Separate Spheres Combined: Elite White Confederate Women's Work During the Civil War, 1861-1865

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Introduction

> "I really enjoyed the day – hard as the work was, but late in the evening twas very trying when the children were crying to be put to bed and dishes to be washed and put away, milk to strain, water to bring, chips to get, plants to be watered, kitchen to clean up and candle sticks to set up.[1]

A telling quote from Lucy Rebecca Buck, a young elite white Virginian woman who was thrown by the Civil War into a lifestyle contradictory to the one she was living before. Once serviced by her family's slaves, leading a life consumed with visiting with friends and reading, Lucy now had to perform the duties her male relatives and slaves once did when they left her family's plantation due to the war. Although obviously frustrated and worn in this passage, she expresses satisfaction in regards to her completed labor, an interesting contradiction that exists for many elite white Confederate women during the Civil War.

Due to the lack of men and male and female slaves, elite white women assumed new responsibilities during the war. As written by Drew Gilpin Faust in her review of Augusta Jane Evan's wartime novel, *Macaria*, there was a demand for female mobilization into the previously all-male civilian support services.[2] These services existed both inside and outside of the home, and included slave management, nursing, teaching, and government clerking. Through these new roles, women began to move outside of the domestic ideology proscribed by separate spheres, and, through diary writing, this move began to be better understood. During the course of thoroughly reading diaries written by Confederate women in Virginia, one can see how complicated it was for these women to comprehend the altered meaning of their daily existence. In some entries, these women enjoyed the tasks set before them, eager

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[1] Lucy Rebecca Buck. *Shadows on My Heart: The Civil War Diary of Lucy Rebecca Buck of Virginia*. Ed. Elizabeth R. Baer (Athens, Georgia: The University of Georgia Press, 1997), xv.
[2] Drew Gilpin Faust, "A War Story for Confederate Women" in *Southern Stories: Slaveholders in Peace and War*, ed. Drew Gilpin Faust (London: University of Missouri Press, 1992), 161.

to become more productive in their households. At other times, the diary writers were tired and frustrated, desperate for their new lifestyles to end. But, although they wrote about these new "labors", most women did not view these changes as redefining Southern womanhood.

With war comes necessity, and, as an old saying states, "Necessity is the of the mother of invention." This could not be better illustrated than in the case of Confederate women during the Civil War, particularly of the upper and middle classes of Southern class structure. As thousands of men were shipped off to war, and many lost in battle, vacancies in occupations grew, and no one was available in the South to fill them. No one, that is, except women. Desperate, and with no other plausible alternative, the Confederacy turned to women, calling them to fulfill new roles they were once banned from. Illustrated by a statement in Catherine Clinton and Christine Lunardini's book, *The Columbia Guide to American Women In the Nineteenth Century*, "women in both the North and the South were drafted for labor that would have been unsuitable and unthinkable for them before the war."[3] Clinton and Lunardini argue that women "although they were expected to remain true women, patriotically serving on the home front", as they were called to fill male occupations, "women found gender conventions were suspended during the difficulties of wartime."[4] At this time, many women were placed in a position where they had to confront new physical, mental, and emotional roles as they were given new independence.[5] This struggle between newly granted independence, and the binds of "true womanhood", resonates throughout Southern women's history.

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[3] Catherine Clinton and Christine Lunardini, *The Columbia Guide to American Women in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 83.
[4] Clinton and Lunardini, 83.
[5] George Rable, *Civil Wars: Women and the Crisis of Southern Nationalism* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 78, 96.

In the South, true womanhood was defined by separate spheres, which encompassed domestic ideology. This sphere, arising from separate sphere ideology, had confined women to the home for decades prior to the war. "To a woman it belongs…to elevate the intellectual character of her household [and] to kindle the fires of mental activity in childhood."[6] They were expected to fulfill the Southern stereotype of woman as a frail and feminine, embodying chastity, piety, and purity.[7] As stated by Barbara Berg in her book, *The Remembered Gate: Origins of American Feminism*, "The insistence that woman's sphere be limited to the home became the prevailing dogma of nineteenth-century faith."[8] Great debate exists about the cause of the split between male and female "spheres", and scholar Catherine Clinton argues that it came from the development of manufacturing and industrialization.[9] Whether this is the case, what is essential to the split is the idea that females did not belong in the cruel, harsh, and selfish public world of men.[10] The wife and mother of a household was expected to be pure and nurturing, the antithesis of the character men assumed beyond the threshold of their homes.[11] Women were seen as "the special guardians, not only of the home, but of democracy itself."[12] A woman was the pinnacle of domestic virtue and morality, shielding her home from the harsh outside world, aiding men in feeling better about their competitive and greedy character in the public world.

The justification of the assignment of these roles to women lay in the theory that women were naturally suited to fulfill the role of the tender and moral center of the home.

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[6] Patricia Cline Cohen, Susan M. Hartmann, Michael P. Johnson, Alan Lawson, James L. Roark, and Sarah Stage, *The American Promise: A History of the United States* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2000), 267.
[7] Catherine Clinton, *The Other Civil War* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1984), 39.
[8] Barbara Berg, *The Remembered Gate: Origins of American Feminism* (New York: University of Oxford Press, 1978), 67.
[9] Clinton, 23.
[10] Berg, 68-69.
[11] Berg, 68-69.
[12] Berg, 68.

Women were viewed as passive and intellectually inferior, incapable of possessing the skills required of a person in the public sphere. According to Berg, one reason separate spheres ideology arose was due to men's need to exert control over women because men were incapable of controlling the outside world they were now expected to participate in. She argues that women became "imprisoned" by the male's need to create differences between men, as the class structure became weaker due to the creation of a middle class and the advent of industrialization. Unable to create these differences between each other, men began to create them between themselves and women, forcing a seemingly rigid gender division into place.[13]

Science also aided in widening the gap between men and women, reinforcing separate spheres through empirical means. A woman was proclaimed to be of "vulnerable character due to a larger nervous system," being labeled a "creature of passion".[14] Regarded as delicate and defenseless by nature, women were considered to be too weak for serious academia, strenuous work, and to deal with "reality". They were secluded from the outside world, dependent upon husbands and male relatives, yet told that they were integral to society. Although they were seen as delicate creatures, they were expected to tend to the sick, staying bedside for prolonged periods of time in order to serve the ill in a maternal manner befitting of a woman's domestic role.[15] While they were expected to be moral paragons in order to teach their children virtues, as well as be a child's introduction to the academic world and a caretaker for the ill, a woman was not allowed act in this manner beyond the confines of their homes, as it would be unbefitting of her nature. As shown in a statement by Clinton,

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[13] Berg, 70-75.
[14] Berg, 76.
[15] Berg, 72-104.

"women were expected to fulfill the dictates of their domestic roles as well as provide the family with an unimpeachable moral example."[16]

While women received an education, it was a limited one that focused upon the ultimate goal of servicing others, as mothers taught their daughters to conform.[17] A girl's education depended primarily upon her parent's beliefs about women's education. Some fathers went to great lengths to give their daughters an enriching education, but not for the purpose of elevating her position as a woman. Rather, fathers wanted their daughters to become intellectual and respectable young ladies who possessed proper social graces and domestic skills. Much of this scholastic instruction was superficial and was a means of entering into high society. While many elite girls did attending boarding schools, they were often taught painting and needlework alongside botany and chemistry. The center many school curriculums, though, was upon producing exceptional wives and mothers.[18]

Southern women, despite myth, were no strangers to working long hours at arduous tasks. Indeed, employment, as defined by Frances B. Cogan, was "any productive labor;" while women themselves knew this, society refused to recognize it, as it went against separate spheres.[19] "For the plantation mistress, her performance in her daily obligations was a measure of how well she could live up to the womanly standard set forth in the plantation myth."[20] On the home front, Southern white women "were expected not only to keep the 'home fires burning' but to chop wood as well."[21] They planted beans, corn, vegetables, and

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[16] Clinton, 148.
[17] Clinton, 51.
[18] Rable, 19-21.
[19] Frances B. Cogan, *All American Girl: The Ideal of Real Womanhood in Mid-Nineteenth-Century America* (Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, 1989), 200.
[20] Ronit Charon Gechter, "The Plantation Mistress" (Senior Honors Thesis, University of California, Santa Barbara, 1996), 18.
[21] Clinton and Lunardini, 83.

grain to feed the plantation, as well as slaughtered pigs and churned butter.[22] Women cared for their slave "family", providing them with food, clothing, shelter, medical care, and religious instruction.[23] Although the majority of women in the antebellum South did not labor in the public realm, most women labored producing goods and administering services that were valuable to the plantation.

Virginia and Women

The state of Virginia holds characteristics that make it an important place to study in reference to women during the Civil War. It was the most important state in the Confederacy in terms of population, industrial resources, and proximity of the national capital. Over eighty percent of males aged seventeen to fifty in Virginia served in the army or war related industries.[24] In Virginia, tobacco was the main source of the state's wealth, as the manufacturing of tobacco was done primarily in Virginia, and the product did not need to be shipped elsewhere to be finished.[25] In fact, the tobacco industry employed forty-five percent of Richmond's, the state capital of Virginia, population.[26] During the 1850s, one of Virginia's five regions, Tidewater, had 16,241 farms and plantations, or 1.6 farm and/or plantation per square mile, a figure that illustrates how much land could be allotted to tobacco growth.[27] The iron industry was also prosperous, as Richmond housed Tredegar Iron Works, which produced railroad tracks, large cannons, and other iron goods.[28] There were iron

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[22] Clinton and Lunardini, 83 and Clinton, 23.
[23] Clinton, 23.
[24] William Blair, *Virginia's Private War: Feeding Body and Soul in the Confederacy, 1861-1865* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 4-5.
[25] John Majewski, *A House Dividing* (United Kingdoms: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 144.
[26] Majewski, 162.
[27] Majewski, 158.
[28] Majewski, 161.

furnaces in Alleghany, Botecourt, and Rockbridge counties as well.[29] Virginia had also sparked an agricultural reform movement in order to improve the economy, as well as avoid suffering a loss of power to Northerners or Southern manufacturers and merchants at the same time. In order to do this, the state began to encourage mechanical arts, manufacturing, and the production of home goods, such as homespun clothing.[30]

As stated before, Virginia was a border state, which presented problems surrounding secession when the war broke. The state had a great deal of pride invested in being identified as a Southern state, and it wanted to be a leader in both the South and the Union.[31] Because Virginia had a more dispersed slave population compared to other Southern states, Virginians were more concerned about infringements upon liberty than slavery.[32] The state housed a great deal of "state pride, revolutionary heritage, and notions of liberty," that gave its inhabitants a cause for fighting.[33] And, because of its location on the border between the Union and Confederate states, "unlike the Deep South, war presented an immediate threat against the state, bringing armies into Virginia with disastrous consequences."[34]

In relation to women, Virginia presented certain problems and opportunities. "Women living in invaded areas had more hardships than those living in areas the Union had not gotten to," especially in northern Virginia.[35] This is particularly true of Richmond:

> as the Confederate capital, it provided white middle- and working-class women with extensive opportunities for employment in traditional and nontraditional occupations on a scale unheard of before the war began and far exceeding those available to women in most Southern communities.[36]

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[29] Blair, 18.
[30] Blair, 24-27.
[31] Blair, 24-25.
[32] Blair, 4-11.
[33] Blair, 32.
[34] Blair, 30.
[35] Bill Irvin Wiley, *Confederate Women* (London: Greenwood Press, 1975), 150.

The Confederate government turned to women to fill vacant clerk positions.[37] "Women volunteered as nurses, cooks, and seamstresses" during the war as well.[38] Illustrated by E. Susan Barber, some women were working prior to the war, allowing an easier transition for some women into certain positions:

> Of the 171 white and free black women who appeared in the manufacturing schedule of the 1860 Richmond census, the majority, 69 percent, labored as shoemakers' assistants, milliners, hoopskirt makers, tailors' helpers, and mantua makers…[39]

Also, women created charitable organizations to help alleviate the pressures of war, such as Lucy Otey and Mrs. John Speed, who started the Ladies Relief Hospital for Confederate soldiers during the war.[40]

Women's Labor During the Civil War

Laura F. Edwards, in her book *Scarlett Doesn't Live Here Anymore: Southern Women in the Civil War Era*, concentrates upon the roles these women played prior to, and during, the war. She states that planter class women were more likely to remain loyal to the Confederate government and ideology because they had more invested (mainly slavery) in the survival of the Confederacy. They were also more likely to remain loyal to the patriarchal social structure that perpetrated domestic ideology, as they "saw the war in terms of their men's social, economic, and political position."[41] For this reason, women accepted one of the first occupations they were called to in order to maintain their already established way of life; they

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[36] Susan Barber, "Cartridge Markers and Myrmidon Viragos" in *Negotiating Boundaries of Southern Womanhood,* ed. Janet L. Coryell, Thomas H. Appleton, Jr., Anastatia Sims, and Sandra Gioia Treadway, (London: University of Missouri Press, 2000), 200.
[37] Blair, 87.
[38] Blair, 38.
[39] Barber, 200.
[40] Blair, 38, 96-97.
[41] Laura F. Edwards, *Scarlett Doesn't Live Here Anymore: Southern Women in the Civil War Era* (Chicago: University of Illinois, 2000), 72.

were asked to manage the farms and plantations their male relatives had left behind in leaving to fight in the war. This was especially true in Virginia, as a large portion of the state was farm and plantation land. Women had been quite involved in work on farms and plantations before as "most housewives actively managed their households, and even when slaves did much of the cooking and cleaning, white women sewed and devoted considerable time to child care," but not in the same manner as they were once the Civil War struck.[42] As stated by Clinton, "farm wives,…, were expected to continue raising food and providing clothing, not only for themselves but for the enlisted men as well."[43] "They stepped up domestic production, organizing the making of cloth, foods, and other basic items on their plantations."[44] In a situation were elite white women were coping with "reduced privilege and affluence", they took on the added stress of "new responsibilities for plantation economy and slave society."[45] As stated by Faust, Glymph, and Rable, "slavery's demise combined with the war's economic hardships forced even elite women to tackle unfamiliar domestic chores."[46] This was wholly novel to some women, such as Fannie Christian, who wrote a June 1862 letter to the war office requesting the discharge of her husband because she knew nothing about managing a farm and had no one to teach her.[47] Other women had already performed many of the duties now required of them. Some of these chores included raising

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[42] Rable, 9.
[43] Clinton, 86.
[44] Edwards, 76.
[45] Drew Gilpin Faust, Thavolia Glymph, and George C. Rable, "A Woman's War: Southern Women in the Civil War" in *A Woman's War: Southern Women, Civil War, and the Confederate Legacy*. ed. Edward D.C. Campbell, Jr. and Kym S. Rice (Charlottesville: The University of Virginia Press, 1996), 16.
[46] Faust, Glymph, and Rable, 3.
[47] Edward D.C. Campbell, Jr. and Kym S. Rice, "Voices from the Tempest: Southern Women's Wartime Experiences" in *A Woman's War: Southern Women, Civil War, and the Confederate Legacy*. ed. Edward D.C. Campbell and Kym S. Rice (Charlottesville: The University of Virginia Press, 1996), 79.

children, cooking, sewing, and spinning cloth.[48] Other, more physical, activities included raising food crops, plowing fields, reaping the harvest, and killing animals for nourishment. These women also chopped firewood, made shoes, and created medicines for illnesses.[49]

Overwhelmed by their newfound autonomy and role as slave manager, women often deferred judgment to local males and their husbands (through letters), seeking advice about the management of slave plantations. This reliance upon male judgment kept the domestic sphere intact, as women were not actively thinking independently of males. Some women did become involved in bookkeeping, fearing that male overseers and merchants would attempt to con them out of money due to their supposed ignorance of plantation finances. Growing weary of constant questions and skepticism from overseers and slaves, women forced themselves to become more reliant upon their own judgments.[50]

The most difficult problem women faced, though, was slave rebellion during a time in which they most needed compliance. This is illustrated by George Rable when he states "just as women had begun to master the skills required for running a farm or plantation, their authority over their slaves steadily evaporated."[51] This is demonstrated in Fannie Christian's letter to the war department, in which she writes that she has "no one to correct them when they do [wrong]."[52] Without a white male to rely upon, women grew stronger in their determination to succeed and keep their family alive. As affirmed by Drew Faust, "the female slave manager necessarily served as a pillar of the South's political order."[53] Congress, though, began to question the ability of women to hold the slaves from rebellion. In April of

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[48] Faust, Glymph, and Rable, 3.
[49] Wiley, 147.
[50] Rable, 113-114.
[51] Rable, 118.
[52] Campbell and Rice, 79.
[53] Drew Gilpin Faust, *Mothers of Invention* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996), 54.

1862, Congress began debating this, and by October, they had passed a conscription law that allowed one white male per every twenty slaves to be exempted from military service in order protect plantations, as well as the paternalistic structure society relied upon. Through this, Congress "hoped to maintain agricultural output and provide security for women left on the plantations," but, as Rable states, they "managed to do neither while pleasing no one."[54] Within months of the bill's passage, women saw that they would not be able to seek the assistance of white males in controlling their slaves.[55]

In the midst of the battle over the conscription law, women found that they were forced to manage a slave institution quite different than the one their male counterparts managed. As stories of slave insurrections caught fire across the South, women grew more apprehensive about the independence they were given.[56] They also realized, though, that, after being denied protection when the Confederate government and its citizens had recognized the apparent slave threat, as well as the assumed female incapability of managing a plantation, "many women would be impelled to question – even if implicitly – the logic of their willing acceptance of their inferiority."[57] Being constantly confronted with tales of slave rebellion, women began to employ the physical coercion seen as necessary for slave management, coercion that was traditionally administered by men. When women enveloped this responsibility, it signified their movement from the fragile and weak female into a new role, an altered "sphere".[58]

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[54] Rable, 84.
[55] Faust, Mothers of Invention, 54-55.
[56] Clinton, 57.
[57] Clinton, 59.
[58] Clinton, 63-64.

Nursing also became an occupation dominated by women out of necessity. Hospital work was seen as appropriate for women as long as it was temporary and did not interfere with domestic duties. This, though, became near impossible as the war waged on and the number of injuries grew to catastrophic proportions, especially in the constant battleground of Virginia. A variety of women, imbued with sympathy for soldiers, gravitated toward nursing as an outreach of their maternal roles within the home.[59] As shown by Faust, the idea that a "woman's moral and emotional attributes uniquely fitted her for hospital work gained strength and currency," allowing for women to move guiltlessly into the profession.[60] In the beginning, women "raised money, set up hospitals near the camps, and opened wayside hospitals at railroad for sick and wounded men on their way home."[61] Slowly, they became more incorporated into the medical framework of the Civil War, and introduced nursing into the professional world.[62] During the course of the war, Rable notes a change in ideology surrounding women due to their transition into nursing. Women were now seen as brave, strong, loving, and refined, gaining endurance and perseverance through their work.[63]

Although there was only a combined 3200 women employed as nurses between the North and South (the majority these women were from the North), the Confederate Congress recognized the efforts of these women in an 1862 bill that defined the duties of a nurse, how many nurses should be staffed, and set their salaries. Congress also stated that females were preferred for nursing positions.[64] A nurse's primary job was to cook and keep the ward clean, but they also assisted doctors and comforted soldiers. In attempting to perform their duties,

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[59] Faust, Mothers of Invention, 92.
[60] Faust, Mothers of Invention, 92.
[61] Rable, 121.
[62] Rable, 121.
[63] Rable, 127.
[64] Rable, 122.

they dealt with persons who detested the idea of women in the medical profession. While women believed that the war was just as much theirs as that of a man's, public opinion did not necessarily concur.[65] One reporter for the *Southern Monthly* expressed this sentiment when he wrote: "Ladies…should be satisfy themselves with making clothes for soldiers and providing 'comforts and delicacies' for camp and hospital."[66] Others believed that nursing was inappropriate for women because it required work outside the home, the possibility of opposing male doctors, and "'intimacy with male bodies.'"[67]

Although women made some remarkable improvements in the profession, Faust argues that participation did not raise a woman's self-confidence. While women greatly reduced the mortality rate (five percent below that of the rate recorded in male-headed hospitals), they did not come out and volunteer in the numbers the Confederate government had hoped for.[68] "Whether southern women feared losing their respectability, their lives, or simply the comforts of home," Faust states, "they did not volunteer for hospital work in the numbers needed in the face of mounting casualties."[69] Many women were still overcome with the belief that it was indecent for a woman to be a nurse, and often employed their husbands and male relatives as excuses not to volunteer for the profession.[70] Also, as shown in the following quote, in some instances women were ushered out of hospital volunteer positions: "When Gordon hospital reopened, the ladies of the hospital association were chagrined to discover that they had very little to do in the reorganized hospital", as food donations were no

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[65] Rable, 124-126.
[66] Faust, Mothers of Invention, 93.
[67] Cheryl Wells, "Battle Time: Gender, Modernity, and Confederate Hospitals," *Journal of Social History* 35.2 (2001): 409.
[68] Rable, 128.
[69] Faust, Mothers of Invention, 108.
[70] Faust, Mothers of Invention, 110.

longer needed.[71] Due to this, people viewed nursing as a female profession to be a failure in experimentation with gender ideology, as their accomplishments meant little in the postwar South.[72]

Lastly, women were employed as teachers and government clerks to fill the vacancies left by men who went to war. Middle class women generally chose teaching above all other professions, as many felt forced into labor because their families were deprived of their former support by Federal invasions.[73] Few had the formal training that was required for the profession, though, and many faced fierce opposition from both family and peers.[74] Encouragement existed as well, and many men, including Calvin Wiley, the superintendent of common schools in North Carolina, believed that "'…there is no employment better suited to the female nature…than in the business of forming the hearts and minds of the young.'"[75] In fact, as noted by Rable, "in the nineteenth century, the schoolroom seemed a safe and proper place for women to practice their nurturing skills, and even in the South the number and proportion of female instructors steadily increased."[76] To further affirm this, Clinton states that, by 1870, of the 200,000 primary and secondary school instructors, more than half were women.[77] The only problem that arose from this new opening for women was that they lacked the necessary requirements for being an effective teacher. Suffering from poor education themselves, they were not well equipped with knowledge to impart to their students, particularly their male students. Realizing this, many advocated the reform of

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[71] Glenna R. Schroeder-Lien, *Confederate Hospitals on the Move* (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1994), 51.
[72] Rable, 128.
[73] Wiley, 24.
[74] Rable, 129-130.
[75] Faust, Mothers of Invention, 82.
[76] Rable, 28.
[77] Clinton, 46.

female education, as long as it was to benefit others (such as being educated for the purpose of teaching), advancing a woman's career along with the advancement of the Confederacy.[78]

As previously mentioned, women worked as government clerks. This profession arose primarily from the pleas of women to the government in seeking employment for survival during the war. Richmond provided excellent opportunities for women seeking employment in this field, as it was home to the Confederate "central" government. Many of these women were from the upper and middle class, as they were better educated and well connected to people in the Confederate government. As most of the women were employed in the Treasury and War departments, their primary job was to sign banknotes, and the Confederate government wanted this done in neat handwriting. Wealthier women were more likely to be educated in the art of handwriting, and were therefore more likely to be hired.[79] A few women were also employed with the Post Office Department as postmistresses. Others were employed in other departments, for example the Quartermaster's Department, performing duties such as coping, washing, cleaning, and sewing uniforms, knapsacks, and other articles.[80]

Current Debate

As argued by Drew Gilpin Faust, women were not necessarily willing to join the working force to aid the war effort; rather, many women had to be cajoled into it.[81] She argues that most women engaged in "labor in order to ensure both their own survival and that

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[78] Faust, Mothers of Invention, 83-85.
[79] Faust, Mothers of Invention, 88-91.
[80] Rable, 131-133.
[81] Drew Gilpin Faust, "Altars of Sacrifice: Confederate Women and the Narratives of War," *The Journal of American History* 76, no. 4 (March 1990): 1201.

of the Confederacy."[82] In fact, the Confederate government played an integral role in reshaping domestic ideology to better fit the new roles they wanted women to take. They began to bring women into the spotlight as active participants in the war, evidenced by the April 1862 proclamation thanking women for their "'ardent devotion…unremitting labors and sacrifices.'"[83] The government and media began to praise women for their wartime effort, sending the message that women were fighting effectively alongside men by keeping the home front stable. This defense of women's importance to the war effort was employed in order to ensure women's active and positive participation in the war, thereby keeping them from calling their husbands, sons, and other male relatives back home.[84] Further expressed by Rable, women were allowed to step outside of the domestic sphere out of necessity. Due to the fact that Southern society believed peace would return women to the domestic sphere, there was no real concern about them temporarily stepping outside it.[85] This is why, according to Faust, women were capable of stepping outside of their proscribed role as Southern belle.

Catherine Clinton presents an opposing view of women's desire to be involved in the Civil War, stating: "women perceived that they might extend female jurisdiction into the public and hitherto exclusively male realm by using their 'domestic' role as a lever."[86] This is supported by previous discussion about arguments employed by women to foster acceptance of women into the work force. Clinton believed that women used these arguments as a "springboard" into the public sphere, from which they could launch themselves into positions

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[82] Faust, Mothers of Invention, 51.
[83] Faust, "Altars of Sacrifice", 1201-1203.
[84] Faust, "Altars of Sacrifice", 1203-1204.
[85] Rable, 112.
[86] Clinton, 41-42.

of power. While these women did accept their subordination under the separate sphere ideology, and acknowledged their place as the domestic contributor, they realized that they could move this position into the public sphere without compromising their own beliefs about their place in society.[87] Unfortunately, as with Faust's argument, Clinton spends little time focusing upon this idea. Each author concentrated a far greater amount of writing space on describing women's duties, lapsing into recovery history rather than analytic history.

Creating an Identity Through Diaries

Jo Burr Margadant, author of *The New Biography*, addresses the issue of analyzing women's diaries in an era in which women were painted as docile, deferent, and unintelligent creatures who enjoyed their roles as such.[88] In her chapter titled "Constructing Selves in Historical Perspective", Burr focuses upon how to read through these diaries in order to extract the essential pieces of these often-vague works. Although she analyzes the diaries of eight nineteenth century Frenchwomen who were raised to celebrity status during their life, as well as post-mortem, the similarities between the French and American societies, and their placement of women, are too strong to ignore. Therefore, Margadant's work becomes an excellent tool for analyzing white elite women's diaries during the Civil War.

Margadant states that the women she studied lived in a place and era in which women were limited as to how they could present themselves in public, and these limits were rapidly growing narrower. Their public self began to run counter to their public presence. As Margadant states, "women who ignored or sought to expand existing stereotypes faced a daunting and never-ending task controlling others' opinions of their femininity."[89] It is likely

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[87] Clinton, 41-42.
[88] Jo Burr Margadant. *The New Biography*. (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2000).
[89] Margadant, 2.

that women wrote histories and commentaries from the fringe for this reason, as they were expected to remain on the fringe of public situations.[90] Due to this, it is important for one to grasp the "symbolic world from which they [women] construct meaning in their lives" in order to understand how these women assume an identity.[91] This symbolic world was epitomized through the cultural definitions of masculinity and femininity in nineteenth century America, and how these definitions were worked to settle females in relation to social power.

Margadant often refers to the self, one who she believes "is performed to create an impression of coherence or an individual with multiple selves whose different manifestations reflect the passage of time, the demands and options of different settings, or the varieties of ways that others seek to represent that person."[92] This is illustrated by Lucy Rebecca Buck, a young woman living in Virginia during the Civil War who has two distinct selves throughout her diary: the southern belle and the domestic laborer. In exploring Buck's person, Margadant suggests that one should look at the nature of inventing selves. As each social location grants a limited number of alternatives for the creation of a possible self, women's "use of accepted notions of femininity in unconventional places did more than create new opportunities for themselves."[93]

Another book that offers insight into gender and identity through writing is *Haunted Bodies: Gender and Southern Texts*, edited by Anne Goodwyn Jones and Susan V. Donaldson. In their introductory essay, "Haunted Bodies: Rethinking the South Through Gender", they examine southern women's writing during the period in which domestic

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[90] Margadant, 3.
[91] Margadant, 4.
[92] Margadant, 7.
[93] Margadant, 10.

ideology dominated. As stated, "certainly hierarchical and dichotomous gender constructions took a prominent place in antebellum proslavery ideology," underlining the importance of studying the following women in their cultural context.[94] To Jones and Donaldson, "looking at the region through a lens of gender reveals a South uneasily balancing polarized stereotypes of manhood and womanhood with the never-ending process of negotiating boundaries between 'femininity' and 'masculinity'…".[95] This is exemplified by a quote from William Harper, a proslavery champion, in reference to women in the South, in which he states: "'here, there is that certain and marked line, above which there is no toleration or allowance for any approach to license of manners or conduct, and she who falls below it, will fall far below even a slave.'"[96] Harper illustrates the intense pressure Southern women were under to be the dainty, dutiful belle who did not cross the strict gender code they were forced to abide by. This did not prevent women from attempting to comprehend their multiple identities. Mary Chesnut, a prominent Virginian woman during the war, wrote a diary and revised it for publishing in the 1880s. In this diary, "Chesnut worked out innovations within a female tradition of literary form while she played the lady in her everyday life."[97] Through diary writing, she found a way to break through the confines of her sphere during the war. In this, she represented multiple voices that she no longer understood in familiar ways.[98] This analysis of Chesnut becomes integral to the study of the following five women's diaries, as she lived through experiences almost parallel to that of the following women, and found a

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[94] Susan V. Donaldson and Anne Goodwyn Jones, "Haunted Bodies: Rethinking the South Through Gender" in *Haunted Bodies: Gender and Southern Texts* (Charlottesville, Virginia: The University of Virginia Press, 1997), 2.
[95] Donaldson and Jones, 16.
[96] Donaldson and Jones, 2.
[97] Donaldson and Jones, 9.
[98] Donaldson and Jones, 9-10.

similar space in which to sort through the changing definition of true womanhood in the South.

Margadant, Jones, and Donaldson offer an imperative insight into the analysis of a woman's diary during the nineteenth century, and display evidence that wartime situations, such as the Civil War, would indeed create an environment in which new selves could be invented. These selves were manifested through women's newly acquired duties and responsibilities as the male presence on plantations and farms was being depleted by the war effort and the Emancipation Proclamation. Through the examination of the following diaries, one will find that women created new identities in their labor, identities that broke the stereotypical feminine mold they were once forced into.

Primary Sources

Lucy Breckinridge

Lucy Breckinridge of Grove Hill, a plantation in Botecourt County, Virginia, was eighteen years of age when the Civil War broke out in 1861. Immediately, her five brothers joined the Confederate army in Virginia. Breckinridge's father, Cary Breckinridge, remained on the plantation, as he was considered too old to join the army.[99]

During the 1850s, a period once called the "golden decade" of the plantation, Grove Hill produced plenty of crop for subsistence, as well as surplus sale. Tobacco, corn, vegetables, and fruits were grown, and animals for meat and eggs were raised. Wheat for meal and flour was harvested also. Cary Breckinridge owned one hundred thirty-one slaves, placing him as the second largest slave owner in the county. The plantation functioned in typical antebellum style, the wife, Emma Walker, presiding over the domestic economy of

[99] Lucy Breckinridge, *Lucy Breckinridge of Grove Hill,* ed. Mary D. Robertson (Ohio: The Kent University Press, 1979), ix-1.

Grove Hill. She was described as acting as "'mistress, manager, doctor, nurse, counselor, seamstress, teacher, housekeeper, slave, all at once.'"[100] During the war, Emma Walker emerges as the mainstay of the Breckinridge family.[101]

Mary Robertson, the editor of Breckinridge's diary, mentions a variety of different tasks that women performed during the war in her introduction. These tasks included sewing clothing for family and soldiers, making bandages, and caring for the sick and wounded. Women passed also their time by reading and praying. Robertson's most significant observation about Breckinridge's diary, though, is Breckinridge's seemingly ambivalent feelings toward traditional male and female roles.[102] In one example, Breckinridge relates a conversation between her sister, Eliza, and a close family friend, Miss Fanny, regarding the superiority of males to females. Miss Fanny argues that men are superior to women, and Eliza argues the opposite.[103] In describing the discussion, Breckinridge relates: "And where Miss Fannie can mention only one instance of the husband's superiority, Eliza can bring forward ten where the wife is the labourer, the head of the family, the gentle and good angel of the household."[104] While Breckinridge states that she does believe that women are purer and more moral than men, this quote is more telling than Robertson allows it to be. If read from a shallow perspective, it does seem that Breckinridge is indifferent to the content of the conversation, as she does not add her thoughts in either the conversation or the diary; stating the she believes women to be more moral is not a definite statement of superiority. When examined deeper, though, the quote loses its ambivalence. Breckinridge purposely

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[100] Breckinridge, 5.
[101] Breckinridge, 5.
[102] Breckinridge, 6-7.
[103] Breckinridge, 21-22.
[104] Breckinridge, 22.

mentioned a situation in which the person defending male superiority cannot make just cause for her argument. For every one possible reason for male superiority she mentioned, the opposing side had prepared ten reasons for the justification of female superiority. In this, Breckinridge sided with the idea that women are superior due to her recognition that Eliza's evidence is greater than Miss Fannie's, thereby creating a better argument for the superiority of women. Unfortunately, she does not relate to the reader what Eliza used as defense for women. Equally interesting is the phrasing of Eliza's statement. In the same sentence, she relates a Southern wife to be both a laborer and an angel of the household. Through this, it is shown that separate spheres ideology was not as strictly adhered to as previously thought. And, although women were not supposed to be, they were indeed laborers in their own household. This, in turn, blurs the line defining when women began to take on "new labor".

Breckinridge also mentions taking on a form of labor she had not performed since her childhood: sewing. Like many women during the war, Breckinridge and her female family members sewed clothing for the Confederate soldiers. On one Monday, she sewed 'the first whole garment that I have made in many years – since I used to play with "babies".'[105] In this instance, it is obvious that she had performed a duty almost foreign to her, certainly one outside of her daily routine, and one that she is quite proud of. Soon after this date, Breckinridge records that her family was being sent soldier's shirts for repair.[106]

This sense of accomplishment, and desire for more, carries into a statement she makes much later in her diary. Breckinridge expresses a desire to physically fight in the war. Believing that a woman's life was no more precious than a man's, she felt that all were made to suffer, and that women should be given an equal opportunity to wage the battle against the

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[105] Breckinridge, 75.
[106] Breckinridge, 76.

Union.[107] Although not expressly stated in her diary, an aspiration toward equality can be clearly discerned from her words. It can only be a notion of equality Breckinridge is relating in her idea that a woman is no more precious than a man. In effect, a woman's worth is parallel, if not equal to a man's. To fight in the war, side by side, would give men and women equal footing in the eyes of both government and society. It would also allow women to experience the same type of physical suffering that men did participating in the war.

Lucy Rebecca Buck

In contrast, Lucy Rebecca Buck of Bel Air plantation in Front Royal, Virginia, a small town located in Warren County in the Shenandoah Valley, chronicled a great deal more about assuming new duties and responsibilities during the Civil War. At the time the war broke, Buck was an eighteen year-old girl living in an area that was termed "the breadbasket of the Confederacy."[108] Buck was a typical Southern belle, as she was schooled in the "female arts" of music, needlework, and gardening.[109] But, as illustrated by the editor of the diary, Elizabeth Baer, Buck did not believe that the proscribed role for white women in the south was either obtainable or desirable. Rather, throughout her diary there exists a gap between the ideology of white Southern womanhood and the version of womanhood that she actually practiced.[110]

Although Buck's father did not leave the plantation to enlist in the Confederate army, an absence that was quite often a factor in the nature of the duties a woman performed in the household, the family slaves fled. Prior to this event, Buck rarely mentions any form of labor, the most notable being hat trimming, which was mostly likely done as added decoration to

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[107] Breckinridge, 132-33.
[108] Buck, xv.
[109] Buck, xv-xvii.
[110] Buck, xx-xxi.

women's hats.[111] In 1863, though, the last of her family's slaves ran away, taking three horses with them. While her father followed the former slaves to retrieve the horses, Buck begins to chronicle the switch from southern belle to domestic laborer in her diary. The female members of her household began to milk their cows, clean the home, kindle the fire, make breakfast, and dress the children of the household. Within a week, she had labored in the plantation stables, of which she said: "truly Hercules' labor in the Augean stables was the only thing it could be compared to."[112] Through this statement, one can surmise that Buck was unaccustomed to hard physical labor, but she also insinuates that she is proud of it. Although she does not describe what the labor in the stables entailed, it is safe to say that Buck had been ignorant of the amount of time and energy her servants had put into their chores.[113]

It would be incorrect to assume that the women of the Bel Air household were not aided in their duties. Buck's relatives, and their servants, came to the plantation in order to perform tasks for her family. Within a day, a servant named Eliza had come in from Rose Hill to milk cows, kindle a fire, and cook meat for dinner, all chores Buck said that her family could not perform themselves.[114] Also, Mrs. Normal, of unknown relation to the Buck family, came to do their laundry, a task the female members of the household did not know how to perform. Rather than learn the task of clothes washing, the family decided to ask Mrs. Normal to come a week later to wash the laundry on salary, employing her as their laundress.[115] In examination, the fact that the Buck family females decide to hire someone to

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[111] Buck, 115.
[112] Buck, 209.
[113] Buck, 208-209.
[114] Buck, 210.
[115] Buck 210.

do their laundry rather than learning how to perform the task, a skill that would save their family money, shows how deeply domestic ideology was embedded in these women. This was a skill that would save her family money since, when the family's slaves ran away, they took with them three horses and other unnamed items, an estimated loss of $16,000.

Buck makes many negative comments about her newly acquired duties. On one particular day, she states:

> I really enjoyed the day – hard as the work was, but in the late evening twas very Trying when the children were crying to be put to bed and dishes to be washed And put away, milk to strain, water to bring, chips to get, plants to be watered, Kitchen to clean up and candle sticks to be set up.[116]

In fact, an entire chapter of her diary was titled "Very, very footsore and weary" by the editor, an indication of how Buck felt about her new role in life. Through this statement, Buck is expressing a desire to enjoy the tasks she is performing, but feels overwhelmed at the same time. She states that, during a typical day, she feels "stupid, tired, and worn".[117] Within a week, the Buck females had declared a day of rest, an indication of how truly unusual and straining the work was to the women. Many women who were accustomed to performing household chores would not afford themselves such luxury, as a day in the life of a Buck female was the day in the life of lower and yeoman class women of the time. As shown by Lucy Buck, elite white women raised on plantation wealth in luxury, an environment that required little responsibility, were shocked and depleted by the end of the day.

These newfound responsibilities were not without reward, though, and self-praise is more often seen in Buck's diary then complaint is. She writes a great deal about the food she makes and the praise she receives for it, such as her pea soup. A few days after the slaves had

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[116] Buck, 210.
[117] Buck, 216.

fled, she states that the female members of her family "did enjoy it [dinner] so too – it seemed so sweet after working so hard for it," expressing her personal pride about cooking something herself.[118] On her first night without the plantation slaves, Buck made biscuits, which were "pronounced faultless".[119] About this, she states, "I feel a great deal better satisfied with myself to know that I am competent to discharge these duties than I would to know that I was a mere idler useless to myself and all around me."[120] To many slaves, a task such as making a biscuit was rather elementary, but the amount of pride she expresses over a routine chore indicates her exclusion from domestic functions, a key factor in understanding her feelings toward chores. This quote also underlines the idea that Buck was searching for something in her life that could give her self-satisfaction, something outside the typical daily routine of a southern belle. From this, one can also read the change in Buck's sense of self, believing that, prior to having useful knowledge about domestic duties, she was an idler who did not benefit the plantation. Now, Buck gained satisfaction from her change from idler status into someone who could actively participate in the mechanics of her family's plantation. Through labor, although tired and frustrated, Buck found that she could perform tasks she was always told she was too weak or pretty to perform.

During the first week her slaves fled, Buck wrote, "Oh me! what would the boys think to see us now in our several new capacities."[121] Elizabeth Baer stated that women could no longer pretend to be weak and stay out of public light and assume protection in white males. She believes that the Civil War forced women into a public position of strength, and that, because women were not allowed to examine the contradiction this raised with their

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[118] Buck, 215.
[119] Buck, 209.
[120] Buck 102.
[121] Buck, 212.

upbringing in southern ideology, they often turned to journals to express their emotions. Lucy Buck's diary is a perfect example of this contrast and one's attempt to resolve it within the tenets of southern ideology, as shown by her concern over male approval of her new duties.

Julia Chase

Julia Chase was a thirty year-old woman living with her Union-sympathetic family in the town of Winchester in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia when the war commenced.[122] During the Civil War, the Shenandoah Valley was the most agriculturally productive part of Virginia, as well as a scene of continuous battles. Michael Mahon, the editor of Chase's diary, stated that Winchester "became a military command post and major supply depot for the Confederacy, with industrial and agricultural supplies of every description being collected from the region for military use."[123] As he illustrates:

> the war consumed everything, and the simple everyday task of feeding one's family became troublesome, as food shortages were commonplace and the few supplies that could be found demanded a high price.[124]

These shortages were often reflected in Chase's writing, as she became obsessed with the rising cost of items that were once staples in her household, as it is mentioned in the majority of her entries.[125] On August 15, 1861, she wrote: "Calicoes are selling a shilling per yard. White sugar 25cts. Lb. Coffee is 25 to 30¢. Our winter, I fear, will be a rather hard one."[126] When comparing this with domestic ideology, finances are odd issue for a female to become so concerned with, especially a female such as Chase, who was from a well-to-do family, her

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[122] Julia Chase and Laura Lee. *Winchester Divided: The Civil War Diaries of Julia Chase and Laura Lee*. Ed. Michael G. Mahon (Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania: Stackpole Books: 2002), viii.
[123] Chase and Lee, vii.
[124] Chase and Lee, 1.
[125] Chase and Lee, 7.
[126] Chase and Lee, 7.

father being the town's United States Postmaster.[127] Due to the pervasive gender ideology that controlled every aspect of women's lives, women were not generally perceived as intelligent enough to handle mathematics, and were certainly not expected to wrap their minds around the concept of family funds. Chase's concern reflects a change during the time that allowed all members of a wealthy family to grow concerned about monetary matters. This can be interpreted as a wealthy family losing their financial stability due to the war as well. Her concentration on money is possibly a result of a loss in wealth, which would make every penny valuable. In these ways, her concern with money illustrates a break in previously held beliefs about the strict bounds of gender ideology.

In relation to gender ideology, Chase mentions little about female laborers during the war. In one entry, she mentions a visit to the town courthouse, which had been converted into a hospital, to bring oranges to the hospital patients, and briefly mentions that the sick and wounded in the courthouse hospital had female nurses, and that she brought oranges to the hospital patients that day.[128] Her lack of concentration upon the new female nurses could relate to the new justification that women's work as nurses was an extension of their womanly domestic duties, as they were nurturing the wounded. This was a duty women had commonly performed in their own households prior to the war.

One subject she briefly touches upon, the flight of African American slaves from Winchester, gives the reader a sense of how labor changed. She remarks that, when the slaves begin fleeing "we shall be at a great loss to get anything done."[129] Later, when able-bodied African American men were being recruited for the army, she states "I don't know how we

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[127] Chase and Lee, viii.
[128] Chase and Lee, 35, 40.
[129] Chase and Lee, 79.

are to get along, shall have no one to do anything for us in the way of cutting wood, tilling the ground."[130] These statements are particularly potent due to the fact that her father was not at home during the war, as he had been captured by the Confederate army in March 1862 due to his Unionist sympathies; he later died in a prisoner's camp. Chase, and the other female residents of her household, had obviously relied upon their slaves to perform many household, and outdoor, tasks. Without their slaves, Chase and her relatives were confronted with performing tasks domestic ideology had prohibited. And, they would also have to be self-taught. It would appear, though, by Chase's first statement about the loss of servants, that, rather than learn through trial how to perform these tasks, she expressed a strong lack of desire tackle these new duties. Equally as important was the fact that many of the tasks she mentions are tasks that were once performed by her slaves. This connection of tasks to slavery explains her distaste for executing these tasks herself. In doing so, she would, in effect, be "degrading" herself to the level of a slave, something a southern lady was not allowed to do. In essence, performing these tasks would tarnish her femininity.

The diary does contain a brief discussion of "Secech", or Confederate, ladies. In an entry in May 1862, Chase briefly discusses "sun bonnets", or hats that Confederate women made and wore during the war to demonstrate their loyalty to the Confederate cause. More importantly, the women who donned these bonnets were referred to as "bold and imprudent" by Chase, a judgment that reveals a great deal about her views about femininity.[131] It can be surmised that Chase felt that public political displays by women were improper, even though these hats were based upon the latest fashion. She later states that the women and girls of the

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[130] Chase and Lee, 138.
[131] Chase and Lee, 35.

Confederacy had "demonical" behavior, as they consistently heckled and were increasingly rude to both the Union soldiers and the Union supporters in their town.[132]

Laura Lee

Laura Lee also lived in Winchester, Virginia, was thirty-eight years old, and lived with the wife of her deceased older brother. Michael Mahon also edited her diary. Lee was from a well-to-do family, as her father was a lawyer, as well as the county clerk of Frederick County in Virginia.[133] Unlike Chase, Lee was a secessionist, and mentioned a great deal about aiding the wounded in the hospitals. In the first entries of her diary, she spoke of cooking food for the wounded, mentioning that other women in Winchester were doing the same.[134] In an entry during March 1862, Lee stated that before the wounded came to the hospitals, the women of Winchester

> thought that nothing would induce us to enter the hospitals, but we never thought of having our own troops and their wounded and dying together. We could not stay away. We are having ones now moved into the wing, and are getting them fixed comfortable. We have furnished them with fresh clothing. Many persons have applied for permission to take the wounded and nurse at home and the Provost has permitted that it may be done.[135]

This entry relates a great deal about the Confederate woman to the reader. First, there was a certain level of shock once Lee and her female peers saw their men hurt in battle, and this shock moved them to work in capacities that they rather disliked, such as nursing the wounded. One can discern what tasks female volunteers in the hospitals were allowed to perform as well. Within two days of this entry, Lee announced that a group of female nurses had come to Winchester to serve in the hospitals, and Lee was grateful for the release from

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[132] Chase and Lee, 40.
[133] Chase and Lee, xiii.
[134] Chase and Lee, 27.
[135] Chase and Lee, 27.

duty as she had a great deal of housework to perform each day as well.[136] Unfortunately, she does not relate what these duties are specifically.

Lee pays close attention to the treatment her family rendered toward Confederate soldiers when she writes about her sister-in-law, Mary, who bought a great deal of clothing and shoes to outfit the Confederate soldiers passing through Winchester.[137] Throughout her diary, Lee mentions that several young men came by her sister's home to pick up boots, shoes, and clothes.[138] Also, her family established a cooking room in town, and at one point this room was serving two separate hospitals. This was an arduous task; although she does not write much about the labor involved, one can imagine the time and strength put into the construction and operation of the building. This employment of their own physical labor was a large step out of the domestic sphere, as construction of buildings was not a task proscribed for women by southern ideology. Lee and the other women spent time at the town dispensary as well, a place from which medical supplies were made and distributed.[139] In December 1862, the dispensary had been closed, but women still continued to make and distribute medical supplies from their homes, making a concentrated effort to continue their own recognizable contribution to the war.[140]

Lee received comfort from supplying Confederate soldiers with the items that they needed, but this is not the only duty she performed. Lee's family managed their household, and the heads of her household were her sister Mary and herself, as the other members of the Lee household were Mary's children. In her diary, Lee mentioned cutting down the trees in

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[136] Chase and Lee, 28.
[137] Chase and Lee, 81.
[138] Chase and Lee, 95.
[139] Chase and Lee, 60, 62, 68.
[140] Chase and Lee, 70.

her yard for firewood, as well as the family's "exertions in the garden" from which they grew "an abundance of fine vegetables."[141] This contrasts sharply with Chase's concerns about money in her entries, and illustrates that some southern families were more fortunate than others. While her diary focused primarily upon the events of the war, the reader still gains an understanding of some of the new duties women took on during the Civil War.

Phoebe Yates Pember

One of the most intuitive diaries written by a woman in Virginia about the war was Phoebe Yates Pember's (the current edition including an introduction by George C. Rable), which was written by 1866 as a memoir, and published as a book in 1879. The chief matron at the Chimborazo Hospital in Virginia, Pember was born in 1823 to a prominent Charleston, South Carolina family who became Georgia refugees during the war.[142] Women, according to Pember, were first appointed as matrons in hospitals because people were beginning to think that there was something wrong with hospital administration. Pember was offered the position by the wife of George C. Randolph, and she immediately identified this occupation as a change from her life of luxury. While she was apprehensive at first because she was worried that her delicacy and refinement may be hurt, the example Mrs. Randolph set changed her mind:

> Foremost among the Virginia women, she had given her resources of mind and means to the sick, and her graphic and earnest representations of the benefit a good and determined woman's rule could effect in such a position settled the result in my mind.[143]

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[141] Chase and Lee, 50.
[142] Phoebe Yates Pember. *A Southern Woman's Story*. ed. George Rable (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 2002), ix.
[143] Pember, A Southern Women's Story, 2.

Through this quote, Pember illustrates her belief in the positive power of a woman's control over a person's fate. She expresses a deep admiration for a woman who has filled the typically male occupation of nursing, and performed it in a manner that gave Pember something to aspire for. This glimpse into Pember's thought shows the reader that she was interested in extending the boundaries of the domestic sphere to encompass more public roles that she believed women were better suited for than men.

Matrons and nurses received very little recognition and nominal pay. Although women had visited and nursed before, Pember saw volunteering as more detrimental to the patients than beneficial. In fact, there was a shortage of women willing to fill nursing positions, and Pember characterized many of the women who applied for these spaces as insufficient and uneducated. Hiring nurses was one of Pember's many duties in the ward, duties for which she had no formal training. Pember decided that she had the duties of a housekeeper and cook, an assessment that aided her, as one head surgeon in the hospital stated: "she was to be a cook and a housekeeper and nothing more."[144] In her role as cook, Pember had to prepare meals for and deliver them to the six hundred men on the matron's diet list, the sickest sick being served directly from her own stove.[145] A matron and her nurses were also responsible for keeping the bed clothing in order, the receiving and dispensing of liquor, and the fulfillment of reasonable requests.[146] Eventually, Pember was called upon to dress wounds and aid the surgeons with their duties. The first wound she dressed was that of an Irishman, who complimented her lovely hands once she was finished.[147] Pember herself stated that she tried to perform only her duties as a matron, and to avoid medical treatment,

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[144] Pember, A Southern Woman's Story, 12.
[145] Pember, A Southern Woman's Story, 5.
[146] Pember, A Southern Woman's Story, 18-19.
[147] Pember, A Southern Woman's Story, 24,43.

but she had a particularly difficult time keeping herself from alleviating the suffering of her patients.[148]

As previously mentioned, the liquor in Pember's ward, whiskey, was directly under her control. It was often distributed as a pain reliever to the wounded soldiers, but many others attempted to take advantage of the whiskey stock. Pember, therefore, had the whiskey moved into her living quarters, to which only she had the key. This duty proved to be quite burdensome, though, as the men of the ward, soldiers and surgeons, began to demand it from Pember. In order to combat these demands, as well as the stealing of whiskey, she brought charges against surgeons and officials who tried to take whiskey from her, or even their patients. These charges could not be pursued, though, as Pember lacked rank. Many men reacted against her because of this, stating that she was not a lady because she had been brought into contact with certain elements: "'Did Mrs. _____ consider herself a lady when she wrote such notes?' 'No,' was always the indignant answer. 'How could she be, when brought into contact with such elements?'"[149] It can be assumed that the "elements" alluded to would be the duties she performed as a nurse that once belonged to lower class men.

In one particular instance, an unnamed ward-master who was stealing liquor mumbled that he would make Pember know her place.[150] In another instance, a contract surgeon attempted to cut down Pember's authority by keeping the whiskey allowance at a certain amount per patient per day, a rule that was prohibiting the surgeon from receiving liquor from her supply. The contract surgeon eventually grew so angry over his inability to procure liquor

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[148] Pember, A Southern Woman's Story, 43.
[149] Pember, A Southern Woman's Story, 37-38.
[150] Pember, A Southern Woman's Story, 39-40.

from Pember that he wrote a letter to her about matrons in hospitals that stated: "'she must be prepared to *meet* the responsibility upon *your own shoulders.*'"[151]

Much to the credit of her strong will, Pember took the abuse in stride and remained steadfast in her devotion to her duties as matron of the ward. The men in the hospital, quite unaccustomed to a woman in a position such as Pember's, had mixed reactions toward her. Some mocked her, as one Texas man did by looking Pember over while circling around her, examining every detail of her dress, face, and figure. Although other men laughed at this spectacle, she was capable of keeping calm and asking the Texan, "'Did you never see a woman before?'" a question that immediately ceased the laughing.[152] In another instance, one patient, in reference to Pember's position as ward matron, stated that the poor quality of the Confederate government was apparent "'when they put such a little fool to manage such a big hospital as this.'"[153] And although some men treated Pember rather poorly, other patients and members of the hospital staff were quite supportive of her efforts, and praised her work. One of her patients, who struggled to remain alive for six days after being severely wounded, asked Pember to find his mother to tell her how bravely he fought, and how kindly he was nursed by Pember, a statement that showed his acceptance of women as nurses.[154]

As these examples illustrate, most men did not welcome Pember into her new role as hospital matron. In his introduction, George Rable emphasizes his when he states: "Pember entered an environment that many Confederates (and Americans generally), regardless of gender, considered unsuitable for women."[155] While this may be true generally, in October of

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[151] Pember, A Southern Woman's Story, 42.
[152] Pember, A Southern Woman's Story, 16.
[153] Pember, A Southern Woman's Story, 60.
[154] Pember, A Southern Woman's Story, 25.
[155] Pember, A Southern Woman's Story, ix.

1864, during a one-month absence due to exhaustion, Pember noted some changes that were particularly startling to her, although they were not changes in the nursing world. When she began to make her traveling arrangements for her leave, she searched for a male traveling companion, as it was a ladylike practice to travel with a male escort prior to the war. Upon inquiry into where she could find one, 'general advice was unanimously given to "go alone," on the grounds that women had become entirely independent at this time.'[156] And although one man on Pember's train back to Virginia rudely commented about the number of women traveling alone, a woman responded to him with

> What for pity sake do you men mean by running all around the country for, instead of staying in the field, as you ought to do? You keep filling up the cars so a woman can't attend to her business. Your place should be opposite the enemy.[157]

This assertion is an indication of how far women had come, especially because the men in the train car, rather than retort, moved to the smoking car. This woman, described as a large woman who spoke with more vigor than elegance, was barely touched upon by Pember. In analyzing the quote, though, one will see that this woman was the example of independence Pember's advice-givers spoke of: she was an independent woman who spoke her mind to those persons society subordinated her to. It is also interesting to note that Pember felt this woman spoke with vigor, separating her speech from elegance, and was most likely stating that the large woman was not a lady. Nonetheless, by this point, women had gained enough respect and independence to be capable of speaking assertively to a man in a public situation without fearing chastisement, as well as being capable of commanding him in front of his peers.

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[156] Pember, A Southern Woman's Story, 65.
[157] Pember, A Southern Woman's Story, 70.

While her diary does not speak ill of many men, with the exception of those who made her duties particularly difficult, Pember does devote an entire chapter to relating a story about female nurses she had hired as matron. Originally, when asked to hire nurses to work under her, she did not want to hire women, but was convinced that, because of their gender, they would not attempt to drink the whiskey they would have minor control over. She decided that hiring women from the common class of respectable servants would be more beneficial because these women, due to their prior occupations, were accustomed to accepting authority and following orders.[158] Pember hired three women she felt would be best suited for the open positions, but within a day one woman objected to bringing drinks to the patients because she felt a decent woman should not be in a place where a man sits up in his bed with just a shirt on. Pember remarked that a "hospital was no place for a person of her delicate sensibility," and kindly released the nurse from her position.[159] The decency issue was a precise objection many people had with women working as nurses, as it broke with the proscribed rules of their gender code. A commonly held belief was that women were not supposed to be exposed to "masculine" and somewhat raunchy circumstances, as it would make a woman less pure because she was no longer as naive as she once was. Due to the fact that innocence and naiveté were treasured in a woman, maintaining these characteristics was one of their main concerns. Being exposed to a situation that could destroy these characteristics was frightful for many southern women.

After speaking about the first nurse, Pember concentrated her writing upon her relationships to nurses number two and three, also unnamed. Within a day, the women expressed a grievance against Pember because she had not asked them to call upon her during

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[158] Pember, A Southern Woman's Story, 18.
[159] Pember A Southern Woman's Story, 18-19.

her break, and they felt that they were just as much ladies as Pember was, and that Pember insulted them by not asking if they would come to her quarters during her break.[160] This displays an ongoing struggle related to class-consciousness and the ideology surrounding the proper lady. Pember, who admitted to hiring the two women because they were common class servants, subconsciously drew a line between her upper class self and the two nurses, who she perceived to be of lower class ranking than herself. This action illustrates the idea that, although females were rising to a new status as a strong and independent gender, they still held prejudices against one another. This prejudice was further complicated when Pember found the two women dipping snuff, an activity that, judging by Pember's negative reaction, can be assumed was an activity that ladies did not openly involve themselves with.[161] Through their actions, the nurses only lowered themselves in Pember's eyes, and the reader can discern Pember's dislike for uneducated and unrefined women, as noted earlier in her diary.

Lastly, in her diary, Pember addresses women and the war effort. She states that women begin engaging and loving and energetic labor for their relatives, and this love and energy pours out to the war in general. A sentiment best stated by Pember, "female sympathy being much more demonstrative than masculine,"

> Women passing accidentally, like myself, would put down their basket or bundle, and ringing at the bell of neighboring houses, ask for basin and soap, warm water, and a few soft rags, and going from sufferer to sufferer, try to alleviate with what skill they possessed, the paid of fresh wounds, change the uneasy posture, and allay the thirst[162]

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[160] Pember, A Southern Woman's Story, 20.
[161] Pember, A Southern Woman's Story, 20.
[162] Pember, A Southern Woman's Story, 59.

of wounded soldiers. Female relatives of the hospital patients began to come to the ward to bring provisions and food to their wounded males. But, as Pember notes, "they seemed to think it a pious and patriotic duty to be afraid or ashamed under *any* circumstances," a thought that maintained their deference for men and gender ideology.[163]

In retrospect, Pember believed that women did not lose delicacy or modesty when working in a hospital. Rather, she felt that unpleasant circumstances did not arise in patient-nurse situations, and that only women were suited to properly nurse the wounded. She felt that, indeed, women did have to move beyond conventional ideology in hospital circumstances, but that hospitals were beneficial for a woman if the hospital experience chastened and purified her nature. The women of the town reiterated this belief through their kind treatment toward Pember when the war ended and she was left with nothing but worthless Confederate money. These women brought Pember food from their own storages. From these women, "who never made me feel by word or act, that my self-imposed occupation was otherwise one which would ennoble any woman," Pember gained acceptance.[164] Through this, it becomes quite clear that female nurses were not social pariahs who should be feared because they were breaking the code. Rather, Pember's boundary stretching was welcomed by other women, as shown through their kindness toward her "houseless, homeless, moneyless" condition after the war.[165] From the nursing experience, a woman should grow wiser and better through contemplation and endurance of suffering, allowing benevolence,

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[163] Pember, A Southern Woman's Story, 53.
[164] Phoebe Yates Pember, "Food for the Wounded" in *The War Women Lived,* ed. Walter Sullivan (Nashville, Tennessee: J.S. Sanders and Company, 1995), 270.
[165] Pember, "Food for the Wounded", 270.

chastity, and love to radiate from her being. If this is achieved, then, according to Phoebe Yates Pember, the hospital is a proper place for a woman to hold an occupation.[166]

Conclusion

Women during the Civil War were given a great deal more duties and responsibilities than during the antebellum period. They were called upon to manage plantations and rebellious slaves, and to become teachers in a system that did not educate them well enough to do so. In Virginia, many women were drafted as government clerks. Still others fulfilled their domestic roles as nurturers of wounded soldiers through nursing. Although a debate still exists about whether or not women truly embraced and enjoyed these new tasks, through the women analyzed in the previous section, one will find that there was mixed sentiment about these tasks. The five women studied expressed pride in completing the tasks set before them, pleased that they could be a productive part of society in the manner men were prior to the war. Anxiety was also expressed, as women grew frustrated with the constant labor and worry about survival. As written by Clinton and Lunardini about the conclusion of the war, "some white women recommitted themselves to male hegemony in response to men's alarm concerning this issue. Some women challenged and berated men over this male notion of honor and victory."[167] To conclude, the only thing that can be stated with certainty is that this topic remains open to more scholarship.

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[166] Pember, "Food for the Wounded", 270-272.
[167] Clinton and Lunardini, 88.

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