

Breaking the Mold: Rethinking the Southern Woman in the Civil War

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Abstract

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Scholarship during the last forty years has increasingly engaged the history of women and gender in the United States. Yet the lives of Southern upper class women, particularly during the years surrounding the Civil War, has received relatively scant attention. Among the broader public, many people envision the Southern “belle”—a well-to-do woman with few cares besides relaxing at her grand plantation mansion and waiting for the perfect man to marry her so that she could then become the sought out Southern “woman” she longed to be. It is commonly believed that these women served as adamant supporters of secession and the Southern cause. After researching the letters and diaries of women from the Southern upper class for this thesis, it becomes evident that they did not all fit this stereotypical mold. Anna Bell Cadwallader, Lucy Virginia French, Sarah Pannill Miller Payne, Lucy Wood Butler, and Lila Chunn all felt apprehensive about secession and the war. My research shows that the primary reasons why they felt this way were that they did not want their relatives or friends fighting, they were so loyal to their country that they feared its division, and finally, they were unsure of the role slavery would have in their country’s future. A look into the private lives of historic figures such as these Southern upper class women reveals a side to history overlooked for far too long.

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

The American symbol of a Southern belle or Southern woman appeared prior to the Civil War and has left a lasting impression that has been under examined and relatively unchallenged in American intellectual and popular thought.<sup>1</sup> Popular imagination displays these women as residing in the grandest mansions of the South, awaiting a proposal from a dashing young man who would allow them to complete their life long goal of giving themselves up and becoming fully devoted to one man for the rest of their life. Once the Southern belle marries, her metamorphosis is complete. She becomes the symbolic Southern woman she longed to be. In the Antebellum period, family, friends, and the very literature that they read, taught these women that their sole purpose was to become a Southern woman and that it was the only way to maintain Southern traditions.<sup>2</sup> With the coming of the Civil War, this particular demographic was asked to transform into Confederate women by continuing their traditional roles and simultaneously supporting and contributing to the war cause. However, some Southern women's diaries and letters make it apparent that not all Southern, upper class women supported the Civil War and the Southern cause. Their fascinating stories have been overlooked since the 1860s. It is now time to reevaluate how we view this not-so-static, or easily categorized, group of women.

Although the Civil War did not commence until 1861, the years leading up to the event were not as perfect as the Lost Cause ideology has attempted to portray the period. Cotton from the American South dominated the market as it allowed England and the North the opportunity to industrialize, and slavery made this economy possible. As the United States continued to

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<sup>1</sup> Diana Roberts, *Faulkner and Southern Womanhood* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1994), xii.

<sup>2</sup> Kathryn Lee Seidel, *The Southern Belle in the American Novel* (Tampa: University of South Florida Press, 1985), xii-5.

expand westward, the question at large was: will the new states be free or slave ones?<sup>3</sup> What many historians have concluded is that many Southerners wanted to both keep the slaves they already had and also have the opportunity to bring them to the new territories. They saw expanding slavery into new territories as a great challenge under a centralized government; therefore, they wanted more power for individual states to make decisions. As historian James McPherson wrote, “The flag, the Union, the constitution, and democracy—all were symbols or abstractions, but nonetheless powerful enough to evoke a willingness to fight and die for them. Southerners also fought for abstractions—state sovereignty, the right of secession, the Constitution as they interpreted it.” North and South held very different opinions, so it was inevitable that the Civil War would erupt. However, the causes of the war were not as cut and dry as some may expect, for in many states bordering North and South, the citizens did not all agree. For instance, Tennessee, Virginia, and North Carolina did not secede until after the fall of Fort Sumter in mid-April of 1861.<sup>4</sup> The country and states were not the only ones with divided opinions; even family members debated the war.

There were women of the Southern upper class who did not adhere to this pro-war, pro-Confederacy mindset. Instead, they seized the moment to display their true feelings about slavery, secession, and the war. In reading diaries and letters written during the war years, I discovered that some women thought very differently than the majority that surrounded them. They felt so strongly about their opinions that they were brave enough to put in writing their concerns about the war. As I examined particular women’s diaries and letters, three main themes as to why they opposed the war and Confederacy appeared. First, these women did not want their friends or relatives fighting and potentially losing their lives in a fight in which they did not

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<sup>3</sup> James McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 7-8.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 190-250.

believe. Another reason was their deep rooted connection to the Union and their patriotic support of the country. The last thing they wanted to watch was the country split apart due to the political disagreements. Last, the women in this project all felt uneasy and unsure of slavery and the role it would play in the future. Despite the reasons why these women were against the Civil War, they all had one thing in common: they wished there was an alternative solution to bloodshed to solve the country's controversies.

The common idea that a majority of Southern citizens owned slaves was the very opposite of reality. On the eve of the Civil War, there were four million blacks in the South, 95 percent of whom were slaves. However, there were very few people who owned grand mansions with hundreds of slaves. In fact, in the decade before the Civil War, only 20-25% of white families owned slaves. Of this group, half owned five or fewer slaves, and only one-tenth owned more than twenty slaves. Perhaps even most shocking, only one-half of 1% owned more than 100 slaves. There was a small group of wealthy planters and others who rivaled their wealth were successful merchants and industrialists. Underneath this group were the professionals who worked for the wealthiest but were still a part of the upper class and may have owned slaves.<sup>5</sup> I provide this information to make clear that the women focused on in this project were not in the wealthy, planter class. However, their families did own at least some slaves which allowed them membership to the Southern upper class.

Scholars have conducted valuable, but limited research on this particular demographic. As people continue to be interested in the Antebellum and Civil War periods, it is necessary that they learn of all those who were impacted by the time. Some scholars of Southern culture in the past decades have started to focus on women of the Southern slave-holding class especially

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<sup>5</sup> Edward Pessen, "How Different from Each Other Were the Antebellum North and South," in *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 85. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 1121-1132.

during the Civil War. One of the earliest pieces to focus on this group was Barbara Welter's 1966 essay, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860." Welter uses women's magazines and religious literature to represent how people viewed womanhood between the 1820s and 1860s. Welter argues that a "true woman" of this time would be pious, pure, submissive, and domestic. She leaves it to future researchers to discover how some women changed the norms.<sup>6</sup> Published fourteen years later, Catherine Clinton's book, *The Plantation Mistress: Woman's World in the Old South*, draws from diaries, letters, and memoirs to describe the everyday roles of women from this class. Another topic she delves into is women's place in the hierarchy of the South.<sup>7</sup> This work focuses on the antebellum period while books that follow examine the war years.

Kathryn Lee Seidel provides a different take on Southern belles and Southern women in her book from 1985, *The Southern Belle in the American Novel*. Diana Roberts' book from 1994, *Faulkner and Southern Womanhood*, shares similarities with Seidel's. Both of these books investigate how this group of women was portrayed in literature. Instead of using diaries and letters, both authors use literary texts as their sources and made historical, cultural, and psychological insights about these women's experiences.<sup>8</sup> A monumental book on this demographic is Drew Gilpin Faust's 1996 work, *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War*. This work is the most similar to this project because of the class she focuses on and her use of diaries, letters, newspapers, and literature to defend her argument that women of the Southern upper-class did more during the Civil War than people assume. She devotes limited attention to women who were anti-war and interprets these women's stances more for the reason that it was causing them to change their lifestyle and they

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<sup>6</sup> Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860." In *The Locating American Studies: The Evolution of a Discipline* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 44-64.

<sup>7</sup> Catherine Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress: Woman's World in the Old South* (New York: Pantheon, 1982).

<sup>8</sup> Kathryn Lee Seidel, *The Southern Belle in the American Novel* (Tampa: University of South Florida Press, 1985). & Diana Roberts, *Faulkner and Southern Womanhood* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1994).

perceived it as an inconvenience. Faust's book is an important text that demonstrates how ordinary lives were impacted during the war.<sup>9</sup>

More recent books focusing on this group include Laura F. Edwards, *Scarlett Doesn't Live Here Anymore: Southern Women in the Civil War Era* from 2000. Edwards argues that women of the South took advantage of the situation at large, the Civil War, and found this to be the time to control their destinies. Her book does not solely look at the wealthy class, but African Americans and poor whites as well.<sup>10</sup> Last, in 2008, Victoria E. Ott's book, *Confederate Daughters: Coming of Age during the Civil War*, inspects the lives of young women, those labeled "Southern-belles," and their attitudes regarding the Civil War before and during. Every woman in this study came from families who either supported secession or did so after Lincoln's call for troops. It is an important text as it examines the expectations women were to uphold to fully become a woman.<sup>11</sup> Each of these books and essays play an important role in the historiography of Southern women's history. However, until this project, no work in existence has focused on women of the upper class who were against the war right from the start.

In "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860," Barbara Welter successfully describes the duties women of the Antebellum era were responsible to perform. Women of this time yearned for the title of a true woman in her society, which was attainable through her marriage and by following the norms of piety, purity, submissiveness in a domestic setting. Although society perceived all four attributes as equally important, submissiveness was regarded as the most feminine virtue. Men were the ones expected to make everything happen in society, while

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<sup>9</sup> Drew Gilpin Faust, *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1999).

<sup>10</sup> Laura F. Edwards, *Scarlett Doesn't Live Here Anymore: Southern Women in the Civil War Era* (Chicago: University of Illinois, 2000).

<sup>11</sup> Victoria E. Ott, *Confederate Daughters: Coming of Age during the Civil War* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University, 2008), 9.

the women were perceived as passive characters who focused on domestic responsibilities.<sup>12</sup> These responsibilities included caring for her children, hosting guests, and creating a safe haven for her husband when he returned home from work.<sup>13</sup> As she was perceived as too weak and uneducated to handle the evil forces from society: staying at home surrounded by her loving family contributed to her safety. Most simply put, a Southern woman could pledge her allegiance to her country by participating in domestic roles, remaining submissive to her husband, and allowing him to handle any outside forces that could potentially harm their way of life. Once she married, she became fully devoted to him and needed to support him in all his decisions.<sup>14</sup>

In the Antebellum period, girls learned what was expected of them as women through family, church, social activities, and education. Girls who came from wealthy families often had the opportunity to attend an academy or seminary and may have even had a private tutor.<sup>15</sup> More than one hundred magazines, most of which were published in the North taught women from the North and South how they were to properly dress and behave. Philadelphia alone published *Godey's Lady's Book*, *Peterson's*, and *Lady's Friend*.<sup>16</sup> By the time of the Civil War, *Godey's Lady's Book* had 150,000 subscribers both in the North and South. The periodical focused on fashion and dress, household management, and the education of children. Sarah Josepha Hale published and provided content for the *American Ladies' Magazine*, and she later became editor of *Godey's*. Hale sought to discuss politics in the magazine until Mr. Godey wanted her to stop as the war approached so not to offend and lose readership.<sup>17</sup> Welter notes, "But even while the

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<sup>12</sup> Welter, "Cult of True Womanhood," 44-66.

<sup>13</sup> McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 28.

<sup>14</sup> Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood," 44-64.

<sup>15</sup> Ott, *Confederate Daughters*, 8-15.

<sup>16</sup> Kathleen L. Endres, "The Women's Press in the Civil War: A Portrait of Patriotism, Propaganda, and Prodding." In the *Civil War History*, Volume 30, Number 1 (Kent: The Kent State University Press, 1984) 31.

<sup>17</sup> Joseph Michael Sommers, "Godey's Ladies Book: Sarah Hale and the Construction of Sentimental Nationalism," in the *College Literature*, Volume 37, Number 3. (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 43-44.

women's magazines and related literature encouraged this ideal of the perfect women, forces were at work in the nineteenth century which impelled woman herself to change, to play a more creative role in society." Historic events such as industrialization, social reform, and the Civil War required these women to take on different roles and break away from traditional ones.<sup>18</sup> Whether they wanted to or not, during these crucial events in America's history, women were required to change their lifestyles.

Perhaps the most dramatic and disheartening event that caused women to accept responsibilities other than what they were accustomed to was the Civil War. After the war, the Lost Cause ideology gained prominence and many women took to writing their own stories about what had happened during the war to boost support for the Southern cause. They discussed how they did all they could for the war cause and lived and breathed the ideal of the Confederacy. Post-Civil War, Southern women who recorded their personal stories of the war and discussed their support of the Confederacy until the very end, were given the name Confederate belle or Confederate woman.<sup>19</sup>

These Confederate women did their part during the war through material and familial sacrifice and wanted to help support the Southern cause even after the war by writing down their stories.<sup>20</sup> During the war, the women who fit this mold brought pressure on men to enlist; they would even fight themselves, many claimed had they been born men.<sup>21</sup> In one case, women went so far as to show their support for the cause by insulting Union soldiers. In response, General Benjamin Butler passed General Order No. 28 which stated that if a woman acted in such a

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<sup>18</sup> Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood," 65-66.

<sup>19</sup> Ott, *Confederate Daughters*, 129-130.

<sup>20</sup> Ott, *Confederate Daughters*, 5-7.

<sup>21</sup> McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 251.

manner to Union soldiers she would be considered a prostitute and would be treated as such.<sup>22</sup>

While this example shows the extreme side to Confederate and war supporters this is the type of story many people remember when envisioning this particular group. However, this project presents a very different perspective to this particular demographic.

The adamant supporters of the war and Southern rights gained a voice in politics as they participated in events both inside and outside of their household. They were not seeking to overturn antebellum society, but instead make sure it remained through and after the war. They and their cohorts engaged in war work, and discussed their patriotism and support for the Confederacy in public or in their domestic spheres. They even discussed military battles, their leaders, and their relationships with Union soldiers. As for those who were loyal to the Union and wanted the country to stay together, they were an anomaly and could not speak out.<sup>23</sup> This project addresses the women who wanted to keep their thoughts in private through letters and diaries. While letters are meant to be read, the women were cognizant of who read them and knew they needed to be trustworthy.

This project delves into the lives of a group of Southern women whose views on the Southern cause and Civil War have not been researched and analyzed sufficiently. While some research has been done on women of the Southern upper class, it tends to deal with those who were strong Confederate and war supporters. Most scholarship neglects to look at those who felt differently about the conflict of their day. The project will begin with a woman of the Southern upper class everyone would think of as the quintessential Southern woman and Confederate supporter—Varina Davis (1826-1906). The thesis project will then explore the lives of other women who shared common feelings to Varina Davis and are able to be grouped into the three

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<sup>22</sup> Ott, *Confederate Daughters*, 59.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 36-37.

recurring themes. Three of the women, Anna Bell Cadwallader (1842-c.1900), Sarah Pannill Miller Payne (1820-1910), and Lucy Wood Butler (1841-1921), resided in Virginia and held strong opinions about the war. Anna Bell Cadwallader was a young woman, whose brother fought in the Civil War. Sarah Pannill Miller Payne had ten children, four of whom chose to fight for the Confederacy. Lucy Wood Butler, a newlywed at the start of the war, challenged her new husband with her opinion of slavery. This project also examines a woman by the name of Lila Chunn (1842-1923) who lived in Cassville, Georgia, and desperately wanted her husband to return home and not have to fight in the war. Last, a Tennessee woman by the name of Lucy Virginia French (1825-1891) shared what it was like to live in a state very divided by the conflict and how the war constantly challenged her career as a writer. By the end, this thesis should make it clear that not all women of the Southern upper-class supported the war and the Confederate cause.

For this project, I examined correspondence from the letters and diaries firsthand of five women who lived through the Civil War: Anna Bell Cadwallader, Sarah Pannill Miller Payne, Lucy Wood Butler, Lila Chunn, and Lucy Virginia French. Each of these women came from the upper class or was part of families that owned at least some slaves or were wealthy enough to fit into this class. Only one of the women, Sarah, owned enough slaves to be a member of the elite planter class owning over twenty slaves.<sup>24</sup> Their letters and diaries are housed in various locations in the country including: the Virginia Historical Society, the Rubenstein Collection at Duke University, the Wilson Library at the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, and the Tennessee Historical Society online archives. After thoroughly reading through about thirty primary sources, I decided to focus on these five women's stories for this project. Thorough

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<sup>24</sup> Pessen, "How Different from Each Other Were the Antebellum North and South," 1132.

research on Varina Davis is already in existence so I included her story using secondary sources. I was fortunate to have the opportunity to read the remaining exceptional sources first-hand and have the ability to share these women's Civil War stories.

Perhaps the most surprising woman examined in this project is the wife of the President of the Confederacy, Varina Davis, who will be discussed in chapter two. I decided to open this project with Varina Davis and her Civil War story to allow readers a chance to realize that not all women of the Southern upper class followed the stereotype of the Southern belle or embraced a Southern woman lifestyle. In chapter three, I will explore the lives of Anna Bell Cadwallader, Lila Chunn, Sarah Pannill Miller Payne, and Lucy Virginia French, and their opposition to the war due to not wanting relatives and friends to fight. In the fourth chapter, I examine the women's love for the Union and their patriotic drive behind their opposition to secession. The final chapter explores how these women felt about slavery as a cause to the war and if it should still exist in the future. No matter the reason, each of these women wanted the country to find an alternative option to resolve their differences instead of seceding and starting a war.

## Chapter 2

### Varina Davis

It is shocking to believe that Varina Davis, a woman who should have symbolically represented the South and its cause, was against a war to which her husband was completely devoted to. However, if one were to read the various letter correspondence and newspaper articles from the war years, one would discover that Mrs. Davis did in fact make many bold statements against the Civil War and perhaps more significantly, the Confederacy. In Joan Cashin's book, *The First Lady of the Confederacy: Varina Davis's Civil War*, she focuses on Varina's side of the story and her relationship with her husband throughout the four warring years. While Cashin does not focus on Varina's opposition to the war, there are quotes and content pertinent to this thesis project's topic.<sup>25</sup> Carol Berkin also does a commendable job portraying Varina Davis's life in her book, *Civil War Wives: The Lives and Times of Angelina Grimke Weld, Varina Howell Davis, and Julia Dent Grant*. Berkin goes into great detail about Varina during the war years.<sup>26</sup> Through reading these two pieces, it is evident that Varina Howell Davis did not support the Civil War.

In order to understand Varina's apprehension about the war, one should start with her story prior to meeting Jefferson Davis. Varina was born in Natchez, Mississippi, to William and Margaret Howell. At the age of ten she attended Madame Grelaud's school in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. This was most likely her first time visiting the North, but would certainly not be her last. Varina's education did not stop after two semesters, however, for the next twelve years a family friend by the name of Judge George Winchester tutored her. She studied Latin, French,

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<sup>25</sup> Joan E. Cashin, *First Lady of the Confederacy: Varina Davis's Civil War* (Cambridge: Belknap Press Harvard University, 2009).

<sup>26</sup> Carol Berkin, *Civil War Wives: The Lives and Times of Angelina Grimke Weld, Varina Howell Davis, and Julia Dent Grant* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2009).

literature, and philosophy and she thoroughly enjoyed continuing her education.<sup>27</sup> In her younger years, her family, particularly her father, had financial success while living in Natchez, Mississippi. However, in 1839 her father went bankrupt and members of the family including the thirteen- year-old Varina needed to start working in ways they were not used to. For instance, as their slaves were sold off, Varina and her mother were forced to undertake more household tasks that their slaves had done for years. Despite the financial challenges the Howell family faced, Varina was a very educated young lady. Early in the 1840s she met her future husband.<sup>28</sup>

It was not until Varina married Jefferson Davis in 1845 that she would experience the lavish lifestyle of a large, successful plantation dependent on an enslaved workforce. While Davis participated in the Senate, the couple and their family lived in Washington D.C. Varina regarded their years there as her favorite time of their marriage. Meanwhile, as states began to leave the Union, Jefferson ordered his family to return to his preferred location, the plantation in Natchez, Mississippi. Cashin comments that Varina's education in Philadelphia, familial ties to the North, and her time spent in Washington made her ill prepared to be the Confederate First Lady. Her olive skin complexion, wide reading, and her wit led her to not be the ideal Southern woman figure.<sup>29</sup> While many Southern women judged Varina negatively for her extensive education, many men she encountered such as John C. Calhoun commented on enjoying her beauty and intelligence.<sup>30</sup> However, shortly after her time in Washington, the characteristic that would get her in the most trouble as a political wife were her doubts about the Confederate cause and the war.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Berkin, *Civil War Wives*, 108.

<sup>28</sup> Cashin, *First Lady of the Confederacy*, 21-23.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 98 & 311.

<sup>30</sup> Berkin, *Civil War Wives*, 120-124.

<sup>31</sup> Cashin, *First Lady of the Confederacy*, 311.

Although she should have represented the Southern cause due to her marriage to Jefferson Davis, Varina had many reasons to oppose the war. Like many of the other women in this study, she was related to the North both by blood and through friendships. In a letter to her friend Jane Pierce dated October of 1860, Varina described her love of the Union and her hope that the sectional crisis could be resolved without a war. She maintained connections with many Northerners throughout the war to check on her family members and friends' well-being. She even sent and received gifts.<sup>32</sup> Since she had lived in the North for a few years, she was educated in the way Northern society functioned both economically and socially. In a letter to her mother from June of 1861, Varina admits that the South lacked the ability to wage war. She believed that the North had an automatic advantage due its large population and she knew its manufacturing power outweighed that of the South.<sup>33</sup> Varina was a well-educated woman through her years of private tutoring, who showed no qualms in discussing politics and economics. Politics and economics were part of the man's sphere and Varina and all women of the time were to only focus their attention on domestic affairs.<sup>34</sup>

Although Varina received criticism for her interest in politics and believing differently than her husband, the first wave of criticism came from elite women of Virginia in the summer of 1861, as Jefferson and Varina arrived in Richmond. The comments regarded her physical appearance.<sup>35</sup> As a woman from the Southern upper class, she was supposed to have a pale white complexion, possess lady-like manners, and leisurely enjoy the plantation lifestyle while spending her free time reading about the arts.<sup>36</sup> Varina had a darker complexion than the other women of this class, one that many would describe as olive-skinned and her sense of humor and

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<sup>32</sup> Cashin, *First Lady of the Confederacy*, 90-114.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

<sup>34</sup> Berkin, *Civil War Wives*, 28.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 160-161.

<sup>36</sup> Cashin, *First Lady of the Confederacy*, 22.

manners appalled many of her cohorts. She enjoyed talking politics and played practical jokes on men, both of which were negatively seen in this society. Her love of learning and education overwhelmed those who feared an educated or literary woman, but that did not stop her.<sup>37</sup> While many women of this class would have been thrilled to be married to the President of the Confederacy and to receive the publicity, Varina despised everything about the spotlight. In a letter to her mother at the beginning of the war, she admitted that the constant attention was exhausting.<sup>38</sup> Varina even went so far as to leave her husband's inauguration, which drew much negative attention about her lack of support for the war cause. In a letter to a friend she wrote that her husband's inauguration was like watching a, "willing victim going to his funeral pyre."<sup>39</sup> If she compared her husband's inauguration to a funeral there was little hope that she would ever support the Confederacy. This social event was meant to inspire support for the Confederacy and it is unimaginable what onlookers thought as they watched Mrs. Jefferson Davis abruptly leave before the conclusion of the event.

While it is notable that Varina's primary reasons to being against the war were due to her familial relationships and connections to the North and its people, there was one characteristic of the South about which she had no qualms—slavery. There is no doubt that slavery served as a central cause of the Civil War and it received much support from the Southern people. It would be very puzzling for Varina to be against an institution that had rescued her from her family's poverty. She married into one of the wealthiest families of the Natchez, Mississippi region and their success relied on the backs of their slaves.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Welter, "Cult of True Womanhood," 58.

<sup>38</sup> Cashin, *First Lady of the Confederacy*, 108.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

Ironically, in May of 1861, an ex-slave of the Davis family, the coachman William Jackson, dealt a heavy blow to the family's image. Jackson fled to the Union lines on April 27, 1861, and Secretary of War Edwin Stanton questioned him about the family, an interview which was subsequently published in the *New York Tribune*. In the interview, Jackson described Mr. Davis as sickly and irritable and his wife as pessimistic about the Confederacy. Jackson revealed that Varina told various friends she wanted to escape to Europe and that she did not support the South within the first few weeks of war. As news on this report traveled, friends of the family in the South denied that Varina had ever said these statements. Interestingly, Varina never defended herself against Jackson's comments: however, in a letter composed close to the time of this event, Jefferson Davis urged his wife to be discreet when it came to sharing her true beliefs.<sup>41</sup> Jefferson realized his wife did not share his political views. In fact, he sometimes treated her so horribly that one wonders if he were exacting revenge for her lack of Confederate support. In letters to his wife, Jefferson made it clear he did not approve of her stubbornness and what he saw as her unfeminine attitude, probably referring to her political opinions and doubt in his political success. In order to make him happy, Varina commented on how she read Mrs. Ellis's *Guide to Social Happiness*, an advice book that aimed to teach women how to be a proper wife.<sup>42</sup> No matter how hard Varina tried, she would never become the perfect Southern woman Jefferson wanted her to be.

Even after the conclusion of the Civil War, Varina did not empathize with the South's defeat as much as people had wanted. She never became the symbolic woman of the Lost Cause and the most she did for the cause was to assist her husband in writing his memoir. When President Lincoln was assassinated, she wrote a letter to her husband referring to the event as

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<sup>41</sup> Cashin, *First Lady of the Confederacy*, 126-128.

<sup>42</sup> Berkin, *Civil War Wives*, 129-134.

“dreadful news.” Years later she claimed that she wept for Lincoln’s family and she realized it was devastating news for the South. Perhaps the most important statement Varina Davis made in her life was in 1901 after she had been living in New York since 1891. In a newspaper she revealed that she felt that the right side had won the Civil War.<sup>43</sup> We may never know the full meaning behind why she made the bold statement, but it could not be any more shocking coming from the wife of Jefferson Davis.

In conclusion, Varina Davis is a difficult character to understand in America’s history, which makes her incredibly fascinating. Everything she was expected to be in the Southern upper class society: submissive to her husband, refrained from politics, pale-white complexion, adamant Confederate supporter, and uneducated, she was not one of these which led to her less than admirable life. Varina tried to adhere to the standards of the society, but it was not who she was. To its simplest form, Varina Davis was against the Civil War since she loved the North and was related by blood and friendships to many of its inhabitants. She was content with the way society ran and wanted the country to find a way to solve its issues without war. While Varina’s feelings and gender got her in trouble numerous times, Cashin makes an interesting point about the special privilege she enjoyed. “The Confederate government arrested Union sympathizers, put them in prison, sequestered their property, and sometimes executed them.” Cashin writes, “Yet no one tried to arrest the Confederate First Lady, who was protected, ironically, by her social status and by her gender.”<sup>44</sup> Perhaps Varina Davis wanted to revolutionize Southern womanhood through her years of marriage to an important Southern figure, but unfortunately, she tends to be overlooked in the history books since she was drastically against the norm of the time.

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<sup>43</sup> Cashin, *First Lady of the Confederacy*, 159& 312.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.

After reading about Varina Davis's war experience, it becomes apparent that she did not fit the Confederate woman mold. The women focused on in this thesis shared similar feelings to Varina about secession and the war. In the following chapters, the Southern women and their negative feelings towards the Civil War will be categorized based on one of three reasons: they did not want family and friends fighting, were so patriotic they did not want to see the country split in two, or they were unsure of slavery and its future. Many of these women's feelings were similar to the First Lady of the Confederacy's: however, unlike Varina, their thoughts were more hidden because they were not in the public's eye. By the conclusion of this thesis, it should be clear that there were women of this particular class that were anti-war and this in turn shows they did not fit the quintessential Southern belle and Southern woman stereotype.

### Chapter 3

#### **An End to Moonlight and Magnolias:**

##### *Families Torn Apart by War*

On a fall day in September 1861, in Newtown, Virginia, 19-year-old Anna Bell Cadwallader received devastating news that her brother and their friends decided to reenlist with the Confederate Army for three more years. Young Anna Bell, immediately distraught that her brother would not be returning home anytime soon raced to her room. She grabbed for paper and in rushed writing exclaimed her disappointment in his decision to continue fighting in the Civil War and for the cause. Anna Bell would not be the only Southern woman to write down her true feelings about the war on paper. In fact, the women in this chapter each felt apprehensive of the war because they did not want their relatives or friends fighting. Anna may have felt as though she was an anomaly in her society, but she was not the only one who held these sentiments.

The chapter begins with a discussion of widespread perceptions of Southern women as adamant supporters of the cause and their feelings during the Civil War. We then shift to the stories of four women who challenge this idea and were not in fact, supporters of the war largely because they did not want their loved ones to fight. By the end of the chapter, it should be apparent that there were women of the Southern upper class who were fearful of the war because they were concerned about what would happen to their loved ones.

It is hard for anyone to watch his or her loved ones leave to fight a war, but it is an even harsher realization if you do not support the cause. Many Southern women believed their men were serving a cause that would defend their home and their way of life, which produced a sense of comfort to them enough that they supported their decision to fight. Some women even went as far as to call men who did not want to fight disgraceful and an embarrassment to their wives and

children.<sup>45</sup> Although this sort of example tends to be what many people envision the Confederate belle or woman to be, this was not the case for every woman in the South. In *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War*, Drew Gilpin Faust explains how elite southern women feared both physical separation from their husbands and the latter's possible death. The two became foreigners to one another and lived quite different lives, especially if one partner did not support the cause. A statement such as, "I don't want fame or glory! I want you!" indicates that not all women saw war as a glorious event.<sup>46</sup> Anna Bell Cadwallader (1842-c.1900), Lila Chunn (1842-1923), Sarah Pannill Miller Payne (1820-1910), and Lucy Virginia French (1825-1891) are prime examples of Southern women who did not believe in the war and had a difficult time supporting their loved ones' decision to fight.

Anna Bell Cadwallader was an unmarried young woman whose brother, John N. Cadwallader, enlisted in the Confederate army under the 1<sup>st</sup> Virginia Cavalry. For most of the war, Anna and her parents, Ezra and Mariah Cadwallader, lived in their hometown of Newtown, located in Frederick County, Virginia.<sup>47</sup> Anna and John had a very close relationship and they wrote letters to one another frequently between 1861 through 1864. Throughout the letters, Anna proved uneasy about the war and wanted her brother and hometown friends to come home immediately. She even became irate when she heard that the group of men reenlisted in September of 1861. In the very first letter to John on June 1, 1861, Anna wrote, "I received your letter this morning but would've rather have received your self for I thought that you would have tried to come home the last of this week."<sup>48</sup> In the ensuing letters in 1861 and 1862, Anna shared

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<sup>45</sup> Ott, *Confederate Daughters*, 45-46.

<sup>46</sup> Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 10-16.

<sup>47</sup> 1870 United States Federal Census for Ezra Cadwallader. <http://search.ancestrylibrary.com>. Accessed March 5, 2017.

<sup>48</sup> Anna Bell Cadwallader (ABC). Letter to John Cadwallader (JC). June 1, 1861. Mss 1 C1158a Manuscripts. Cadwallader, John N., 1836-1876 Papers. Virginia Historical Society Special Collections, (VHS). Richmond, VA.

with him current events of the town such as the high prices and limited availability of paper but she saw it as her duty to write to him frequently. She referred to him as a very kind brother and when he did not write to her she became depressed.<sup>49</sup>

Particular statements make it very clear that Anna did not support the war or the Confederate cause. As she heard news in September of 1861, that her brother and their friends were to reenlist she wrote, “well I do hope and pray John that you will think more of us here at home than to enlist for three years oh John do pray come home rather than join the army for three years come home if you have to join the militia oh I think it is an awful thing to think about.” In the same letter she continued, “Oh I am sorry I do hope that the boys will have more sense than to enlist for three years I hear that Naylor also intends to enlist I thought he had more sense.”<sup>50</sup> It is clear that Anna did not even remotely support her brother and their Newtown friends’ choice to fight in the pivotal war. She probably felt strongly against their decision since the men had already risked their lives in the battles of First Bull Run and Second Bull Run in July and August of 1861. It is one thing for her to oppose her brother’s choice to reenlist, but her disappointment in the other men’s decision to fight brought her immense dissatisfaction.

However, there was one way that Anna demonstrated interest in the war. In one of her letters from August of 1861, Anna wrote, “John you must be sure to send me something from the field of battle something that I can say from the Northern Army oh John you must take good care of yourself.”<sup>51</sup> The battle refers to First Bull Run which occurred July 21, 1861, located near the city of Manassas, Virginia.<sup>52</sup> Whether she supported the war or not, Anna was still a young woman who had never lived through a war and possibly never even visited the North. A relic had

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<sup>49</sup> ABC to JC, August 5 and 28, 1861. VHS.

<sup>50</sup> ABC to JC, September 29, 1861. VHS.

<sup>51</sup> ABC to JC, August 5, 1861. VHS.

<sup>52</sup> McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 278.

some type of draw to since it was an object not just from the battlefield, but a physical object from the Northern side.

Relics were important to Americans in the nineteenth-century. Historian Teresa Barnett, in *Sacred Relics: Pieces of the Past in Nineteenth-Century America*, notes that during this time, people believed that objects connected them with their own absent loved ones and this same idea applied to people creating connections with the nation's history. Especially during the Civil War, Americans wanted to obtain objects from the battlefield since war was something unique to the soldier's experience. They withstood combat and were left forever altered. The practice of obtaining an object assisted in collecting the memory of the historic event and after the war, served in memorial practices either in the public sphere or privately. Groups helped to create museums or organizations to remember the war or had their own collection in their home. Overall, collecting objects continued their involvement in a war that consumed their lives for four years.<sup>53</sup> Although Anna disagreed with her brother's decision to fight, she still wanted a souvenir from a battle. The letter in which she wrote about her brother retrieving an object for her was written August 5, 1861. The timing of the letter, it being written in the immediate aftermath of the battle strongly suggests that this young woman realized early on the importance this event would have on America's history. In a few instances, some of the earliest examples of objects sent home from battle were quite grisly. Some Southern sources commented on Yankee bones appearing after battles. Although none of Anna's remaining letters commented on what her brother sent back, it is important to note that objects ranging from buttons to human bones were used to remember the historic event.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Teresa Barnett, *Sacred Relics: Pieces of the Past in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2013), 8-83.

<sup>54</sup> Barnett, *Sacred Relics*, 82.

Lila Land Chunn (1842-1923) was born to Nathan and Mona Land in Twiggs County, Georgia, and moved to Cassville, Georgia at a very young age. Nathan Land was a Judge and County Ordinary who owned sixteen slaves according to the 1860 United States Federal Census slave schedule.<sup>55</sup> In 1850, slaves accounted for 32% of Cassville, Georgia's population. While only a handful of the white population could be considered planters who owned over twenty slaves, many of the citizens had at least a few. In 1854, the town built the Cassville Female College, Lila graduated from the school, and her family helped maintain the boarding house, along with their sixteen slaves. Their neighbors were the Chunn family, and their son would soon be Lila's husband, William Augustus Chunn. William's father, Samuel Chunn, owned ten slaves as well. By 1860, 91% of the town's slaveholders owned fewer than twenty slaves.<sup>56</sup> Undoubtedly, Lila and William were raised in a territory with many slaves and their own families utilized slaves in their everyday tasks.

On the outbreak of the Civil War, William enlisted in the First Regiment Georgia State Troops and nine months later moved to the Fortieth Georgia Infantry Regiment. Lila and William who married in 1860, wrote letters frequently to one another. The collections of letters include documents from family friends to Lila. However, a majority of the collection consists of the married couple's romantic correspondence. One fascinating piece of information is that William brought one of his father's slaves, a man named Sip, along with him throughout the war. There is very little mentioned about him but William did make it a point to complain to his wife

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<sup>55</sup> 1860 United States Federal Census Slave Schedule for Nathan Land. <http://search.ancestrylibrary.com/>. Accessed March 5, 2017.

<sup>56</sup> Claremont, Alexis. "Creators of Community: Cassville, Georgia 1850-1880." MA Thesis. University of Georgia, [https://getd.libs.uga.edu/pdfs/claremont\\_alex\\_a\\_i\\_200512\\_ma.pdf](https://getd.libs.uga.edu/pdfs/claremont_alex_a_i_200512_ma.pdf), 2005. Accessed 14 March 2017. 17-19.

about Sip's cooking not tasting well.<sup>57</sup> In the letters Lila wrote to her husband, it seemed as though she disagreed with his decision in fighting and was melancholy through the entire war.<sup>58</sup>

Lila was very gloomy when discussing the war and wished her husband a quick and safe return. In one of the earliest letters in the collection Lila wrote, "I do wish that you could have staid at home until you were entirely well. I feel so much uneasiness about you." Later in the letter she stated, "I fear by the cartridges being distributed that you all are going to have fighting to do, but pray God that your life may never be so exposed."<sup>59</sup> The way that Lila wrote emphasized that she did not see the purpose in the great cause, especially since she wrote the letter near the start of the war. A true Confederate woman would be excited that her husband participated in combat and would see the experience as glorious, but Lila feared her husband participating in the act. An adamant supporter of the war would look past her husband's absence, but Lila does not.

In the majority of Lila's letters she asked when she would see him again and discussed how lonely she felt without him. In one of her letters to William early on in the war she admitted, "I can do very well in the day but at night when I go up to our room I can think of nothing else but my dear absent one, and how can I feel otherwise than sad and lonely?"<sup>60</sup> Although not all of William's letters still exist, it is noticeable through the wording in her letters that he is disappointed in her lack of support. In the one letter she stated, "You ask me to try and bear the disappointment cheerfully, that the time will soon pass away. Well, for your sake I will, the best that I possibly can, but it seems like a long time and I fear in spite of one that it will be a gloomy

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<sup>57</sup> Claremont, "Creators of Community," 22-23.

<sup>58</sup> William Augustus Chunn Papers, 1861-1864. Sec. A Box 24 items 1-75. David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University, Durham, NC.

<sup>59</sup> Lila Chunn (LC) to William Augustus Chunn (WAC), December 2, 1861. Duke University.

<sup>60</sup> LC to WAC, February 9, 1862. Duke University.

period in my lifes history.”<sup>61</sup> A true Confederate woman would have fully supported her husband’s decision to fight and not make it about herself and refer to it as a “gloomy period in my lifes history.” She would have realized that he was making the greatest sacrifice by potentially sacrificing himself for the country and her job was to support him and continue taking care of the domestic roles.

In a letter from December 30, 1863, Lila seemed to be defending herself and her love for William, perhaps because of something he said in a letter to her questioning her devotion. She wrote, “I have no other real pleasure than receiving letters from you and writing to you. This dear Willie I have often told you before and will you doubt me? You do not think that I could neglect or forget you for any one else? No, no I can not believe you think so, although you have almost said it.”<sup>62</sup> A statement like this represents the challenges couples faced while separated. It is unclear how many times the couple saw one another during the war so it is inevitable that disagreements ensued since their only form of communication was via letter. In one of the last letters in the collection, written on November 6, 1863, Lila wrote, “I do want this cruel war to be over and you be permitted to come home, that I may as far as in my power provide comforts for you, this and having you love me would be happiness enough.”<sup>63</sup> In this statement, it is important to note her yearning to return to life as it was before the war. Lila wanted to continue her Southern woman’s role as providing domestic needs to her husband. Lila was fortunate enough to see her husband, William Augustus Chunn return home; he lived until 1921 and Lila died a few years later in 1923.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> LC to WAC, February 3, 1862. Duke University.

<sup>62</sup> LC to WAC, December 30, 1863. Duke University.

<sup>63</sup> LC to WAC, November 6, 1863. Duke University.

<sup>64</sup> Death records for William Augustus Chunn and Lila Chunn. <http://search.ancestrylibrary.com/>. Accessed March 5, 2017.

Another woman of the Southern upper class unsure of the Civil War was Campbell County, Virginia resident, Sarah Pannill Miller Payne. Sarah was born in 1820 and her husband, Robert S. Payne, was born in 1811. According to the 1850 United States Federal Census, the two had six children by this point, only five survived.<sup>65</sup> Four of her sons fought in the Civil War: Samuel, John, Robert, and David. In the 1860 census, Robert S. Payne is listed as the owner of fourteen slaves, nine women and five men.<sup>66</sup> Throughout Sarah's collection of letters from 1865 to 1872 she refers to her slaves, which she says numbered twenty-three. The reasons for the discrepancy in numbers of slaves from those two sources are not clear.

Slavery was a system Sarah was accustomed to, as she belonged to a family that always owned slaves. She was the daughter of Samuel Thomas Miller and Frances E. Fitzpatrick who owned 11 slaves in 1860.<sup>67</sup> Perhaps even more interesting, Sarah's great uncle Samuel Pannill was one of the largest slave holders in the state of Virginia; according to the 1860 Slave Schedule, he owned 81 slaves. His plantation, named Green Hill, was located in southern Campbell County, Virginia. Samuel purchased 600 acres in 1797 and, by his death in 1864, had increased his holdings to nearly 5,000 acres. His property contained many buildings and his 81 slaves lived amongst 17 houses.<sup>68</sup> It is possible that some of his slaves could have passed through the family and been owned by many different family members. It is evident that Sarah spent a large portion of her life around slaves both through her family and her marriage.

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<sup>65</sup> 1850 United States Federal Census for Sarah P. Payne. <http://search.ancestrylibrary.com/>. Accessed March 5, 2017.

<sup>66</sup> 1860 U.S. Federal Census Slave Schedule for Robert Payne. <http://search.ancestrylibrary.com/>. Accessed March 5, 2017.

<sup>67</sup> 1860 US Fed. Census Slave Schedule for Samuel Thomas Miller. <http://search.ancestrylibrary.com/>. Accessed March 5, 2017.

<sup>68</sup> John Michael Vlach, *Back of the Big House: The Architecture of Plantation Slavery* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina, 1993), 185-186.

Sarah's letters include a very lengthy letter written to a relative up North about the war. She tells her cousin, Mary M. Clendenin, that she was never for secession but it was forced upon her home state of Virginia. Sarah lost two sons on the battlefield, Samuel died at Seven Pines and John at Gettysburg. Her two other sons, Robert and David, returned home. Sarah wrote in her letter to Mary in coming to terms with their death, "I suppose they fill 'rebel' graves, but nevertheless, I honour them as brave and noble boys, patriots according to their understanding."<sup>69</sup> This is a very difficult statement to read when one thinks about all that this woman endured. While in her lengthy letter she flips back and forth about her support for the Confederacy, it seems as though she did not believe in the war. In the second to last word of this statement, when she says "their" understanding, she does not incorporate her own beliefs into the matter. She also referred to the war as the "dark dark days of the last four years" and stated, "I, as well as many others—have seen hard times and am still suffering privations to which I was unaccustomed till the commencement of this unfortunate war."<sup>70</sup> Undoubtedly, Sarah lost a lot in the war: two sons, her families' wealth, and their slaves which caused her to write in such a gloomy manner. In the end, she was proud of her sons for fighting for something they believed to be just even if she had personal doubts through it all.

Lucy Virginia French was the daughter of Mease and Elizabeth Smith born in Accomac County, Virginia. Mease was a wealthy educator and lawyer who owned three slaves in 1860. Just as many other girls of this class, Lucy received an education in Mrs. Hannah's School in Washington, Pennsylvania. Lucy and her sister moved to Memphis, Tennessee, and both became teachers. Lucy was a serious writer who went by the pen name of "L'Inconnue." In 1853 she

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<sup>69</sup> Sarah Pannill Miller Payne (SMP). Letter to Mary M. Clendenin (MMC) May 10 1866. Mss 2 P29393. Payne, Sarah Pannill Miller Papers, 1839-1926. Virginia Historical Society Special Collections, (VHS). Richmond, VA.

<sup>70</sup> SMP to MMC, 1866. VHS.

married Colonel John Hopkins French (1817-1892) of McMinnville, who was a wealthy breeder of horses and offered her a rich future in antebellum Tennessee. During the Civil War, Lucy wrote in her diary about the five slaves they had. Throughout their marriage, Lucy continued working as an editor of many newspapers and magazines. She also wrote poetry and some of her most well-known works are entitled: “Wind Whispers,” “Tecumseh’s Foot,” and “The Great River.” Her entire married life until her death was spent at her and John’s plantation in McMinnville, Tennessee, called “Forest Home.”<sup>71</sup>

McMinnville is located in the eastern middle edge of Tennessee in Warren County; the eastern portion of Tennessee was Unionists. The middle of the state had 25% of its population enslaved, while the east was only 15%. After secession, if there were still Union supporters in middle or west Tennessee, they tended to hide at their farms and plantations until the war ended. Lucy did not support secession, she had women of her town sign a petition for peace that was printed in the *Nashville Patriot*, and hosted a “Union Party” to celebrate the New Year of 1861. Even throughout the war, Lucy and John had many visitors to Forest Home from both the Union and Confederate sides. However, as the war progressed, Lucy became irate as Union soldiers damaged her house and the town. For this reason, she wished the South would win so the Northerners would retreat to where they came from.<sup>72</sup> She became very weary throughout the four years, so much so that she wrote scathing remarks about her husband when he would not repair their home. “I often wonder what men are made for!” she exclaimed. “To keep up the species I suppose—which is the only thing they are ‘always ready’ and never slow about doing! For my part I am quite wearied and worn out with their general no-accountability--and wish they

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<sup>71</sup> Connie L. Lester. “Lucy Virginia French: ‘Out of the Bitterness of My Heart.’” In the *Human Tradition in the Old South*. (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources Inc., 2003), 189-197.

<sup>72</sup> Lester, “Lucy Virginia French,” 188-197.

were all put into the army, where they could kill each other off—the less of them the better!”<sup>73</sup>

Before she got to the point of wishing her husband dead, she had a very different opinion prior to the war.

Besides her career as a writer, Lucy also kept an extensive diary throughout the Civil War. In one of her diary entries Lucy wrote, “This is my dear Darlin’s birthday—and I have just given him a kiss thereupon congratulating myself that he has now reached the age when men are past being compelled to military duty.”<sup>74</sup> John Hopkins French celebrated his 45<sup>th</sup> birthday on that day. She made it very obvious that she did not want her husband fighting in the war if she made an effort to give him a kiss celebrating this inevitable accomplishment. An ardent Confederate woman would have forced her husband into the Civil War, but Lucy Virginia French was far from taking such a stance. Besides celebrating her husband’s avoidance of having to fight, Lucy and her husband spent time during the war creating a plan for building a new house. Lucy even wrote in her diary entry, “It seems like great folly to be thinking of building houses now, when our country is going to ruin as fast as it can & when there is every reason suppose that before this war is over we will be left without a dollar in the world.”<sup>75</sup> Again, it seems as though the couple avoided the war happening around them by only focusing on their personal lives, which is not symbolic of a Confederate family.

Some women of this class supported the war initially and lost confidence throughout while others defended the cause through the entirety of the conflict. The women explored in this thesis, however, opposed both secession and the war from the start. As historian Laura F.

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<sup>73</sup> Lucy Virginia French (LVF). Diary Entry on September 25, 1864. ID # 36059. Lucy Virginia French Smith Diary. Women in the Civil War Collection, Tennessee State Library & Archives Online, (TEVA). Nashville, TN. <http://teva.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/ref/collection/p15138coll15/id/501>.

<sup>74</sup> LVF, August 10, 1862. TEVA.

<sup>75</sup> LVF, November 2, 1862. TEVA.

Edwards writes in her book, *Scarlett Doesn't Live Here Anymore: Southern Women in the Civil War Era*, many Confederate women believed, "Peering at the war through a romantic haze, many planter-class Confederate women initially saw it as an exciting adventure that would affirm the mastery of their menfolk and, by extension, the virtue of slaveholding society."<sup>76</sup> At the start, they encouraged enlistment among their family members and friends, sewed uniforms, and sported their Confederate pride through patriotic attire. But, by the end of the war it was a challenge to find any fully devoted supporters. In *Mothers of Invention*, Faust addresses the allure of honor, courage, and glory that led Confederate women to support the Confederacy and the war. By war's end, these virtues had lost their charm.<sup>77</sup> However, by reading through the diaries and letters of Anna Bell Cadwallader, Lila Chunn, Sarah Pannill Miller Payne, and Lucy Virginia French, one cannot help but notice that these women were never seduced by the initial charm of a noble Confederate cause.

It is believable that as the war continued longer than anyone expected women from both sides grew tired of their loved ones fighting. A war that both sides thought would quickly come and go ended up stretching over four years as thousands died or were wounded in the process.<sup>78</sup> Some Southern women expressed in their letters to their husbands, beaus, and friends that they felt that they had done enough for the cause. A North Carolinian woman, Mary Bell, told her husband that she felt he had done enough for the Southern cause; this letter was written July of 1862. Another anti-war Southern wife stated that she wanted to fight the men who kept her husband from her.<sup>79</sup> Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas demonstrated doubts about the war by the end. She was an ardent supporter of the Confederacy at the start, but as the war progressed she

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<sup>76</sup> Edwards, *Scarlett Doesn't Live Here Anymore*, 73.

<sup>77</sup> Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 13-14.

<sup>78</sup> McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 754-756.

<sup>79</sup> Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 241.

doubted a Southern victory. However, her statements often demonstrate opposition to the war: “Am I willing to give my husband to gain Atlanta for the Confederacy? No, No, No, a thousand times No!”<sup>80</sup> These three women mentioned have something very much in common; the doubt of the Confederacy and its cause, and no longer having the fear to write what they were feeling. If these women were in fact the prototypical Confederate women and Southern women they were supposed to be, they would have supported their men’s decision to fight until the surrender at Appomattox.

A deeper look into these women’s beliefs reveals something fascinating. These women were not just rejecting the war, but also in some form, their roles at home and the rules society set for them. Just as Barbara Welter outlined in “The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860,” women’s roles were solely domestic and submissive and these set standards were designed to endure even through war.<sup>81</sup> While these women continued their domestic roles as much as possible by caring for their families and running a household, they did not adhere to the submissiveness role. Anna Bell Cadwallader, Lila Chunn, and Sarah Pannill Miller Payne, each held beliefs different than the men in their lives and the majority of people in their home state. These men made the decision to fight and believed whole heartedly in the Southern cause but their female counterparts did not agree. As Faust writes, “If the South was to survive, women had to become patriotic, had to assume some of the political interests of men, and had to repress certain womanly feelings and expectations for the good of the Cause.”<sup>82</sup> If there was a lack of support in the home front, then it was definitely an uphill battle for the South.

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<sup>80</sup> Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 242.

<sup>81</sup> Welter, “Cult of True Womanhood,” 66.

<sup>82</sup> Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 17.

When women were given the chance to become active in politics, they did not always agree with those they had respected and followed for their entire life leading up to the Civil War. For instance, Lila Chunn and Anna Cadwallader disapproved of the men in their lives' decision to fight in the war. Sarah Pannill Miller Payne, in a letter to her relative discussing political scenarios such as African American suffrage and secession, confesses that she and her cousin are women and do not have a voice in the nation's decisions.<sup>83</sup> Another woman who commented on politics was Lucy Wood Butler (1841-1921). She was born in Charlottesville, Virginia to John Wood Jr. and Eliza Jane Harper Wood. She met her fiancé, Waddy B. Butler, while he was a student at the University of Virginia. At the start of the war he enlisted in the Confederate Army. The two married on July 3, 1861, and wrote letters throughout his enlistment.<sup>84</sup> In one letter, Lucy discusses her disapproval of secession, a political matter, then proceeds to say that she does not want to have a political opinion and does not like it when women discuss politics.<sup>85</sup> A comment such as this demonstrates women as being cognizant of politics, but their society had trained them not to so they steer away from the discussion.

While the women in this chapter simply did not want a war due to the fear of their friends and relatives fighting, there are other reasons why women disagreed with the war and the Southern cause. The women categorized in the proceeding chapter felt strongly about tradition, but that did not stop them when it came to disagreeing with the Civil War.

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<sup>83</sup> SMP to MMC, July 20, 1867.VHS.

<sup>84</sup> Lucy Wood Butler Papers. Collection Number: 01159, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, (UNC).

<sup>85</sup> Lucy Wood Butler (LWB) to Waddy Butler (WB), January 21, 1861. UNC.

## Chapter 4

### Preserve the Union:

#### *Anti-war Sentiments due to the Love for the Country*

On a rainy, cold day in February 1862, Tennessee native Lucy Virginia French heard word that it was the day Jefferson Davis would be sworn in as the President of the Confederacy. As she stared out her window to see the dreary looking day, she could not help but connect the weather as omniscient of Jefferson Davis's political career. She held little respect for him and those who caused the states to secede from the Union from the start. In order to let her true feelings out, she headed to her desk to write a diary entry for the day. Other women in this project shared feelings similar to Lucy's and felt deeply saddened by the division of their country. Writing down their true feelings in a diary or letter allowed them a way to be fully honest with what they thought about the country's issues.

This chapter begins by researching the reasons as to why some Southerner's felt a deep connection to the United States and their understanding of how the North and South differed. The chapter then looks at instances in which the women pledged deep allegiance for the Union and wished there was an alternative to war and a divided nation. By the end of this chapter, it should be evident that some women of the South believed that it was time for both Southern and Northern societies to share a common way of life.

For some of the women studied in this project, the ultimate fear was to watch the country divide into two separate spheres. For many, they wanted to see their way of life continue and they realized that this meant war. To preserve this way of life, they personally needed to transform their everyday activities into a form of patriotic support and would ultimately protect

their future as women of the slaveholding class.<sup>86</sup> The question at stake here is why would some women of the Southern upper class be against a war and Southern cause that if successful, would ensure their way of life continued? Perhaps these women felt very apprehensive about the Southern way of life, and not until the war were they given the opportunity to have a political opinion. As part of their duties as Southern women both before and during the Civil War, they were to submit to their spiritual mission as obedient wives and daughters of white men.<sup>87</sup> However, women such as the ones in this project refuted the war and traditional roles by questioning their family and friends decisions to fight, and felt uneasy due to their love of the country and wanting to preserve the Union.

By the onset of the Civil War, the United States was celebrating its early years as a new country. Many wealthy Southern families had ancestral ties to the colonial years of America's history and felt this gave them an exceptional connection to the young country. Historian Carol Berkin in her work *Civil War Wives* states, "The men and women who created the Cotton Kingdom in the 1830s and 1840s were cut from the same optimistic cloth as their Northern counterparts. They considered themselves patriotic Americans whose grandfathers had fought in the Revolution and their fathers and brothers in the War of 1812."<sup>88</sup> People living in this century, specifically in the South, felt a deep connection to historic figures such as George Washington since they had kin who lived during the same time as him.<sup>89</sup> Southerners and Northerners alike felt a deep connection to the country; unfortunately, they saw its future heading in different directions.

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<sup>86</sup> Ott, *Confederate Daughters*, 6.

<sup>87</sup> Edwards, *Scarlett Doesn't Live Here Anymore*, 19.

<sup>88</sup> Berkin, *Civil War Wives*, 103.

<sup>89</sup> Barnett, *Sacred Relics*, 79.

It is puzzling to think of Southerners' position on the war. For the majority, fighting in the Civil War for the Confederacy served as the attempt to preserve their way of life. Others felt that remaining in the Union and opposing secession would help maintain the South's economic and political interests.<sup>90</sup> Perhaps deep down, a handful of Southerners knew it was time for Southerners to update the way they lived, and by opposing the war, they hoped their region would start to mirror the Northern way of life. The North had a diverse economy composed of manufacturing, agriculture, technological innovation, and banking and finance. This economy employed free labor, much of which was skilled. In contrast, the South depended almost exclusively on farming and large plantations successful due to forced labor.<sup>91</sup> Both sides felt strongly about their country, and even women of the Southern upper-class wanted to voice their opinions on opposing the war and preserving the Union.

Anna Bell Cadwallader occupied the anti-war position. In the spring of 1861, she wrote her brother, a soldier in the Confederate Army, to describe Newtown's support for secession:

The election went off yesterday and every body was for secession in Newtown and I know you will drop this letter in amazement when I TELL YOU THAT PAPA VOTED THE SECESSION TICKET. Now what have you got to say John when such a strong Union man as he was at one time to vote secession but he said he did not see the use of trying to vote...Oh it is an awful thing to think of. Our glorious old Union dissolved and I am afraid forever well for my part—I can't help who is for secession I am for Union always not that I advocate the Lincoln's proceedings or Abolitionism either but I cant bear the thought of our Once Glorious Union the home of our Washington the land that the stars and stripes have floated over so long to be dissolved for the sake of a few wooly

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<sup>90</sup> Edwards, *Scarlett Doesn't Live Here Anymore*, 68.

<sup>91</sup> James McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 34.

headed Negroes although I suppose that as all the rest of the Southern states have seceded it was as well for Virginia to secede and Papa did not say a word about you voting he said that you did perfectly right to vote as you did for he said he did not vote until nearly sundown just to see if there would be any who would vote for Union and there was not one union vote cast in town. The strongest Union men and the wisest and most sensible who voted last election for Union were strong for secession so I suppose it was right.<sup>92</sup>

The shaky writing and grammatical mistakes indicate a letter written in a hurry and that the young woman had much to tell her brother.

It is easy to see that Anna felt great apprehension towards the war. In nearly every letter to her brother she yearned for him to return home and bring the other boys from Newtown home as well. Anna shared in this letter the shock of the family that her father voted for secession although he waited the entire day to vote. It seems as though if another man voted for Virginia to remain in the Union, Anna's father would have voted for that side as well. One important takeaway from this letter is her obvious interest in the political state of her hometown. Prior to the Civil War, women did not take an active role in politics and this role was strictly reserved for men. However, as historian Victoria Ott writes, "Historians have shown that the war often heightened women's civic activism and created new spaces in which they could express their political beliefs."<sup>93</sup> While it is not clear that Anna orally discussed politics at home or in public, she does make it a point to write to her brother about political topics she saw as important.

Anna's letter revealed the political and social opinions of patriarchy and those living in a society influenced by patriarchy. When one reads this letter, he or she may think to themselves

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<sup>92</sup>Anna Bell Cadwallader to John Cadwallader, May 24, 1861. VHS.

<sup>93</sup>Ott, *Confederate Daughters*, 36.

that Anna had a confident and outgoing opinion about the political situation. However, if you analyze two particular sentences from the text, they demonstrate another side of the debate. Towards the beginning, she stated, “Our glorious old Union dissolved and I am afraid forever well for my part—I can’t help who is for secession I am for Union always.” Then, in the concluding sentence she writes, “The strongest Union men and the wisest and most sensible who voted last election for Union were strong for secession so I suppose it was right.” By comparing these two statements, it is evident that Anna lived amidst a patriarchal society that was forceful enough that she even changes her personal opinion for the sake of her brother. Even though her brother would potentially be the only one to read this letter, he could tell other soldiers, community members, and family that she was against the Confederate cause. Anna boldly claimed that she is for the Union always, but since the strong Unionists of her town voted for secession she could do nothing but accept the situation.

The theme of patriotism is well depicted in this letter between siblings. As Anna wrote of her support for the Union, she described how she could not fathom the dissolving of her “Once Glorious Union the home of our Washington the land that the stars and stripes have floated over so long.” She felt a deep connection to her country and its first president and the last thing she wanted to see was the country divide into two. From her descriptive words, one can imagine an American flag waving over Virginia, presenting a very patriotic, symbolic picture. She also uses George Washington as a form of imagery, as it is evident she revered him by calling him “our Washington.” She wrote this since she lived in the state Washington did. Further, one can see how important preserving the Union and the patriotic country is to this young Southern woman.

One portion of this letter that shocks the reader immediately is the bold, racist statement about African Americans. The excerpt where Cadwallader referred to African Americans as,

“wooly headed Negroes,” and when she stated she was opposed to abolitionism, clearly demonstrates the state African Americans lived in at the time. In her letter, African Americans are the “other,” while white male figures were the norm of the society in which Anna lived. It can be assumed that the African Americans were treated poorly due to the way she referred to them in such racist terms without hesitancy. Her words implied both their appearance as well as their intellectual capacity even though the writing style of this letter is rushed. For many Southerners, there was a fear that if African Americans were freed, they would share the same power as whites. They saw them as unintelligent and did not think they could function appropriately in society.<sup>94</sup> Overall, it is particularly disturbing that she so quickly referred to this group of people as “wooly headed Negroes” and says nothing else.

From the “wooly headed Negroes” statement and her anti-abolitionist beliefs, it is safe to say Anna was content in preserving the institution of slavery in the United States. In addition to being against secession, she also did not want the culture to change in regards to its stance on slavery. By stating Anna was against the abolitionist movement, she is in support of the institution of slavery. Her racist phrases and opinion of abolitionism make it clear that she was supportive of having enslaved people provide labor for Americans who could afford slaves, which is precisely the demographic in which she belonged. Although she seldom invoked race in this letter, it speaks volumes in regards to what African Americans lived through as being portrayed as the “other.”

Overall, there are many takeaways after evaluating this text from different angles and leads to multiple conclusions. After the first reading, the reader is left envisioning Anna Cadwallader as a bigoted, opinionated, and excited young woman. Although she does not think

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<sup>94</sup> William A. Link, *Roots of Secession: Slavery and Politicism in Antebellum Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003). 138-139 & 248-249.

the country should go to war for African Americans, she also does not want them fighting because she had a deep connection to the Union and realized the importance of preserving the nation. While she received pressure from her family, society, and her own brother fighting for the Confederacy, deep down she opposed the war and the Confederate cause. Anna's strong-willed nature and political opinions helped to create this fascinating letter.

Sarah Pannill Miller Payne, the Southern woman who lost two of her four sons to the war, also discussed in a letter to her Northern cousin her regret in watching the South secede. She stated, "No one can regret the war or rebellion, if you choose to call it so, more than I do. Few had more cause to regret it, but as to repentance—that is a different thing. I had no hand in bringing it about. I thought the first states that seceded were wrong, though I thought the South had a good deal of provocation from the Abolitionists." Later in the letter she stated that she was violently opposed to secession in the beginning and that it was forced upon her home state of Virginia.<sup>95</sup> Sarah's views are complicated. She said she was very opposed to secession and then in the same letter admitted she understands why her sons fought. It had to be extremely difficult for a mother of four soldiers not to empathize with her sons. She made it clear that she was proud they fought for a cause they believed to be just, but Sarah also speaks of her opposition to secession.

Sarah's letter demonstrated Southern women's political oppression during this time. She stated that she had no hand in the secession debate and thought that the first states to secede were wrong, but as a woman, she had no control over the situation. It is noticeable in her letter that she felt a connection to keeping the country together and felt that the disagreements were solvable in some other form than seceding and fighting. She identified with her home state of Virginia and

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<sup>95</sup> SMP to MMC, March 18, 1866. VHS.

believed that secession was forced upon the state, but she does not seem to support the state's choice for secession. She did believe though that secession came about because of the forcefulness of abolitionists. Overall, Sarah seemed to regret the war happened and claimed she felt this way even from the start when states began seceding. She is a prime example of a Southern woman who wanted her state of Virginia and the Southern states to remain in the Union and to find another way to solve the problems.

Tennessee native Lucy Virginia French also invoked patriotic symbols in her diary entries. When she discussed Jefferson Davis's inauguration in her diary entry for February 22, 1862, she wrote that some people referred to him as the "second Washington" and she does not believe he should be called that. She commented on the gloomy weather of the day and believed it was ominous for Jefferson Davis's political career.<sup>96</sup> Lucy's choice in discussing George Washington demonstrates the connection Southerners had with the country's first president. February 22 was the day George Washington was born so that is why she is discussing the topic in this particular diary entry. She rejected the idea of Jefferson Davis being comparable to her revered Washington.

Lucy rejected secession and opposed the war with the North. In Lucy's one diary entry she wrote, "Oh! How angry and [embittered] I felt that day (as I often have before) to see what trouble this vile thing 'secession' had brought upon us! One of the men told me that "the South had brought this army with its consequent troubles upon herself" I said "If you know anything at all—you know very well that Tennessee never brought this upon us—she stood firm for the Union that she loved until Lincoln's war proclamation, drove her into exile & rebellion."<sup>97</sup> She was daring enough to stand up for her home state of Tennessee by demanding that they did not

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<sup>96</sup> LVF, February 22, 1862. TEVA.

<sup>97</sup> LVF, June 15, 1862. TEVA.

want to secede. Later in the letter, she admitted that Tennessee seceded once Lincoln issued his war proclamation. The fact that Lucy chose to write about this event in her diary represents her concern for the situation. She was not happy with Tennessee's or for any Southern state's decision to secede in general.

In some of Lucy's letters it is apparent that she became emotional when thinking back on the country when it was united. On July 17, 1862, Lucy wrote after seeing a flag that belonged to the 9<sup>th</sup> Michigan Infantry after the 1<sup>st</sup> Battle of Murfreesboro, "I shall never forget the scene which passed before us upon this evening. Did I ever think to see the old "stars and stripes" a captive banner and not weep over it?"<sup>98</sup> The stars and stripes serve as a symbolic representation of the old way of life, or a time when the country stood firmly together in Lucy's eyes. The fact that she cried over seeing this flag shows that she was a firm believer in the Union and wishes her country did not divide into two. With the continuation of the war, Lucy's writing style became more depressing. On October 30, 1864, Lucy wrote, "Three weeks since I have written in my journal. I really do not know why, unless it be that a deep feeling of sadness has settled down upon my soul."<sup>99</sup> She commented on the war as needless and unnatural and claimed that each day her whole heart and soul wondered if the war would ever end. Lucy even came to despise where she lived because of the damage that was done and how poor everyone was. On the last page of her diary written June 26, 1865, she boldly stated, "I am weary of this stupid place I want to get where there is some progress, and some civilization."<sup>100</sup> Through the pages of Lucy's diary it is easy to recognize how depressed she was throughout the duration of the Civil War.

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<sup>98</sup> LVF, July 17, 1862. TEVA.

<sup>99</sup> LVF, October 30, 1864. TEVA.

<sup>100</sup> LVF, June 26, 1865. TEVA.

Even though she portrayed herself as a strong supporter of the country, towards the end of the war she lost hope in both sides and for the future of the very country she had loved. Fighting took place very near her house which could account for her anger towards the war. For instance, in her diary on January 4, 1863, she discussed the Battle of Stones River and even included a newspaper clip about the battle and the Southern victory which to her was good news because it caused the soldiers to evacuate the area.<sup>101</sup> Lucy wanted the fighting to end and for her town to not be in danger any longer and even wrote, “I want to get up & leave this God-forsaken land, and go somewhere where no one has ever heard of America, her glory or her shame!”<sup>102</sup> This statement is quite depressing as a once very strong, opinionated Southern woman who felt deep dedication to the nation wanted to leave the country she once loved. Indeed, she lost support for the entire situation enough that she wanted to physically leave the area and forget about her once beloved country. However, the news of the Civil War did not solely remain within the country as Lucy alludes to, but was instead newsworthy to other nations as well. In fact, scenarios such as the Union Blockade caused issues even for other countries as trade was affected between the South and their trading counterparts, such as Britain.<sup>103</sup>

Although some women of the South stood firm in supporting Confederacy in the hopes that the cause would lead to the continuation of the Southern way of life, the women mentioned in this section did not hold the same ideas. Their ultimate fear was to see the country they had loved for so many years dissolve as states chose to secede from the Union. These women’s choice of symbolic representations of the country such as George Washington, the stars and stripes, glorious old Union, and even family tradition served as the touchstone of their thoughts.

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<sup>101</sup> LVF, January 4, 1863. TEVA.

<sup>102</sup> LVF, October 30, 1864. TEVA.

<sup>103</sup> McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 314-317.

They did not want to see the disappearance of these familiar things even though a majority of the people surrounding them wanted the country to divide. From reading these diaries and letters it seems as though women that fall into this category felt that there was another way to solve these questions than seceding and fighting in the war. Again, it is satisfying to a modern reader to see how these women left their normal roles and wanted to have a political voice. Even more appealing is that their political voice did not follow the majority, a concept that few Southern belles and Southern women followed.

**Chapter 5**  
**An Uncertain Future:**  
*A Few Words on Slavery*

On a spring day in March 1866, Sarah Pannill Miller Payne settled down to continue to write a lengthy letter to her cousin Mary. Sarah was exhausted from working all day. Her and her husband needed to rent out a few of their house servants for money which in turn left more of the household duties to Sarah. As she read the letter from her cousin who addressed the issue of slavery, Sarah had to think deeply over what she would write. She came from a family who always owned slaves. Her great uncle was one of the largest slave owners in Virginia, and Sarah and her husband at one point owned twenty-three slaves. After the war, the Payne's began their lives without them and Sarah wanted to tell her cousin about all the hardships her family faced. The women whose stories are focused on in this project either owned slaves themselves or their families did. Each of the women was unsure heading into the war what their take on the peculiar institution was.

The chapter commences with a discussion of the breakdown of how many slaves lived in the South and the minute amount of the population who actually owned slaves. The chapter turns then to how women on plantations handled overseeing slaves while the men were off fighting. The rest of the chapter focuses on the vastly different opinions these women had about slavery. While some despised the system and never wanted to own slaves, others felt that it was folly to fight a war over the issue. Disregarding which side of the debate they were on, they carried their own interesting opinions about a system that shaped them into the people they were.

When discussing the Civil War it is inevitable that questions regarding slavery arise. For the women that are the focus of this project, there are questions surrounding their thoughts on the

institution of slavery. If they rejected secession and the war, did that mean they wanted to return to the antebellum way of life, or did they see this pivotal event as a time for societal change? Many assume that every person living in the South during the Civil War whole-heartedly supported the economic system of slavery. In fact, a very small portion of the South's population owned slaves, and these were composed of the elite upper-class. However, Edwards notes that by the eve of the Civil War, 33% of the South's inhabitants were slaves and of the 33%, 48% of all slaves lived on plantations with twenty or more slaves. 68% of slaves lived on plantations with ten or more slaves and only 32% lived with ten or fewer slaves.<sup>104</sup> Even with a large portion of slaves present in the South, the majority of white Southerners were not wealthy enough to own slaves therefore it is likely they would not choose to support the system. According to historian James McPherson, slaveholders needed to convince non-slaveholders that they should defend the Confederacy because if slaves were freed, there would be chaos and racial wars in the country.<sup>105</sup>

It is believable that women of the Southern upper-class whose husbands or fathers left to fight in the Civil War were apprehensive of their slaves. As men headed to battle, women of the slave-holding class were expected to still submit to their husbands, maintain the authority to oversee their slaves, and abide by the set standards of womanhood.<sup>106</sup> For many of the women left in charge of the slaves, there was an overarching fear of a slave uprising or that the slaves held premeditated plans to kill them.<sup>107</sup> Their fears were not farfetched as examples of slavery uprisings circulated throughout the South. For instance, Virginia, the state with the largest percentage of slave-owners in 1860 witnessed instances of slaves taking action against the plantation system. Slaves burned masters' homes, poisoned food they prepared for the family,

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<sup>104</sup> Edwards, *Scarlett Doesn't Live Here Anymore*, 49-51.

<sup>105</sup> McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 8.

<sup>106</sup> Edwards, *Scarlett Doesn't Live Here Anymore*, 18.

<sup>107</sup> Link, *Roots of Secession*, 52.

assaulted overseers, attacked and on occasion even succeeded in killing mistresses and masters of the plantation.<sup>108</sup> Especially for women whose plantations had many slaves, this fear was extremely prominent.

Southern women wrote many letters to Confederate officials demanding their husbands return home. In order to please the upper class who owned many slaves, Congress passed a law that allowed any man the opportunity to hire a substitute to fight for him. Shortly after, another law was passed that allowed one man for each plantation with more than twenty slaves the option not to fight.<sup>109</sup> “But the soon infamous ‘Twenty-Nigger Law’ triggered enormous popular resentment, both from non-slaveholders who regarded it as valuing the lives of the elite over their own and from smaller slaveholders who were not included in its scope.”<sup>110</sup> This special privilege only applied to 5% of the white population.<sup>111</sup> While these men wanted to support the Confederate cause, maintain slavery, and secure that the system would extend into the Western territories, they did not want to physically fight for the cause.

One woman who expressed her concerns about slavery most outright was Lucy Wood Butler. According to the 1860 U.S. Federal Census Slave Schedule John Wood Jr., Lucy’s father, owned 13 slaves.<sup>112</sup> At the start of the war Lucy’s fiancé, Waddy B. Butler, enlisted in the Confederate army. The two married on July 3, 1861, and wrote letters throughout his enlistment with the army.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Link, *Roots of Secession*, 4.

<sup>109</sup> McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 364-529.

<sup>110</sup> Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 55.

<sup>111</sup> McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 528.

<sup>112</sup> 1860 U.S. Federal Census Slave Schedule John Wood Jr., <http://search.ancestrylibrary.com/>. Accessed March 5, 2017.

<sup>113</sup> Lucy Wood Butler (LWB) to Waddy Butler (WB) Collection of Letters University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

In a letter to her then fiancé, Waddy, she wrote, “You wished to know if I had changed my opinion on the disunion question. Well, to some extent I have, yet I can never be a disunionist whilst I believe that as soon as it is in the power of the South the slave trade will be reopened, an idea which is to me extremely revolting and, apart from the act itself, I feel that the consequences must be in a few years dreadful.”<sup>114</sup> This letter between the soon-to-be-married couple is fascinating since the context shows Waddy must have asked for her opinion on secession. She boldly stated her political view on the matter and even commented on slavery itself. Lucy realized that the reason slavery existed was caused by the slave trade which a federal law banned in 1807. The people who wanted more slaves to be imported to the United States were comprised of the same people who wanted to continue slavery and move it into the new territories.<sup>115</sup> Since Lucy feared the slave trade reopening, she was definitely against slavery. The way she discussed the matter as “extremely revolting” makes it seem as though she witnessed a slave auction firsthand or a similar scenario that haunted her forever. It is interesting that someone whose parents owned 13 slaves showed such strong feelings against slavery. Lucy did not find it necessary to have a war over the issue of slavery. Perhaps she saw the years leading up to the Civil War as a time for the South to change the way it made its capital by relying on agricultural labor, but unfortunately a war had to occur before that happened.

We will never conclusively know if Lucy opposed slavery her whole life. Perhaps during the outbreak of the war in which her future husband chose to fight for the South, she saw this as the time to speak her mind about slavery. She may have even been fearful of slaves since she lived in Albemarle County, Virginia which was an area with many slaves. In April of 1859, in Albemarle County, a story circulated that a nine year old slave girl attacked a plantation mistress

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<sup>114</sup> LWB to WB. January 21, 1861. UNC.

<sup>115</sup> McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 81-82.

by the name of Margaret M. Terrill. The young slave girl attempted to kill her mistress with kitchen tongs. After the attack, the account added that Margaret Terrill had beaten the slave girl four days prior to the attack.<sup>116</sup> Besides her comment on slavery, throughout Lucy's letters she is melancholy because her husband is not around and even gets angry that women out in public do not seem sad that the war was happening. She stated, "There were a great many ladies at the depot but they all seemed to imagine it was a festive occasion and their spirits were not at all depressed."<sup>117</sup> From her letters, it is noticeable that Lucy did not favor the war or slavery. While she does not suggest a way for slavery to be eliminated, she was a Southern woman who wanted to avoid bloodshed and end slavery in the country.

Unfortunately, Lucy Wood Butler's story does not have a happy ending. She and Waddy were married for a very short period of time before he died April 7, 1862, at the Battle of Shiloh in Pittsburg Landing, Tennessee. Lucy did not remarry and she passed away in 1921.<sup>118</sup> Lucy's letters give us valuable insight into a woman of the Southern upper class that disagreed with the institution of slavery and feared that if the South won, it would continue a system in which she disagreed with.

Anna Bell Cadwallader, the young woman who wrote to her brother frequently throughout the war, demonstrated her thoughts on slavery very honestly. Anna's opinion represents those women who thought that the war issue was unnecessary. When she discussed not wanting to see the country divide she wrote that it was pointless to wage a war, "for the sake of a few wooly headed Negroes"<sup>119</sup> Anna made it very clear that she did not think they should fight a war over the issue and she stood true to the Union and the old way of life she was raised

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<sup>116</sup> Link, *Roots of Secession*, 49-50.

<sup>117</sup> LWB to WB, 1861. UNC.

<sup>118</sup> Death Records for Waddy and Lucy Butler. Ancestry.com. Accessed March 25, 2017.

<sup>119</sup> ABC to JC, May 24, 1861. VHS.

to love. The Tennessee woman, Lucy Virginia French, made a similar comment about slavery when in her diary she wrote that she told her slaves that the war was not made on purpose for them to be free.<sup>120</sup> Lucy believed the war was pointless and avoidable, but she wanted to make sure her slaves knew it was not for their benefit. While other women shared the same opinion as Anna and Lucy, they do not suggest a solution to the debate over slavery.

There were, of course, women of this class who were on the fence when it came to slavery. These women most likely lived their whole lives surrounded by slaves and were blind to the problems with the situation. To not have slaves meant that these wealthy families needed to create a humane way of maintaining their lifestyles and to make a profit. One woman that commented on the challenge Southerners faced after the war was Sarah Pannill Miller Payne. In Sarah's letter to her cousin living in the North in 1866 she wrote:

As to slavery, I never was a great admirer of the institution and never cared to own many slaves, but I do not think it was a sin, and I do not think it was right for the North to free our servants without making us any compensation; put arms in their hands to kill their masters, and all the time, profess to be fighting for the Union and the Constitution; after we gave up, finding resistance hopeless, then to oppress us with taxes and allow us no representation...I have no wish to own another servant, but I am truly sorry for the negroes. I conscientiously believe, as a whole, they have been greatly worsted.<sup>121</sup>

Sarah made a very bold statement in regards to her opinion on the institution of slavery and the impact it had on her society. From these statements, one can gather that there is little to no

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<sup>120</sup> LVF, June 22, 1862. TEVA.

<sup>121</sup> SMP to MMC, March 18, 1866. VHS.

remorse in owning slaves and she wants to blame the North for their economic issues after the war.

Sarah admitted in one of her other letters that her family at one point owned 23 slaves and after the war they had to hire servants who she claimed did not do a good job.<sup>122</sup> While she admitted in this excerpt that she, “never cared to own many slaves and does not wish to own another servant,” there is a sense that she is only saying this to her Northern cousin, from who she is trying to gain sympathy. Sarah blamed the North for the ordeal since they did not compensate the families who owned slaves before releasing them. While she stated that the African Americans were worse off than they were under slavery, she mentioned that she did not like owning them and does not want any in the future. In sum, Sarah is a very complex character, one who goes back and forth with her opinions in order to make both herself and her cousin happy. She attempted to have a political voice. However, in one of her last sentences to her cousin she concluded, “But enough of this—as neither you nor I have a voice in the councils of the nation, and I am no more an advocate for female suffrage than I am for negro suffrage.”<sup>123</sup> In this letter, Sarah referred to women’s suffrage at the same moment the event was taking place. For a few years after the war, Sarah and her cousin sent letters back and forth debating politics and the social situations of the day and then Sarah abruptly stops the argument, perhaps attempting to retreat back into her original womanly roles pre-war.

The women analyzed in this project also held their own opinions regarding slavery. One had a very strong opinion against slavery, some thought it was pointless to fight a war over the debate, and others remained silent on the matter. These women all had one thing in common however: their families were successful due to their reliance on the peculiar economic system. It

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<sup>122</sup> SMP to MMC, March 18, 1866. VHS.

<sup>123</sup> SMP to MMC, July 20, 1867. VHS.

can be assumed that the women who opposed the Civil War all had hoped that the dilemma could be solved without bloodshed. As Julia Davidson wrote to her husband John in 1861, “and get the blues so bad I do not know what to do. God grant that all things may yet be settled without *bloodshed*.”<sup>124</sup> Although Julia’s thoughts were probably shared by many people, in time the war became unavoidable. No matter what their feelings were in regards to slavery, the women in this project hoped for the debate to be settled without secession and then war.

Slavery cannot be overlooked when examining this period in American history. All the women discussed here felt that secession and the war were unnecessary but did not offer any suggestions as to how the debate could be settled without bloodshed. From reading their diaries and letters it is evident that they were unsure about a life without slavery. During their entire lives, they were surrounded by the bizarre economic system and they simply could not imagine a life without slaves. For the women studied in this project, it seems that another reason they were against the war was that they were uncertain of the question of whether slavery was appropriate or not and they were not ready to address the question. While today we see the multitude of issues with enslaving human beings, it was hard for people of this period and class to accept the potential for the demise of slavery.

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<sup>124</sup> Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 13.

## Chapter 6

### Conclusion

At the conclusion of the Civil War, soldiers and civilians alike began to write down their experiences of the war. While both Northern and Southern citizens wanted to record their stories, some members of the South approached their experience a little differently and wished to devote their story to the Confederate cause, which is what we refer to now as the “Lost Cause.” Adamant war supporters of the South, the Confederate belles took part in this as well. They desired to create the image of the Confederate belle or Confederate woman and the importance they played in the Civil War and to venerate the Confederate cause.<sup>125</sup> Unlike this group, the women in this project did not rush to share their stories at the end of the war. They wrote their feelings down in private diaries and correspondence between relatives rather than in public for everyone to read. These highly personal views were perhaps the most intriguing part of a project like this: reading about how a woman experienced the war and what she ultimately chose to write down. Their stories which have been overlooked, add a richness and complexity to our understanding of antebellum women and their thoughts about slavery, dissolution of the Union, and war.

Anna Bell Cadwallader, Lila Chunn, Lucy Virginia French, Lucy Wood Butler, and Sarah Pannill Miller Payne all had concerns about secession and the Civil War. Each of these women took the time to put in writing their doubts and true feelings regarding the war. During the antebellum period women were expected to focus solely on the domestic sphere which included caring for her family, being a gracious hostess, and educating her children. She was left

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<sup>125</sup> Ott, *Confederate Daughters*, 130.

out of what happened outside of the house—areas such as politics were deemed part of a man's duty. However, the Civil War changed lives in many ways, including allowing women to follow and express their thoughts on politics.<sup>126</sup> In some instances, women who had full confidence in their husbands and families for protection started losing that devotion to which they were accustomed. They were even starting to believe that they personally possessed rights and desires that they had not known about prior.<sup>127</sup> In the case of the women of this project, they disagreed with their husbands and relatives decisions to fight and they made the choice to write down these feelings onto paper.

The five women focused on in this project each felt apprehensive about the war and three primary reasons came to the forefront as I read their diaries and letters. Probably the reason easiest to understand is that they did not want any of their family or friends to fight. In Anna Bell Cadwalladers letters to her brother John, she consistently expressed her disappointment at both his decision and the decision of their friends to enlist. Throughout the long war, she continuously wished he were home. Lila Chunn of Georgia wrote to her husband William frequently expressing her sadness that he was not home yet and questions his decision to enlist. Sarah Pannill Miller Payne who lost two sons in the war admired their decision to fight but referred to the war as dark days and an unfortunate war. Last, Lucy Virginia French celebrated when her husband was excluded from entering the war, threw a party to celebrate the Union at the onset of the war and only became disheartened by the war when it came very near her house. Each of these examples represents these women's apprehension towards the war because they did not want their loved ones getting involved.

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<sup>126</sup> Welter, "Cult of True Womanhood," 44-64.

<sup>127</sup> Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 234-242.

While examining archival sources, I discovered another cause for the apprehension these women felt. In each case, they felt a deep connection to the Union, so deep in fact that the last thing they wished to see was a divided country. Anna Bell Cadwallader invoked the importance of patriotism behind the American flag and George Washington when she discussed her hometown voting for secession in a letter to her already enlisted brother. Sarah Pannill Miller Payne discussed how the war was forced on her home state of Virginia and that she never supported secession from the beginning. Lucy Virginia French also connected George Washington into her diary when discussing her pride in the country and that she felt secession was forced upon Tennessee. Each of these women's letters and diaries refer to their love for the country and their fervent wish that their state not secede.

Finally, the women's letters and diaries reveal their strongly ambivalent feelings towards slavery. The most outright opponent of the institution was Lucy Wood Butler who tells her fiancé that she feared the outcome of the war because if the South would win, the slave trade would reopen, something she despised. Anna Bell Cadwallader and Lucy Virginia French both made statements that it was unnecessary to have a war over the debate of slavery. Neither made it clear whether they support slavery or not, but they did feel that the war could be avoided by solving the problem another way. Lastly, Sarah Pannill Miller Payne, whose family members owned the most slaves out of these women, commented that she never liked slavery and did not wish to have any more servants. That being said, she is also upset that owners were not compensated for the slaves. As a researcher, I found it challenging to figure out each of these women's feelings on slavery. Regardless, they made it clear that they did not think any issue between North and South should have started a war.

In *The First Lady of the Confederacy: Varina Davis's Civil War*, Joan Cashin discovered a surprising fact: the Confederate government arrested Union sympathizers and punished them for their attitudes. However, Varina Davis and the women referred to in this project technically fell into this category, but their social class and their gender ironically protected them from this fate.<sup>128</sup> However, each of these women only displayed their true feelings in private either through written correspondence with someone they trusted or in their private diary. It is uncertain of how these women would have been treated had they been outspoken opponents of the war in public.

Another topic in dire need of research is the group of Southern women that belonged to the middle or lower classes. Their feelings would be quite a challenge to locate due to the fact that not many of them kept diaries, but they did write letters to their enlisted men. It would be fascinating to conduct research on that particular group and attempt to understand their feelings on secession and the war.

In the end, women of the Southern upper class proved to be more self-sufficient and opinionated than we may have thought. Solely looking at the Civil War era provides us with prime example of women who were apprehensive of secession, the war, and where the country's future was headed. No matter the reasoning, the women in this project demonstrated that history and what we believe is not always as straight forward as we may think. It is gratifying to have the opportunity to question what we have been taught and to conduct research thoroughly using archival and documentary evidence to create a well-rounded story of our nation's history.

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<sup>128</sup> Cashin, *First Lady of the Confederacy*, 116.

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