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"Our Women Played Well Their Parts": East Tennessee Women in the Civil War Era, 1860-1870

William A. Strasser Jr.
University of Tennessee - Knoxville

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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by William A. Strasser Jr. entitled "'Our Women Played Well Their Parts': East Tennessee Women in the Civil War Era, 1860-1870." I have examined the final electronic copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in History.

Stephen V. Ash, Major Professor

We have read this thesis and recommend its acceptance:

Susan Becker, Elizabeth Haiken

Accepted for the Council:

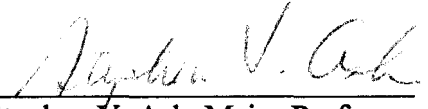
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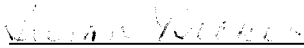
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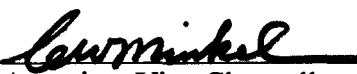
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Associate Vice Chancellor
and Dean of the Graduate School

“Our Women Played Well Their Parts”:
East Tennessee Women in the Civil War Era, 1860-1870

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

William A. Strasser, Jr.

May 1999

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ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates East Tennessee women in the Civil War era and finds that women experienced a change in roles during wartime, but those changes did not prove lasting. East Tennessee Unionist and Confederate women took on a variety of new roles in wartime, from petitioning government leaders and spying for their cause to relocating their families to safer areas and operating an underground railroad for Union prison escapees. This change in roles did not prove lasting for a number of reasons. First, women did not join together in postwar remembrance groups as they did in other parts of the South because East Tennessee was politically divided for many years after the war. Second, East Tennessee was economically devastated during the war, and the men and women of the region sought a return to antebellum normalcy and stability. This meant a return to farms and a revival of patriarchy as the accepted social order. Thus, the social and economic geography of postwar East Tennessee meant a return to antebellum roles for East Tennessee women. This would remain the norm in the region until suffrage movements attracted wealthy white women around the turn of the century.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The history of East Tennessee, if fully written, would reveal many incidents of heroic daring on the part of its brave, noble women.¹

In 1899, Oliver P. Temple published a history of East Tennessee during the Civil War in which he commented that the story of women in the region would be worth telling. Yet in the century that has passed since Temple made that statement, no historian has directly addressed the topic of women in East Tennessee during the Civil War era. This study will investigate that topic using a wide variety of sources, from diaries, journals, and letters to newspapers, census records, church records, and court records. The central questions of this study are: What were the social experiences of women in the war? Did East Tennessee women's roles change during the Civil War, and, if so, was the change lasting?

An understanding of the historiography of women during the Civil War is essential to this study. In 1936, Francis Butler Simkins and James Welch Patton wrote one of the first studies of Confederate women in the Civil War South. They concluded that the Confederacy survived as long as it did only because of the support of women, and that the Confederacy's collapse was as much "due to the collapse of the morale of its women as to the defeat of its armies." Later, Mary Elizabeth Massey found that the Civil

¹ Oliver P. Temple, East Tennessee and the Civil War (Cincinnati, OH: Robert Clark Company, 1899), 524.

War compelled women to become more active, self-reliant, and resourceful, and this ultimately led to their economic, social, and intellectual development.²

Women have received a good deal of attention in recent American historiography. Women's history is an important part of the "new social history" that has dominated American historiography since the late 1960s. The common denominator among these new women's historians is their insistence that gender must be an important category of analysis. Many of the studies that have investigated women in recent years have focused on wealthy white women. Anne Firor Scott began this trend in 1970 with The Southern Lady, which emphasizes the burdens the war imposed on elite Southern white women. Elizabeth Fox-Genovese's Inside the Plantation Household (1992) focuses on women on plantations with twenty or more slaves. While it is an excellent study, it tells us little about women of the middling classes. Likewise, Drew Gilpin Faust's Mothers of Invention (1996) and LeeAnn Whites's The Civil War as a Crisis in Gender (1995) focus on elite women in Southern society. While these historians defend their focus by pointing to the lack of sources on non-elites, work by other historians proves that the story of lower and middle class Southern women can be told.³

² Francis Butler Simkins and James Welch Patton, The Women of the Confederacy (New York: Garrett and Massie, 1936), vii; Mary Elizabeth Massey, Bonnet Brigades (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966), x.

³ Linda Gordon, "U.S. Women's History," The New American History, Eric Foner, ed. Revised and expanded edition (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997), 257-84; Anne Firor Scott, The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970); Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, Inside the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Drew Gilpin Faust, Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); LeeAnn Whites, The Civil War as a Crisis in Gender: Augusta, Georgia, 1860-1890 (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995).

Historian Suzanne Leacock finds that women in antebellum Petersburg, Virginia, had a separate culture and argues that the distinctiveness of Southern women lies in the discontinuity between their private power and public invisibility. During the Civil War, she hypothesizes, women took on new responsibilities that heightened their self-esteem, but in the end gained little more than memories. Other historians, including Victoria Bynum and George Rable, have confirmed Leacock's thesis. In her study of women in three Piedmont counties of North Carolina, Bynum finds that with war threatening to destroy their families, some poor women defied the boundaries of their sphere in the struggle to preserve community autonomy. In the end, however, the war did not change their place in society; the struggle to sustain themselves and their families remained a hard one in a society in which their gender, class, race, and behavior limited their power in crucial ways. George Rable also finds that little changed for women in the South as a result of the Civil War. Rable discovers an inherent conservatism before and after the war: women accepted and maintained their subordinate position in society before the war, and the tumult of war left the web of relations between the sexes largely intact: "The war portended no domestic revolution; and despite great strain, traditional definitions of appropriate sex roles still held sway in the Reconstruction South." He finds that wealthy white women buttressed the hierarchical social order to maintain their standing in society and were willing to defend slavery to hold onto their class standing. The war did bring some changes for women as they moved into professions such as nursing and teaching, but these changes proved temporary because private, domestic issues of poverty and

social insecurity dominated in the Reconstruction era. Retreat to conventional roles was only natural in an era where survival was most important. The author concludes that the war changed many things, but not women's sense of powerlessness and dependence – there was, he says, “change without change.”⁴

The historiography of Civil War East Tennessee is less developed than that of women during the time period. One must begin with O.P. Temple's 1899 study and Thomas W. Humes's The Loyal Mountaineers of Tennessee (1880), but the usefulness of these books is limited by their military focus and their Unionist sympathies. The modern study most useful to this thesis is Charles Faulkner Bryan, Jr.'s dissertation, “The Civil War in East Tennessee: A Social, Political, and Economic Study” (1978). The first half of Bryan's dissertation examines the region under Confederate and Federal occupation while the remainder deals with the war's impact on institutions such as government, education, churches, and slavery. While Bryan never specifically addresses the experience of women in the war, women appear in his study through letters, diaries, and other sources. This thesis will examine the same thirty-one counties that Bryan used in his study. The counties lay between the crest of the Cumberland Plateau on the east and the Tennessee-North Carolina border on the west. East Tennessee's geographic

⁴ Suzanne Lebsack, The Free Women of Petersburg: Status and Culture in a Southern Town, 1784-1860 (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1984), 249; Victoria E. Bynum, Unruly Women: The Politics of Social and Sexual Control in the Old South (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992); George C. Rable, Civil Wars: Women and the Crisis of Southern Nationalism (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 227, 288. See also George Rable, “Missing in Action: Women of the Confederacy,” in Divided Houses: Gender and the Civil War, Catherine Clinton and Nina Silber, eds. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 134-46.

separation led to divergent patterns of growth, society, and politics from the rest of the state, and these thirty-one counties best demonstrate that separation.⁵

Other works that discuss East Tennessee during the war years include Noel C. Fisher's War at Every Door (1997) and Todd W. Groce's dissertation, "Mountain Rebels" (1993). Fisher focuses on guerrilla warfare in the region, but does mention loyalist women's work as spies, messengers, couriers, and operators of safe houses for Union prison escapees. He concludes that Unionists ultimately won the war of violence for political and military control of East Tennessee. Like Fisher and Bryan, Groce argues that the Confederate experience in East Tennessee is distinctive if not unique among Rebel Southerners. His study of Confederate sympathizers in East Tennessee largely overlooks women in the region. Also useful for East Tennessee Civil War studies is Digby Gordon Seymour's Divided Loyalties (1963). Although mostly a military history, it provides some useful background information about conditions in Knoxville during the time period.⁶

⁵ Thomas William Humes, The Loyal Mountaineers of Tennessee (Knoxville: Ogden Brothers and Company, 1888); Charles Faulkner Bryan, Jr., "The Civil War in East Tennessee: A Social, Political, and Economic Study" (Ph.D. diss., University of Tennessee, Knoxville, 1978), 8, 12. For a map of the counties studied, see Bryan, "Civil War in East Tennessee," 9.

⁶ Noel C. Fisher, War At Every Door: Partisan Politics and Guerrilla Violence in East Tennessee, 1860-1869 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997); Todd W. Groce, "Mountain Rebels: East Tennessee Confederates and the Civil War, 1860-1870" (Ph.D. diss., University of Tennessee, Knoxville, 1993); Digby Gordon Seymour, Divided Loyalties: Fort Sanders and the Civil War in East Tennessee, 2nd ed. (Knoxville: East Tennessee Historical Society, 1982).

CHAPTER TWO

“BETWEEN TWO FIRES”: WOMEN FACE THE APPROACHING CIVIL WAR

What was life like for women in antebellum East Tennessee? It was in some ways better than in many other Southern states. After the war, an East Tennessee woman wrote that “Women took a leading part in religious and educational affairs[;] in politics they were the ‘power behind the throne,’ wield[ing] considerable influence in a quiet way.” Between 1796 and 1860, Tennessee saw the expansion of a wife’s legal recourse against an unfit husband. In 1836, legislative divorce was abolished, and women thereafter effectively and energetically utilized the state’s comparatively progressive divorce laws. Gains were also made in the matter of inheritances: between 1792 and 1843, female heirs experienced an increase in the property they inherited. Legal protections for married women’s property rights were also strictly enforced.¹

Education was also available for women. Barbara Blount (territorial governor William Blount’s daughter) and several of her friends became the nation’s first coeds when they attended Blount College in 1804; this practice was soon discontinued. The General Assembly of Tennessee, however, chartered twenty-seven coeducational academies across the state in 1806. Schools in East Tennessee included the Greeneville

¹ W.A. Craighead Memoirs, Confederate Collection, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville [hereafter cited as TSLA]; Lawrence B. Goodheart, Neil Hanks, and Elizabeth Johnson, “‘An Act for the Relief of Females...’ Divorce and the Changing Legal Status of Women in Tennessee, 1796-1860,” *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 44 no. 3 (Fall 1985): 318-39; Margaret C. Crawford, “The Legal Status of Women in Early Tennessee: Knox, Jefferson, and Blount Counties, 1792-1843” (M.A. thesis, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, 1992), 115.

Female Institute, the Jonesboro Female Academy, the Female Seminary in Rogersville, and other schools in Kingston, Knoxville, and Blountville. The most prominent of these was the Knoxville Female Academy, founded in 1811. Later known as the East Tennessee Female Institute, the Knoxville academy (along with the other female academies) was primarily a finishing school, issuing “Mistress of Polite Literature” degrees. However, the Institute did teach spelling, algebra, astronomy, philosophy, Latin, chemistry, and botany, among other subjects. Since these schools charged tuition, wealthier East Tennesseans patronized them. It will be demonstrated that these wealthy families tended to support the Confederacy in the war. Education was much less accessible to poor rural families; this helps to explain why so few first-hand accounts of East Tennessee Unionist women remain.²

With the approach of the Civil War, East Tennessee men and women had to decide which side they would support. This was a difficult decision for many women to make. East Tennesseans had a long tradition of Unionism, stemming from their sense of geographical and political isolation from the rest of the state. East Tennessee had once been dominant in state politics, but by 1860 its population comprised only 26 percent of the state’s population, slightly less than recently developed West Tennessee. This led to a

² Wilma Dykeman, *Tennessee Woman: An Infinite Variety* (Newport, TN: Wakestone Books, 1993), 53; Bennett D. Bell, “Female Schools in Tennessee Prior to 1861,” *Confederate Veteran* 32 (1924), 170-74; Laura E. Luttrell, “One Hundred Years of a Female Academy: The Knoxville Female Academy, 1811-1846; The East Tennessee Female Institute, 1846-1911,” *East Tennessee Historical Society’s Publications* 17 (1945), 78-79; Greeneville *Democrat*, August 28, 1860; Martha Luttrell Mitchell *Memoirs*, Confederate Collection, TSLA; John Trotwood Moore, compiler, *Biographical Questionnaires of 150 Prominent Tennesseans*, ed. Colleen Morse Elliott (Easley, SC: Southern Historical Press, 1982), 4-5.

proportional decline in political power as Democratic Middle Tennessee began to dominate state politics. In addition, East Tennessee was the least productive agricultural region in the state and only 9.2 percent of its population were slaves in 1860 (as compared with 29 percent in Middle Tennessee and 33 percent in West Tennessee).³ Other social and economic factors contributed to Unionist tendencies among the mountain people: they harbored a growing hostility to slaveholders, who tended to be wealthy, and to a slave system that benefited the mountain people in no clear way; they felt the growing isolation and poverty of the mountains; they were influenced by family traditions and personal antagonisms; and, lacking the economic structure of the deep South, they feared a political economy detrimental to their interests. These political, economic, and social factors, combined with the strong Unionist leadership of editor William G. Brownlow of the Knoxville Whig, Senator Andrew Johnson, Congressmen T.A.R. Nelson and Horace Maynard, and Knoxville attorney O.P. Temple, helped the region remain loyal to the Federal government in 1861.⁴

Women who supported the Union in the Civil War tended to live on small, self-supporting farms and usually did not own slaves. The poor and yeoman nonslaveowning women who lived on these East Tennessee farms worked hard to contribute to the

³ Bryan, "Civil War in East Tennessee," 12-13, 16-19.

⁴ Philip Shaw Paludan, Victims: A True Story of the Civil War (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1981), 62; Fisher, War at Every Door, 31-32; Bryan, "Civil War in East Tennessee," 30, 34-35; Eric Lacy Russell, Unvanquished Volunteers: East Tennessee Sectionalism From Statehood to Secession 2nd ed. (Johnson City, TN: Overmountain Press, 1971), 184-91. For other explanations of the long tradition of East Tennessee Unionism, see Mary Emily Robertson Campbell, The Attitude of Tennesseans Toward the Union, 1847-1861 (New York: Vantage Press, 1961) and Daniel W. Crofts, Reluctant Confederates: Upper South Unionists in the Secession Crisis (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989).

family's self-sufficiency, and they relied on their families for support. Horace Keaton of McMinn County remembered that his mother "did the cooking, spinning, carding, dying, [and] weaving [of] all the cloth for the whole family." Daughters usually aided their mothers, and the boys were sometimes impressed as well. Occasionally, impoverished wives worked outside the home to add to the family income, usually as domestic servants.⁵

Despite these class indicators, some chose to sympathize with the South. There was a strong correlation between wealth and Rebel sympathies. Of the six East Tennessee counties that voted for separation from the Union, all but one was wealthier than the average county in the region. East Tennessee Confederates owned more slaves than their Union counterparts and owned significantly more land as well. Men from East Tennessee slaveholding families overwhelmingly became Confederates; 100 percent of East Tennessee planter families joined the Confederacy. Thus, the higher a man or woman's economic standing, the more likely he or she was to support the Confederacy. Affluent slaveowning women often chose the Confederate cause to continue their way of life, which was characterized by a leisure ethic. A Rhea County slaveowning woman "worked only as she wanted to . . . knitting, sewing, and [making] fancy quilt work." To continue

⁵ Fred Arthur Bailey, Class and Tennessee's Confederate Generation (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 35-37; Bailey, "Class Contrasts in Old South Tennessee: An Analysis of the Non-Combatant Responses to the Civil War Veterans Questionnaires," Tennessee Historical Quarterly (Winter 1986): 280-81.

this way of life, wealthy white slaveowning women would have to support the Confederate cause.⁶

East Tennessee women had a difficult time deciding which side to support as war approached. A Knoxville Confederate-sympathizing housewife whose husband was a Unionist wrote her sister in Alabama: “This is a time when all true hearted souls must be willing to sacrifice themselves on the altar of Freedom. I am between two fires. If I escape one, I am sure to be consumed by the other in the widening of the struggle.” Many were caught between these two fires, but for the most part, women sided with their husbands or families.⁷

Some women spoke out for their cause. A “Tennessee Woman” wrote the Knoxville Register before the state’s June 1861 vote on secession encouraging the men of East Tennessee to “Gird on your armor, husbands and brothers, fathers and sons. ‘Separation and Representation’ your watchword, not that you love the Union less but that you love your country more” and the women to “Place your hands on their shoulders or your arms about their necks and plead with them to go on the 8th of June and cast their suffrage for SEPARATION AND REPRESENTATION, and rescue your liberties from the hands of the enemy.”⁸ Most women however were not so outspoken. They kept their

⁶ Verton M. Queener, “East Tennessee Sentiment and the Secession Movement, November 1860-June 1861,” East Tennessee Historical Society’s Publications 20 (1948): 70; Peter Wallenstein, “Which Side Are You On? The Social Origins of White Union Troops from Civil War East Tennessee,” Journal of East Tennessee History 63 (1991): 89; Bailey, Class and Tennessee’s Confederate Generation, 37.

⁷ Mary V. Rothrock, ed., The French Broad-Holston Country: A History of Knox County, Tennessee (Knoxville: East Tennessee Historical Society, 1946), 129.

⁸ Knoxville Register, June 5, 1861.

sentiments to themselves and their immediate family. But, however outspoken and whatever their political stance, they were in for a long war that would change their lives, at least for the duration of the war.

CHAPTER THREE

“A TARGET OVER THE HEART”: UNIONIST WOMEN IN WARTIME

EAST TENNESSEE

On June 20, 1861, a convention of Unionist East Tennesseans met to write a petition to the state government, which had recently seceded from the Union. In that petition, they complained that the state's

bigoted, overbearing, and intolerant spirit has already subjected the people of East Tennessee to many petty grievances; our people have been insulted; our flags have been fired upon and torn down; our houses have been rudely entered; our families subjected to insult; our peaceable meetings interrupted; our women and children shot at by a merciless soldiery; our towns pillaged; our citizens robbed; and some of them assassinated and murdered.¹

Conditions would only worsen for the residents of East Tennessee, both Union and Confederate. Women of both sides experienced the challenges that war brought with it, including labor shortages and destruction by invading armies:

The laboring young men were in the armies, and what was left of the people's substance being wasted, the prevailing want pressed upon the brink of starvation and was brought to the homes of thousands who had never known hunger before. The present and prospective victims of the extreme destitution were women and children.

In 1864, a Knoxville resident reported a murder in her journal:

About two weeks ago either some soldiers or Union men went to a man's house a few miles out of town, I think his name was Duncan, at night and called him out and killed him (his wife was very sick, had a young infant only a few days old, and it excited her so much she has been at the point of death almost ever since) & then went and burnt his mother's house. . . . The military take no notice of it at

¹ War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies (70 vols. in 128, Washington, D.C.: 1880-1901), Ser. One, 52/1: 175. Hereafter cited as OR.

all.²

Conditions quickly deteriorated for East Tennesseans. Neither side was safe as an internal civil war broke out in the region. A captain in Confederate general James A. Longstreet's corps passing through East Tennessee in the fall of 1863 commented that "In East Tennessee the people are about equally divided and there rages a real civil war, which causes great misery." In his study of western North Carolina during the Civil War, historian Philip Shaw Paludan commented that allegiances were "worn as a target over the heart, amid armed enemies, and loyalty could attract both dangerous friends and mortal enemies."³ How did women react to these divided loyalties and dangerous conditions? Did their roles change as a result of wartime hardships?

Although it would be difficult to estimate the numbers of women who remained loyal to the Union cause, historians generally assume that the majority of women in East Tennessee did so. Unfortunately, these women left few primary sources such as diaries and letters. Poor and yeoman women, who in East Tennessee tended to be Union supporters, rarely left diaries behind. In East Tennessee, poor women from rural backgrounds had less access to education because they lived far away from schools located in the cities and because they could not afford school tuition. Wealthier women who lived in the cities had more access to education and were more literate. These

² Thomas William Humes, The Loyal Mountaineers of Tennessee (Knoxville: Ogden Brothers and Company, 1888), 303; Daniel E. Sutherland, ed., A Very Violent Rebel: The Civil War Diary of Ellen Renshaw House (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1996), 104.

³ Charles M. Blackford, III, Letters from Lee's Army, or Memoirs of Life In and Out of the Army in Virginia During the War Between the States (New York: A.S. Barnes and Company, 1947), 226; Paludan, Victims, xi.

wealthier women tended to sympathize with the Confederacy during the war. Whatever the reason, there are many more first-hand accounts from East Tennessee Confederate women than from Unionist women.

When secession came to Tennessee in 1861, many East Tennessee Unionist men resisted the movement by joining the Federal armies in Kentucky. But many others were forced to hide in the mountains for fear of pro-Confederate bushwhackers. Andrew Johnson decried the fact that East Tennessee Unionists had been driven from their homes, “compell[ing] them to desert their wives, their children, and all that man holds dear on earth.” With the men hiding out in the mountains or fighting for the cause, East Tennessee was left without a sufficient labor supply, multiplying the residents’ misery. A concerned Confederate in East Tennessee wrote Confederate Congressman Ben Hill, complaining about the effects of Confederate conscription in East Tennessee, which had deprived the region of male labor:

Nine-tenths of the producing labor of East Tennessee is white labor, hence, when led by conscription or stampeding the men subject to military duty leave, the labor of East Tennessee is gone. There are within our borders at this time thousands of families left without any male members capable of labor. These helpless women and children are to become a charge upon the public, for whatever may be the sins of their fathers or husbands the Southern people cannot deal cruelly with them.

The letter was forwarded by Hill to Confederate President Jefferson Davis, who responded unsympathetically to the plight of East Tennessee women: “if we are to have the hostility of the class called in East Tennessee Union men, it were better that they should be in the ranks of the enemy than living as spies among us and waiting for

opportunity to strike. The commanding general of the department will, I am sure, be as lenient as is proper, and mindful of the need we have that the fields be cultivated.”⁴

Davis’s lack of concern for East Tennessee Unionist families is typical of Confederate policy in the region. E. Kirby Smith, the Confederate commander of the region, established martial law shortly after the war began. As the war progressed, Confederate commanders became frustrated with protecting a hostile population, and in 1862 they issued a proclamation that said they would welcome back Unionist men who had fled north if they laid down their arms in thirty days. “At the end of that time,” the proclamation went on,

those failing to return to their homes and accept the amnesty thus offered, and provide for and protect their wives and children in East Tennessee, will have them sent to their care in Kentucky, or beyond the Confederate States’ line at their own expense. . . . The women and children must be taken care of by husbands and fathers, either in East Tennessee or in the Lincoln Government.⁵

This order went unenforced except for the families of prominent Unionist leaders William Brownlow and Horace Maynard, but the order struck fear in the hearts of all East Tennessee Unionist women.

Unionist women were not merely acted upon in this dangerous time; they took an active role in trying to change their circumstances and help their cause. Women, for example, attempted to change their situation by petitioning political leaders. Catherine Melville, an East Tennessean who at the outbreak of the war worked in the Washington

⁴ LeRoy P. Graf, Ralph W. Haskins, and Paul H. Bergeron, eds., The Papers of Andrew Johnson (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1967-), 4:699; OR Ser. Four, 2/1: 367-71.

⁵ OR Ser. One, 10/1: 641.

quartermaster general's office, wrote Andrew Johnson to encourage him to send supplies to East Tennessee Federal troops in hospitals: "Can we get Boxes sent to the East Tennessee men who are in Kentucky? Mr. Maynard told us that you had got them clothing. . . . We would like to do some thing for the noble men of Tennessee who have stood firm in the glorious cause. . . . Let us know if we can do anything to show that we love Tennessee and honor the men who have stood unflinchingly in her defence." In December 1861, Elizabeth Self, daughter of a Unionist bridge burner condemned to death, wrote Jefferson Davis pleading for her father's life. Her telegram worked, as Davis pardoned Self two hours before he was scheduled to hang.⁶

Women also took matters into their own hands to provide for their families. In Washington County, Margaret Timpkins was indicted for grand larceny in January 1862 for stealing from Debra Leab and Elizabeth Parrington. What is interesting are the items she stole: a pair of shoes, four pair of stockings, a calico dress, a shoulder of bacon, eighteen pounds of flour, and other items totalling \$14.75. She was sent to jail for her crime.⁷ With a shortage of male labor and the destruction wrought by invading armies, many such crimes took place in wartime in East Tennessee.

Noel Fisher notes in War At Every Door that East Tennessee Unionist women played a critical role in the resistance movement, serving as couriers, safe house operators, and spies. Courier work, while dangerous, was a common way for women to

⁶ Graf, Haskins, and Bergeron, Papers of Andrew Johnson, 5:38; Temple, East Tennessee, 397-98.

⁷ Washington County Criminal Circuit Court Minutes, February 23, 1862, TSLA.

use their sex to their advantage. The most celebrated East Tennessee courier was Blount County resident Mary Love, who volunteered to deliver a message from Union general Ulysses S. Grant in Chattanooga to General Ambrose Burnside in Knoxville, informing Burnside of reinforcements. When the army courier could get no further than Kingston, Love announced that she would get the message to Knoxville. In the process she was arrested by Confederates, but talked her way out of arrest and took the dispatch on to Louisville (in Blount County), where a thirteen-year-old boy carried it the rest of the way to Knoxville. Historian O.P. Temple contrasted her ride with the comparatively easy twelve-mile ride of Paul Revere: “Here was a ride, by a delicate young lady, of 35 miles or more, in bitter cold weather, over rough roads, and through a country of high ridges and hills, patrolled in every direction by a watchful enemy, with a wide river to cross. . . . Let us hope, at least, that some Longfellow may arise some day, who shall in verse give immortality to this daring woman.”⁸

When the war began, East Tennessee developed an “underground railroad” for Unionists to travel northward to safety in Kentucky. This underground railroad was based on the networks that slaves developed for helping escaped slaves travel northward. Guides or “pilots” such as Daniel Ellis became famous for their activities in helping Unionists escape to the north. One woman, Kate Summers, worked with her husband as a pilot in East Tennessee. As the war progressed, the network expanded to include helping

⁸ Fisher, *War at Every Door*, 72; Temple, *East Tennessee*, 524; Inez Burns, *History of Blount County, Tennessee: From War Trail to Landing Strip, 1795-1955*, rev. ed. (Evansville, IN: Whippoorwill Publications, 1957), 63.

Confederate deserters and, more frequently, Union soldiers who had escaped from Southern prisons. Often these escapees turned to blacks for help. Captain Willard Glazier, an escapee from a South Carolina prison, reported that he was hidden by a slave during the day and at night he was taken to the cabin of an “Aunt Katy,” who, in addition to providing him food and shelter, held a prayer meeting for him. He was then equipped with a full haversack and a hunting knife and sent on his way. Where they could not identify friends by the color of their skin, escapees often looked for small cabins and farms; they avoided large houses and towns, where they would be less likely to find help.⁹ At those small cabins, white Unionist women often sheltered escaping soldiers, taking huge risks to themselves and their families as they helped the men on their way. In addition to housing the escapees, women also left food along the escape routes for the pilots and their fugitives.¹⁰ Historian Durwood Dunn argues that this underground railroad was possibly East Tennessee Unionists’ greatest contribution to the war effort, for the participants tied up Rebel troops in preventing escapes, helped Federal soldiers return to their units, and passed important information on enemy troop locations to Federal authorities. Union sympathizer Jeanette Mabry, wife of Confederate colonel George Mabry, ran a regular message drop for Union pilots passing through. “No guide considered his mission complete unless he stopped going and coming to trade intelligence

⁹ W.B. Hesseltine, “The Underground Railroad from Confederate Prisons to East Tennessee.” *East Tennessee Historical Society’s Publications* 2 (1930): 63; Paludan, *Victims*, 73; Paul Whelan, “Unconventional Warfare in East Tennessee, 1861-1865” (M.A. thesis, University of Tennessee, 1963), 132.

¹⁰ For stories of women sheltering escapees, see Paludan, *Victims*, 75; Daniel Ellis, *Thrilling Adventures of Daniel Ellis, the Great Union Guide of East Tennessee for a Period of Nearly Four Years During the Great Southern Rebellion* (Johnson City, TN: Overmountain Press, 1989 [1867]), 123.

with Mrs. Mabry. Many a Federal soldier was astounded at the amount of information she gave them to relay to the first headquarters they reached in free territory,” commented one pilot. Women played a very important part in keeping this underground railroad in operation, as most men were absent either in hiding or with the Union army. Daniel Ellis praised one of his assistants in the underground railroad, Melvina Stevens: “She had often arisen at night where she obtained intelligence of importance, and communicated it to loyalists some miles distant, preventing their capture or murder by the enemy.” This work constituted a new role for women during the war; in the words of one historian, it showed “just how capable they were of crossing the lines of traditional gender roles to meet the new demands imposed on them by war.”¹¹

In the isolated mountain communities of East Tennessee, women also had an important role in protecting their homes. Some communities organized “home guards,” made up of women and children who served as pickets for their community. When a stranger approached, the sentinel would ascertain the stranger’s sympathies and then could sound an alarm for the community if danger threatened. These home guard units increased morale in the community because they let everyone contribute to the common defense. The units also demonstrated the local population’s approval of the underground railroads, for they cooperated with the pilots. An escaping Federal prisoner described his

¹¹ Durwood Dunn, Cades Cove: The Life and Death of a Southern Appalachian Community 1818-1937 (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1988), 137; Temple, East Tennessee and the Civil War, 427-28; John C. Inscoe. ““Moving Through Deserter Country”: Fugitive Accounts of the Inner Civil War in Southern Appalachia,” in The Civil War in Appalachia: Collected Essays, eds. Kenneth W. Noe and Shannon H. Wilson (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1997), 173, 176-77.

approach to Cades Cove in Blount County: “We entered the Cove about 3 p.m. and very unexpectedly caused quite an alarm. A girl was on duty as a sentinel. She gave the alarm with a horn. . . . In an instant [the Cove] was alive. The men were driving their cattle before them, and every man had a gun on his shoulder.” The “loyal, liberty-loving men and women” of Cades Cove fed and clothed the men and piloted them to Knoxville. Before leaving the community, the soldier asked the young sentinel “what she would do if a stranger should demand the horn of her before she could use it. . . . Her reply was that she should tell him to go to ‘Hell!’ And from my knowledge of her as a sentinel on duty, I am very sure that she would have done so.”¹² The active cooperation of women in the internal escape network was a significant factor in the success of the underground railroads in East Tennessee.

Besides passing prison escapees and information along the underground railroad, women took an active role in undermining Confederate efforts. In his memoirs, pilot Daniel Ellis thanks Melvina Stephens of Bulls Gap for volunteering to inform him of any pickets at a bridge he needed to cross. The most famous case of an East Tennessee female Union spy is that of Sarah Thompson of Greeneville. In 1864, her husband was killed by Confederates. Spurred by his death, Thompson continued her husband’s work of delivering dispatches and recruiting information to Union officers. When Confederate general John Hunt Morgan’s men came to Greeneville, she wrote, “they pilferd and

¹² Dunn, *Cades Cove*, 135, 137-38; Gordon B. McKinney, “Women’s Role in Civil War Western North Carolina,” *North Carolina Historical Review* 69 No. 1 (January 1992): 37-56; Whelan, “Unconventional Warfare,” 128.

stole all they could and abused the wives and daughters [daughters] of Union men on many ways that would not be proper for me to state here for more than one reason.” Morgan himself came into her house, took the tomato butter she had been making, and “used a great deal of flattery as it made me mad and it did him good to taunt me for I disliked it very much.” In retaliation, she slipped out of town and identified Morgan to some Union soldiers, who subsequently killed him. Thompson went on to work as a nurse in Knoxville and then gave lectures in the North about her war experiences. She is buried in Arlington National Cemetery.¹³

Some Unionist women worked in plain view in support of their cause. In Blount County, six women formed the “Loyal Ladies Home Guard” and engaged in spying and informing on the Confederates. In December 1863, when Union general William T. Sherman came into their county, they rode out to inform him that Confederate general James Longstreet had quit his siege of Knoxville. The Loyal Ladies Home Guard was so effective that one member, Harriet McTeer, was arrested by the Confederate army for spying, and the husband of member Dora Jackson Birdwell was killed because of his wife’s spying activities.¹⁴ Confederate nurse Kate Cumming reported that in Chattanooga

¹³ Ellis, Thrilling Adventures, 357-58; “Sarah Thompson’s Account of Morgan’s Defeat,” Sarah E. Thompson Papers, 1859-1898, Online Archival Collection, Special Collections, Duke University. Thompson’s responsibility for Morgan’s death has been questioned by Noel Fisher, who points out that James Leahy and Lucy Williams also claimed responsibility (Fisher, War at Every Door, 186-87). However, Thompson’s claim is corroborated by Andrew Johnson and others. A letter by a Knoxville woman (Rhoda Williams to Rufus Morgan Williams, September 22, 1864, Col. John and Rhoda Campbell Williams Papers, McClung Historical Collection, Lawson McGhee Library, Knoxville [hereafter cited as McClung Collection]) also denies Williams’s claim and reinforces Thompson’s.

¹⁴ Wilma Dykeman, Tennessee Women, Past and Present (Memphis: Tennessee Committee for the Humanities, 1977), 21; Burns, History of Blount County, 63.

the Unionist women gave the best food they had to Union prisoners, but refused to give a mouthful to the hungry Rebel guards. And when Union general Ambrose Burnside was defending Knoxville against Longstreet's siege, men and women along the French Broad River sent flatboats loaded with supplies down the river at night to the surrounded Union army. "Never in the history of the war did a people labor more willingly nor more enthusiastically for a cause, or give more generously than these patriots on the French Broad," commented one historian.¹⁵

East Tennessee Unionist women suffered mightily at the hands of the Rebel occupiers. An 1864 tribute to East Tennessee women honored their work to support the Union cause:

Although the government, which owed them protection, did not protect them, [these women] broke their last biscuit, and gave [the Federal soldiers] the biggest half, out of the mouths of hungry children. They gave up the last horse, mule, cow, sheep, hog, everything they had to the soldiers that needed them, because they were Union soldiers, or were plundered out of them by the enemy.¹⁶

These were not the only losses that they suffered. Many mothers lost sons in the Union army, and in some cases women were forced to serve as funeral directors and grave diggers. A boy named Marvin was killed at the battle of Bulls Gap. "His mother took a wagon to Bulls Gap, approximately thirty miles [from northeast Greene County], for the body of her son and transported him back in that wagon. He was buried in Providence

¹⁵ Richard Barksdale Harwell, ed. *Kate: The Journal of a Confederate Nurse* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1959), 193; Temple, *East Tennessee and the Civil War*, 500. See also Wilma Dykeman, *The French Broad* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1965), 105.

¹⁶ Report to the Contributors to the Pennsylvania Relief Association for East Tennessee by a Commission Sent by the Executive Committee to Visit that Region, and Forward Supplies to the Loyal and Suffering Inhabitants (Philadelphia: The Association, 1864), 6.

Cemetery and at his grave was a marker bearing, ‘Murdered By the Rebels.’” Robbery was also a constant threat. Daniel Ellis tells of several women attacked by Rebels: “One lady living in Carter County, who was the wife of a Federal soldier, had her clothes torn off of her entirely, and the belt containing her money and jewels taken from her waist.” Mrs. Elbert Treadaway’s home was broken into and she was forced to strip, but she managed to escape with her nearly naked children into the cold January night. Apparently the Rebels robbed her solely because she was a “Lincolnite.” These women were lucky, however; some women were tortured and hanged by robbers. When they refused to reveal the location of their savings (hidden in a five-gallon jar), Samuel and Elizabeth Kelley were hung, apparently upside down, until someone came along and cut them down. Fighting back against the thieves often seemed useless, because the robbers were most often Confederate soldiers who would retaliate with more vengeance. When some Rebel soldiers came to take their horse, Elijah Oliver’s wife stopped her husband from resisting because, she said, “it would never do, that the whole army might come and kill us all, and so she constrained him to let them go, saying it would be better to lose the horse, than it would be to lose some or all of our lives.”¹⁷

In addition to robbery, expulsion was also a threat to East Tennessee Unionist women. Only two East Tennessee families, the Maynards and the Brownlows, were expelled from the region, but Unionist women feared that this practice would become

¹⁷ Carl N. Hayes, Neighbor Against Neighbor, Brother Against Brother: Greene County in the Civil War (no pub., 1966), 6, 7; Ellis, Thrilling Adventures, 367; Fisher, War at Every Door, 89; Dunn, Cades Cove, 133.

more widespread. Susan Brownlow, the twenty-three year old daughter of the vituperative editor of the Knoxville Whig, made the most of her expulsion experience. After the Brownlows were banished from Tennessee by the Confederate army, she accompanied her father on his speaking tour of the North in 1862. While she was at home in Knoxville in early June 1861, she had confronted two men at her house who were attempting to take down the family's Union flag. Brandishing a gun, she forced the men to retreat. The story was embellished for Northern audiences; now, narratives told of her solo defense of the flag against ninety or more soldiers. Received as a heroine in the North, Brownlow was presented with a revolver at the Colt factory in Connecticut, and several brochures were printed about her exploits. One, entitled Miss Martha [sic] Brownlow; or the Heroine of Tennessee (1862), was translated into German for immigrants from that country.¹⁸

The Unionist women of East Tennessee long awaited the arrival of the Union army to end their fears of robbery and expulsion from their homes. In an October 1861 report to Union general George H. Thomas, William Blount Carter reported that “the loyalty of our people increases with the oppressions they have to bear. Men and women weep for joy when I merely hint to them that the day of our deliverance is at hand. I have not seen a secession flag since I entered the State.” After they had endured these hardships for two and one-half years, the Unionists' day of deliverance finally arrived in

¹⁸ E. Merton Coulter, William G. Brownlow: Fighting Parson of the Southern Highlands (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1971 [1937]), 154, 223-44; Steve Humphrey, That D----d Brownlow: Being a Saucy and Malicious Description of Fighting Parson William Gannaway Brownlow (Boone, NC: Appalachian Consortium Press, 1978), 261.

East Tennessee in the fall of 1863.¹⁹

The Unionist women of East Tennessee rejoiced at the Federal troops' arrival in East Tennessee in the fall of 1863:

“‘Glory be to God, the Yankees have come!’ ‘The Flag’s come back to Tennessee!’ Such were the welcomes all along the road, and as we entered Knoxville, it was past all description. The people seemed frantic with joy. I never knew what the Love of Liberty was before. The old flag has been hidden in mattresses and under carpets. It now floats to the breeze at every staff in East Tennessee. Ladies wear it – carry it – wave it! Little children clap their hands and kiss it.²⁰

When troops came into Knoxville, one man reported, his mother “went eighteen miles on horseback to Knoxville, ‘just a purpose to see Burnside’s army.’” To celebrate the occasion, the women of Knoxville arranged a dinner in Sherman’s honor in December. Scouring the countryside for the best food available, the women prepared a feast for the general. Unfortunately, Sherman reacted with anger; he had just put his men on a forced march from Chattanooga to relieve Burnside in Knoxville, and this display of plenty sickened him. He and his men returned to Chattanooga in a leisurely manner, picking the countryside clean in revenge.²¹ This unfortunate incident is symbolic of the experience of East Tennessee women; though they felt redeemed by the arrival of Union soldiers, they would continue to suffer from the ravages of civil war.

It was difficult for East Tennessee Unionists to rebuild when bushwhackers and robbers remained a threat. A Madisonville Unionist reported to a friend, “Major Love,

¹⁹ OR Ser. One, 4/1: 320.

²⁰ Harper’s Weekly, October 24, 1863.

²¹ Report to the Contributors, 16; Seymour, Divided Loyalties, 213-15.

Willie and I were sitting in the parlor last night, Willie was thumping on the piano, and some one knocked at the window blinds – The first thought was bushwhackers of course, but I opened the blind and who should I see but Mollie Johnston.” This fear of bushwhackers was well founded, for as times worsened, so did the robberies. Adeline McDowell Deaderick of Jonesboro reported that in one case, women had become bushwhackers themselves: ““The women had become so emboldened that they shaved their heads, don’d mens apparel, and entered the pilfering traffic. . . . They betrayed themselves to their victims when they began to quarrel over dishes and bed quilts and silk dresses. ‘This looking glass is mine, t’other is yourn.’” In most cases, however, the thieves were soldiers foraging for food or supplies. Susanne Fillers Tramel of Greene County once got into a tug-of-war with a Union soldier marching by. He was trying to steal a saddle hanging on the fence, but she kept pulling on the saddle until the soldier gave up.²²

In response to these conditions, including a lack of food due to the male labor shortage and robbery by invading armies, many Unionist families left their homes during the Civil War. When possible, they headed for cities, where they were more likely to receive aid from the military. One Unionist family from eleven miles east of Knoxville reported that no one from their town was receiving aid, but many were leaving for Knoxville in hopes of drawing rations from the army quartermaster. Knoxville,

²² Mary Caldwell to Carrie Stakely, June 18, 1865, Hall-Stakely Papers, McClung Collection; Dykeman, Tennessee Women, 21; Hayes, Neighbor Against Neighbor, 8.

Chattanooga, Nashville, and other Federal-held towns boomed with an influx of wartime refugees. Nashville reported receiving 9,000 refugees (many of whom were from East Tennessee) in two months of 1864, 2,500 in one week. A visitor to the refugee barracks in Nashville reported finding them full of “sick, poorly clad, and dispirited women and children” from East Tennessee, Western North Carolina, North Georgia, and North Alabama. In Chattanooga in early 1864, 5,000 rations a day were being issued to refugees, mainly white women and children. In April 1864, Sherman ordered an end to the distribution of rations, but the refugees continued to pour into the cities. The Louisville Journal reported that “every day women, marriageable girls, children, cripples, and needy of every age and both sexes may be seen here [in Chattanooga] in rags and wretchedness, barefooted and in tears” looking for food that the army could not supply.²³

Many families left Tennessee altogether. As early as December 1863, thousands of Unionist East Tennesseans were fleeing into Kentucky and the Ohio Valley. While one Knoxville family headed as far north as New York, Ohio Valley locations such as Cairo, Louisville, Cincinnati, and Jeffersonville were more popular with the refugees. Some travelers in Nashville reported meeting a group from Knoxville heading for the Ohio Valley: “we approached a group of refugees decently, but poorly dressed, huddling round a fire. There were three families, thirteen in all. They were going to Vincennes, Indiana, where they had friends. One old man, dressed in homespun, with a straw hat on his head,

²³ Report to the Contributors, 18–20; William C. Harris, “The East Tennessee Relief Movement of 1864–1865,” Tennessee Historical Quarterly 48 (1989): 86–96.

said, simply, ‘All’s gone.’”²⁴

When the East Tennessee refugees arrived in these new locations, they were met with mixed receptions. Many residents welcomed the families, but some in the Midwest could not put aside prewar stereotypes of nonslaveholding Southerners as ignorant and uncouth. The residents also resented the black East Tennesseans who were among the refugees. But refugee relief associations and women’s auxiliaries in these towns responded to the crisis with aid, at least for the white refugees. The Cairo Relief Association dealt with the two thousand refugees a month who were arriving in the town by February 1864, some nine-tenths of whom were women and children. But the Cairo Relief Association did not provide aid to black refugee families; that role was left to the Freedmen’s Commissions.²⁵

Some Northerners who observed this outpouring from East Tennessee feared that it could upset the postwar political makeup of the state. The President of the Nashville Refugee Relief Association contended that “it is important to keep the loyal population at home on account of their labor and their votes. They are wanted to reorganize the State on the old basis of harmony with the Federal government.” Motivated, then, by both politics and philanthropy, a group of concerned Northerners founded the East Tennessee Relief Association (ETRA) in 1864 for the benefit of the “poorly clad, well-nigh starved,

²⁴ William C. Harris, “East Tennessee’s Civil War Refugees and the Impact of the War on Civilians,” Journal of East Tennessee History 64 (1992): 3-19; P.O. Cowan, James H. Cowan: A Tribute of Affection (Boston: Press of Frank Wood, 1883); Report to the Contributors, 18.

²⁵ Harris, “East Tennessee’s Civil War Refugees,” 3-19; Harris, “East Tennessee Relief Movement,” 86-96; Report to the Contributors, Appendix E, “Their Situation in Cairo.”

and well-nigh heart broken” people of East Tennessee. Ultimately, the ETRA would distribute more than \$250,000 in aid to East Tennesseans. Unionist families who had suffered at the hands of the Rebels on account of their loyalty received the largest portion, followed by other Unionist families, then by formerly secessionist families who had taken the oath of allegiance to the Union, and finally to the old men, women, and children of families that had members in the Confederate army. It should be pointed out that none of this money went to black families; a circular published in the North to raise funds stated that “A Refugee Relief commission has just been organized to receive contributions of money, clothing, and other articles needed for white Refugee sufferers from the Rebellion. . . . Now, when the women and children are suffering, let us extend them immediate and abundant relief.”²⁶

A look at the women applying for aid gives us some insight into the conditions these women had suffered through. In Hancock County, seven women received food and clothing from the Union army. They had been robbed by Rebel bushwhackers and had walked sixty-five miles to Strawberry Plains to receive aid. Nine other women, also robbed of everything by Rebels, walked eighty-five miles to Knoxville but returned home disappointed when they found that the ETRA’s goods had not come in yet. Mary Jane Henry of Jefferson County had six children, her husband was in the hospital, and she was sickly and unable to work. Mary Lenter’s husband was in a Rebel prison, two of her

²⁶ Report to the Contributors, 21, Appendix C: A circular spread for support of the ETRA, 12. Emphasis added.

children had died since her husband left, the third was sick, and Rebels had destroyed her property. Mary Odom of Washington County had four sons in the Union army and a husband who “has fits and cannot support her. Says she has no chemise. Wants clothing for herself and her daughter and child.” She, like all of the other women cited here, received the clothing she requested from the ETRA. In addition to supplying needed goods, the ETRA secured a building in Knoxville in 1864 for the large numbers of refugees arriving in the city daily. Delivering supplies to needy East Tennesseans outside of the cities proved difficult. Cities such as Knoxville and Chattanooga received a disproportionately large amount of aid, while counties with no rail connection received little or no aid. An 1865 report of the association stated that no aid had been delivered to Carter, Johnson, and Hancock counties because of their inaccessibility. Fifty thousand dollars’ worth of goods and provisions finally reached the most eastern counties of the state in 1865. Many farmers thus chose to leave the region rather than depend on relief supplies that might or might not come in.²⁷

Black East Tennessee Unionists comprised a unique case. Nine percent of the population of East Tennessee in 1860 were slaves, and most of them were owned in units of nine or fewer. Despite the small numbers, the wartime experience for African Americans in East Tennessee was not significantly different from that of those in the rest

²⁷ List of Applications Made Through Thomas A.R. Nelson to the East Tennessee Relief Association in 1864, MM-1997-103, McClung Collection; Thomas W. Humes, Report to the East Tennessee Relief Association at Knoxville (Knoxville: no pub., 1865); Humes, Loyal Mountaineers, 330; Robert Tracy McKenzie, One South or Many?: Plantation Belt and Upcountry in Civil War-Era Tennessee (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 105.

of the South. Although the slave population was small and most of the slaves worked in households where personal contact enhanced relationships between slaves and owners, East Tennesseans were as prejudiced against blacks as whites in any other area of the South. East Tennessee was predominantly Unionist, but it was not abolitionist; its white residents saw slavery as a necessary form of social control.²⁸

Motivated by the desires to gain new opportunities and to escape cruel owners, some East Tennessee slaves ran away from their owners during the war. There is evidence that slave women used the threat of running away to get what they wanted during the war; Martha of Loudon County asked her owner to start paying her \$50 a year. When he refused, she left to work for someone else who would provide her compensation. Nancy, a slave who escaped from Mary Jane Reynolds, later wrote to inform Reynolds that she was in Knoxville attending school and had “everything that [her] heart could wish.” Some runaway women and children were captured in Loudon County, but were freed by angry male fugitives who went on to beat the would-be capturer severely. Most escaping fled northward to Kentucky or to Union-occupied cities such as Nashville during the Confederate occupation of East Tennessee. The cities offered freed persons personal development and job opportunities with the federal government. Many of these fugitives returned to the region after the war, but they and the freed slaves who had remained in the region were just as unwelcome there as they were

²⁸ Bryan, “Civil War in East Tennessee,” 299-343; Robert J. Booker, The History of Blacks in Knoxville, Tennessee: The First Hundred Years, 1791-1891 (Knoxville: Beck Cultural Exchange Center, 1990), 11.

in the rest of the South.²⁹

It is difficult at best to find traces of slave women in Civil War East Tennessee. No diaries remain, for almost all blacks were illiterate. An exception was Laura Cansler, a free black woman who had attended the only school for free blacks in the South, in Charleston, South Carolina. In 1863, she obtained permission from Union general Ambrose Burnside to open a school for blacks in Knoxville. She became a teacher there, and the Burnside School she founded was the first taught by blacks in Knoxville. Other signs of wartime black culture include the churches. The first black church in Knoxville was Mount Zion Baptist, founded in 1860. Several other black churches were formed in Knoxville in wartime, including Logan Temple African Methodist Episcopal Church (1865) and Shiloh Presbyterian Church (1865).³⁰

Nevertheless, the slave system always threatened African-Americans. As late as August 1862, an issue of the Chattanooga Daily Rebel advertised “For Sale or Exchange a Negro Woman, good cook, ironer, and Washer.” The Greene County court records show several cases in which female slaves were delivered to the court to be bound to slaveholders, even as late as May 1863. Running away was an option for slaves to escape the system, but the presence of Confederate forces in the region discouraged this. Slaves feared what their Rebel capturers might do to them. East Tennessee newspapers ran an average of only four new fugitive slave advertisements a month during Confederate

²⁹ Wiley, Confederate Women, 197; John Cimprich, “Slavery’s End in East Tennessee,” East Tennessee Historical Society Publications 51-52 (1980-81): 78-88.

³⁰ Mary V. Rothrock, ed. The French Broad-Holston Country: A History of Knox County, Tennessee (Knoxville: East Tennessee Historical Society, 1946), 316; Booker, History of Blacks in Knoxville, 37.

occupation, which was lower than antebellum averages.³¹

Slavery legally ended in Tennessee on February 22, 1865, when the state constitution was amended to declare the immediate emancipation of all slaves in the state. The peculiar institution had been finished for a long time in East Tennessee, though, due to runaways and Federal occupation of the region. Freedmen's schools were established in the area, and blacks formed their own churches. Yet conditions for freed men and women in postwar East Tennessee were in some respects not much better than they had been before emancipation. White East Tennesseans were determined to keep blacks in an inferior position; freedmen's schools were burned, blacks were lynched, and sharecropping became the norm throughout the region. Knoxville blacks protested when a policeman beat a black woman in 1868: "I, with many others, would like to know whether this brutal outrage was perpetrated on account of color? For I have never seen a white woman, when under arrest, treated as that officer treated this black woman."³² White East Tennesseans, while Unionist, differed little from their racist Southern counterparts.

For white East Tennessee Unionist women the war meant robbery, food shortages, harassment by invading armies, fears of expulsion from their homes, and murder. In response, these women petitioned political leaders, stole goods to provide for their families, supported an underground railroad, spied on the enemy, walked miles to

³¹ Chattanooga Daily Rebel, August 9, 1862; Inman Diary, February 26, 1865; Greene County Court Minutes, November 5, 1861, May 5, 1863, McClung Collection; John Cimprich, Slavery's End in Tennessee, 1861-1865 (University, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1985), 17.

³² Bryan, "Civil War in East Tennessee." 316, 336-43; Knoxville Press and Herald, November 26, 1868.

obtain goods from Northern philanthropists, and moved their families to lands of greater promise when times became too hard at home. This was a major step outside the “women’s sphere” to which they had been confined before the war. Because of the dearth of men in the region, East Tennessee Unionist women had an opportunity to take on new roles in their communities.

CHAPTER FOUR

“ENOUGH TO RILE A SAINT”: CONFEDERATE WOMEN IN WARTIME

EAST TENNESSEE

Near the beginning of the war, a Confederate cavalry company from Monroe County stopped at the Knoxville household of Ellen Wilson White, a nineteen-year old Confederate sympathizer. The men, called the “McGhee Invincibles,” were dressed very handsomely, White recorded in her diary, and one of them shouted, “‘Hurrah for Jeff Davis!’ I said ‘Hurrah for the McGhee Invincibles!’ and then one of them said, ‘Hurrah for the ladies!’ and they took off their hats and got ready to hurrah when the captain said, ‘Let’s move, boys.’”¹ As this episode shows, Confederate women of East Tennessee cheered the men on to battle as the men left their homes in the spring and summer of 1861. Confederate women in East Tennessee also took on new roles to support their men: cooking and cleaning for the soldiers, holding fundraisers for the sick, visiting the wounded in hospitals, working as nurses and laundresses, making textiles, and bringing supplies to soldiers in the field.

In 1861, women organized the Soldiers’ Relief Society in Knoxville. This organization was intended to support Rebel men through such activities as sewing circles and visiting the sick.² Little else is known about this relief society; perhaps it did not last

¹ Ellen Wilson White Diary, June 28, 1861, MM-1994-007, McClung Collection.

² Knoxville Daily Register, December 31, 1861.

long. But women supported the cause on their own: Mrs. A.M. Van Dyke recalled, “I have carded and spun wool and cotton to make cloth and with my own hands have helped to fashion it into garments for the soldier boys. I have spun flax on the little wheel for towels and table cloths, have knit socks by the dozens, have sent to the front boxes of bandages and lint.” East Tennessee Confederate women often cooked for the soldiers passing near their homes. When Confederate general Nathan Bedford Forrest’s men were near her home in Cleveland, Myra Inman reported “cooking and washing hard all day for soldiers, a great many have eaten here today.” Knoxvilleian Ellen Wilson White reported in August 1861 that “Five or six soldiers came here for supper – said they had had nothing to eat since yesterday morning.” East Tennessee women also fed Confederate prison escapees just as Union women did; Sallie Florence McEwen housed and fed a soldier who had escaped from the enemy at Murfreesboro.³

Other women worked in Confederate hospitals, tending to the sick as nurses and laundresses. The role of caring for the sick and wounded was within the female “sphere” as defined by society in that time period; Chattanooga native and nurse Josephine Hooke wrote that “To be able to relieve in some degree the suffering of any soldier who bleeds in defense of our homes should be esteemed an honor and a privilege by Southern women.” The most famous of these nurses was Mobile native Kate Cumming, chief matron of Chattanooga’s Newsom Hospital. While Cumming was at Newsom Hospital,

³ A.M. Van Dyke, “A Paper Read Before the Daughters of the Confederacy,” University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Special Collections [hereafter cited as UTSC]; Myra Inman Diary, September 29-30, 1863, McClung Collection; Ellen Wilson White Diary, August 5, 1861; Sallie Florence McEwen Diaries, May 1, 1862, Confederate Collection, TSLA.

the local women of the town held a benefit “Soiree Dansante,” which raised eighty-five dollars for the benefit of the wounded there.⁴

Other women took a more visible role in supporting the cause. In Rhea County, twenty-seven young women organized themselves into a “cavalry troop” in the summer of 1862; “their chief activity was to visit Confederate companies stationed in the vicinity and supply them with articles of clothing, food, and nicknacks.” They were eventually arrested by Union forces and taken to Chattanooga, where they were forced to take the oath of allegiance. While spying activities were unnecessary during Confederate occupation, famous Rebel spy Belle Boyd was serenaded by a brass band when she stayed at Blount Mansion in Knoxville in February 1863.⁵

For East Tennessee Confederate women, the first two years of war resembled antebellum life in many respects. For example, in Knox County in November 1863, there was an advertisement for the theater. Due to martial law, however, social events such as dances and the theater had to end by the 10 PM curfew. Sallie Florence McEwen was taking music lessons in May 1862, and remained in school until Federal occupation threatened.⁶ Many of the female institutes in East Tennessee, which catered to children of wealthy Confederate families, attempted to remain open during the war. In an advertisement, the recently established Cleveland Female Institute encouraged making

⁴ Tennessee Records of Hamilton County, Miss Josephine H. Hooke’s Diary August 30, 1863 – April 29, 1864, Historical Records Project # 465-44-3-115, 1938, UTSC; Glenna R. Schroeder-Lein, “Confederate Army of Tennessee Hospitals in Chattanooga,” Journal of East Tennessee History 66 (1994): 54.

⁵ Dykeman, Tennessee Women, 21; Rothrock, French Broad, 135-36.

⁶ Rothrock, French Broad, 138; Sallie Florence McEwen Diaries, May 8, 1862.

sacrifices in wartime to send one's children to school: "Dress your children in homespun, in cotton gowns and wooden shoes if need be, but don't deny them teachers, books and studies. Notwithstanding 'hard times,' the school should be kept up." In 1862, the Masonic Female Institute in Cleveland, Aldehoff's Institute for Male and Female in Chattanooga, and the Athens Female College all ran advertisements in a Chattanooga paper encouraging parents to send their daughters to school.⁷

Other signs, however, showed that times had changed in Confederate East Tennessee. As food became scarce, families that had previously supported the soldiers could no longer afford to help them. In turn, the soldiers' behavior became worse: "The soldiers are dealing very badly, taking corn, leaving down fences, stealing horses, chickens, hogs and everything else they see. We turned off several that wanted dinner," reported one East Tennessee woman. General Simon Bolivar Buckner, the commanding Confederate general in Knoxville, gently admonished five young Knoxville women for stealing food:

It pains me very much to learn from our brave soldiers . . . that you had deprived them of their rations such as sweet bread, more commonly called Ginger Cakes, which was prepared for them by their wives, mothers and sisters. It is with regret that I shall and do order you one and all to appear before me at these headquarters to answer the charge made against you viz sweet bread thereby trying to make yourselves sweet at the expense of the Poor Soldier.⁸

Worsening conditions would drive women closer and closer to desperation after the

⁷ Athens Post, October 18, 1861; Chattanooga Daily Rebel, September 13, 1862.

⁸ Inman Diary, October 13, 1863; Major General Simon Bolivar Buckner to Eva Craton and Lizzie Lillard, Lizzie and Emma King, and Sallie McClain, June 4, 1863, Civil War Records of East Tennessee, Vol. 2, 174, UTSC.

Federal army took possession of East Tennessee in the fall of 1863.

Conditions in East Tennessee quickly worsened for Rebel women once the Federals took over the region in the fall of 1863. “When the Confederates had possession of Knoxville, we had such good times – but when the Federals came, all was different, I assure you,” commented one woman in her memoirs. The experience of living through a battle was terrifying, as Martha Mitchell reported: “During the seige [of Knoxville] the suspense was very trying. We often slept in our clothing at night – not knowing when we went to bed whether we would be blown to pieces before next morning.” Once the battle was over, however, the realities of Union occupation began to sink in; Martha Mitchell wrote that her family’s books, horses, cow, and clothing were stolen by Union soldiers shortly after occupation.⁹

East Tennessee Rebel women did not welcome the new Union masters. After the troops arrived, a Union soldier was stationed in the Knoxville home of a Mrs. Blanton, a Southern sympathizer. When the soldier attempted to be friendly by reaching down to pat the head of Blanton’s daughter, the little girl bit the soldier on the hand. As this episode suggests, many East Tennessee Rebel females fought back against their new masters. When one of Sherman’s men killed her only cow, cooked it on her stove, and then ate her little boy’s bread, Minerva McKamy “began beating that Yankee over the shoulders with a stick of stove wood and if you ever heard a fellow beg that one did. . . . I had not forgotten the killing of our cow and I would have been glad if I could have killed that

⁹ Martha Luttrell Mitchell Memoirs, Confederate Collection, TSLA; Seymour, Divided Loyalties, 84.

Yankee right there.”¹⁰

Of course, women could not always fight back against their new masters. They often had to appease the Federals to protect their property. Mary Jane Reynolds of Loudon allowed some Yankee officers to camp on her land, which proved to be wise because the officers later gave her some food from the commissary. But her duplicity troubled her, she wrote in a letter to her husband: “If you knew how ugly I feel sometimes you would be surprised how agreeable I make myself, and this deceit is what I abominate. . . . I feel like if I could cry it would relieve me some, but I cannot and it is hard work for me to pray.” Other families cooked for Union soldiers to win their favor. Margaret Oswald Klein remembered that some soldiers came to her house demanding dinner; because she lacked butter, her brother was sent to borrow some. “When he came back, he did not even have the plate. He said some soldiers had taken it away from him.” Elisa Bolli Buffat remembered that she had played accordion for the Union men while they ate at her house.¹¹

Some women not entirely dedicated to the cause found themselves flirting with the Federal soldiers. A pro-Union Nashville paper reported that “already our officers are quartering themselves among the Secesh, and fraternizing with the fair rebels; who find Yankees and greenbacks are not so bad as they supposed.” The same paper charged that

¹⁰ Seymour, *Divided Loyalties*, 84; Minerva McKamy Memoirs, VI-F-3 Box 4, TSLA.

¹¹ Marilyn Mayer Culpepper, *Trials and Triumphs: Women of the American Civil War* (Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1991), 202-203; Mary Jane Johnston Reynolds to husband, February, 1864, Mary Jane Johnston Reynolds MSS, UTSC; Memoirs of Margaret Oswald Klein, MM-1997-06, McClung Collection; Elisa Bolli Buffat, “Some Recollections of My Childhood Days and Incidents of My Life During the Civil War,” in David Babelay, *They Trusted and Were Delivered: The French-Swiss of Knoxville, Tennessee* (Knoxville: Vaud-Tennessee Publisher, 1988), 452.

secessionist East Tennessee young women were “seen every day accompanied by our gay Lotharios to the wonder of Union people and the disgust of real rebels.” Some East Tennessee women even married Union soldiers, to the disgust of Rebels such as Ellen Renshaw House: “The widow Fatio has married a Yankee Capt. They say she is crazy.”¹²

Other East Tennessee women turned to prostitution as a way of supporting themselves. Prostitution was reported as a problem in Knoxville before Union occupation; a Confederate major stationed near the town wrote his wife in June 1863, “I will state as a matter of history that female virtue if it ever existed in this country seems now a perfect wreck. Prostitutes are thickly crowded through mountain and valley in hamlet and city.” In February 1862, two elders of the First Presbyterian Church of Knoxville went to the house of member Mary A. Havelly and accused her of “keeping a house of ill form” and other “acts of lewdness.” On being confronted, Havelly admitted that the charges were substantially true, but claimed that she intended to reform. She refused, however, to remove from her house a woman whom the elders accused of being a prostitute, and she also refused to appear before the elders of the church. Instead, she sent a note to the clergy that admitted her guilt but asserted her pride:

I expect to reform at some future day not far distant, but I will not decide to be a member of your church again. I have been dissatisfied as a member of your church for about a year, so whenever I feel that I am fit to be a member of any church I shall join another. I will close with many thanks to you for the interest you have taken in my future welfare – this from your humble servant Mary

¹² Nashville Daily Press, October 2, 10, 1863; Rothrock, French Broad-Holston Country, 145-46; Sutherland, A Very Violent Rebel, 123.

Arlenna Havely.

The church excommunicated her the following week and published her letter to the congregation.¹³

Apparently, the problem worsened in East Tennessee after Federal occupation. It is unknown how many of the prostitutes were Unionist or Confederate sympathizers. Certainly many of these women were not prostitutes but camp followers and other women seeking aid from the armies. A Union captain in Chattanooga who thought little of these women wrote that “the war appears to have demoralized everybody and the rumor says that almost half the women in the vicinity of the army, married and unmarried, are lost to all virtue.” In Chattanooga, the army attempted to solve the problem by shipping the prostitutes to Nashville. They felt they were doing the city of Chattanooga a great favor: “We are making quite a reform in the morals of this community now by sending all the frail fair ones who infest Chattanooga, and increasing daily in numbers, to Nashville and other points beyond our lines They are a poor specimen of the morality of Southern ladies. Many of them are married and their husbands are in the Rebel army.” William Brownlow reported in the spring of 1864 that the Knoxville police were attempting to remove all prostitutes from the town: “Filthy and disreputable persons, especially of the female persuasion, are being removed, and ought, one and all, irrespective of color, be driven out of the town, and kept out.” Yet Chattanooga and Knoxville ran a poor third and fourth to Memphis and Nashville, the

¹³ Bell Irvin Wiley, Confederate Women (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1975), 161-62; Records of First Presbyterian Church, Knoxville, February 10 - March 4, 1862, McClung Collection.

latter of which reported 393 new prostitutes in the last six months of 1864 alone.¹⁴

The stresses of war had a deep impact on upper-class Confederate women as well. A wealthy Dandridge woman wrote her son that she and her sister had been forced to take in boarders to pay the bills and “we keep but two servants and as all servants are so so now, I have a great deal to do, indeed I work harder than I ever did in my life before. . . . I rise at half past four in the morning and go to bed at half past eight generally and always tired but I sleep soundly.” Ellen Wilson White, a Knoxville Confederate who could afford baked salmon and champagne in April 1862, was alarmed when “all the young chickens and all but two old hens and the rooster were stolen [by Union soldiers] off the roost. I’ll declare tis enough to rile a saint.” Mrs. John Williams wrote of a wealthy friend who “has been badly treated by both Rebels and Federals, all her negroes that were any account have run away, and those old ones who have remained are stealing constantly from her, and the soldiers have stolen and killed nearly all her stock and burned all her fences and she is in great trouble to know how she is to make a support.” One of the clearest signs that times had changed in East Tennessee was reported by Martha Mitchell. When a regiment of African-American soldiers marched by her house, Martha’s sister noticed her former slave John in the regiment and cried, ““Oh! There is my John!” and ran out to him. John took her in his arms and marched to the corner carrying her.” Martha later turned to John to escort her to the train depot when, due to martial law, she was

¹⁴ Wiley, *Confederate Women*, 161-62; Jenny O’Leary and Harvey H. Jackson, eds, “The Civil War Letters of Captain Daniel O’Leary, USA,” *Register of the Kentucky Historical Society* 77 (Summer 1979): 170; Knoxville *Whig and Rebel Ventilator*, May 28, 1864.

unable to pass to the depot without a permit.¹⁵

When Union occupation came in the fall of 1863, many of the female schools had to shut down because most of their students were daughters of Rebel sympathizers and the families had to flee or go into hiding. This was the case in Knoxville, where Martha Mitchell reported that the schools had closed during Union occupation, but a “Mrs. Hair” taught a few pupils in her home. The East Tennessee Female Institute in Knoxville remained open through the spring of 1863, but the approach of Federal troops forced it to shut down and the property was taken by military authorities and used as a hospital until the end of 1864.¹⁶

Many women had to pay the price for exhibiting overt Confederate sympathies during Union occupation. Ethie M. Foute Eagleton of Cades Cove endured the hatred of her neighbors. Her husband, a Rebel preacher, was dragged from their home in the middle of the night in August 1864, beaten, and ordered to leave Cades Cove. He went to North Carolina; his family stayed in the Cove until they were denounced by Brownlow’s paper and their house was searched by Federal authorities. Eagleton then left to join her husband, but was forced to leave her ailing mother behind, expecting never to see her again.¹⁷

East Tennessee Confederate women’s support of the Confederacy through caring

¹⁵ Mrs. W.R. Caswell to William Caswell, June 19, 1865, MSC 18, Caswell Papers, McClung Collection; White Diary, November 5, 1862; Mrs. John Williams to Rufus Williams, January 15, 1865, Col. John and Rhoda Williams Papers, McClung Collection; Martha Luttrell Mitchell Memoirs.

¹⁶ Martha Mitchell Memoirs. See also Knoxville Whig and Rebel Ventilator, February 27, 1864, for advertisement of Hair’s classes.

¹⁷ Elvie Eagleton Skipper and Ruth Gove, eds., “‘Stray Thoughts’: The Civil War Diary of Ethie M. Foute Eagleton,” East Tennessee Historical Society’s Publications 40 (1968): 128-37, 41 (1969): 116-28.

for soldiers continued to some extent under Union occupation. Knoxville native Isabella French brought food to Confederate captain Reuben G. Clark for six to eight weeks while he was imprisoned in an iron cage in downtown Knoxville. When he was released, some women came to warn him that Rebels were being shot down on the streets without warning. Knoxville Rebel Ellen Renshaw House made shirts for the Confederate prisoners of war in town, cooked and delivered food to them, and even cut her dining room carpet into blankets for them. Martha Mitchell made bandages and carried food to the sick and the prisoners, just as she had before Union occupation. Dr. J.G.M. Ramsey's daughters contracted typhus fever and died while on a trip to Sevier County to collect food and clothing for the prisoners. After the battle of Fort Sanders in Knoxville, "many ladies visited the [Confederate] prisoners [of war], found them almost famished. They all received every attention in food and clothing." The Rebel prisoners were thankful for the ladies' work, crediting the women of Knoxville for their survival: "They said before the guards if it had not been for the Southern ladies of Knoxville they would have frozen stiff." And when the women came to visit the prisoners, they remained defiant of the Union guards. When a guard told three Rebel women that it would be better for the prisoner they were visiting to take the oath, they replied, "Do you suppose, sir, that a Southern gentleman would stigmatize his name by deserting his country's cause?" The effect was overwhelming; the Yankee bowed himself out and was gone."¹⁸

¹⁸ Wilene B. Clark, ed., Valleys of the Shadow: The Memoir of Confederate Captain Reuben G. Clark, Company I, 59th Tennessee Mounted Infantry (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1994), 66-67, 73; Rothrock, French Broad, 136; Elizabeth Baker Crozier Journal, November 24, 1863, MS 1048, UTSC; Sutherland, A Very Violent Rebel, 33, 85; Martha Mitchell Memoirs.

Another way for women to support their cause was through petitioning government officials. Like Union women, Confederate women were sometimes able to obtain pardons for condemned loved ones. A woman wrote to Andrew Johnson vowing that her Rebel son would never fight again if Johnson would get him out of a Northern military prison: “Govner I am goin to beg you for my Son as I am in hops that it is in your power. . . . I never nowd what troble was tel latly I feel some times like I can’t live and I can’t die tel it is god will if I could redeem my child with money I would do So but I am pore I can do nothin but beg.” Another who wrote Johnson claimed that her Rebel cousin imprisoned at Johnson’s Island “did not willingly enter the service” and that the cousin was kind to her family and “all Union people.” Sarah Meek played on Thomas A.R. Nelson’s emotions in an April 1865 letter, which sought a parole for her Rebel husband: “Mr Nelson I know that your heart had not become callous during this cold war and that you have influence enough to help me in my dire extremity. . . . My condition is a deplorable one indeed, I am out of money and have no one to whom I can look for any assistance.” Meek’s letter worked, for Nelson granted her wish a week later.¹⁹

Other Rebel women worked more directly in support of their cause. Several female spies were tried in Knoxville, including Annie Law, and spying was often listed as a reason for the expulsion of Rebel women from the region. In a column titled “Four She-Devils,” the Knoxville Whig and Rebel Ventilator reported on guerrilla-type activity

¹⁹ Graf, Haskins and Bergeron, Papers of Andrew Johnson, 5:450, 7:414; C.W. Meek to T.A.R. Nelson. April 25, 1865, T.A.R. Nelson Papers 1861-1870, MSC 2, McClung Collection.

undertaken by some East Tennessee Rebel women: “A short time since in the northeast corner of this county . . . the wife of a villain at Camp Chase, two single girls of another family, and a rebel negro woman, dressed themselves in rebel uniforms and caps and visited the house of a Union lady and frightened her almost out of her life, making threats and acting up generally.” The paper went on to assert that a women’s prison should be built for all of the “gallant rebels in breeches.”²⁰

As East Tennessee Rebel women forcefully defended their homes against plundering, snubbed Union officers, displayed Confederate flags, carried medicine and supplies through the lines, spied for Confederate authorities, and displayed “unladylike conduct” in general, Union officers began to lose their reluctance to punish them. In McMinn and Knox counties, army officers began to record the names of women publicly supporting the Confederate cause. Federal authorities arrested some women; one was Julie Lenoir, who remarked in a Loudon store that “she wished she could get to Morgan and tell him how few [Union] soldiers there were [here].” Lenoir was detained in jail overnight and she and two friends were forced to take the Union oath. Union general Samuel P. Carter in Knoxville remarked, “I do not want any more rebel women in Knoxville,” and expelled a woman for refusing “to take the amnesty oath and us[ing] language both disloyal and unladylike. She is smart and far too dangerous a person to remain within our lines.” Women were expelled for lesser reasons: an elderly Cleveland woman was banished because she was the mother of a Rebel soldier and her daughters

²⁰ Dykeman, Tennessee Women, 21; Knoxville Whig and Rebel Ventilator, April 30, 1864.

were Confederate sympathizers, and Sue Ramsey was escorted out of Knoxville after local Unionists reported that she sewed Confederate flags and flew them on her father's estate. Some Rebel women were even imprisoned in the North. A Mrs. Whiteside of Chattanooga was sent to a Northern prison with her family of seven children. "She felt certain that the Federals would not molest her if she kept quiet; but it appears she has given them more credit than they deserved," commented Kate Cumming.²¹

To encourage this spirit of revenge, newspaper editor William Brownlow began publishing lists of known "she-rebels" in the Knoxville Whig and Rebel Ventilator. According to Parson Brownlow, there were only two kinds of female Confederate sympathizers: "the prudent, quiet kind (which are few and far between)" and the more numerous class "brazen as the devil, full of impudence, with but little sense, and less prudence, flirting about, meddling in everybody's affairs, and seeking notoriety by acting and talking as a well raised lady would be ashamed to act or talk." He advocated sending the latter group south for the rest of the war. In another column titled "Sending Them South," Brownlow urged that no pity be taken on the people forced from their homes:

Oh! You scoundrels, you have had your day – ours has at length come – and you must take consequences. Some of these she-devils who are to go South were of the very class who two years ago waved their handkerchiefs and exulted when Union men were hung here! These are beautiful devils to claim the sympathies of Federal officers now! They are daily trotting up and down the streets abusing the Lincolnites, and avowing their dedication to the South. Let them go to their friends, and stay with them!²²

²¹ Fisher, War at Every Door, 138; Groce, "Mountain Rebels," 177; Harwell, Kate, 267-68.

²² Knoxville Whig and Rebel Ventilator, January 16, 30, February 6, 1864.

Brownlow also published lists of those who had taken the Federal oath of loyalty and lists of those who had been ordered to leave Knoxville and not to return until after the war.

Rebel women knew that expulsion was a possibility, and most did their best to avoid it. Mary Jane Reynolds commented on her attempts to keep a low profile: "I try to keep myself in obscurity and do not want to be known any more than possible. I get frightful when I hear of them talking of arresting ladies. They came near arresting all of the Harrison ladies a few days ago." But some women such as Ellen Renshaw House welcomed the chance to leave: "Gen Carter has told several that he intends to send all the Rebel girls South. He could not please them better. If I only could get clothes enough made to last me two or three years, I would like to start tomorrow." A little over a week later, House learned that she had been banished from East Tennessee on the charge of insulting a Union woman, and that Brownlow had urged that punishment on Union army leaders. She commented on the irony of the situation: "Really for a poor insignificant woman the Yankees all seem to concern them selves very much about me. Gen Carter says he has watched me for a month. He need not to have taken the trouble to do that. Not that I would not do any thing but because I had not the power."²³

Many Rebel families headed south before they could be banished from their homes. The nature of the Southern refugee experience depended on the wealth of the family. For instance, the wealthy Hooke family from Chattanooga lived in a boxcar

²³ Mary Jane Reynolds to husband, June 20, 1864. Mary Jane Reynolds MSS; Sutherland, A Very Violent Rebel, 123, 128.

secured by the father, who had connections with the railroad. The conditions were spartan for the family, compared to their Chattanooga standards: “We have no stove in our cars, and to feel the bleak weather coming on makes us think of the dear old home we have left and all the comforts with which we were surrounded. None but those who have been exiles, wanderers in a strange land, can sympathize.” They traveled from Chattanooga to Cassville, Calhoun, Atlanta, and Decatur before finally finding a small, cramped dwelling. Shortly before Union troops arrived in her native Morristown, Margaret McCalla packed her elderly mother, three small children, slaves, and all the possessions she could fit onto two wagons and a buggy and headed two hundred miles over mountain roads to her sister’s home in the Chester district of South Carolina. Once she arrived there, she reported that her slaves built living quarters for them, and the Southern lady turned farmer did quite well for herself.²⁴

Georgia was the most popular place for East Tennessee Rebel refugees to escape to, but others headed elsewhere. Ellen Renshaw House went to Bristol before travelling on to her sister’s house in Abingdon, Virginia, and then south to Eatonton, Georgia. A.M. Van Dyke was exiled into Confederate lines with her two children; she first went to Greeneville, then to Charlotte, North Carolina, and then back home to Jonesboro at the end of the war. Susan Heiskell McCampbell went to Virginia during the war, then after the war went to Franklin, in Middle Tennessee, where Confederates were not

²⁴ Groce, “Mountain Rebels,” 174-75; Hooke Diary, September 17-21, October 23-26, 1863, UTSC; Robert Partin, ed. “The Wartime Experiences of Margaret McCalla: Confederate Refugee from East Tennessee,” *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 24 (1965): 39-53.

unwelcome.²⁵

The stories of two Confederate women are particularly worth telling for the insight they give into conditions in East Tennessee. Elizabeth Baker Crozier, a Knoxville Confederate, remained in Knoxville to protect her home while her family headed for safety in Georgia. On November 18, 1863, Federal soldiers broke into her home. She described the scene in her diary: "Every lock in the house was broken open, the contents of every wardrobe, bureau, closet, and side board, the front of which had been broken out, were scattered over every room. I was overwhelmed with amazement not knowing what to do. . . . Yet I pushed back the scattered garments out of sight if possible and resolved that we would not leave again." But the next day the army ordered her to leave her home, and to her disgust she found a soldier sleeping in her bed. She watched her home burn and then left Knoxville to wander in Georgia for eight months looking for her family. When she was reunited with them in Covington, they were forced to rent a room and borrow household items; all they had for cooking was one broken skillet. The family would return to Knoxville after the war.²⁶

Margaret Crozier Ramsey's story was equally doleful. Before leaving Knoxville, she reported being "robbed of everything, houses burned, ladies insulted. I asked one old man how he would like for his mothers and sisters to be so treated, he said if they were rebels he would think it all right." Her daughter, Susan Ramsey, was exiled at the same

²⁵ Sutherland, *A Very Violent Rebel*, 129-39; Van Dyke, "A Paper Read"; Susan Heiskell McCampbell Diaries, 1863, 1865, Ac. No. 98, TSLA.

²⁶ Crozier Journal, November 18, 1863; Groce, "Mountain Rebels," 175; Culpepper, *Trials and Triumphs*, 159-61.

time as Ellen Renshaw House for her “activities, interest, and sympathy with the Confederates.” Departing was a difficult decision, for “we were leaving our native home not knowing that we should return or where we were going or what sorrowful news we should hear after arriving in the Confederacy.” During their exile, Ramsey lost two of her daughters and a son in the Confederate army.²⁷

“This war is horrible; when and what will be the end! The grave and the prison hold many of our loved ones; and crimson ghastly death hangs over them; families are rudely separated; and want is now where abundance, luxury, and elegance once were. We have merited heavy chastisement, and surely we have received it.”²⁸ This excerpt from a December 1864 letter reflects the hardship East Tennessee Confederate women had experienced during the Civil War. Unfortunately for these women, the horror and violence would continue in East Tennessee for years after the war as vengeance-minded Unionists looked to settle the score.

²⁷ Culpepper, *Trials and Triumphs*, 157-58; Martha Mitchell Memoirs; Margaret Crozier Ramsey Journal, July 1864, UTSC.

²⁸ Sarah A. Coffin to T.A.R. Nelson, December 7, 1864. Nelson Papers.

CHAPTER FIVE

“A SAD STATE OF THINGS”: CONDITIONS IN POSTWAR EAST TENNESSEE

Confederate-sympathizing women in East Tennessee met the end of the war with disbelief, regret, and a sense of loss. At the end of the war, Myra Inman recorded in her diary:

Mysterious it is to me why God permitted such a sad calamity to befall our South. Why He permitted the noblest blood of the South to be sacrificed for the bondage of the sable race. Many a bitter tear and sad regret has the termination of this unhappy ending caused me – unjust as I would deem it, if I did not believe God had decreed it thus.

Knoxvillian Lizzie Welcker recorded her changing emotions in a diary she began on

April 5, 1865:

April 6, 1865. The “niggers” are all – men, women, and children – out today with the ‘star spangled banner’ celebrating their freedom. . . . When – when – when will we be delivered?

April 7, 1865. The “news” today is that Gen. Lee has surrendered! L-a-u-g-h!!! I feel certain (altho we can’t know where Gen L is) that he is in the right place and that he and his gallant soldiers will “act well their parts” – God bless! God revere them all!

April 12, 1865. . . . Altho I feel dreadfully – my brain seems paralysed – I can but hope that “things are not what they seem.”

Many East Tennessee Confederate women had a hard time accepting the South’s loss.

Ellen Renshaw House would not forgive the Federals; in April 1866 she wrote, “I hate the Yankees more every day I live, if possible.” Some Confederate women found

consolation in taking provisions to the paroled Rebel soldiers; Lizzie Welcker took food,

money, stationery, and other items to the men. Other women turned to religion to console themselves; A.M. Van Dyke remembered, “when the surrender came, and the ashes of our dead hopes were scattered, when we realized that for some mysterious reason God saw it was best that the Southern Confederacy should not be established, it took a great deal of Grace to feel that it was all for the best.” Women would ultimately have to come to terms with their loss; in the short run, that meant, for some, accepting responsibility, as Ellen House did: “All our sacrifices, all the blood shed has been for nothing, worse than nothing, and the Southern people have no one but themselves to thank for it.”¹

When Confederate refugee families returned home after the war, they found widespread desolation from which they would be unable to recover until the turn of the century (except in the cases of Chattanooga and Knoxville, where Northern capital helped them recover more quickly after the war). Many of these returning Confederate families found that the region was just as hostile to them as it had been during the war. Elisa Buffat reported that guerrillas had killed a young girl when she tried to interfere in the hanging of her father; she commented, “It is awful, no one is safe, not even in their own homes.” Bushwhackers were still a threat, and returning Union soldiers were looking to settle the score with Rebels who had oppressed their families during the Confederate occupation. A “Miss Bogus” showed her continued support for the now lost cause by warning some returning Fourth Tennessee Infantry veterans that the Federal troops at

¹ Myra Inman Diary, April 8, 1865; Lizzie Welcker Diary, April 6,7,12. 1865, McClung Collection; Van Dyke, “A Paper Read” ; Sutherland, A Very Violent Rebel, 202, 165.

Sweetwater were confiscating Rebel property. The veterans swam the Tennessee River and bypassed the Union troops because of her intervention. Many Rebel families were forced to leave the region after the war was over; in 1866, the Deaderick family was told to leave within ten days or death would be the penalty. The family left the next day and moved to Bristol. Writing from there, Adeline Deaderick reported in 1866 that a Union League in Jonesboro had driven out Confederate families in Washington County. Rebel women in Blount County were also ordered to leave. Some moved to Knoxville or Chattanooga, where ex-Confederates were safer from Union counter-terror. Knoxville and Chattanooga experienced a sharp increase in population in 1865, while the rural counties in the state remained under-populated until conditions became safer.²

Many Confederate families that left East Tennessee during the war chose to remain in exile rather than face postwar retribution. A former Greene County woman wrote of the situation to President Johnson: "Those who had to fly on account of their opinions, dare not come home. Is it not a sad state of things? I would not live in East Tennessee if they were to give me the whole of it, unless there is a change." Others moved to more sympathetic areas -- Kentucky, southwestern Virginia, Memphis, Atlanta, and Confederate-sympathizing East Tennessee counties such as Sullivan.³

East Tennessee Unionist women, of course, were relieved when the war was over.

² Harris, "East Tennessee's Civil War Refugees," 16-18; Thomas B. Alexander, "Neither Peace Nor War: Conditions in Tennessee in 1865," *East Tennessee Historical Society's Publications* 21 (1945), 33-38; Bailey, *Class and Tennessee's Confederate Generation*, 109; Groce, "Mountain Rebels," 185-90; Moon, "Civil War Memoirs of Mrs. Adeline Deaderick," 62; Bryan, "Civil War in East Tennessee," 183-84; James Bernard Campbell, "Some Social and Economic Phases of Reconstruction in East Tennessee, 1864-1869" (M.A. thesis, University of Tennessee, 1946), 34.

³ Graf, Haskins and Bergeron, *Papers of Andrew Johnson*, 9:69; Groce, "Mountain Rebels," 211-12.

On January 1, 1866, Kate Livingston reflected: “1866 is now upon us, how long it has been since New Year has dawned with peace in our land. Oh! May we as a nation forever remain in peace.” Unionist women too had to deal with bushwhackers and returning soldiers who felt free to forage in the countryside for foodstuffs. Many Unionist refugee families chose to remain in exile as well; a Kingston paper reported in 1868 that a Unionist family named Derment from East Tennessee was in good health in Floyd County, Indiana.⁴

East Tennessee churches reflect the division that persisted in East Tennessee after the war. Many Unionist churches reopened by early 1865, but they were caught in the spirit of revenge against their former Rebel masters. Cedar Fork Baptist Church of Loudon County declared a “non-fellowship against all aiders and abettors of the Rebellion until satisfaction be made by them to the church in the letter and spirit of the Gospel.” Mount Pleasant Baptist Church of Lenoir City also refused to offer fellowship to Rebels, and when in July 1865 it “agreed to invite all the members of the Church as far as practicable who sided and abetted in the Rebellion to attend the next meeting . . . to make their defense or their acknowledgements,” no Rebels showed up. Several women who were known to have been Confederate sympathizers were excluded the following month for their wartime sympathies.⁵

Some churches did manage to escape wartime vindictiveness. Mount Olive

⁴ Kate Livingston Diary, January 1, 1866; Kingston East Tennessean, July 2, 1868.

⁵ Records of Cedar Fork Baptist Church, Philadelphia, Loudon County, March 1865, TSLA; Records of Mount Pleasant Baptist Church, Lenoir City, Loudon County, May – September 1865, TSLA.

Baptist Church of Knox County encouraged all its members to return in July 1864: “We know that we have past through many fiery trials and many disapointment that was unavoidebel [W]e wish now to gather the flock together again that we the Church may make one strong effort to teare down the deviles kingdom and bild up Christs Church.” As evidence of its good intentions, in June 1865 the church agreed to take up a collection “for the benefit of widows and orphans made so by the death of their husbands and fathers in army of the U.S.”⁶ While it did not include Confederate soldiers in its collection, at least it took up a collection; no other church studied in my research recorded taking up a collection for widows and orphans. Friendship Primitive Baptist declared in December 1864 that “polliticks should be no bare to fellowship” and again in June 1867 that “The Church invites all to attend without any respect to persons on acount of politicks,” but the church would continue to be divided for many years to come.⁷

Women apparently flocked back to the churches as the war was ending and afterward. Mount Olive Baptist Church baptized ten women in late 1864, Third Creek Baptist of Knoxville took in fifteen women in the first six months of 1865, Cedar Fork Baptist reported four new female members in August 1865, and First Presbyterian Church of Knoxville reported eleven new women members in one month of 1866. While these numbers may sound low, they were much higher than antebellum or wartime admissions. Despite this new membership, it would take a long time for wartime wounds

⁶ Records of Mount Olive Baptist Church, Knox County, July 1864, June 1865, TSLA.

⁷ Records of Friendship Primitive Baptist Church, White Pine, Jefferson County, December 1863 – May 1864, June 1867, TSLA.

to heal; Mount Olive Baptist Church reported 188 members still on the rolls in October 1864, but by October 1865 it had only ten men and seventeen women still in the church. Other churches virtually ceased to exist for a time, such as Slate Creek Baptist Church of Cocke County, which did not meet between 1860 and 1868.⁸

The East Tennessee Relief Association continued to help Unionists in need through 1866. Much of its aid went to widows and children of Federal soldiers; besides issuing clothing, the ETRA sold bacon, flour, and other provisions to widows at reduced prices, and provided transportation on the East Tennessee and Virginia Railroad and the East Tennessee and Georgia railroad at half-rates. The ETRA relied on women to help it with its work; an 1866 report states that the benevolent ladies of Knoxville were distributing aid there. By 1867, Northern money ceased to flow into the ETRA, but the organization continued to do what it could for the families. It reported that in 1867 there were still refugees arriving in Knoxville, and “except in a few cases, [they] have consisted of women and children – a large part of these being the families of deceased Federal soldiers.” The ETRA ceased operation in 1867, having distributed \$250,000 worth of goods to needy East Tennesseans during the war. There was still need for relief, however; the Freedmen’s Bureau was distributing foodstuffs among white and black East Tennessee women as late as the summer of 1866. An 1866 Freedmen’s Bureau report recorded that Chattanooga was still crowded with the cabins and huts of refugees, and

⁸ Ibid., October 1864; Records of Third Creek Baptist Church, Knoxville, July 1865, TSLA; Records of Cedar Fork Baptist Church, August 1865; Records of First Presbyterian Church, Knoxville, December 1866; Records of Slate Creek Baptist Church, Cocke County, TSLA.

“the condition of the women is even worse than that of the men. They outnumber the former at least three to one. These women are also less regularly employed than the men, a majority of them being prostitutes of the lowest order.”⁹

After the war, prosperous Northerners and Federal authorities forgot about the sacrifices of East Tennessee Unionists. Ironically, the Unionist residents, who were on the winning side, were left to fend for themselves in a region shattered by war. They had a difficult time getting started again; veterans returning home in 1865 returned to fields planted by women and children, which were restricted in size. The East Tennessee postwar economy was further hindered by the shift among landless whites from wage labor to tenancy. In addition, the postwar rise in population brought on an agricultural crisis as more pressure was put on the land. Families became less self-sufficient with more mouths to feed. The rural regions of East Tennessee would not recover from the devastating wartime losses until the New Deal.¹⁰

While the economy remained devastated, wounds created by the war began to heal toward the end of the 1860s. Unionist violence toward Rebel sympathizers subsided substantially by 1866; many Unionists in Knoxville took oaths that they would not harass former Confederates. When a serious flood threatened Knoxville in 1867, former Confederates and Unionists joined together to protect the town. By 1868, it was safe

⁹ Bryan, “Civil War in East Tennessee,” 161; Reports to the East Tennessee Relief Association at Knoxville, 1865, 1866, 1868; Harris, “East Tennessee Relief Movement,” 95-6; Alexander, “Neither Peace Nor War,” 39.

¹⁰ Robert Tracy McKenzie, “The Economic Impact of the Civil War in Upper East Tennessee,” Noe and Wilson, The Civil War in Appalachia, 207-16. See also Groce, “Mountain Rebels,” 219-20.

enough for Rebel families to begin moving back into the region; the McCalla family returned to their home in Morristown in the summer of 1868 after fleeing to South Carolina during the war. In 1869, former East Tennessee Confederates were elected to the state legislature. Union veteran Irvin Hampton reflected on the postwar reconciliation between families of wartime enemies: "I have lived to see my children & grandchildren married to the sons and daughters and nieces of the boys who wore the Gray."¹¹

While the violence might have ended, things would never be the same again for many communities in East Tennessee. Alienated by poverty and bitterness from the larger region, many rural communities in East Tennessee became isolated units. To fill this vacuum, a folk culture developed among the men and women of these isolated mountain communities. This folk culture compensated the people in part for their wartime economic losses and greatly enriched the quality of their relations with one another. Cades Cove in Blount County is a good example of this phenomenon; there, the cessation of immigration after the war and the expulsion of pro-Confederate families led to increasing social isolation, conformity, and the new folk culture. East Tennessee remained predominantly rural; only two towns in the region beside Knoxville and Chattanooga had populations of more than 1,000 in 1870 -- Greeneville and Cleveland.¹²

Census records document some of the changes that took place in East Tennessee

¹¹ Michael J. McDonald and William Bruce Wheeler, Knoxville, Tennessee: Continuity and Change in an Appalachian City (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1983), 14; Bryan, "Civil War in East Tennessee," 182; Partin, "Wartime Experiences of Margaret McCalla," 41-42, 52; Bryan, "Civil War in East Tennessee," 185; Wallenstein, "Which Side Are You On?," 92.

¹² Dunn, Cades Cove, 143-44.

as a result of the war. These show, for one thing, the numbers of women who were listed as heads of households. In his study of Shelton Laurel, North Carolina, Philip Shaw Paludan found that the female heads of households increased from one in 1860 to seven in 1870. He uses this as an example of how the patterns of community life were shaken by the war. To interpret changes in East Tennessee, it is useful to select counties that are representative of the entire region. In his studies of Civil War Tennessee, Robert Tracy McKenzie selected Johnson and Greene counties as representative of the region. Extremely isolated and self-sufficient, Johnson County was typical of many of the mountainous areas of nineteenth-century East Tennessee, while Greene County, a small-farming region, was typical of the fertile valley areas.¹³ To these two counties, I have added the urban areas of Knox County, which provide an interesting contrast to the more rural counties of Greene and Johnson.

In Johnson County, I surveyed districts one through ten (the entire county), which in 1860 had a population of 2,393 white males, 2,364 white females, 28 freed people, and 233 slaves. The county had 823 total free households in 1860, of which 49 (six percent) were headed by females. The census forms listed “housewifery” as the occupation of forty of these forty-nine women. Two others were listed as washer women and one was listed as a seamstress (the others had no occupation listed). Only one woman head of

¹³ Paludan, *Victims*, 133; McKenzie, *One South or Many?*, 3-5. See also McKenzie, ““Oh! Ours Is a Deplorable Condition”: The Economic Impact of the Civil War in Upper East Tennessee,” in Noe and Wilson, *Civil War in Appalachia*, 199-226 and McKenzie, “From Old South to New South in the Volunteer State: The Economy and Society of Rural Tennessee, 1850-1880” (Ph.D. diss., Vanderbilt University, 1988), 12-14.

household had no dependents, 53-year old Martha Cook, who had a personal estate valued at \$75. The others had from one dependent to eleven. The wealthiest female household head was 70-year-old Margaret Wagner, whose total estate was valued at \$4,000 and who had two daughters living with her engaged in “housewifery.”¹⁴

Between 1860 and 1870, Johnson County increased in population by 800 citizens. The 1870 census showed 2,855 males and 2,997 females in the county. There were 1,013 total households and 119 female heads of households. Thus, the proportion of female heads of households almost doubled in Johnson County between 1860 (6 percent) and 1870 (11.7 percent). The occupations of the women household heads in 1870 were either not recorded or were listed as “keeping house,” except for Elizabeth Williams, who was listed as a midwife, and another woman who was listed as a domestic servant. Williams and three other women had no dependents, while the others had from one to eleven. Two of the female heads of households were black and one was listed as a mulatto. The wealthiest female household head in the county was 66-year old Sarah Sutherland, whose estate was estimated at \$5,500. She had seven people in her household, including two domestic servants (one of whom was black) and two children away at school.¹⁵

Greene County’s prewar population was 19,004, which included 8,735 white men, 8,750 women, 222 freed people, and 1,297 slaves. I surveyed districts one through ten of the twenty-five districts in the county. In 1860, there were 1,383 total households and 92

¹⁴ Population of the United States in 1860 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1864), 457, 461, 463; Population of Tennessee in 1860, Free Inhabitants Schedule, Johnson County.

¹⁵ The Statistics of the Population of the United States in 1870 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1872), 635; Population of Tennessee in 1870, Johnson County.

female heads of households, or 6.65 percent. Of these women, 41 were listed as “farmers,” 36 had no occupation listed, 9 were seamstresses, 3 were laborers, 2 were weavers, and 1 was a washer woman. Five of the women had no dependents, including one of the laborers and one of the seamstresses. The wealthiest woman of the 92 had \$3,000 in real estate and \$500 worth of personal property. One of the women, 45-year old Mahala Perman, was a mulatto with five children.¹⁶

Between 1860 and 1870, Greene County’s population increased by some 4,000, to 10,569 men and 11,099 women. In districts one through ten in 1870, Greene County had a total of 1,648 households and 222 female heads of households. As in Johnson County, the numbers of households increased but so did the proportion of female heads of households, doubling to 13.5 percent from the antebellum 6.65 percent. In this census, all of the women heads of household either had no occupation listed or were listed as “keeping house.” Five of the women had no one living with them, and three of these were over sixty-five years old. The wealthiest woman household head was 72-year-old Sarah Wilson, who lived by herself and had \$4,000 worth of real estate and \$300 of personal estate. Only one of the women was black, 22-year-old Ev Jenkins, who was born in South Carolina and had two children, four and two years old. Her occupation was listed as housekeeping.¹⁷

The population of Knox County in 1860 was 22,813, including 10,196 white men,

¹⁶ Population of the United States in 1860, 457, 459, 463; Population of Tennessee in 1860. Free Inhabitants Schedule, Greene County. There is no special significance to these ten districts; they were picked as a sample of the county.

¹⁷ Population of the United States in 1870, 635; Population of Tennessee in 1870, Greene County.

9,824 white women, 423 freed people, and 2,370 slaves. The population of Knoxville itself was 3,704. I looked at the manuscript returns for the third, fourth, fifth, seventh, and twelfth districts of the county. Each of these had “Knoxville” listed as its address, as opposed to the more rural parts of the county. Of the 866 households in these districts, 100 had women heads (11.5 percent). Thirty-four were listed as farmers, six as washers and ironers, one as a seamstress, and one as a boarding-house keeper. Several of the 100 women were quite wealthy. Thirty-year-old Margaret White, a farmer, had \$45,000 worth of real estate and \$7,000 of personal estate; seventy-eight-year-old Martha Luttrell had \$15,000 worth of real estate; sixty-five-year-old Jane Jones had \$23,000 of real estate and \$3,000 of personal estate; and nine other women had farms worth \$2,000 or more. Only one of the women in these districts had no dependents. Bridget Scanlon, a forty-year old boarding house keeper, lived with her sister (also a boarding house keeper) and four men who worked as railroad hands; all of them were Irish immigrants. Seventy-four-year-old Sarah Epps, a farmer, had one woman living with her and real estate worth \$10,000. She also owned thirteen slaves (five of whom she reported as fugitives), which made her the largest female slaveholder in the county. In Knox County in 1860, there were eighteen female slaveholders, including Sarah Epps; three of these owned ten or more slaves, while six owned three or fewer.¹⁸

Knox County experienced the largest growth over the decade of any of the

¹⁸ Population of the United States in 1860, 457, 461, 463; Population of Tennessee in 1860, Free Inhabitants Schedule, Slave Inhabitants Schedule, Knox County.

counties surveyed; the population increased by some 6,000 people to 28,990, including 14,153 men and 14,837 women. Most of the growth came in Knoxville itself; the city's population rose from 3,704 to 8,682. A surprising change occurred over the decade: of the 876 households in the city's five districts in 1870, only eighty-five were female-headed (9.7 percent), a substantial decrease from the 1860 proportion. Other changes are also apparent: among the female heads of households, much of the wealth that was observed in 1860 was now absent. The wealthiest woman in these districts in 1870 was 70-year-old Melissa Bradley with \$5,000 worth of real estate and \$100 in personal estate. Only three other women had property worth \$2,000 or more. No occupation besides "keeping house" was listed for women heads of household in any of the districts. Five of the 85 women had no dependents, and all five were over 55 years of age. Two black women household heads were listed, Mima Johnson and Lousinda Gillespie, and they each had five children living with them.¹⁹

These statistics reveal some interesting changes for East Tennessee women. As one might expect, the number of female heads of households in rural counties increased after the war, almost doubling in the cases studied. Johnson and Greene, with their Unionist sympathies, likely lost many men to Union army deaths. Widows in those counties would continue to struggle as they had during the war to provide for their families. The numbers of single women with some property remained fairly constant in the rural counties because the women were likely Unionist women who were not forced

¹⁹ Population of the United States in 1870, 635; Population of Tennessee in 1870, Knox County.

to leave during the war. Knox County reflects the changes that took place in the cities. In 1860, there were many single wealthy women, including a fair number of slaveholders. The 1870 census reveals a dramatic change – the numbers of single wealthy women dramatically declined, because wealthy women were likely Rebel sympathizers who fled or were forced to flee the region during the war. The numbers of female heads of households declined in Knox County for a number of reasons. For one thing, men flocked to the cities for jobs after the war, giving women more opportunities to marry. In addition, many of the single Confederate-sympathizing women left Knoxville during the war. These statistics confirm the demographic changes one would expect to see in urban and rural East Tennessee counties.

Other signs point to changes for women in postwar East Tennessee. Education for women changed from the antebellum women's academies that favored the wealthy to postwar coeducational institutions that were more inclusive of other classes of women. The women's colleges declined in number after the war as coeducation became more popular in the 1880s and 1890s. The Lookout Mountain Educational Institution, a non-denominational co-educational school that pioneered in the field of home economics, opened in Chattanooga in May 1866. Several other schools in the region, such as Maryville College in 1867, began admitting women.²⁰

Other social changes occurred that were new experiences for women. Musical organizations involving women were founded, such as the Philharmonic Society and the

²⁰ Dykeman, Tennessee Woman, 6-7, 53-54.

Martingale Club, which were established in Knoxville in 1867. A woolen cloth factory opened in Kingsport shortly after the war, and it employed ten women and five men. In December 1873, the Knoxville Benevolent Association was organized to extend aid to the worthy poor. The aid was directed by a board of managers composed of women from each church in the city. In 1874, the association established and supported the Girls Industrial Home for orphan girls aged three to eighteen. In 1882, the black women of Knoxville founded the Daughters of Zion, a group dedicated to looking after orphan and poor children. In 1885, a Knoxville women's club called the Ossoli Circle was formed; elite women in the club discussed classical literature.²¹

After the war across the South, women joined together in groups such as the United Daughters of the Confederacy to help create the myth of the Lost Cause. The UDC was more successful in East Tennessee than its male counterpart, the United Confederate Veterans, but many chapters folded shortly after they were founded. The UDC was founded in Nashville in 1894; by 1900 there were five chapters in East Tennessee, and by the 1920's thirty-one chapters, but most of these were dropped from the organization's rolls because of low attendance. One chapter historian in Mountain City realized the difficulty of the women's task: "they never hoped to do great things for

²¹Campbell, "Some Social and Economic Phases," 36-41, 43-44, 49-50, 66; Rothrock, French Broad-Holston Country, 144-46; Maxwell A. DeVoe, "Community Organizations," Lucile Deaderick, ed. Heart of the Valley: A History of Knoxville, Tennessee (Knoxville: East Tennessee Historical Society, 1976), 341; Booker, History of Blacks in Knoxville, 61; Carol Bucy, "Tennessee Women as Social and Political Activists," Natilee Duning, ed. Shaping a State: The Legacy of Tennessee Women (Nashville: Margaret Cunigim Women's Center, 1995), 37; Sadie Boyd Saxton and Elizabeth Skaggs Bowman, Highlights of Ossoli Circle's History, 1885-1960 (Knoxville: no pub., 1960), 7-10; Mary Boyce Temple, Mrs. H.N. Saxton, and Mrs. Samuel McKinney, History of the Ossoli Circle (Knoxville: no pub., 1906), 5-6.

the cause located as they were, the outpost of the state . . . where most of the people were on the other side.” Many of these chapters were civic and social clubs organized during the First World War and would die out after a short time.²²

The UDC did accomplish some tasks in East Tennessee, such as marking graves and placing pictures of Confederate heroes in libraries and schools. In addition, it encouraged women in the region to record their reminiscences of the war. The UDC presented firm rules to follow for members to record the “true history of the war.” One such recollection was read to the UDC chapter in Athens by Mrs. A.M. Van Dyke, who painted this picture of the hard work of East Tennessee Confederate women for the Cause:

During the four years of privation, suffering, and continuous danger, our women played well their parts and were wonderfully sustained. Their zealous and unbounded faith in the ultimate success of our cause never wavered. . . . But in their unselfish devotion, they were always ready to cheer, their comforting ministrations to the sick, wounded, or unfortunate soldiers, were never wanting.

Historian Sarah Elizabeth Gardner argues that through such personal accounts and reminiscences, women “helped to fashion a new cultural identity for the postbellum South and, increasingly, for the nation as a whole.”²³

Despite the work of the women of the UDC, there was never a strong movement for monuments to the Civil War in East Tennessee. A forerunner to the UDC, the Ladies Memorial Association (also known as the Ladies Memorial Society of Knoxville), was

²² Annie E. Cody, History of the Tennessee Division – United Daughters of the Confederacy (Nashville: Cullom and Ghertner Company, 1946); Groce, “Mountain Rebels,” 222.

²³ Groce, “Mountain Rebels,” 222; Sarah Elizabeth Gardner, “‘Blood and Irony’: Southern Women’s Narratives of the Civil War, 1861-1915” (Ph.D. diss., Emory University, 1996), 1, 17; Van Dyke, “A Paper Read.”

organized in 1868 and established a cemetery in Knoxville. In 1882 it launched a campaign to build a monument, and it took eight years to raise enough funds to sign a contract. By 1920, only three Confederate monuments had been erected in East Tennessee, and only four more were ever built in the region. The Unionist women's group, the Women's Relief Corps, had even less luck than the UDC; its monument was destroyed by lightning three years after it was dedicated in 1901.²⁴

Knoxville never named streets and buildings after Confederate heroes, either; instead, Union names such as Farragut, Sanders, and Johnson reflect the prevailing sympathies in the town. Knoxville also failed to preserve Fort Sanders as a national monument because of public apathy.²⁵ The still-divided loyalties in East Tennessee engendered this lack of war memorialization. Thirty years after the war, hostilities had subsided; but no one wanted to antagonize his or her neighbors by honoring their one-time enemies. In addition, both sides were quick to put aside old grudges because they were hoping to industrialize their region to become part of the "New South." Throughout the region, then, the men and women of East Tennessee attempted to bury their past and put wartime antipathies to rest. For East Tennessee women, this meant a retreat to antebellum sex roles and a return to "women's sphere" as part of the effort to restore peace and stability.

²⁴ Frederick C. Moffatt, "A Tale of Two Monuments: Civil War Sculpture in Knoxville," *East Tennessee Historical Society's Publications* 50 (1978): 3-20; Groce, "Mountain Rebels," 223.

²⁵ Seymour, *Divided Loyalties*, 219; McDonald and Wheeler, *Knoxville, Tennessee*, 14.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

East Tennessee women's roles changed as a result of the Civil War. Women entered the public sphere in ways unimaginable in antebellum years; they petitioned political leaders, spied for their cause, nursed and cooked for soldiers, operated an underground railroad for Unionists and prison escapees, visited prisons and hospitals, moved their families to safer locations, and even robbed and threatened fellow citizens. As historian Victoria Bynum has argued, women ignored the boundaries of their sphere during the war in the struggle to preserve community autonomy and order.¹

The major factor that brought about these changes was the absence of men, who were in the armies or in hiding. This brought about a change in social relations, as women, older people, and children left at home had to fill the void. Elisa Buffat of Knoxville expressed the changes her family faced when the war began:

In those days, just before the War of Secession, the young people would have dances and we used to enjoy dancing the old Virginia reels. We went to a quilting party at Squire Knott's one day and at night they had a dance. In our houses we would sometimes dance waltzes or quadrilles with our cousins. The war put an end to all these pleasures, the young men having joined the army or gone across the mountains to the Northern states. Many families were left without any men, ours for one, and we went through many dangers unharmed, being protected by our Heavenly Father.²

The absence of men in East Tennessee brought about not only a change in social relations but also a shift in responsibilities. Women became responsible for providing for their family's immediate economic needs and protecting their long-term economic security. As

¹ Bynum, *Unruly Women*, 149.

² Nancy Grey Osterud, "Rural Women During the Civil War: New York's Nanticoke Valley, 1861-1865," *New York History* (October 1990): 357-85; Buffat, "Some Recollections," 448.

providers, they became the labor force in order to provide food for themselves and their children. When their efforts were unsuccessful, they found other means to provide for their families; two examples of this are stealing and walking eighty-five miles to Knoxville to obtain food and clothing from the ETRA.

Women bore the brunt of the domestic mountain war as they dealt with separations, divided families, closed churches and schools, famine, pillaging, shortages of necessary goods, relocations, and the overall breakdown of kinship and family ties. When the circumstances became too difficult for them, they packed up their belongings and moved to where things might be better. For Confederate women, that might mean packing one's belongings and heading to South Carolina to farm, like Margaret McCalla did; for Union women, that meant heading to the cities to receive aid from the ETRA or heading northwest into the Ohio Valley. These were all major changes in East Tennessee women's role, as women became the primary decision makers for their families.³

Were these wartime changes lasting? For at least one East Tennessee woman, they were. Margaret McCalla, the Morristown Confederate who loaded her family onto wagons and went over the mountains into South Carolina, remained in charge of her family after the war. Since her husband was often away from home on engineering projects, McCalla continued in her wartime roles, caring for the family, supervising the education of the children, and transacting family business. However, McCalla was the exception rather than the rule for East Tennessee women. The Civil War in East Tennessee was not a "springboard from which [women] leaped beyond the circumscribed 'women's sphere' into that heretofore reserved for men." Instead, we find

³ McKinney, "Women's Role," 37-56.

conditions in East Tennessee similar to what historian George Rable has described for women of the South in general: “change without change.” Women took on new, traditionally male roles during the war; but after the war, women retreated to their prewar roles.⁴

Just before Confederate general Robert E. Lee surrendered at Appomattox Court House, the husband of South Carolinian Mary Chesnut came to see her in North Carolina where she was in hiding. He reported to his wife that many Southerners of the lower sort were rejoicing over the ruin of the planter class. ““They will have no Negroes now to lord it over!” he says he heard one of them say. “They can swell and peacock about and tyrannize now over only a small parcel of women and children.”⁵ Although there were few planters in East Tennessee, returning Union and Confederate veterans came home and “tyrannized” over their families. While women had defied the boundaries of their sphere during the war, they retreated to antebellum roles to restore order and stability to their lives. The uniqueness of East Tennessee politics contributed to this capitulation on the part of women; with the region still politically divided in the postwar years, East Tennessee women did not pursue their public lives because East Tennesseans needed tranquility to restore order to their lives.

A comparison with the experience of Memphis women helps shed light on that of East Tennessee women. Historian Darla Brock argues that before Union occupation, Memphis women took on many new roles. They organized benevolent societies such as the Methodist Episcopal Church’s Ladies Military Sewing Society. They worked in

⁴ Partin, “Wartime Experiences of Margaret McCalla,” 50-53; Massey, Bonnet Brigades, 367; Rable, Civil Wars.

⁵ Edmund Wilson, Patriotic Gore: Studies in the Literature of the American Civil War (New York: Oxford

wartime industries such as gunmaking and the manufacture of cannons and percussion caps. They established hospitals and nursed the sick and wounded. During Union occupation, women visited Confederate prisoners and patients in hospitals, smuggled letters and goods into the region, and served as spies. Brock concludes that the Civil War made women more prominent in Memphis society. War support activities such as the benevolent and military aid societies made women aware of female networking and gave them an idea of what they could accomplish collectively; the war enabled them to see themselves as capable of participating in, and making a difference in, Memphis society. As a result, postwar women's societies such as the Southern Mothers, the United Daughters of the Confederacy, and the Confederate Memorial Association were strong in Memphis. Brock asserts that these postwar ladies' associations later grew into organizations such as the Women's Christian Association, the Women's Christian Temperance Union, and the Nineteenth Century Club.⁶

This emergence into the public sphere did not happen for women in East Tennessee. East Tennessee's divided loyalties made this sort of emergence difficult, if not impossible. No wartime industries such as munitions plants existed in East Tennessee, with good reason; bushwhackers from one side or the other would quickly destroy any attempt at such industry. No women's benevolent societies could emerge during either occupation, because to identify oneself with either side was always dangerous. In addition, later in the war, women were too busy trying to feed themselves and their families to join together to help their cause. A woman walking eighty-five miles

University Press, 1962), 298.

⁶ Darla Brock, "'Our Hands Are at Your Service': The Story of Confederate Women in Memphis." West Tennessee Historical Society Papers 45 (1991): 19-34.

on rumors of aid from the East Tennessee Relief Association did not have time to support her cause. In addition, many of those who might have performed work in benevolent societies either fled or were banished from the region. Women such as Ellen Renshaw House did deliver aid to the Rebel prisoners in Knoxville, but she and many of her friends were later banished.

The new public roles that women took on during the war did not prove lasting. As historian Drew Gilpin Faust has suggested, women gained a new understanding of themselves as a result of the Civil War, but they accepted the rehabilitation of patriarchy as a way to reestablish order and stability.⁷ Postwar ladies' associations had a difficult time getting started in East Tennessee, partly because the region was still so divided and partly because East Tennesseans were ready to put the war behind them. The Knoxville Benevolent Association, the Daughters of Zion, and the Ossoli Circle were able to get started in Knoxville because they had missions different from that of other Southern postwar ladies' associations; rather than dwell on wartime losses, the organization looked ahead to different women's issues. But the women's organizations that formed shortly after the war, the Benevolent Association and the Daughters of Zion, did not have missions that challenged the nineteenth century notion of women's proper sphere. Economics was a factor also. The region was devastated economically by the war; with the exception of Knoxville and Chattanooga, East Tennessee would not recover until the New Deal. With the antebellum wealth gone, as is seen in the Knox County census records, women had to struggle to support themselves and their families, just as they had during the war. Groups like the Benevolent Association and the Ossoli Circle attracted

⁷ Drew Gilpin Faust, Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War

wealthy women who had leisure time; but for most East Tennessee women, the struggle to put food on the table prevented their joining together in ladies' clubs. Therefore, the Civil War did change East Tennessee women's roles, but their new roles did not prove lasting in an area economically devastated and politically and socially divided.

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PRIMARY SOURCES

MANUSCRIPTS

Duke University Special Collections

Sarah E. Thompson Papers

McClung Historical Collection, Lawson McGhee Library, Knoxville

Boren Family Papers

Caswell Papers

Thomas D. Edington Diary

John N. Fain Papers

First Presbyterian Church of Knoxville Records

Hall-Stakely Papers, 1861-1866

Myra Adelaide Inman Diary

Margaret Oswald Klein Memoirs

List of Applications Made Through Thomas A.R. Nelson to the East Tennessee
Relief Association in 1864

Thomas A.R. Nelson Papers, 1861-1870

Lizzie Welcker Diary

Ellen Wilson White Diary

Col. John and Rhoda Williams Papers

Special Collections Library, University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Civil War Records of East Tennessee

Elizabeth Baker Crozier Journal

Josephine H. Hooke Diary

Kate Livingston Diary

Margaret B. Crozier Ramsey Diary

Mary Jane Johnston Reynolds MSS

A.M. Van Dyke, "Paper Read Before the Daughters of the Confederacy"

Kay Walsh MSS

Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville

Athens Baptist Church Records, McMinn County

Cedar Fork Baptist Church Records, Philadelphia, Loudon County

W.A. Craighead Memoirs

First Presbyterian Church Records, Knoxville, Knox County

Friendship Primitive Baptist Church Records, White Pine, Jefferson County

Susan Heiskell McCampbell Diaries

Sallie Florence McEwen Diaries

Minerva McKamy Diaries and Memoirs
 Martha Luttrell Mitchell Memoirs
 Mount Olive Baptist Church Records, Knox County
 Mount Pleasant Baptist Church Records, Lenoir City, Loudon County
 Shiloh Primitive Baptist Church Records, Roane County
 Slate Creek Baptist Church Records, Cocke County
 Third Creek Baptist Church Records, Knoxville, Knox County

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