

2022

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Brooke Hemingway  
*William & Mary*

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### Recommended Citation

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**They are United as Me Now:  
Chloe Whittle in Norfolk During the Secession Crisis**

Brooke Hemingway

HIST 150: Early American Lives

December 13, 2021

On the late evening of Monday, April 15th, 1861, seventeen year-old Chloe Whittle sat down to transcribe a thrilling tale of the weekend in Norfolk into her diary. She wrote the wrong date at the top of her page, perhaps intending to mark the importance of April 12th, 1861 for posterity.<sup>1</sup> She took care to write that she was in “Norfolk, VA United States”, as a prediction that soon she would not reside in the United States, but in the Confederate States of America. As a secessionist, Chloe said “this is the last day I will even be able to write [the words United States]”, in expectation that the Confederacy's victory at Fort Sumter would drive Virginia to secede from the Union. According to her diary, Chloe was not the only person in Norfolk who felt this way. Accompanied by “the universal cry” of “Secession!”, the Confederate flag had waved “triumphantly” in Norfolk’s streets soon after the first shots of the Civil War were fired. In Chloe’s words, the city was as “united as me now” and finally ready to support Virginia’s secession from the Union.<sup>2</sup>

Although Norfolk hosted the “biggest and best” Naval facility in the United States, the town did not experience much conflict during the Civil War.<sup>3</sup> It was taken over by Union troops bloodlessly in 1862, and the city would spend many years under occupation during the war and Reconstruction period.<sup>4</sup> Despite the city’s brief role as a Confederate military base, Norfolk’s rush to secession can help explain why urban Southern cities broke away from their Northern trading partners and aligned with the planter class’ interests. Chloe Whittle’s insight into the early days of the Confederacy in Norfolk reveals that Norfolk citizens initially supported the Confederacy because of the appearance of Northern territorial aggression after the Battle of Fort Sumter and the seizure of the Norfolk Naval Yard. While Norfolk citizens wanted to keep the institution of slavery intact - and would later explicitly state this - the most direct cause for Norfolk’s support of secession in April 1861 was territorial aggression. This is distinct from the cause of Southern slaveholding rights that influenced more rural communities to support

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<sup>1</sup> The date in Chloe’s diary reads “April 12th 1861”, but the passage must have been written on Monday, April 15th because she mentions the fall of Fort Sumter on April 14th and references her attendance at school after this event.

<sup>2</sup> Chloe Tyler Whittle, “Private Journal of Cloe Tyler Whittle Commenced March 18 1861,” 12 April 1861. Chloe refers to herself as “Cloe” when labeling her diaries, which is possibly a nickname or shortened version of her name.

<sup>3</sup> J. H. Robertson, “War Comes to Norfolk Harbor, 1861,” *Virginia Cavalcade* 50, no. 2 (Spring, 2001): 64.

<sup>4</sup> Craig L. Symonds, “Lincoln and the Navy,” *American Heritage* 58 no. 6 (Winter 2009), 46.

secession.<sup>5</sup> There are not many accounts from Norfolk civilians who were both politically and socially engaged in the secession conflict because of the city's early occupation by Union troops. This makes Chloe's descriptions of the "changing opinions of the people" important to an analysis of the social and political changes in Norfolk at the beginning of the Civil War.<sup>6</sup>

Chloe Whittle was the third daughter of Conway and Chloe Whittle, born on September 25, 1843. The Whittles were an upper middle class family in Norfolk; Conway Whittle was a successful lawyer and his wife's father was a prominent judge in Williamsburg, Virginia.<sup>7</sup> The family's prosperity was also shown in their ownership of two enslaved people. Although these people are not directly named in Chloe's diaries, one letter from Henry Custis to Conway Whittle mentioned the lease of a female slave named Letty in 1830.<sup>8</sup> The ownership of these two slaves indicates the Whittle's social status and could be the reason for their early support of the Confederacy.

Chloe's first diary entry is dated March 18, 1861, which means that details about her daily life prior to 1861 are relatively unknown. However, she emphasized that education was very important to her and something she spent a lot of time nurturing throughout her early life. The Whittles' social status gave Chloe the ability to pursue education in multiple areas; she was especially fond of algebra and dancing.<sup>9</sup> After her mother's death in 1858, Chloe began taking a larger role in managing her father's household, alongside her widowed aunt and the Whittle's two slaves. Chloe's writing shows that she embraced this domestic role, and completely devoted herself to this work after leaving school after the Civil War started. Despite her love for education, leaving school and managing the domestic household was the only option available to Chloe. There were fewer than thirteen women's academies in Virginia, and these institutions

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<sup>5</sup> William A. Link, *Roots of Secession: Slavery and Politics in Antebellum Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

<sup>6</sup> Chloe Whittle, "Journal," 12 April 1861.

<sup>7</sup> See George Holbert Tucker, *Abstracts from Norfolk City Marriage Bonds (1797-1850) and Other Genealogical Data*, Baltimore, MD: Genealogical Pub., 2001. and Antoinette Van Zelm, "Chloe Tyler Whittle: Religion, Gender, and Identity in Norfolk, Virginia, 1865-1876", Dissertations, Theses, Master Projects, Paper 1539625766.

<sup>8</sup> For an 1860 tax record that cites the ownership of two slaves, see "Tax receipt," 1860, Conway Whittle Papers, Box 9, Folder 19. For the letter from Henry Custis, see Henry Custis, "Custis, Henry to Conway Whittle," 23 June 1830, Conway Whittle Papers, Box 1, Folder 44.

<sup>9</sup> Chloe discusses the pride she felt at being the best in her dancing school and succeeding in math classes. Chloe Whittle, "Journal," 12 April 1861.

were primarily intended for “frivolous young women and Bluestockings [who] would not be able to find happiness.”<sup>10</sup> In urban slave-holding societies, “master-class” women like Chloe “found fulfillment through marriage, leading the elevated life of ‘the lady’ and successfully managing households.”<sup>11</sup>

Chloe distinguished herself from the working-class people of Norfolk by occupying the position of a lady, allowing her more power than other girls her age. Chloe’s father, Conway Whittle, was a lawyer and later a Confederate leader who granted her a great deal of respect and freedom. He was politically active in Norfolk and spoke about his opinions frequently to her. As a result, she was a fierce opponent of President Lincoln and referred to him in her writing as “President(!) Lincoln”, invoking the surprise and outrage that he was elected.<sup>12</sup> Chloe’s diaries talk about some of these political discussions about secession between Chloe and Conway Whittle. She describes correspondence between them where Conway urged Chloe to oppose the Union in any way possible, and confided in her that he might leave the country entirely if the Confederacy was defeated.<sup>13</sup> Despite this support from her father, Chloe was conflicted about trusting her judgement. In one late-night musing in her diary, Chloe wished that she “had more sense! What a blessing it would be to both myself and my relations”.<sup>14</sup> Chloe’s belief that she was nonsensical was caused by the male-dominated society she lived in, and likely made her submit to - and even copy - the opinions of her father.

Chloe was also highly ambitious and sought to be admired for her talent. Perhaps due to the respect Conway Whittle had for her, Chloe wanted to be respected by everyone else around her. In one passage, she wrote “Ambition! Even now I can feel it thrill through every atom of my being. I can detect it is almost the highest notion that I do. Not in the least thing can I be satisfied if I do not stand on the top rung of the latter [sic].”<sup>15</sup> Chloe saw her diaries as a lasting testament to her thoughts and a way to

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<sup>10</sup> The 1872 Census was the first recording of women’s schools in Virginia and listed thirteen institutions. See Fix, Julie K., “Virginia Women’s Academies 1830-1860”, University of Virginia, 1991, 2-26.

<sup>11</sup> Powers defines the “master-class” woman as belonging to an elite urban class of slave-owners in Charleston, South Carolina, although the term can be applied to other urban Southern societies. See Bernard E. Powers, “Book Review: Braided Relations, Entwined Lives: The Women of Charleston’s Urban Slave Society by Cynthia M. Kennedy,” *The South Carolina Historical Magazine* 108, no. 3 (2007) 259.

<sup>12</sup> Chloe Whittle, “Journal,” 12 April 1861.

<sup>13</sup> Chloe Tyler Whittle, “Private Journal commenced by Cloe Tyler Whittle Oct. 1st 1863”, 7 March 1865.

<sup>14</sup> Chloe Whittle, “Journal,” 18 March 1861.

<sup>15</sup> Chloe Whittle, “Journal,” 12 April 1861.

impress people in the future.<sup>16</sup> Chloe Whittle wrote to inform her future readers about her beloved Norfolk and her unique place in it.

Norfolk differed from many urban and rural communities in the South for their treatment of African-Americans. The city was home to a significant free black population that was given small privileges, such as smoking on pipes in public.<sup>17</sup> Ira Berlin's study of free blacks in the Antebellum South, *Slaves without Masters*, calls the late 1850s the "best of times, the worst of times" for free blacks in Norfolk. They were achieving large economic gains, such as buying property and owning businesses, although the local government frequently attempted to curtail what little freedom they had.<sup>18</sup> At the end of the 1850s, many in Norfolk feared a slave rebellion or abolitionist movements from the North. The Harper's Ferry Raid in 1859 by abolitionist John Brown made many believe that a slave insurrection was imminent; a danger that posed a threat to not only the slave owning class, but also to the working-class. Southern Democrats stoked this fear in middle-class voters by warning of the dangers abolition posed to their lives and job security.<sup>19</sup> According to some slaveholders, slaves "believed that Northerners were seeking their freedom; many of them even thought that the new Republican president would be black". Slaves who had information about abolitionist efforts in the North were charged with insurrection, leading to what historian William Link called a "white panic" among Virginians in rural areas. In Norfolk, some citizens organized militias to protect white people from revolting African Americans.<sup>20</sup>

This panic was a primary cause of the Confederacy's rise to power; According to *Roots of Secession*, "Secession represented a logical measure of self-protection that flowed directly from deteriorating master-slave relationships, increased slave restiveness, and the possibility of northern

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<sup>16</sup> Chloe Whittle, "Private Journal of Chloe Tyler Whittle, Norfolk, Virginia, March 22, 1865," 11 April 1865. Chloe writes "it may be that some eye will light on this page when mine are closed forever on earth, if so it [the diary] will be strong proof of the worthlessness of presentiments"

<sup>17</sup> Norfolk was home to a total of 4,319 African Americans in 1860 (22% of the total population. 1,035 of these people were free. See Michael Hucles, "Many Voices, Similar Concerns: Traditional Methods of African-American Political Activity in Norfolk, Virginia, 1865-1875," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 100, no. 4 (1992): 543–66. For information about the freedom given to free blacks by the Norfolk government, see William A. Link, *Roots of Secession*.

<sup>18</sup> Ira Berlin, *Slaves Without Masters; the Free Negro in the Antebellum South* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1975).

<sup>19</sup> Frank Towers, *Urban South and the Coming of the Civil War*, Charlottesville: Univ Of Virginia Press, 2008.

<sup>20</sup> William A. Link, *Roots of Secession*, 161-2.

intervention... across much of the deep South.”<sup>21</sup> Link also addresses that the effect of white panic was much more pronounced in rural than urban areas. Although people in Norfolk were concerned and outraged by violence like the Harper’s Ferry Raid, they saw it as the work of “Northern fanatics”, and not a symbol of all Northern politics. Compared to language used by politicians and newspapers from more rural parts of the South, Norfolk did not immediately panic and assume that all white people would be murdered by Northern abolitionists and freed slaves.<sup>22</sup> Throughout 1860 and 1861, Norfolk was more concerned about issues like “sovereignty”, “territorial rights”, and “misrepresent[ed] purposes”, and hardly mentions the danger of marauding slaves.<sup>23</sup>

Unlike Norfolk’s working-class population, the Whittle family was staunchly secessionist and directly engaged in South Carolina’s secession from the beginning of 1861. Chloe’s oldest sister, Grace Whittle, lived in South Carolina with her husband Horace Sams. Horace Sams wrote his father-in-law a detailed letter about the causes of secession and the anticipation that more states, including Virginia, would soon follow. Like many supporters of the Confederacy, Sams cited the South’s humiliation and not slavery as the reason for secession. He said that the decision to secede was due to being part of an “unhallowed union” where Northerners “jeer, laugh at, and despise us, and being mere idle boasters”. The correspondence with Sams indicates that the Norfolk Whittles similarly believed that ““So[uth] Ca[rolina] will stand forth among’ the nation of the earth a living example of what a bold and determined people can accomplish, when they determine to be dictate[d] to by no others.”<sup>24</sup> Virginia’s journey to secession began soon after South Carolina’s; in January 1860 one former Unionist declared that “only a united southern conference could restore the “perfect equality of the Southern States””. According to the Southern Democrats, secession was an issue of political enslavement to the North and “black slavery”.<sup>25</sup> While

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<sup>21</sup> William A. Link, *Roots of Secession*, 213.

<sup>22</sup> William A. Link, *Roots of Secession*, 163.

<sup>23</sup> J.R. Hathaway, ed., *The Day Book*, April 27 1861.

<sup>24</sup> Horace Sams, Beaufort, South Carolina, to Conway Whittle II, Norfolk, Virginia, 1860 November 27, Conway Whittle Papers, Box 6 Folder 28. Sams would later die in 1865 from a fever, after volunteering for the Confederacy and fighting in the 11th Regiment, South Carolina Infantry (9th Volunteers).

<sup>25</sup> William A. Link, *Roots of Secession*, 182. “Black slavery” refers to the idea that African-Americans would have the power to control white people as business-owners or members of the government. Whites, in the minds of Southern Democrats, would become the new slaves.

Virginia's first vote for secession failed in early 1861, Fort Sumter provided the perfect catalyst for supporters of the Confederacy to declare the South under attack.

Norfolk's sudden support for secession in April 1861 was extremely welcome to Chloe, and perhaps a little unexpected. On Friday, April 12th, Chloe and her father received a telegram, possibly sent by Horace Sams, which informed them that the first shots of the Civil War had been fired on Fort Sumter.<sup>26</sup> Almost four months after South Carolina had seceded, Chloe was probably shocked by the seemingly sudden conflict. The first month of entries in her diary discusses the weather, spending time with her friends, and gossip from school, a far cry from worries over an impending war. The beginning of the Civil War snuck into her life, like it did for many of Norfolk's citizens. On April 12th, however, the conflict was all anyone could talk about. Chloe mentions reading the latest copy of the *Richmond Dispatch*, whose bold support for secession probably appealed to her political beliefs and made her increasingly impatient for Virginia to join the Confederacy. "The spirit of our people is fairly aroused," the newspaper declared. "Our hearts are fired by the remembrance of grievous wrongs, and by the anticipation of greater injustice; our arms are made strong by the justness of our cause... let the strife begin."<sup>27</sup> The *Dispatch* accurately describes the "aroused" feelings of injustice and urgency to defend Southern interests that defined Norfolk after this day. Indeed, prior to April 1861, Norfolk newspapers "seemed only to go through the motions of demanding intransigent defense of "Southern rights" and warning of possible secession".<sup>28</sup> Due to its strong economic ties with Northern trading partners, Norfolk had been occupying a mostly neutral front throughout the secession crisis. Even President Lincoln and other members of his Cabinet advocated "gentle" measures to secure federal property at the Norfolk Naval Yard because they never expected the city to turn against the Unionist cause.<sup>29</sup> After the Battle of Fort Sumter, however, Norfolk would transition from an "intransigent" defense of Southern rights to a wholehearted battle for these rights.

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<sup>26</sup> Chloe Tyler Whittle, "Private Journal of Cloe Tyler Whittle Commenced March 18 1861," 12 April 1861.

<sup>27</sup> "From Charleston", *Richmond Dispatch*, 12 April 1861.

<sup>28</sup> Thomas C. Parramore, Peter C. Stewart, and Tommy Bogger, *Norfolk: the First Four Centuries* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1994) 197.

<sup>29</sup> J.H. Robertson, "War Comes to Norfolk Harbor, 1861," 65.

After coming home from school on Monday, April 15th, Chloe raced to tell her father about the signs of imminent secession that she had witnessed that day. She said that she was “much surprised” when a young man came to her at school and announced, “‘Miss Chloe I am a secessionist!’ For he ha[d] been a most uncompromising Unionist. I saw he was deeply moved”. As this young man illustrates, Norfolk Unionists virtually vanished overnight, turning to secessionists. One of her father’s “Unionist” friends, a Mr. George Newton declared that “there is not a Unionist in this city!” after the defeat of Fort Sumter.<sup>30</sup> The once-neutral *Day Book* printed that Northern politicians and newspapers were agents of “Beelzebub, the Prince of Liars” and were “endeavoring to mislead the people by telling all manner of willful, base and infamous lies about the South.”<sup>31</sup> These three examples show that once-neutral or Unionist supporters had completely flipped to supporting secession and open hostility to the North. Although Chloe does not specifically state the reason for Norfolk’s sudden switch to supporting secession, the responses of newly-declared secessionists makes it clear that they were reacting to the perceived defense of the South’s territory after the Battle of Fort Sumter. Although most Norfolk citizens wanted the institution of slavery to remain intact, the election of President Lincoln and danger of slave rebellions had failed to sway them to the side of South Carolina and other secessionist states. Chloe’s observations on April 15th make it clear that Norfolk’s support of secession was purely reactionary and focused more on the direct issues of territorial aggression and Southern pride.

Chloe also discusses the conflict she feels about traditional gender roles in Norfolk in the context of the secession crisis. The day she wrote about the firing on Fort Sumter, she describes putting new buttons on her Secession Dress, which she planned to wear when Virginia eventually declared secession. She remarks on the insignificant role that women could play in this critical political moment, saying that

All that is in their [a woman’s] power is to put a few brand [new] buttons onto the front of their dresses!

But I suppose the blessing of manhood much be looked in so, like all other blessings, as not granted to all

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<sup>30</sup> Chloe underlines the word “Unionist” when describing her father’s friend, demonstrating her shock that anyone in Norfolk would continue to not support secession. Chloe Whittle, “Journal,” 12 April 1861.

<sup>31</sup> J.R. Hathaway, ed., *The Day Book*, April 27, 1861.

mankind, but when I see young men wasting their time and talents I can scarcely help the thoughts arising,  
 “Why has God made me this?”<sup>32</sup>

Although Chloe expresses frustration at her inability to do more for the Secessionist cause, she concludes that as a man, she would be expected to fight and put herself in danger, which is something she was unprepared to do. Chloe never describes any work she did to support the Confederacy throughout the war, aside from praying to the “God of Battles” and participating in national days of fasting.<sup>33</sup> While many women volunteered as nurses, such as her neighbor Mrs. Parrish, Chloe’s support for secession was mainly limited to putting new buttons on her dresses.<sup>34</sup>

The day after Chloe recorded the race towards secession, her father attempted to sabotage the Navy Yard, the United States’ naval base right next to Norfolk. Perhaps relying on the city’s widespread outrage from Fort Sumter, Conway tried to convince city officials to “[stop] the mail to Naval Officers.”<sup>35</sup> This would have prevented personal correspondence and important instructions from President Lincoln from reaching the officers who controlled millions of dollars of U.S. military power. Although the Norfolk government did not act on Conway Whittle’s suggestion, it shows that the goal of undermining U.S. military power was already present in Norfolk’s citizenry.

On April 17th, the statewide convention in Richmond voted to secede from the Union. Although she had hoped for this outcome, Chloe must have been surprised at the speed of this. She had written that “when [Virginia will secede] is not known” on the very day secession was declared. Even after the Battle of Fort Sumter, many people in Virginia and in the North did not expect the state to secede. In one *Harper’s Weekly* article, “Will Virginia Secede?”, the magazine declared that secession could not occur because the Virginian guard was dedicated to keeping the American flag safe.<sup>36</sup> The impact of secession, however, was immediate. Virginian soldiers and officers serving at the Naval Yard left their posts and

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<sup>32</sup> Chloe Whittle, “Journal,” 12 April 1861.

<sup>33</sup> Chloe Whittle, “Private Journal Commenced by Cloe Tyler Whittle July 20 1862,” 21 July 1863.

<sup>34</sup> Chloe describes an encounter with Mrs. Parrish, who told her about “one of the true sons” of the Confederacy who “brav[ed] the pain without a murmur because “it was for his country”. See Chloe Whittle, “Journal,” 21 September 1862.

<sup>35</sup> Chloe Whittle, “Journal,” 16 April 1861.

<sup>36</sup> “Will Virginia Secede?,” *Harper’s Weekly*, April 27 1861, 7.

pledged “their allegiance first to Virginia, then to the Confederacy”. In the *Petersburg Express*, a Norfolk correspondent described the city as “alive with soldiers. Military forces are coming in from all quarters... Business is almost entirely suspended, and God only knows when this will end.”<sup>37</sup> In the *Day Book*, advertisements called to the “patriotic citizens of the South... to come forward with haste in order that the gallant champions of States’ rights may at once put his regimen[t] in the field.”<sup>38</sup> Chloe describes the rumor of a “Baltimore Boat who it was thought might have marines on board to reinforce the Navy Yard”, and the movement of soldiers to defend Norfolk.<sup>39</sup> Although this was found to be untrue, the tension between Confederate troops and supporters in Norfolk and the Union soldiers in the Naval Yard was about to result in Norfolk’s first taste of conflict.

Late in the night of April 20th, hundreds of Norfolk citizens and former employees at the Naval Yard prepared to take the Yard. Under orders from President Lincoln, who believed that Norfolk could not be defended and was useless as a Naval base, the remaining federal soldiers and officers left the base to Norfolk’s hands. Although these federal employees had set fire to the Yard, hoping to destroy any militarily useful equipment, the damage was not severe. Troops from Norfolk and Portsmouth were able to scavenge artillery, ammunition, rations, and most importantly, the *Merrimack*.<sup>40</sup> The *Merrimack* was repaired and transformed into the world’s first ironclad ship, christened the *CSS Virginia*. Chloe, who lived near the water, described the fires from the burning Yard as a “grand sight”. The day after this event, Chloe was surprised by the lack of people at Sunday service. “Norfolk was in the state of wildest excitement,” she wrote, “and that day I knew never the people to be so much alarmed [at] a thing before, not certainly at the Yellow Fever in ‘35.”<sup>41</sup> According to Chloe, the firing on Fort Sumter and the seizure of federal property at the Naval Yard had fundamentally changed the city of Norfolk. These two early events in the Civil War had transformed the city from a Northerly-aligned economic city into a fiercely Confederate military center.

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<sup>37</sup> J.H. Robertson, “War Comes,” 69-75.

<sup>38</sup> J.R. Hathaway, ed, *The Day Book*, 27 April 1861.

<sup>39</sup> Chloe Whittle, “Journal,” 19 April 1861.

<sup>40</sup> J. H. Robertson, “War Comes,” 76.

<sup>41</sup> Chloe Whittle, “Journal,” 18 May 1861.

Chloe's diary entries abruptly cease after the mobilization of troops in Norfolk began. Although her daily observations and feelings are not recorded, an important change in her life occurred sometime in May: her father was given an appointment in the Confederate army. According to a letter from John Tyler, General Erwin personally appointed Conway to an "honorable and important appointment... one more important is not connected with the army - and I doubt not but that you are perfect now in the discharge of its duties".<sup>42</sup> Although the exact title and content of this job are unknown, Conway was deemed essential to the success of the Confederacy's military strength in Norfolk, and often visited the Naval Yard to conduct his duties. After beginning her father for weeks, Chloe and a few of her friends were granted permission to accompany him on one of these trips. Chloe wrote much about the soldiers that accompanied them to the Base, but did not include information about the state of the Base during her trip. Much like the teenage girl she was, Chloe was more interested in keeping her stockings and dress clean than recording the details of a military zone.<sup>43</sup>

The Confederacy would only hold the Naval Base for another year. In 1862, President Lincoln ordered the seizure of Norfolk and Portsmouth in order to weaken the Confederacy's naval power. In one account, the capture of Norfolk was described as a relatively non-climatic event.

[T]he Union soldiers soon encountered an abandoned enemy camp, its barracks still smoldering, which contained 21 abandoned heavy guns. Cheered by this bloodless victory, the troops pressed on. A few miles short of Norfolk, they encountered a deputation of civilians, including the mayor, who had ridden out in a carriage to surrender the city.<sup>44</sup>

While the city was placed under martial law, General John Dix assumed that Norfolk would quickly consider itself part of the Union due to its former position against secession in 1861. The Union commander attempted to bolster the city's economy, predicting that it would "regain the loyalty of the seaports."<sup>45</sup> However, the attitude of Norfolk had permanently changed after the experiences of Fort Sumter and the battle of the Naval Yard. Major General John E. Wool, who was in charge of the

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<sup>42</sup> "Letters from Tyler, John to Conway Whittle, 1861 June 12," 1861, Conway Whittle Papers, Box 8, Folder 6.

<sup>43</sup> Chloe Whittle, "Journal," 18 May 1861.

<sup>44</sup> Craig L. Symonds, "Lincoln and the Navy," 46.

<sup>45</sup> Spencer Wilson, "Experiment in Reunion".

occupation, asked the city council if the citizens of Norfolk considered themselves neutral or part of the Confederacy. The Council refused to answer this, and claimed that they had no “fair means” of determining the allegiance of Norfolk’s population.<sup>46</sup> Based on Chloe’s diaries, however, Norfolk most definitely considered itself part of the Confederacy, and citizens actively prayed and fasted to help the Confederacy.<sup>47</sup> Although Norfolk had rushed into support secession, they were unmoving in their continued identification with the Confederacy throughout the rest of the War.

Chloe was one of these citizens that presented an uncompromising hostility towards Union rule. She showed an almost flippant attitude towards Union authority, possibly empowered by her position as an elite woman. In 1864, Chloe traveled to South Carolina to visit her sister Grace Whittle Sams. Before returning, she was forced by the Union to sign an oath of loyalty, or be forced to stay in South Carolina permanently. Although she had to return to Norfolk to care for her father, Chloe wrote about the struggle in deciding to sign this oath. She wrote that “I do not like the Oath to the U of A and promise not to return to the Confederacy during the war... a conflict in my mind [h]as made [me] feel really sick.”<sup>48</sup> She eventually signed this oath, and was escorted across battle lines by Union soldiers. During this journey, Chloe attacked the Union soldiers for their defense of a “war of extermination”, and declared that her opinions would never change.<sup>49</sup> Perhaps because she had lived in a Union-occupied city for nearly two years, Chloe could not imagine a return to the pre-war unity Norfolk had once enjoyed.

After the seizure of Norfolk, the justifications for supporting the Confederacy shifted to become about opposition to any sort of abolition and upholding white supremacy in the South. Chloe expressed outrage when an African-American battalion was sent to Norfolk. She wrote that “the Yankees in all their insolence... have armed the Negroes!”, and that their “detested presence” made many people angry.<sup>50</sup>

Since Chloe does not write about the two slaves her family owned, it is unknown if her slaves ran away or

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<sup>46</sup> Ludwell H. Johnson, “Blockade or Trade Monopoly? John A. Dix and the Union Occupation of Norfolk,” *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 93, no. 1 (1985): 54–78.

<sup>47</sup> Chloe Whittle, “Journal,” 21 July 1863.

<sup>48</sup> Chloe’s father Conway Whittle was also faced with this decision. In one of her earlier passages in this diary, Conway contemplates leaving the country until the Confederacy wins the war, but ends up staying in Norfolk. Chloe Whittle, “Journal,” 28 December 1864.

<sup>49</sup> Chloe Whittle, “Journal,” 27 February 1865.

<sup>50</sup> Chloe Whittle, “Journal,” 11 July 1863.

stayed with the Whittles after the Union seized Norfolk. If her slaves had freed themselves, Chloe may have feared her power as a white woman was slipping away, and become increasingly more racist as a result. The *Day Book* also changes its justification for secession later in the war. At the end of the war, editor John Hathaway wrote that “rights to the Negro means martial law to the white man, brought about solely by the ignorance and intemperance of the Negro.” This language prompted the Norfolk Riot in April 1866, where bands of armed whites assaulted black men walking around the city.<sup>51</sup> According to Chloe, the subjection of Reconstruction forced Norfolk citizens to fight the Freedmen's Bureau and other Northern abolition efforts however they could.

The beginning of the Civil War caught Norfolk by surprise, and much of the city's initial support for the Confederacy was purely reactionary. Chloe Whittle's testimony reveals how the Battle of Fort Sumter and the seizure of the Naval Yard shocked Norfolk citizens into believing that they were under attack by the North and joining forces with the Confederacy was the only way to survive. Despite the disconnect between this Northern-aligned port city and the slave-owning rural elite, the threat to territorial sovereignty and Southern pride was sufficient to turn even the most stringent Unionists into secessionists. Although Norfolk would in time vigorously support the right to own slaves, the city initially supported the Confederacy based on a fear of Northern aggression, as opposed to a fear of abolitionism. Chloe's diaries are important to understanding the civilian side of the Civil War in Norfolk. Her descriptions of both teenagers and important politicians during the early days of the war make it clear that Norfolk's motivations were distinct from the planter class in the early stages of the war, and deserve to be defined as such.

The end of the war came on April 3rd, 1865, when the city of Richmond fell to Union forces. Chloe's somber passage reads: “Very bad news today! After breakfast I set about making yeast and Aunt Frannie went to the post office. She returned very soon, and almost in tears, told me “Richmond has fallen.” I said I do not believe it.”<sup>52</sup> Although many of Chloe's acquaintances believed that the

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<sup>51</sup> John Hammond Moore, “The Norfolk Riot: 16 April 1866”, *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 90, no. 2 (1982): 160.

<sup>52</sup> Chloe Whittle, “Journal,” 3 April 1865.

Confederacy could continue to fight and achieve their independence, she faced the fact that Richmond's defeat made it impossible for the Confederacy to defeat a "tyrannical government". She wrote that "I will not have heart. How can I?" after learning that Richmond had been burned.<sup>53</sup> Her diaries have become an everlasting testimony to a teenage girl's understanding of how Norfolk became part of the Confederate States of America, and its struggle to reconcile its slaveholding beliefs with American liberty.

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<sup>53</sup> Chloe Whittle, "Journal," 4 April 1865.

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