, 1861

Epistolary Manuals and Confederate Women's Letter Writing

In her *Gender and Rhetorical Space in American Life*, Nan Johnson reviews several postbellum manuals on the merits and execution of letter writing. Although focusing primarily on postbellum letter-writing literature, Johnson reveals several key commonplaces about women's nineteenth century epistolary practices and the role that gender roles played in this writing. She explains how one such manual, *The Universal Self Instructor*, "constructs letter writing as an indispensable form of middle-class literacy and as a performance of gendered decorum. This fusion of rhetorical literacy and gender identity is one of the distinguishing ideological features of letter-writing literature before and after the Civil War" (67). Johnson names epistolary practices as one of the parlor rhetorics practiced in nineteenth century homes by women throughout America.

Letters are an overlooked site of rhetorical activity, but serve as a complex field for inquiry in and of themselves. Johnson reveals how conflated the notions of American women's letter writing tradition and the domestic sphere truly were, arguing that, like other types of parlor-rhetorics, feminine epistolary training was to be learned in the home, a tradition that produced:

letter writing guides [that] were popular books for the middle class reader in the decades before and after the Civil War...In making the argument for the importance of women learning to write effective letters, nineteenth-century letter writing guides stress not only the everyday function of correspondence in

maintaining social relations and a well-run home, but also the inseparable relationship between belletristic manners and what it meant in nineteenth-century American culture to act like a lady (62).

Thus, Johnson stresses that most nineteenth century letter writing literature limited a woman's epistolary possibilities, instructing her to limit her discourse to domestic and social concerns. Sarah Klein's article "Me, You, the Wide World: Letters & Women's Activism in Nineteenth Century America" also supports the historical observation that the epistolary form has long been classified as a feminine, private function of the domestic sphere, but observes that "rhetorical scholars have, in the past ten years, started to unpack this mythology in earnest" (3). Klein explains that the debunking of such mythology by feminist reexamination has begun an "ongoing discussion about gender and genre. One of the most intriguing outgrowths of this critical recovery has been the conversation about the epistolary and women's histories" (1). Klein's work builds upon Jean Bethke Elshtain's book, *Public Man, Private Woman: Women in Social and Political Thought*. Elshtain challenges the false dichotomy of the political (public) vs. social (private) as the distinction has been traditionally made along rigid gender lines, especially in regards to those pursuing women's history. She explains that her readers "will quickly discover that the way in which determinations about the public and the private and the role and worth of each is evaluated will gear a thinkers' attitude toward women" (4). Elshtain explains how such perceptions have continued the way in which we have valued rhetorical texts and determined which ones are ultimately deemed worthy of recovery.

Klein argues that women's letters are one channel by which antebellum women could establish their ethos, allowing women rhetors to transform "personal experience into political testament" (Klein 23). Confederate women often established ethos in their own personal

journals, a trend observed first by Kimberly Harrison in her article "Rhetorical Rehearsals: The Construction of Ethos in Confederate Women's Civil War Diaries." Harrison uses one of Nan Johnson's definitions of ethos, a representation of the self which depends on the specific demands of a given rhetorical situation, in order to support her claim that "for most nine-teenth-century Confederate women, effective self-presentation in the context of the Civil War was not an easy task, often requiring them to fashion new self-images in response to war-imposed responsibilities while at the same time avoiding overt challenges to traditional gender roles" (246). Despite similarities between private epistolary writing and journal writing that Confederate women practiced, this thesis will examine the more public aspects of the letter in the way that they relate, not to diaries, but to newspapers, truly exploring the "boundary defying flexibility of the genre" (Klein 5).²⁵ Women's letters, for the purposes of this project, will be examined as an avenue around the constraints of the domestic sphere and its material limitations to that allowed rhetorical participation in political activism; as a vehicle to advocate for themselves and a cause that they believed in, a way to pursue direct publication of newspaper editorials under the protection of a sanctioned, "lady-like" form; as a way to build networks and alliances with other politically-minded women and men; and as a way to disseminate relevant news, persuasive testimonies, and provocative arguments to both allies and to potentially hostile audiences.

In her book *Conversational Rhetoric: The Rise and Fall of a Women's Tradition* Jane Donawerth explores several epistolary manuals widely used by young women just before the Civil War. Donawerth's focus on nineteenth century women's epistolary rhetoric highlights its emphasis on the group over the individual. She explains that "American women emphasize the

²⁵ Mary Augusta Jordan's *Correct Writing and Speaking* contains many interesting parallels between women's epistolary and journal writing.

art of collaboration" over individual performance, an argument that also fits with their emphasis on process-oriented rhetorical skills over product-oriented skills (72). Of particular interest is her attention to how these works functioned in a republican society. She concludes that receiving proper training in epistolary was "a means of achieving class status in republican society: it is a social duty and expresses civility" (64). She explores Eliza Farrar's 1840 epistolary manual *The Youth's Letter-Writer; or, The Epistolary Art* as a particular example of ways that epistolary skills were evaluated in American society. In her antebellum manual, Farrar "theorizes a gendered, domestic rhetoric for women" that is consistent with republican values" (65). However, Ladies' Gunboat Societies' correspondence seems to violate "the stylistic conventions of class-coded behavior" as well as the notion of the women's epistle as strictly "domestic" (60). Still, Donawerth insists that the epistolary genre, though it may be "gendered and domestic" still wielded "powerful influence" (72).

Revisiting the Feminine Private Epistolary Style

David M. Henkin's book *The Postal Age* also challenges efforts to pigeon-hole letters as strictly belonging to the realm of feminine private or masculine public. He writes that although, "as categories of correspondence, business letters and personal letters took discrete forms and marked separate practices...in practice...the line proved blurry" (98). In March of 1862 West & Johnson's Publishing Bookselling and Stationery Establishment wrote to the Ladies Defence Association of Richmond to inform the women that, free of charge, they had provided official stationery for the Association, in order that they might "aid...is such a glorious and patriotic enterprise."²⁶ Although they lacked a physical space for their organization, official stationery for their business epistolary discourse helped to establish the organization's identity, ethos, and

²⁶ West & Johnson's to the National Aid and Defence Association, March 26, 1862

presence. Such business-like characteristics were important in establishing these women's groups as a credible organization dedicated to aiding the Confederate cause. However, as will be discussed later in the thesis, poor newspaper circulation sometimes caused women in Ladies' Gunboat Societies to suffer from an anonymity that limited their subscriptions and fundraising capabilities.

Among those letters pigeon-holed as masculine were those concerning political and military upheaval in the Confederate South. Especially at the most turbulent times in the Civil War, newspaper distribution was compromised, and many Confederates wrote to relatives in the larger Confederate towns, like Richmond, to obtain the most recent military developments. In this way, correspondence became a substitute for newspaper circulation throughout the South and, despite the ideology that women's letters should consist solely of private, social, and domestic concerns, women wrote to one another about the movements of the Confederate military in the same ways that men did.

One collection of letters, the war time correspondence of two teenage girls between the years of 1859 and 1862, demonstrates the large variability of Confederate women's epistolary discourse. Emmie Holmes, a Charlestonian, writes her friend Lizzie Greene of Resaca, Georgia about topics that range from what might be expected--news of engagements, marriages, and descriptions of dresses at parties she has attended--to topics that might have, in theory, been prohibited by gendered epistolary practices at the time. Emmie's letters certainly operate as news vehicles, and seem to be written with the idea of limited circulation in mind. Emmie was well-educated and sometimes worked as a tutor in her home--another demonstration of one of Johnson's parlor-rhetorics. More importantly, however, she lived in one of the largest and most significant cities of the Confederacy: Charleston. Thus, she was able to keep her friend, a

resident of a relatively small and isolated town in Georgia, informed of military, social, and political developments both in her city and across the larger Confederacy.

On January 24, 1860, Emmie, in an effort to surmise just how much external information her friend receives about developments in the war, asks Lizzie, "Do you take the Charleston Mercury or the Courier? The former is our most reliable paper."²⁷ Emmie has the luxury of staying abreast of the latest Confederate developments as the two popular publications are circulated and even publicly posted within walking distance of her own home. Although we lack Lizzie's correspondence to Emmie, and thus cannot know her exact answer to this inquiry, it seems that her access to either of these papers is limited or non-existent, given the fact that Emmie provides lengthy updates about a remarkable number of developments in the war over the course of the next two years. Before the war even begins, she explains in great detail the general feelings in Charleston and on April 27, 1859 very accurately observes, "I expect next May and the presidential election, will be a national crisis, and I should not be surprised if the south succeeds."²⁸

Emmie lived in a city that saw one of the most powerful of the Ladies' Gunboat Societies, an organization responsible for the construction of the formidable *Palmetto State*. (See Figures 6 and 7.) I maintain that Charleston, like Richmond, had an exceptionally active chapter of the Ladies' Gunboat Society for two reasons. The first, of course, was its vulnerable situation on a valuable but very poorly protected harbor. The second reason, however, may have been the fact that Charleston received more news and information, including propaganda about the intended brutalities of invading Union fleets, which would have stirred up public resolve to construct an

²⁷ Emmie Holmes to Lizzie Greene, January 24, 1860

²⁸ Emmie Holmes to Lizzie Greene, April 27, 1859

ironclad gunboat in the vein of the widely celebrated *Virginia*.²⁹ In her January 24, 1860 letter, Emmie shows an astounding knowledge of her city's fortifications and expresses the common feeling that, at this stage in the war, Charleston is missing a valuable part of its defenses. She writes Lizzie, "Rutledge says he does not think a single gun will be fired (and that is the general opinion) on either side, if we only delay a little while - we will have it [war] before the 4th of March, and though many are eager for it, the prudent counsel delay, which gives us time to perfect our fortifications, and probably spare the loss of so many of our best and bravest men." In the May of 1862, just as gunboat mania was in full swing across the Confederacy, Emmie observes, "The new fort in the harbor is rapidly progressing, but I doubt whether it is any defense against the iron monsters to be brought against us. What a fearful revolution in war and science they have wrought?"³⁰ In this observation, Emmie captures the ideas about gunboats that were popular throughout the South. Confederates echoed Emmie's thoughts that wooden gunboats were futile against ironclad vessels, following the defining battle between the *Monitor* and the *Merrimack*. Southerners believed that ironclad gunboats would be essential to a Confederate victory. Some ideas, like the notion that the ironclads could somehow help in lifting Union blockades, were not accurate. Yet, the widespread thoughts voiced by Emmie that forts, port obstructions, and infantry could not do much to repel Union ironclad attacks on coastal towns would prove uncannily accurate.

²⁹ The *Virginia* is, in many historical works as well as throughout this thesis, regularly called by its other widely popular name, the *Merrimack*.

³⁰ Emmie Holmes to Lizzie Greene, May 7, 1862

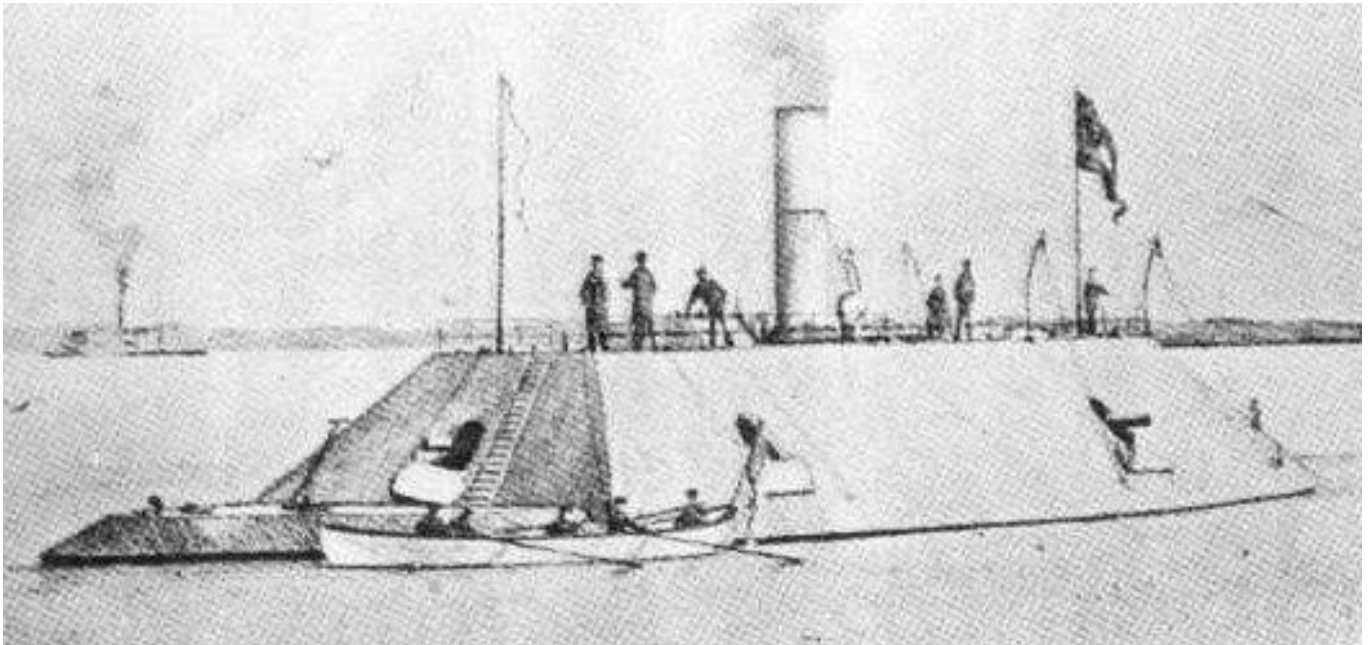


Figure 6. The C.S.S. *Palmetto Sate*. Image by U.S. Naval Historical Center.

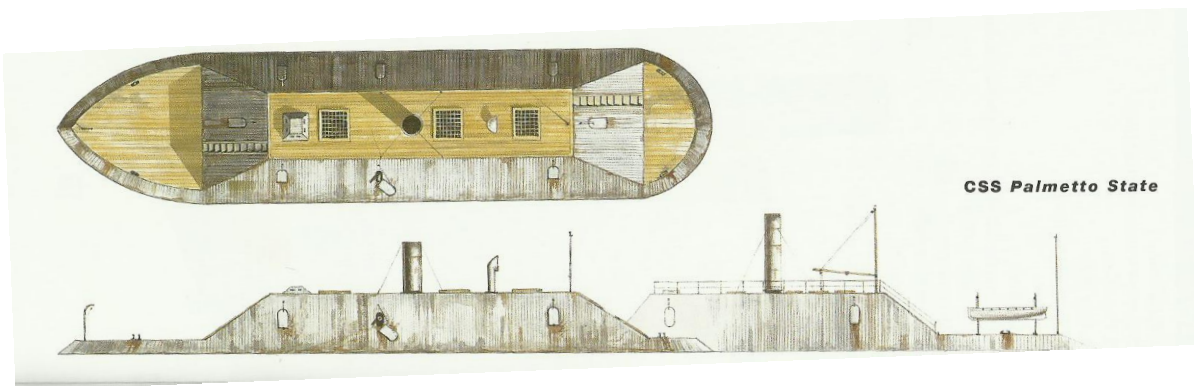


Figure7. C.S.S. *Palmetto State* Cross Section. Illustration by Tony Bryan.

Despite her concern with Charleston's defenses and her knowledge about the value of ironclad gunboats, her correspondence with Lizzie provides no evidence that Emmie actually belonged to Charleston's Ladies' Gunboat Society. When she does briefly discuss the organization, she seems doubtful of its efforts, a stark contrast to the usual paens that appear in official Gunboat Society Correspondence and Publications. In May of 1862, Emmie informs Lizzie that "A fair for the gun-boat fund is going on this week, but I do not think it will be very successful, so many persons are on the wing, others have no heart for such gaiety, others have no escort, as almost all our gentlemen are in the field." Discourse about the failing attempt to construct enough Confederate ironclads in a timely fashion due to waning Confederate spirit is not typically reflected in other texts until well into 1863.

Emmie's spirits tend to sink lower as the war drags on, and the mood of her discourse offers a fascinating contrast to the carefree tone that was often expected of women's letters. At least a portion of each of Emmie's letters fall into the business category, a category which an 1856 article in the Ladies' Repository entitled "A Chapter Upon Letters and Letter Writers, English Woman's Magazine" characterizes as a most unfortunate type of correspondence with which a woman must, on occasion, trouble herself. The author explains that business letters "are to the progress of temporal affairs, what well-wrought iron is for a railway: like rails and sleepers they are needed that things may be kept going; but like the cold, unyielding iron, they have no bright color, no fragrance, no beauty, except what is mechanical" (71). Emmie was apparently tasked with writing many such heavy-hearted letters, as it is clear that Lizzie was not the only friend that pressed Emmie for the very latest news from Charleston. Indeed, when she becomes confined due to a leg injury, she explains the letters from friends across the Confederacy have continued to arrive, but that she has "lost my delight in letter writing, and my letters have been

accumulating, without my having the slightest inclination to answer them." On December 19, 1861, Emmie exclaims that "this is the fifth letter I have written during the last two days to anxious friends."³¹ Like the anxiety Confederate women felt in keeping diaries, lest they be recovered by a raid by Union soldiers, women's letters also contained sensitive information, along with declarations of loyalty that could be dangerous to possess.

Additionally, it was not just an ideological concept of gender propriety that limited Confederate women's epistolary practices during the war. Material, physical circumstances also limited the length and quantity that Confederate women wrote during the course of the war. Toward the end of her correspondence with Lizzie, in the summer of 1862, Emmie writes, "I now have a budget to answer. You must really excuse the bad writing of this, for my ink is so pale that I can scarcely see how or what I have written."³² Indeed, by 1863 many of the letters I recovered for this project were cross-hatched, sometimes in three separate directions and beyond legibility. Such deterioration of the physical means of letter-writing further complicates the recovery of Confederate women's wartime epistolary practices.

Men as Points of Contact for Women's Business Epistolary

Although much of this thesis focuses on discourse written by and for women, there are times when men write on behalf of Confederate Gunboat Society members. It can be entirely counter-productive to feminist historiographic efforts to entirely exclude those male voices that sometimes speak on behalf or in concert with women's. As Jeanne Boydston explains, she is "not unhappy about including males in what we once called 'women's history'...The worlds of females--at their most communal and institutional and at their most intimate, at their most fragile and at their most potent--have included males" (558). In addition to acting as a mouthpiece for

³¹ Emmie Holmes to Lizzie Greene, December 19, 1861

³² Emmie Holmes to Lizzie Greene, May 7, 1862

the organizations, other letters are addressed to an acceptable male point of contact, despite the letter's message quite directly appealing to the women of the Gunboat Societies. For instance, some letters that are archived in the Ladies' Defence Association of Richmond's Papers are addressed to an esquire, a husband of a female Society officer, or a high ranking member of the Confederate Navy. For instance, a letter dated October 20, 1862 names Admiral Buchanan as the high ranking male contact that is speaking on behalf of the Columbus Gunboat Association. In this letter, W.P. Williamson, Chief Engineer, Confederate States Navy, and Jno. L. Porter, Constructor write Secretary of the Navy S.R. Maury concerning the "building of the gunboat by them for the use of the C.S. Navy" and proceed to explain the basic plans for the armament of the proposed ship.³³ Admiral Buchanan continues to serve as the go-between in the business communications with other high-ranking men, a practice that was not uncommon in the mid-nineteenth century South. On October 23, 1862, he responds to Mrs. J.W. Harris, President of the Ladies Gunboat Society of Columbus, Mississippi concerning her inquiries about the specifics of the ladies of Mississippi constructing a gunboat. His reply reads, "I have the honor of forwarding to you the information asked for in your letter of the 7th inst.[anter] relating to the construction of a Gunboat."³⁴ He states that he has also forwarded the reply to the inquiry made on the ladies' behalf that was sent to him by the Honourable Secretary Mallory.

A letter that is signed Allen & Sprague is directly addressed to "Sir" (presumably Mr. J.W. Harris) and is yet another instance where a business-like letter is sent to a man, rather than the women it truly intends to address. In their letter, Allen & Sprague are attempting to draw the Ladies' Gunboat Society of Mississippi's attention to a shotproof vessel in their care, which they claim has been sanctioned by the Confederate Congress and Commander Maury. Despite the

³³ W.P. Williamson and Jno. L. Porter to S.R. Maury, October 20, 1862

³⁴ Admiral Buchanan to J.W. Harris, October 23, 1862

letter being addressed to a "Sir," it is quite clear that Allen & Sprague are making a direct appeal to the ladies' themselves for funds to support the development of the vessel in their care. The letter reads:

This being the condition of our affairs in fact, we trust that the Ladies of your state will be willing to invest whatever funds they can raise in the construction and armament of one or more vessels of war on the plan which we have suggested. If this plan can be so far carried out as to secure the possession of, say six, vessels of this distinction, we hazard nothing in making the assurances, that (allowing for the fallibility of human judgment) we shall be able to drive the enemy from the Mississippi as well as from our coasts, and re-possess ourselves of New Orleans and the rest of our subjugated towns and districts.³⁵

The address to a male point of contact might be due to the explicit and somewhat frightening discussion of the Confederate military position in the paragraph preceding the appeal for monetary funds. The paragraph provides in depth discussion about the possibilities of contributions from European Allies, the daunting size of the Union fleet compared to the Confederate's meager naval forces, and the very astute observation that the South cannot hope to win the war if her lack of ships to do anything but defend her vulnerable coasts makes any offensive an impossibility. However, the address might also merely represent a generic, nonspecific way of opening a letter to an individual (a female member of the Ladies' Gunboat Society) who Allen & Sprague are not acquainted with. Toward the end of their letter, they make the omission that "having no acquaintances in your vicinity we address you [illegible] this subject, confident, from your position, you must like us deeply sympathize with the South in this

³⁵ Allen & Sprague to J.W. Harris, December 4, 186?

present struggle for existence against a foe merciless beyond compare." It must be taken into consideration that the admittedly indefinite salutation of the letter does not actually represent the gender of its recipient. If this is the case, then the letter certainly represents a remarkable example of material war discussion taking place in Confederate women's personal correspondence.

In some cases, the women of Gunboat Societies would respond directly to an inquiry of the business affairs of the women's association, despite it being addressed to some tangential male recipient. In a letter dated April 14, 1864 a R. Hennas at Lynchburg, Virginia responds to a William Bell, Esquire. The letter acknowledges that Mr. Bell's letter "of the 8th instat.[er] to Mr. McDonnil in reference to the "Ladies Defence Association" of this city has been received." Yet, Ms. Hennas, who signs her name above her official title, "Sec'y of the Association" does not employ the same Mr. McDonnil to respond on the ladies' behalf. Instead, she informs Mr. Bell that, despite the letter's being addressed to a male point of contact, it was "read with great pleasure *by the Association*" (emphasis added). In addition, Ms. Hennas makes it clear that it is Mrs. Chaplin, President of the Defence Association of Lynchburg, who is ensuring that his request is being fulfilled.

Mr. Bell seems to have written on behalf of some members of Richmond's Ladies' Defence Association that requests be made for iron donations from Lynchburg's tobacconists. R. Henass assures Mr. Bell that each of the Lynchburg ladies will make every "application to the tobacconists of this city" but is careful to direct her organization's assurances to "the ladies of Richmond," the individual to whom the business inquiries truly belong. In doing so, R. Henass, whether purposefully, or because a direct response was more convenient, breaks traditional expectations that men would speak on behalf of women in the case of public, political, or

business letters. Despite the fact that she still formally addresses her epistle to Mr. Bell, it is clear that the directives and affirmations within are meant for the Lynchburg Association's sister organization, with whom they share common objectives, organization, and, most importantly, gender. R. Henass names only women as the key respondents, stakeholders, and agents in the iron collection, which would likely have been a very public effort in which the women of Lynchburg applied to businessmen in their town for contributions to the warship their Society was attempting to construct.³⁶

Some letters that are addressed to men, despite being intended for the Ladies' Defence Association, may simply be indicative of the relative anonymity of the female officers of these organizations. For instance, in one case, an E.M. Gillespie writes that he has enclosed "one hundred and eighty-one dollars, seventy-five cents for the Ladies' Defence Association."³⁷ He also inquires as to whether a few hundred pounds of scrap iron that "the ladies of our little burgh" collected would be worth transporting to Richmond. Despite the donation and questions being solely intended for the Ladies' Defence Association, the letter is addressed to R.H. Maury, the Commander of the Confederate States Navy. Yet, while it is true that Maury sometimes served as a guiding expert for the organization as his wife served as Treasurer of the Ladies' Defence Association of Richmond, this letter being directed to a high-ranking male official in lieu of a female Gunboat Association officer might not be due to feelings of gender impropriety, as seems the case in other such letters.

Indeed, this address might be traced back to a letter to the editor written in early 1862 that advises the editors of the Richmond Dispatch to print the address of the Ladies' Defence Association as that of R.H. Maury. Lacking any physical group space, the ladies often met in

³⁶ R. Henass to William Bell, esq., April 14, 1862

³⁷ E.M. Gillespie to R.H. Maury, April 24, n.y.

their own homes or, occasionally, at the Broad Street Methodist Church. (See Figures 8 and 9.) Additionally, Maury's wife served as Treasurer of the association, so it would have made practical sense for her to receive the majority of donations directly. Such physical limitations on women's club organization in the Confederacy must always be considered alongside perceptions of acceptable epistolary performance along gender lines as one reason behind male points of contact for business letters (whose content was often solely for Ladies' Gunboat Societies).

In the vein of Pierre Bordieu's "acts of institution," feminist historiographers who take into account the rhetorics of physical space and time can more clearly discern spatiotemporal circumstances that produced gendered rhetorics (Jack 286). However, when one looks at the collection of correspondence as a whole, an unmistakable pattern emerges that appears to be the product of both physical and ideological limitations: when the letter contains discussion of business, political, or military matters, and is authored by a man, it is most often addressed to a male point of contact, though its message may be understood as intended for the women of the Gunboat Societies. Such a pattern, despite the possibility of other physical factors, can be attributed to the gendered epistolary notions discussed in the works of Donawerth, Elshtain, and Klein.



Figure 8. The former site of the Broad Street Methodist Church, a public space utilized by The Ladies' Defence Association of Richmond. Photo by author.



Figure 9. A plaque, donated by a post-bellum women's organization, commemorating the site. Photo by author.

Although letters involving specific plans for the gunboats, especially those between high ranking military officials, were sometimes written or received by men on behalf of women, the most fascinating epistolary texts from a feminist historiographic viewpoint are, of course, those produced by and for members of Ladies' Gunboat Societies. These letters discuss material concerns that involve public, business matters, elements that were thought improper for feminine letters during the nineteenth century. The tone of these letters certainly challenges the notion that the letters of nineteenth century women should be light-hearted, beautiful, and void of any truly serious content.

There are many business letters between women of Gunboat Societies concerning the raising, sending, or disposal of funds relating to gunboat construction. A letter from Susan Montague to Mrs. Clopton on April 3, 1862 provides an excellent example of such an exchange. In the letter, Mrs. Montague writes that she "sold the 50 tickets to 'See Mallorys War Illustrations' that I got at the church yesterday, and send my little girl for one hundred more please send them if you have them, and please count them before you send them, please see that she puts them in her packet, and tell her not to take them out until she brings them to me."³⁸ It is clear from her letter that Mrs. Montague is engaging in several public, business interactions through the advertisement, selling, and distribution of exhibition tickets. There isn't much of the feminine, social, private, or domestic to be found in her letter, as manuals of the time often limited the feminine epistolary tradition. What's more, she is even employing her young daughter to aid in her public fundraising effort.

By the spring of 1865, efforts of the Ladies' Gunboat Society in Columbus to complete an ironclad vessel for the protection of the coastal town in Mississippi had been abandoned. This is

³⁸ Susan Montague to Maria Clopton, April 3, 1862

evidenced by a letter that is written by Bettie Keyes, of the small town of Carrollton, Mississippi, on March 25, 1865. The letter, which is directly addressed to Mrs. J.W. Harris, President of the Ladies' Gunboat Society of Columbus Mississippi, reads, "Last Fall I wrote you that I had collected a small sum (two hundred and eighty-three dollars) for the building of a Gunboat; you replied that your society had decided to wait until Spring before acting further in the matter." Ms. Keyes goes on to complain that she has not yet received the expected letter from Mrs. Harris and needs further direction on what to do with the sum that the ladies of Carrollton have collected. She asks whether she should send the money or, as she suspects, whether "your Society has abandoned the idea of building one." This letter not only discusses the fate of a very large sum of money, it also taps in to the collective actions of these very novel women's organizations in the South. Such letters show just how business-like (and not-so-light-hearted) epistolary discourse between the women of these societies could be.

The Multi-Purpose Epistolary of Letters to the Editor

Some Southerners who were quite eager to donate to the cause of building up the Confederate Navy did not have any real idea where they should direct their gifts of money, jewelry, or metal. In these cases, Confederates often wrote a letter to the editor of a popular and widely circulated newspaper in hopes that they could receive some direction for their efforts. As previously mentioned, it is in this "Letters to the Editor" category that the private epistolary and public newspaper forms are most explicitly blended, offering individuals a chance to widely circulate a text written in the epistolary style. One such letter was written by a Mary M. Fitch of Charlottesville Virginia, who informs Mrs. Vernon, Secretary of the Richmond Ladies' Defence Association, of the lack of information about the Ladies' Defence Association that is available in her area. Mrs. Fitch explains that when she became "anxious to add something to the 'Ladies'

Defence Association, namely, "a lot of Iron," she could not discern where or to whom it should be sent. Thus, she "wrote to the Editor of the Dispatch who kindly noticed the fact in his 'Daily' I represented there should be some place agreed upon to send all such contributions."³⁹

The editor of the *Richmond Dispatch* agrees that there should be some depot set up in every county for the metal that Confederates would like to contribute to the gunboats. However, as Mrs. Fitch goes on to complain, no such action has yet been taken to establish such a network of donation repositories.⁴⁰ Mrs. Fitch adds that she is especially in need of assistance in transporting the old iron because she is a seventy-three year old widow in poor health. Mrs. Fitch's letter represents several challenges that Ladies' Gunboat Societies faced in addition to the aforementioned challenges of anonymity. These challenges included the difficulties of organizing large scale efforts of any kind in the sprawling Civil War South (a challenge of proximity that had largely prevented Southern women from regularly gathering the way that women's groups in the North had already begun to do prior to the war) and the continual issues of transportation that plagued the Southern war effort throughout the war.⁴¹ Additionally, it is clear that, "while women's voluntary movements in the North--from temperance to purity crusades, from missionary work to abolitionist agitation---had flourished for half a century, the Southern social climate was hostile to such activities for women" before the outbreak of war. Thus, women's participation in public organizational efforts presented a largely unfamiliar challenge that Southern women had to navigate as the war dragged on.

³⁹ Mary Fitch to Mrs. Vernon, May, 3 1862

⁴⁰ In a letter dated March 14, 1862 to the editor of the *Macon Telegraph*, two women named Mary-Ann and Ella provides a list of contacts that could serve as points of contact for collecting donations to the gunboat fund. It is not surprising, given the aforementioned collaboration between the Confederate newspapers and the Ladies' Gunboat Associations, that the editors of popular, national newspapers across the South comprise the largest majority of proposed collectors.

⁴¹ Anne Ruggles Gere's "Fashioning American Womanhood" offers fascinating insights into women's club formation in the North.

Letters to the editor not only served as a way for misinformed Confederates to determine where to send their eager contributions, they also served as a tool for Ladies' Gunboat Societies to maximize fund subscriptions through strategies of public recognition. It should be noted that, as in some private epistolary exchanges, Letters to the editor were sometimes written by men on women's behalf. For instance, in a letter published in the *Macon Telegraph* on March 24, 1862, a Mr. E.G. Cabaniss informs the editor, Mr. Clisby, that he is enclosing "\$179,50, collected by the Ladies Soldiers' Relief Society, of Forsyth, for the Georgia Gunboat Fund, and turned over to me by Mrs. Robert Trippe their President."⁴² Because the letters were published in newspapers, the editorials will be treated at length in the following chapter. Yet, it is important to note that the ideas for publishing the names of Gunboat Fund contributors were also debated in epistolary discourse.

On April 21, 1862, a Mr. Blanton Duncan wrote to Mrs. Clopton, the President of the Ladies' Defence Association at Richmond, to advise her that "after procuring the names of a dozen or more responsible persons, the list should be published in all the papers...The papers will all be happy to do this for the Association & by giving publicity to the design, you will reach many persons."⁴³ Mr. Duncan advises that, below these lists, the ladies add a few lines that direct readers to send their own contributions to the office of the Gunboat Association if they should like to see their own names added to the published list. This advice certainly proves sound, as the Ladies' Defence Association of Richmond use the public recognition of names as a strategy by which to procure donations and display forward momentum in completing a seemingly herculean task. However, it can be observed prior to this date that these women's organizations, most

⁴² *Macon Telegraph*, March 24, 1862

⁴³ Blanton Duncan to Maria Clopton, April 23, 1862

notably in Mississippi and South Carolina, were already using this tactic suggested in Mr. Duncan's private letter.

Wherever the public recognition tactic originated, it continued to be used with a great deal of success dozens of times by Ladies' Gunboat Societies all over the Confederacy. One letter to the editor (which exists in its epistolary form prior to publishing and is signed by multiple members of the Ladies' Defence Association of Richmond) expresses the hope that the Editors of the Dispatch will print the address of the Ladies' Defence Association in addition to a list of names of contributors. It also stresses the "great scarcity of Iron Lead and Brass," and the resulting need "that everyone should exert themselves to collect and send to the Tredegar Works all the metals they can for the Gun Boat now to be built by the Ladies' Defence Association."

⁴⁴Such calls to action seemed to be perceived as acceptable so long as they were represented beneath the mantle of Republican Motherhood and confined to the feminine epistolary form before being channeled through an authoritarian newspaper editor.

⁴⁴ Maria Clopton to the Editors of the [Richmond] Dispatch, n.d.

CHAPTER III: EXTENDING DISCURSIVE ACTIVITIES INTO NATIONAL NEWSPAPERS

"It is proposed to name the Gunboat 'Bartow'--a name synonymous with chivalry and daring. Should it be her fortune to 'illustrate Georgia' as gloriously upon the water as her gallant prototype did upon land, what lady would not rejoice that she 'took stock' in the enterprise?"
"Gunboat Fund," Columbus Daily Enquirer, March 15, 1862

Raising Funds through National Newspapers

The women in Ladies' Gunboat Societies did not merely use newspapers as the platform to recognize those individuals who gave contributions. Rather, newspapers also provided outlets for women to inform the public of the successes of their fundraising efforts and express the important and expedient nature of their work. In a piece entitled "Ladies' Defence Association -- Progress and Prospects" published in the *Richmond Dispatch*, Maria Clopton, president of the Ladies' Defence Association of Richmond, announces the beginning stages of construction of the first Ladies' Gunboat, exclaiming, "All honor to the women of the South! No fairer page of history will be written than that recording their labors of love in this struggle of independence; the ladies need no urging to do their duty."⁴⁵ Yet Maria Clopton also hints at the lack of men's efforts in the construction of the gunboat. After her commendation of the Richmond ladies she asks, "What shall we say to the gentlemen? Especially to those of large possessions and ample means. May we not feel certain that they, too, will come out nobly – not with their hundreds but with their thousands." Clopton takes her solicitation for funds a step further by reminding those men capable of making large donations that "This boat, gentlemen, we hope will but be the beginning of many like it, so that when our Southern flag shall have free passage on the high seas, we may take a high rank as a maritime power among the nations of the earth." This published piece demonstrates not only a discourse aimed at legitimizing and glorifying the

⁴⁵ *Richmond Dispatch*, April, 12 1862

successful fundraising efforts of Ladies' Gunboat Societies, but also offers a subtle criticism of men who have failed to donate as generously as they might have. President Clopton extends her position as a leader in the Society to publicly instruct the men of Richmond as to why it is vital that they follow the example of the ladies in giving to the gunboat fund.

In a letter written to the editor of the *Augusta Chronicle and Sentinel*, a woman who identifies herself as "Tempus Fugit" expands her opportunity to discuss the importance of the construction of gunboats and praises the women of the Confederacy for their efforts toward this goal to include a more radical and forbidden discursive practice: directly commenting on Confederate military policy and criticizing the military coordinators and men in general for their lack of forward motion in the development of the Confederate Navy.⁴⁶ "Tempus Fugit" reflects that "a few gunboats might have saved Forts Henry and Donelson...Suppose we had two, would the enemy have erected batteries between Forts Pulaski and Jackson?" She also calls upon the imperative of immediate action in this "death struggle for our rights" to defend her assertions before ending her piece with the challenge: "The ladies are moving. Will the men do nothing?"

Similarly, a Mrs. C. Love wrote to the editor of the *Charleston Mercury* that she was "glad that our people, and especially the ladies, have at last aroused themselves to the necessity of some practical demonstration in the defence of our coast, other than brave soldiers and weak batteries."⁴⁷ Mrs. Love offers her monetary support for the continuation of this effort and subsequently offers a direct critical commentary on the military's "too sanguine expectations of success." She wonders that, had this effort been taken up "eight or ten months ago, Port Royal might have been saved, and our coast, at this moment, free from the invaders." However, Mrs. Love justifies her critical assertions and commentary on public and military policy by

⁴⁶ ACS, March 17, 1862

⁴⁷ ACS, March 14, 1862

immediately relocating her concerns back within an appropriate domestic sphere. She writes of her fears that Federal invaders "hope to take from us our homes, our all, which makes life dear." Mrs. C. Love uses her contribution to the gunboat fund and her appropriate feminine fears that the invading army threatens the harmony of her domestic sphere to critically comment on the disappointing pace of the development of the Confederate Navy. Some women were even bolder and more direct in their criticisms of men's flagging support for the construction of the Confederate Navy. Obviously empowered by the material significance of their own contributions to the effort and determined to be even more independent from men than their sister societies, members of the Ladies' Gunboat Society of Selma, Alabama criticized men for that "stubborn, mulish proclivity inseparable from the masculine gender; and were it not for the smiles and tears and entreaties of lovely women...not a thing could be done, nor a boat could be built."⁴⁸

Uses of National Newspapers in Group Organization

Although Southern women did not regularly enjoy the formation of clubs and organizations common in the North during the antebellum period (largely due to the estimation of the plantation as the center for socialization and interaction in the antebellum South), many seemed to be brought nearer to one another, at least in spirit and discourse, by the collective cause of Southern nationalism. Confederate women in Ladies' Gunboat societies utilized epistolary skills and the Southern press as medium through which they could rally women of differing class distinctions and regions. In her *Intimate Practices: Literacy and Cultural Work in U.S. Women's Clubs, 1880-1920*. Anne Ruggles Gere argues, "Prior to the Civil War, women had little opportunity for anything except domesticity, but the dislocations of the conflict provided some opportunities for women to assume new roles" (138). Although Gere's analysis

⁴⁸ *Selma Morning Reporter*, March 10, 1862

focuses on postbellum clubwomen at the turn of the century, those "dislocations" began expanding discursive possibilities in the early years of the war effort. Much like Gere's turn-of-the-century-clubwomen, Confederate women in "the public culture---spaces where power is elaborated and made authoritative---of clubs" participated in debates of what rhetorical activities were appropriate for their organizations in light of the shifting definitions of Confederate womanhood and unified other Confederate women under the Ladies' Gunboat Societies' common cause. Of course, other large coastal cities were quite easy to recruit to the cause, and as early as April of 1862, smaller coastal towns like Augusta, Georgia, "in a spirit or praiseworthy emulation, not wishing our fair city to be behind her sister cities of Charleston and Richmond--who have been prolific in diverse sorts of pleasant inventions for increasing the Gunboat or the Southern Navy Funds," was resolved to give a "Hot Supper" to begin its own efforts to contribute to the Gunboat fund ("Communicated").⁴⁹

Likewise, the editor of the *Macon Telegraph*, upon receiving a letter from a "Mary Ann & Ella" rallying the women of Georgia to follow the example of their South Carolinian sisters in raising funds for the construction of a gunboat asked, "Who will 'start the ball' in this region" ("Gunboat Fund")?⁵⁰ The two young women who are later identified as Mary Ann P. Ross and Ella C. Ross of Macon, Georgia, wrote to the editor of the *Macon Telegraph* in March of 1862 about wishing to emulate the Ladies' Gunboats Societies they had been reading about in national newspapers. They write, "We see by the Charleston papers that a young lady, Ms. Sue Gelzee, of Summerville, has started a subscription to build a gunboat at Charleston, by the ladies of the Palmetto State, which is being responded to by the ladies of Carolina. We propose that her noble

⁴⁹ ACS, April 14, 1862

⁵⁰ *Weekly Columbus Enquirer*, March 18, 1862

example should be followed by our native Georgia."⁵¹ As evidence of their own devotion to the cause, Mary Ann and Ella enclose five dollars each, dedicating their efforts to "build a gunboat for our own war-worn veteran Commodore Tattnall." They use the rest of the editorial to establish a complex network of newspaper editors and public figures across Georgia who can act as agents in collecting the women's donations and direct them to the proper place. Such networks were instrumental to the fundraising success of Gunboat Societies, especially in the far-flung corners of the South. It is evident that their regional network was a great success because by early June, the *Columbus Daily Enquirer* reported that "the Savannah Treasurers, on the 31st ult., acknowledged the receipt of \$42,000 from Augusta, for this fund."⁵² Among the contributors to this total that the *Columbus Daily Enquirer* names are the agents suggested by Mary Ann and Ella in their original editorial.

Women of the yeoman class whose "husbands' departures meant dramatically increased physical toil in household and farm" tended to be generally less enthusiastic about the war effort in general and were certainly less active in the discourses surrounding fundraising (Faust 22). Women of the yeoman class had more difficulty in organizing, not only because of their increased amounts of burdensome labor, but because the rural settings in which they found themselves often made physical meetings either a great inconvenience or an impossibility. Ladies' Gunboat Societies' use of newspapers as a medium through which to articulate the patriotic importance of their aims successfully appealed to these women of smaller means and varying regional identities, as the spring of 1862 saw donations from women, many just a single dollar, pour in from every corner of the Confederacy. Ladies' Gunboat Societies appealed to women belonging to a diverse number of aid groups, like the more traditional Ladies' Sewing

⁵¹ *Columbus Daily Enquirer*, March 14, 1862

⁵² *Columbus Daily Enquirer*, June 4, 1862

Societies, to make substantial contributions in the more non-traditional category of weapon construction ("Gunboat Fund").⁵³ An editorial in the *Memphis Daily Appeal* reported that "A lady of Greensboro' not long since, gave a very fine quilt to Rev. J. J. Hutchinson to be sold for the gunboat fund"⁵⁴. Such fundraising efforts provided a way for women's groups to make contributions in a prohibited category through more acceptable domestic means.⁵⁵ In an extreme case, the Ladies' Gunboat Societies successfully solicited donations from a woman whose class status was most radically different from their own. A publication of the names of contributors to the Gunboat fund in the *Montgomery Daily Advertiser* revealed that a slave woman by the name of Lethania was among the women contributors in the town of Evergreen, Alabama.⁵⁶ Lethania gave a dollar towards the total sixty dollar contribution, which had been the entire amount of money she possessed at that time.

As in Augusta, women in various other regions were inspired to form their own chapters of Ladies' Gunboat Societies. In some cases, given their landlocked geographical position, their dedication to do so seemed much more a product of the encouragement and guidance offered in Ladies' Gunboat Societies' persuasive appeals to their Confederate sisters that were published in many nationally distributed newspapers. Shaver discusses the unifying power of "reading a mass-produced newspaper" which included the possibility that such a widely distributed text

⁵³ ACS, April 18, 1862

⁵⁴ *Memphis Daily Appeal*, April 20, 1862

⁵⁵ Nan Johnson's classifies tableaux vivants as rhetorical practices that encouraged women to act out acceptable domestic scenes or accepted feminine traits. In the case of delivery, Confederate women's tableaux vivants fit Johnson's model of acceptable female delivery that entailed posing silently (27). However, one tableaux that was popular among gunboat fundraising efforts, called "Southern Confederacy" or "Confederate States," extended feminine representations into more public and political spheres ("Tableaux Vivants for the Gunboat Fund," *Charleston Mercury*, April 21, 1861). One participant, Mary Legg, described this scene in a letter to a friend: "Each [Confederate] state was represented by one of the girls dressed in white with a scarf of the State Colors... while Kentucky stood with folded arms, face rather averted from the southern Confederacy and was looking towards the U.S. flag; poor Maryland was dressed in black kneeling as though supplicating and bound in chains" (Mary Legg to Hattie Palmer, January 15, 1862).

⁵⁶ *Montgomery Daily Advertiser*, April 15, 1862

"can instill a sense of unity or belonging; as individuals imagine others reading the same piece they begin to conceive themselves as part of the larger community" (54). Although her analysis is limited to publications of the church, Shaver argues that a "national newspaper recognized women's [philanthropic] efforts and provided them with a forum through which to report their activities and make appeals for support" (50). Indeed, the Minute Book of the Ladies Defence Association of Richmond reveals auxiliary organizations as far away as Russellville, Tennessee and Macon, GA. Mrs. J.B. Gray of Tennessee wrote in the *Memphis Daily Appeal*, "I wish to make a proposition through your columns to the ladies of Tennessee. That proposition is, that we purchase an iron-clad steamer, to aid in the formation of the Navy of the Confederate States." Mrs. Gary appropriates the same "mantle" of Republican Motherhood as her sisters in Richmond in order to validate her public discourse encouraging women of her region to further a philanthropic cause that falls outside of women's traditional domestic contributions. She makes an appeal to Southern women's substantial familial sacrifices, saying, "Having already given what is more precious than money, or any earthly treasure—some of us our beloved husbands, and most of us our noble sons, let us unite our efforts to strengthen their hands and cheer their hearts by the purchase of such a vessel, which, with the blessing of God, may prove as formidable to our enemies as the Virginia" ("A Gunboat Proposal").⁵⁷

Criticism of Ladies' Gunboat Societies in National Newspapers

Indeed, newspapers did not exclusively encourage and facilitate women's new rhetorical expansions into the public sphere, but also wrote criticisms of the women's efforts and published those of other concerned readers who challenged them. A man who called himself "Gray Beard" wrote a critical response to newspaper publications that he had seen rousing the women of

⁵⁷ *Memphis Daily Appeal*, April 8, 1862

Augusta to "contribute towards the construction of gunboats" ("The Gunboat Fund").⁵⁸ "Gray Beard" seems unsettled by the idea of women contributing to this category that had been the exclusive province of men in the antebellum South. He meditates on what other previously forbidden activities Confederate women might be permitted or encouraged to conduct, saying, "If this is allowed, the next call, of course, will be upon the women to man them. Have we no men left that this thing should be tolerated? It is well enough to ask the aid of women in their proper spheres of usefulness,...but the idea that great whiskered men should ask them for help to build a few gunboats too is, to say the least, shameful." "Gray Beard" closes with a statement concerning his enclosed donation and calls upon other men to similarly act in order to "save our men from this horrible sarcasm" of allowing "the women to undertake the defence of our country." This letter to the editor is preceded by several remarks by the editor himself, who preemptively defend the Ladies' Gunboat Societies' from "Gray Beard's" attacks. The editor indicates the ladies' superior patriotism as the reason they should remain unmolested despite their public discursive action in a traditionally masculine category.

In an editorial published on March 17, 1862, the *Charleston Mercury* informed readers that the Confederate Government "with its full coffers and boundless credit" had earnestly taken up the cause of developing a well-equipped Navy and advised "might it not be well that the ladies should divert the funds which they have so nobly contributed for a gunboat, to some other object equally patriotic, and in which the need for their help is more pressingly felt."⁵⁹ The piece reasserted that Ladies' Gunboat Societies could never really accomplish any real material difference "in the matter of gunboats" and that it was the Government's, and not women's aid societies' place to produce those weapons essential to the war effort. The editor goes on to

⁵⁸ ACS, March 12, 1862.

⁵⁹ CM, March 17, 1862

encourage women to return to those more domestic categories that aided the war effort by extending women's traditional domestic duties outside of the home. He reminds the ladies that "in providing comforts for our brave soldiers in the field, and relief for them when sick, our noble-hearted women can do good in a way that the best Government could not successfully imitate" ("Our Naval Defences").

This rather abrupt criticism may have been borne out of the rapidly increasing influence and contributions of Ladies' Gunboat Societies. It might have also merely been the case that the unexpected length of time necessary to construct an ironclad vessel disheartened the Confederate public and that the Southern press was only reflecting this disappointment.⁶⁰ *The Charleston Courier* seems to cite this expensive and lengthy construction as the reason behind its suggestion that "it is unnecessary for the Ladies to undertake the Herculean enterprise of an ironclad war steamer, which would cost \$200,000. The Courier therefore 'recurs to its original idea'--the building of the [wooden] Gunboat "Palmetto State," which can be done at a cost between \$30,000 and \$40,000."⁶¹

It seems that this discourse surrounding the women of Charleston compromising on the *Palmetto State's* being only a wooden gunboat may have actually confused and misinformed the enemy. A report from Commander J.R.M. Mullany in April of 1862 stated that a contraband, a slave who had escaped to the protection of Union forces, informed him that no ironclad steamer was being built at Charleston. His official report to his commanding officer read, "Two wooden gunboats are being built in Charleston. One of them has her frame party up, the other, generally

⁶⁰ In *Capital Navy*, John Coski indicates that the timeline of completion for the *Virginia II* was much longer than the projections that Captain Farrand had given the Ladies' Defence Association, but that such slow progress was not a reflection of any failure on the part of the ladies to raise tremendous funds (nearly \$30,000) towards its construction, but to massive iron shortages (84-86).

⁶¹ *The Macon Telegraph*, March 31, 1862. Despite the Courier's objection to the great expense of the endeavor, in the end, the Gunboat *Palmetto State* would be constructed as a Richmond Class ironclad.

called the "Ladies' Boat," from the fact of being built by their contributions, had her keel laid a week or ten days ago, neither of them being intended to be an ironclad, as it could not be obtained." This report reveals that the ships were recognized widely as Ladies' Gunboats, even by the Union enemy. It also reveals another key argument of this thesis: that Ladies' Gunboats were not called so in merely an *honorary capacity*, but because the women of Gunboats Societies produced and coordinated the tremendous effort and means that built them.⁶² Whatever the editor's reasons for discouraging the efforts of the ladies, the completion of the ironclad *Palmetto State* necessitated a sort of apology from the Ladies' Gunboat Societies' former critics. In a piece that was published by October of the same year, the editors of the *Charleston Mercury* came to admit, "We judged the undertaking for [the ladies] herculean, and deemed that their energies might be more gratefully spent for the benefit of the soldiers."⁶³ However, the editors, "finding that nothing less than a gunboat would satisfy their patriotism, we yielded our private preference and...the fruit of the ladies' noble exertions is visible, and the country rejoices in the possession of a formidable iron-clad" ("The Ladies' Gunboat 'Palmetto State'").

In the case of the Ladies' Gunboat *Georgia*, however, it was necessary to downgrade original plans for a ironclad war steamer. On July 9, 1862, the *Macon Telegraph* reports that "the Commissioners and Treasurers of the 'Ladies' Association for the construction of a 'Gunboat' or 'Iron-clad Floating Battery' for the defence of the harbor of Savannah, having completed the work entrusted to them beg leave to make the following report: They were induced to give the preference to a 'Floating Battery with Propellers,' over a 'Gunboat,' as being more readily constructed with the means at their command." (See Figures 10 and 11.) Although the *Georgia*

⁶² By August 1862, the Union seems to have realized their error. It is at this time that a new report from an officer named J.B. Marchand, while serving on the same ship that issued the initial erroneous report, tells his commanding officers that contrabands have informed him that "The Ladies' Gunboat is built like an ordinary gunboat. She is intended to be plated with iron."

⁶³ *CM*, October 11, 1862

was downgraded because of the lack of skill and supplies necessary to build her engine, it is important to note that it is not the discouragement of other groups that causes the women of Savannah's Ladies' Gunboat Society to *decide themselves* to downgrade their former plans, but the material situation. A reader of the *Macon Telegraph* wrote to the editor before the ship's completion to cheer the women's efforts to aid in their own defense. The reader, of unspecified gender, writes, "Let the boat built by the ladies of Georgia share in driving the invader from our Southern waters."⁶⁴

When the *Georgia* was completed in the summer of 1862, there was a controversy among several of Georgia's newspapers as to who should be credited with the idea. The *Columbus Daily Enquirer* reports that "a controversy has arisen as to whom the honor of proposing the building, by the Ladies of Georgia, of the gunboat or floating battery lately completed at Savannah belongs."⁶⁵ A correspondent of the *Savannah News* insists that the two ladies from Macon, Mary Ann and Ella, were responsible, while the *Savannah Republican* credits "A Carolina Lady" who sent them a letter from Mobile, Alabama. The *Enquirer* argues that, although there can be no doubt that "A Carolina Lady" first mentioned the prospect, it was Mary Ann and Ella Ross who first "gave a practical start to the enterprise by proposing the plan of collecting the money, and even suggesting many of the agents to whom contributions should be sent." The author concludes that all three of the ladies should have their "names honorably associated with this patriotic achievement of the ladies of Georgia, and that the naming of some of the guns of the battery after them would have been a deserved compliment to their agency in the enterprise."

⁶⁴ *Macon Daily Telegraph*, March 15, 1862

⁶⁵ *Columbus Daily Enquirer*, July 18, 1862

Indeed the ironclad *Georgia* was identified so closely with the women who built her, that there was some talk of naming the battery's armament after some of the women who made her construction possible. An *Columbus Daily Enquirer* article dated July 10, 1862 reads:

The armament of the "Georgia" consists of ten guns of large calibre. It had been our wish to name each of these guns for a lady, and have the names painted thereon, but it was found so difficult to make selections where all were entitled to distinction for their devotion to the righteous cause in which we are engaged, it was, therefore, thought best to name the guns for the cities and counties of the State from which the largest donations had been received.⁶⁶

This inability to select only ten ladies to honor and the resolution to instead name the guns for individual chapter's regions speaks to the hugely collaborative nature of Ladies' Gunboat Societies. Although the armament of the *Georgia* herself may not have borne the ladies' names, the article ends by inviting the "Ladies" to the Exchange Dock to "inspect" the product of their massive efforts: *their Georgia*.

⁶⁶ *Columbus Daily Enquirer*, July 10, 1862

CONCLUSION

The Fate of the Ladies' Gunboats

In a letter dated December 22, 1862, Catherine P. Speed, of the Ladies' Defence Association at Lynchburg exclaims that "All efforts to collect funds have ceased since the destruction of the 'Virginia.'"⁶⁷ Indeed, just as the *Virginia* inspired the mania for gunboat construction in the South, its destruction at the hands of the *U.S.S. Monitor* made Confederates doubt that gunboats were the answer to so many of the Confederacy's wartime struggles. The loss of the *Virginia*, coupled with military defeats in the field of battle, saw funds being diverted away from Gunboat Societies. By May of 1862, Anna Logan writes Maria Clopton, President of the Ladies' Defence Association of Richmond and explains that she has collected over one-hundred dollars for the construction of the gunboat, but has not yet sent it because of "the many reports that the boat has been abandoned." The end of Anna Logan's 1863 letter foreshadows the end of one of the Ladies' Gunboats as she tells Mrs. Clopton that she is "very proud of the citizens of Richmond that they have determined to burn the beautiful city rather than surrender-- It requires very brave hearts to decide such a question."⁶⁸ These two letters represent how very tenuous the idea of raising funds for the construction of a navy was even very early in the war. Confederates were disheartened by losses in the field as well as the destruction of the *Virginia*. Blockades had strangled Southern supplies and many Confederates thought funds originally intended for a gunboat should be diverted to the massively overcrowded hospitals filled with the severely injured and dying.

Despite these early indicators of doubt, the gunboat movement did not truly begin to wane until late in the spring of 1863, almost exactly a year after gunboat fever first began to

⁶⁷ Catherine P. Speed to Maria Clopton, December 22, 1862

⁶⁸ Anna Logan to Maria Clopton, May 27, n.y.

sweep the South. In May of 1863, Mrs. Clopton received a letter from a woman who simply identifies herself as "A Member" which states that "the scheme for building a Gunboat has beyond doubt fallen through, the time having lapsed for such an enterprise, as will be seen in the City paper."⁶⁹ The Member suggests that the Gunboat Society meet soon to determine how the Association will spend the rest of the funds that have not yet been put toward gunboat construction. Like all Confederate aid organizations, Ladies' Gunboat Societies fizzled out throughout the South soon after as Confederates coped with the extraordinary losses of their troops to battle and disease and widespread hunger reigned in urban areas as well as the burned and pillaged countryside.

The Ladies' Gunboats themselves met an equally dismal end, one at the hands of her own crew who were determined not to allow their ironclads to fall in to the hands of the enemy. As Anna Logan's letter foretold, the *Virginia II* was destroyed by her own crew when Richmond was captured on April 3, 1865. The *Palmetto State*, along with the *Chicora*, engaged in an attack on Union forces in January 1862 and helped to defend Charleston's ports, but were scuttled on February 18, 1865. The *Georgia*, which, due to a lack of engine power, protected Savannah as a floating battery, was destroyed when that city fell in December of 1864 (Konstam 40-42).

Ladies' Gunboat Societies' Lasting Discursive Breakthroughs

As previously discussed, Confederate women's discursive practice during the early Civil War period has been placed in two extreme categories. Either it has been represented as trivial in comparison to that discourse they produced toward the war's end and during the immediate postbellum period (which helped cause the war effort to deflate), or it has been recovered through the skewed vision of Southern firebrands who heaped endless praise on the women of

⁶⁹ "A Member" to Maria Clopton, c.a. May 1863

the Confederacy, obscuring their material and practical motivations. This thesis has attempted to focus on Confederate women's wartime voices, efforts, and experiences by examining the texts they produced as material stakeholders in the success of their new nation. Indeed, this halcyon wartime period represents a fascinating transitional period in Southern women's history when Southern women remained largely uninfluenced by discourses of suffrage. Even so, Southern women were at least vaguely aware of Northern "strong-minded" female abolitionists and suffragists.

Despite Confederate women's wartime discursive expansions into new public arenas, a piece entitled "What Can Woman Do?" that was published in the *Southern Illustrated News* in February of 1863 revealed that Southern women drew a distinct line between their public rhetorical activity, whose goal it was to support and further the cause of the Confederacy, and the rhetorical practices of Northern women that seemed much more radical. The author of "What Can Woman Do?" (who calls herself A.V.S.) opens her piece by assuring her male readers of this difference, saying, "Don't think I am about to commence in a labored discussion on *woman's rights*, and thereby bore you to death with philosophical nonsense." In fact, she offers the distinction of Republican Motherhood as one of the largest primary differences between Southern women, who venture into public discourse for the sole purpose of nurturing some effort in regards to the success of the Confederacy, and the "stern character of lecturer upon the rostrum and stage, [who] we will leave to be personated by the strong-minded woman of the North, and turn our eyes to a more extended field of labor in our own *Sunny South*" (19). A.V.S. goes on to discuss the "pure-hearted" power of the patriotic mother who has provided a powerful influence and moral example upon the lives of her sons, even offering a historical embodiment of Republican Motherhood when she states that "the father of his country, our own beloved

Washington owed his success, in life, to that mother whose precepts he treasured within his heart" (20).

Despite the fact that Southern women did not gain the "rostrum or stage" during the Civil War, this thesis maintains that they did make significant and lasting forays into new, largely process-oriented discursive territories. Indeed, Confederate women's classification of their own expanding discursive practices during wartime as purely patriotic and maternal has led some scholars to question whether the discourse produced by women's groups like Ladies' Gunboat Societies during the halcyon days of the Confederacy made any lasting difference in discursive opportunities available to postbellum Southern women. Lee Anne Whites argues that "while ex-Confederate men found their political power at least briefly truncated...ex-Confederate women found a continued and even expanded basis for their own public organization in this very same decline in the position of their men" (166). In this statement, Whites articulates what is perhaps the most significant and enduring discursive opportunity discovered during wartime by Confederate women's aid societies: the ability for Southern women to unite for a collective cause in those formerly prohibited spaces outside of the domestic sphere. Southern women worked through wartime societies to expand their voices into club records, business letters, and editorials.

This particular expansion of Southern women's discursive possibilities would serve as the basis for Ladies' Memorial Associations, groups that Cynthia Mills and Caroline E. Janney credit with the construction of Confederate public memorials and, on a more conceptual level, the rhetorical construction of postbellum Southern memory of wartime (Janney, *Burying the Dead* 3-5). Janney's book explores the actions and import of Ladies' Memorial Associations, which began to form in Virginia as early as May of 1865. Striking similarities exist between postbellum

Ladies' Memorial Associations and the aid societies that were their precursor. Indeed, women who served on wartime aid societies were often responsible for organizing local chapters of Memorial Associations. Much like the women of Gunboat Societies, the women of Memorial Associations formed and networked with regional chapters across the South, held regular meetings in churches, raised funds, and organized their efforts to maximize their potential earnings. They achieved their monumental goal of reinterring thousands of Confederate soldiers' remains in the years following the war. Their efforts would also result in contributions to the very public realm of Confederate memorials through monuments and statues in cemeteries across the South and the formation of a ceremonial Memorial Day that is still celebrated in the present day in select cities in the South (Janney, "Ladies' Memorial Associations").

Ladies' Gunboat Societies provided a valuable precursor to Ladies' Memorial Associations and, later, the popular Daughters of the Confederacy by laying the foundations for new strides in process-oriented rhetorical skills. Their societies mark perhaps the most successful example of the efforts of Southern women to effectively organize their fellow countrywomen, across regional and class lines, in the attainment of a specific goal that lay beyond the threshold of the traditional domestic sphere. Although their ships might have met their untimely ends in less than a year, the strides taken by the women of Ladies' Gunboats Societies left a legacy of organization through discursive breakthroughs that would become an important precedent for benevolent women's organizations and clubwomen in the South. These Confederate women's remarkable expansion into this most masculine province of military and public policy foreshadows the many forays into forbidden rhetorical territory that would later be attempted by the women of the postbellum South by the turn of the nineteenth century.



Figure 10. Model of C.S.S Georgia. Photo by Mike Stroud.

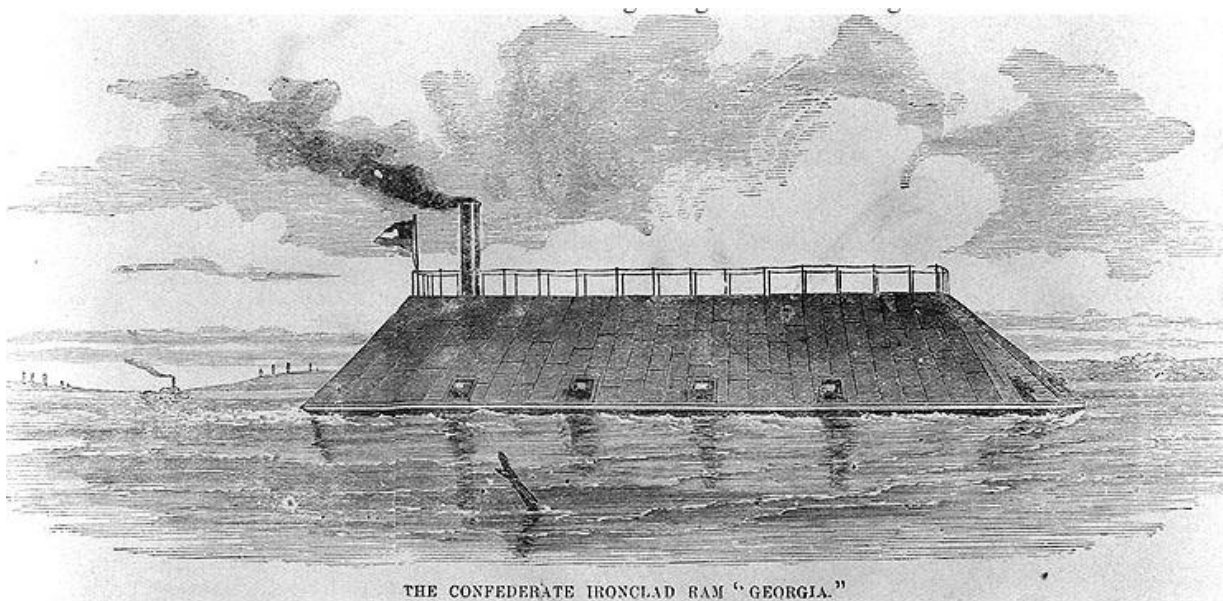


Figure 11. Engraving of C.S.S. Georgia. Image by U.S. Naval Historical Center.

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