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"As If I Were a Confederate Soldier": Mary Greenhow Lee and the Civil War She Waged in Winchester, Virginia

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"AS IF I WERE A CONFEDERATE SOLDIER:"
MARY GREENHOW LEE AND THE CIVIL WAR SHE WAGED
IN WINCHESTER, VIRGINIA

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of History
The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

by

Sheila Rae Phipps

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APPROVAL SHEET

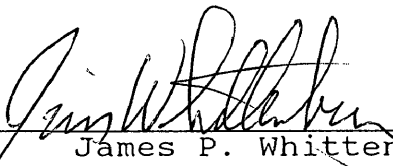
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Approved, March, 1996



James P. Whittenburg



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ABSTRACT

On March 11, 1862, when Union soldiers were just outside of Winchester, Virginia, preparing to take possession of the town, Mary Greenhow Lee felt the need to write her experiences down in a letter to a friend. That "letter" became a journal that described her life in Winchester during the remaining Civil War period. This study is an intensive examination of her journal to determine Mary Lee's identification as a Confederate national, and to explore the manifestation of southern gender ideology during wartime.

Mary Greenhow Lee's journal is tied together with several threads, but the most obvious ones are her intense hatred of "Yankees" and her fiercely independent spirit. Under close scrutiny, her journal also discloses that Mary Lee believed that the Confederate States of America was a sovereign, albeit new, nation.

War in Winchester gave Mary Lee a good field for exercising her Confederate spirit. Occupation of Winchester altered between southern and northern troops over sixty times during the war, creating uncertainty and excitement in Mary Lee's life. Additionally, Winchester was in, but not necessarily of, the Confederacy. Several Unionists resided there, provoking Mary Lee to pepper her journal with complaints about formerly friendly neighbors whom she now deemed traitors.

Building up a contraband store for her army, running an underground mail service, and working in the hospitals also left her little time to feel content. To accomplish much of this work, she needed freedom to move about and the courage to execute her subversive activities. She maintained her defiance by relying upon the gender ideology of her culture. In the process, she began to question the basis of this ideology. At no point, however, did she doubt the Cause for which she fought.

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MARY GREENHOW LEE AND THE CIVIL WAR SHE WAGED
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INTRODUCTION

I know not how a letter can be sent, or to whom to address it, as our Post Office is removed to Harrisonburgh, but I feel as if it would help to pass away these dreadful hours of suspense, to tell some sympathising friend the fluctuations of hope, fear & despair, during the last twenty-four hours.

Mary Greenhow Lee
Winchester, Virginia
March 11, 1862¹

Written by Mary Greenhow Lee, this short paragraph, beginning as a letter to someone as yet unnamed, became a journal encompassing the remaining American Civil War period within 900 pages of tightly-written script. For historians, it provides a view of society in war-torn Winchester, Virginia, as Mary Lee saw it from her porch, the streets, her pew in church; and as she greeted friends, treated the wounded, and scorned her enemies.

Historians such as George C. Rable have tapped this journal for insight into women's wartime experiences; and Winchester historians have made extensive use of it to create narratives of the many events that kept that small western Virginia town in turmoil throughout the Civil War. The purpose of this study, however, is to closely examine Mary Lee's journal for clues to the essence of the

¹Mary Greenhow Lee (Mrs. Hugh Holmes Lee), Diary, March 1862 to November 1865. Typescript, 111. Handley Library, Winchester, Virginia. The original of this journal is also located at Handley Library. [Hereafter MGL]

Confederate esprit that drove her as she waged her form of warfare on the Union forces in her midst.

Even those with only a mild interest in history would find Mary Lee's journal fascinating. She took on a remarkable responsibility during the war for her family, friends, neighbors, and her new nation. Her ability to keep track of troop movements throughout the war would impress military historians. Political historians would delight to find one of the unfranchised taking firm ideological stands on local, national, and international issues. Social historians might garner a great deal from this journal as well. Mary Lee's racism and elitism pour from her journal pages without apology, suggesting how deeply imbedded these attitudes were in southern society. Furthermore, she was a woman who took nineteenth-century feminine constraints for granted but also made them work to her advantage. In all, any historian studying the nineteenth century would find this journal a valuable resource.

When a rich and detailed journal like Mary Lee's is available, it is appropriate to sift her words finely for a clue to the dynamic effect of war on women, for one insightful woman's journal can be a psychological road map to her emotional and physical struggles throughout the war. As Laurel Thatcher Ulrich has shown using Martha Ballard's diaries, one woman's life and the ways she accommodated the

changes in it, can suggest a great deal about women in the past and their cultural underpinnings.² This study is also an intensive look at one woman's journal to answer questions historians are asking about the effect of the Civil War on southern women, the authenticity of Confederate nationalism, and the role gender ideology played in that war.

Mary Lee found nothing rational about war, and even mourned the deaths of her enemies. Although she put her heart and soul into waging her form of warfare, she could find no justification for war when she observed the losses. War surrounded her, however, and she took an active part in it.³

According to Drew Gilpin Faust, since men have controlled and fought wars, then war has been "an occasion for both reassertion and reconsideration of gender assumptions."⁴ Warfare gains legitimacy through national rhetoric, compelling citizens to take part. Young men grow up hearing war stories and understanding there is a certain virtue in being willing to die for a cause. Women are told

²Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *A Midwife's Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on Her Diary, 1785-1812*. New York: Vintage Books, 1991.

³MGL, 185 (7/26/1862).

⁴Drew Gilpin Faust, "Altars of Sacrifice: Confederate Women and the Narratives of War," in *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 76, No. 4 (March 1990), 1200-28, 1200.

war stories as well. As Faust suggests, women have been summoned to help on the home-front and have been "for centuries instructed and inspired...to accept and even champion the martial adventures of their men."⁵

The American Civil War is considered to be the first modern war because it involved the entire population, including a large percentage of assistance from women. For this reason, many women began recording their wartime experiences by writing journals or keeping diaries.⁶ Southern women who had the capacity and opportunity to lay claim to their wartime experiences through their written words were afforded a platform on which they could focus on the Cause and record their participation in it. In the process, they were also better able to judge how successful they were, assess how well they behaved in the situation, and adjust accordingly in the next.⁷ We should approach

⁵Drew Gilpin Faust, "Introduction: Macaria, a War Story for Confederate Women" in *Macaria: or, Altars of Sacrifice*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992), xiii-xxvi; xiii.

⁶*Ibid.*, xiv; Melissa Mentzer, "Rewriting Herself: Mary Chesnut's Narrative Strategies," in *Connecticut Review* 1992 14(1):49-56; 49.

⁷See Paul Rock, *The Making of Symbolic Interactionism* (Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield, 1979), 113-114. According to Rock, in the fast-paced world of war when change is the norm and routine the exception, "language... permits the emergence of a seeming continuity between events over time." It "not only checks the potential disintegration of experience," but "also fosters an apparent harmony between the selves of different settings," allowing diarists to enjoy a kind of "reflective experimentation," to test how they are adapting to new

these diaries from this perspective.

When Mary Lee began her journal, she was really beginning a letter to no one in particular to "pass away...dreadful hours of suspense" when she knew the Confederate troops were evacuating and Union troops were just outside of town. By the end of that first entry, however, she had decided that her "rambling account" would be for the benefit of Virginia ("Jeannie") Mason. The Masons had evacuated Winchester earlier, finally settling in Richmond for the duration of the war. During that time, Jeannie Mason's father, James, was the Confederate representative to England, attempting to persuade England to grant diplomatic recognition to the Confederate States of America.

Eventually, however, Mary Lee clearly appropriated the journal as a place to "talk over" the events of her day with her Self. Mary Lee did not make an entry in her journal for Friday, January 23, 1863. She reported the next night that "as I had nothing particular to say to myself in my journal, I skipped a day."⁸

In a sense, journals are a forum for writers to display their actions and/or feelings for reappraisal. On

experiences. See also Richard D. Logan, "Reflections on Changes in Self-Apprehension and Construction of the 'Other' in Western History," in *The Psychohistory Review* Vol. 19, No. 3 (Spring 1991), 295, 298.

⁸MGL, 301.

another level, a journal can be a stage for interaction where writers can reconstruct the scenes of important events between themselves and an "Other," the responses of which help to define a writer's definition of his or her "Self." If the reactions of a friend are positive, the writer will note a level of affirmation about his or her "Self." Likewise, if the recorded reactions of an enemy are negative, the writer's words will reflect some satisfaction as well. Whatever the case, a journal can be searched for clues about the writer's expectations, both of the "Self" and of the "Other" in each situation.⁹

To her journal, for example, Mary Lee continually reiterated that the "Yankees" had no control over her because she "never ask[ed] favors of them." Instead of asking, Mary Lee stated: "I *make* them do...for me."¹⁰ Certainly Union commanders were willing, within limits, to meet citizen's demands in order to keep life in town as normal as possible. The point is, however, that Mary Lee believed this about her "Self" and her belief was reinforced as she played the scenes over in her journal,

⁹Logan, 295, 298. In studies regarding the significance of autobiographies and journals in history, the "Other" is of major importance. A written account is a way of displaying a "Self" for appraisal. In other words, part of a person's identity comes from the presence of an "Other," through the interaction of the two. The gestures, words, and reactions of the "Other" become measurements of the "Me," or the person who is known.

¹⁰MGL, 7 (3/13/1862), 733 (12/7/1864), 730 (12/3/1864); 763 (1/13/1865), 697 (9/30/1864), emphasis added.

thus giving her the quality of control she aspired to, and confidence for her next confrontation.

Of course, one woman's Civil War journal cannot speak for all southern women. It does, however, give a good example of how women in Mrs. Lee's position viewed their communities, the enemy, and possibly themselves. Mary Greenhow Lee used the term "class" to describe various groups of people: those of less financial means, less education, and less prominent family connections; people from the North, or Union officers and soldiers. At times she even used it as a label for those she had entertained socially before the war, but who now embraced Unionist sympathies and were no longer members of her "class." In other words, Mary Lee rarely used "class" as a term for her own group, but more for those who were outside of the category to which she assigned herself.

Mary Lee's class, as historians strive to define the term, could be located in the middle to upper brackets of Winchester society. She was a white slaveowner who did not labor for her income but who enjoyed the benefits of investments and inheritance. She was born into a prominent Virginia family, provided with a broad range of advantages, including travel opportunities and a good education. Since the meaning of "class" can be ambiguous, therefore, the term "status" will be used when Mary Lee's position in society is important to this study, implying the social

position she occupied in her community based on the advantages mentioned above.¹¹

From Mary Lee's perspective, a foreign army invaded Winchester and placed in jeopardy the lives of her friends and family without valid reason. Instead of running a household and seeing to business, her daily life became dramatically complicated with the intrusion of wartime activities. Added to her schedule were the extra chores left to be done when her male slaves ran away; operating an underground mail service; obtaining, storing, and distributing contraband goods for the army; and supplying the hospitals and tending to wounded and sick soldiers. For Mary Lee, warfare included all of the practical work she undertook as well as the psychological campaigns she waged, refusing to acknowledge the authority Union occupiers had over her. She found energy for this warfare in an intense hatred for "Yankees" and a deep belief in Confederate independence. Her journal is tied together with these two threads especially, but also reflects her enthusiastic spirit of reform, a desire to affect her environment, especially one ravaged by war.

Mary Lee's narrative clearly shows that she considered

¹¹*Ibid.*, 519 (11/23/1863), 523 (11/29/1863), 614 (6/4/1864), 620 (6/15/1864), 733 (12/7/1864). See Fred Arthur Bailey, *Class and Tennessee's Confederate Generation* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1987) Chapter 2 "Broad Distinctions of Social Class," for a discussion of class structure in the South, as defined by the completed questionnaires of Civil War veterans.

herself a Confederate national, but she was also a woman who believed in the ideals of her society's gender roles. In fact, she made extensive use of them to wage war against the Union soldiers occupying her town. The war changed Mary Lee from a woman who depended upon the men around her to handle the public concerns of the day to one who found she could rely upon herself to take the actions necessary to protect her family and her town.

CHAPTER I

WINCHESTER, VIRGINIA: "VILLAGE ON THE FRONTIER"

*"Such have been the changes of one day on the border, roused by the welcome sound that 'the town is full of Confederates;' our hearts warmed by the sight of our men, [then] they are gone & the hated Yankees sneak through, looking so mean."*¹

To Mary Lee Winchester, Virginia, was a "village on the frontier," a border town, occupied by both armies at various times; in effect, an international arena.² At the same time, Winchester's citizens did not all share Mrs. Lee's Confederate sympathies. There were several people in town who either maintained their Union ties, or adopted them quickly under the threat of imprisonment.

The war brought changes to each woman's life in the South. For Mary Lee, and for her town, the only thing constant was change for over three years. By 1862, Winchester was no longer a community of like-minded

¹Mary Greenhow Lee (Mrs. Hugh Holmes Lee), Diary, March 1862, to November 1865. Typescript, The Handley Library, Winchester, Virginia, 544 (1/23/1864). [Hereafter MGL] The original of this journal is also located at Handley Library.

²*Ibid.*, 300-301 (1/23/63).

citizens, but a war zone. Mary Lee became transformed from a woman content to run her household and uphold her family's status in the town's social structure to a woman bent on helping to win the war. Even the criteria by which she identified members of her social group changed as she used her own status as a weapon against new enemies. What did not change for Mary Lee was her strong character and a willingness to help further the causes she believed in while living in a town that bore little resemblance to a community. In fact, her enthusiasm ultimately led General Philip Sheridan to banish Mary Lee and her family from Winchester in February 1865.³

Mary Charlton Greenhow was born on September 9, 1819, in Richmond, Virginia. Her father was Robert Greenhow, originally from Williamsburg, a civic leader in Richmond who occupied the office of mayor in 1813. Her mother, Mary Loraine Charlton, second daughter of Francis and Mary Charlton of Yorktown, became Robert's second wife in 1812 after his first wife, Mary Ann Wills, died in the Richmond Theater fire the year before.⁴

³*Ibid.*, 776, 789.

⁴Tyler Family Papers, Women of Virginia Project Records, Earl Gregg Swem Library, College of William & Mary; Robert Greenhow, Jr., Papers, Earl Gregg Swem Library, College of William & Mary; W. Asbury Christian, D.D., *Richmond: Her Past and Present*, (Spartanburg, South Carolina: The Reprint Company, 1973); Virginus Dabney, *Richmond: The Story of a City*, revised and expanded edition (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1990) 59-60.

Mary Lee's grandfather, merchant John Greenhow, an English settler, had been mayor of both Williamsburg and Richmond. Mary Lee's half-brother, Robert Greenhow, Jr., was a graduate of the College of William & Mary and of Columbia University where he received a medical degree. Robert, Jr., an official with the State Department, married Rose O'Neal of Port Tobacco, Maryland, in 1835. After her husband's death, Rose Greenhow became active in the Confederate cause. Known as "Rebel Rose," she was at one point confined by the United States government for her spy activities. Mary Greenhow spent much of her childhood with Robert and Rose in Washington, D. C., and continued a close relationship with Rose after Robert's death.⁵

When Hugh Holmes Lee, a Winchester lawyer, married Mary Greenhow in 1843, he acquired a wife with an educated, active, and intellectual mind. An attractive woman, Mary Lee's hair was dark brown and, although her eyes were deep set and her nose thin, the whole of her face was softened by a generous, upturned mouth. Her chin was not overly prominent but, when angered, could give a strong indication of her displeasure. Mary Lee's devotion to Hugh Lee is apparent from her journal. Although he had died a few years before the war began, Mrs. Lee was still wearing "deep mourning" in June 1864 and insisted she would

⁵Garland R. Quarles, *Occupied Winchester: 1861-1865* (Winchester, Va: Farmers & Merchants Bank, 1976), 14; MGL, 57 (4/8/1862), 12 (3/14/1862).

continue to do so.⁶

The Lees resided in a brown house on a corner lot in Winchester. A large house, it had two floors, an attic, a cellar, and porches facing both streets. The house was so close to the streets that one porch touched the sidewalk. It was from these porches that Mary Lee could see and be seen by both friend and foe, where she could wave her Confederate flag at retreating Union soldiers, or welcome her own army.⁷

Mary Lee's house was necessarily large. After Hugh's death in 1856, Mrs. Lee lived with two of her sisters-in-law, Laura Lee ("Lal L.") and Antoinette Lee ("Nettie"), and the children of a deceased sister-in-law. Although Mary Lee had no children of her own, she was devoted to the four children of Susan and Philip Burwell of Carters Grove: Laura ("Lal"), Louise ("Lute"), Lewis, and Robert ("Bob"). The nephews became Confederate soldiers and sources of both pride and anxiety to Mary Lee. Laura and Louise provided Mary Lee with extra hands in her wartime activity, but also an added sense of responsibility. Laura Lee, who wrote a journal of her own, abetted Mary Lee in feminine warfare;

⁶*Ibid.*, 614; Garland R. Quarles, *Some Worthy Lives: Mini-Biographies of Winchester, Virginia* (Stephens City, Va: Commercial Press, 1988) for the Winchester-Frederick County Historical Society, 142-143.

⁷Quarles, *Occupied*, 15; Garland R. Quarles, *The Story of One Hundred Old Homes in Winchester, Virginia* (Winchester, Va.: Farmers & Merchants Bank, 1967) 99.

Antoinette was often ill, causing Mary Lee deep concern.⁸

In addition to relatives, Mary Lee's household contained several slaves who lived in separate dwellings. At the beginning of her journal she owned two males slaves, Hugh and Evans, but lost both when they ran away during the first Union occupation of Winchester. She also owned at least four female slaves, a "reduced establishment," but one that helped keep her house in order while she went about her wartime activities.⁹

On May 27, 1862, Mary Lee recorded in her journal: "we were at the parlour windows, looking at them, & I know I was smiling & very jubilant; one of the soldiers...laughed, & called out to me, 'I am going home;' I told him, I was very glad to hear it." She was "jubilant" because the Union army was giving up their first hold on Winchester, retreating in advance of General Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson's army. Mary Lee did not realize that those same forces would be returning in just a few days, nor did she realize the many times she would be subjected to their presence. Before the war ended Winchester would change

⁸C. A. Porter Hopkins (ed.), "An Extract from the Journal of Mrs. Hugh H. Lee of Winchester, Va.," May 23-31, 1862, *Maryland Historical Magazine*, Vol. LIII., 1958: 386-393, 381-382; Laura Lee, "The History of Our Captivity," Diary, March 1862 to April 1865. Manuscript, Earl Gregg Swem Library, The College of William & Mary, Williamsburg, Virginia. Laura Lee was 36 years old when the war began. Her father was Daniel Lee. [Hereafter LL].

⁹MGL 23 (3/21/1862); LL, March 22, 1863.

hands at least 68 times, as many as four times in one day.¹⁰

Present-day Winchester is located approximately 25 miles from Maryland, and only ten miles from West Virginia. Its first white inhabitants probably arrived no earlier than 1732. At this time the area belonged to Lord Thomas Fairfax, heir and proprietor of the Northern Neck of Virginia.¹¹ Colonel James Wood is considered Winchester's founder, however. Born in Winchester, England, in 1707, young Wood ultimately settled in Virginia and earned his credentials as surveyor at William and Mary College in 1734. After surveying several tracts in the Shenandoah Valley, Wood finally settled down in the area that is now Winchester. The Virginia legislature established the town in 1752 after being presented with a survey by Wood for "twenty-six lots, of half an acre each, with streets for a town, by the name of Winchester," in Frederick County.¹²

Conflict came early to Winchester. The first residents were of varying origins: English, Scotch, German, Dutch, and Irish. These ethnic divisions ensured that life

¹⁰MGL, 110; Oren Frederic Morton, *The Story of Winchester in Virginia: The Oldest town in the Shenandoah Valley* (Strasburg, Va.: Shenandoah Publishing House, 1925), 148, 193.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 40, 29, 28.

¹²Samuel Kercheval, *A History of the Valley of Virginia*, 4th ed. (Strasburg, Va.: Shenandoah Publishing House, 1925), 175-176; Morton, 59-60, 47.

was not always peaceful in this frontier town. For instance, St. Patrick's Day incited ridicule from those not pleasantly disposed toward the Irish. St. Michael's Day, on the other hand, gave the Irish their chance for revenge, with "many a black eye, bloody nose, and broken head...the result."¹³

George Washington, as commander of Virginia forces charged with guarding the frontier during the Seven Years War, chose Winchester as his headquarters. During the War for Independence Winchester was again a military headquarters, this time as a prisoner-of-war camp for as many as 1600 British soldiers. Thus, by 1860, Winchester's population of 4400 citizens had a long history of strategic value.¹⁴

The actions of South Carolina in late 1860 were the subject of intense scrutiny from the people of Winchester, but were not a subject for applause. Strongly Unionist at the time, the citizens of Winchester sent as their delegates to the 1861 Virginia convention, Robert Y. Conrad and James Marshall--Union men--from which we might conclude Winchester had a notably "western Virginia" bias to remain in the Union.¹⁵ In fact, Conrad became the conservative

¹³Kercheval, 176.

¹⁴Morton, 65, 88-89, 145. Population figures include 655 freedmen and 708 slaves.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 146.

leader of the convention, working with moderates to effect a delay. They needed time for Lincoln to react favorably to their admonishments. In a resolution dated April 8, 1861, and hand-delivered to Lincoln, the Virginia delegates cautioned him that coercion of the seceded states would only cause further "disturbance of the public peace," and asked him to inform them of his intentions.¹⁶

The President graciously reminded them that he had previously outlined his policy on this matter and would not give up United States property no matter where it was located. By the time the delegates returned to the Virginia Convention with the President's reply, Lincoln had also announced his proclamation calling for 75,000 troops. On April 17 the Virginia Convention voted 88 to 55 for Virginia to follow the lower South out of the Union.¹⁷

Even as late as April 14, Conrad had been hoping the vote would go the other way. Winchester was both geographically and politically linked with the western counties that eventually formed the Union state of West Virginia. Conrad had been sent to the convention charged with those same sentiments. When the citizens of Winchester heard of the events at Fort Sumter, however,

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 147; Henry T. Shanks, *The Secession Movement in Virginia, 1847-1861*, (Richmond: Garrett and Massie, Inc., 1937), 160, 183, 189; Beverley B. Munford, *Virginia's Attitude Toward Slavery and Secession*, (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1910), 277.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 278-279; 281.

most, though not all, switched their positions, aligning themselves on the side of the South.¹⁸

Although Winchester continued to be the home of several Unionists, even Robert Conrad eventually shifted his allegiance to the Confederacy. Mary Lee reported with pleasure that Conrad had been seen walking on the street one day when he encountered a noted Unionist, Boyd Pendleton, who "offered to shake hands." Conrad "put his hands in his pockets," however, "and walked on." Ultimately, Conrad and Mrs. Lee renewed their friendship, sharing news of the war, even watching battles together from his housetop. Conrad's southern sympathies eventually landed him in trouble with Union commanders on several occasions, trouble that included imprisonment.¹⁹

Once again, Winchester was to become a strategic site during wartime. When General "Stonewall" Jackson was assigned to the Shenandoah Valley in November of 1861, he initially chose Winchester as his headquarters.²⁰ Ultimately, both armies realized the importance of the old town and strove to retain control of it, hence the many

¹⁸Shanks, 199; Morton, 147.

¹⁹MGL 12 (3/14/1862), 15 (3/16/1862), 544 (1/23/1864), 733 (12/7/1864), 747 (12/25/1864).

²⁰T. K. Cartmell, *Shenandoah Valley Pioneers and Their Descendants: a History of Frederick County, Virginia* (Berryville, Va.: Chesapeake Book Co., 1909), 322. T. K. Cartmell was Captain and Assistant Provost Marshal under General Jackson in 1862. In 1887 he took over as Clerk of the Court for Frederick County.

times the flag was changed over the courthouse. But, for the Federals, once they saw what Jackson's small army could do, the main value of holding this small, patriotic town, was its proximity to Washington and Baltimore.²¹ Jackson was too good, and Winchester too close, for comfort.

One advantage of Winchester was its accessibility. The Winchester and Potomac Railroad provided transport to Harper's Ferry. During the war the railroad was in service only when in Union hands, but it did give Winchester a strategic importance for both armies. Of additional importance were the nine macadamized highways running to, or near, the town. These roads had developed because of the town's participation in earlier expansion. During the upsurge in westward migration after the Revolution, Winchester was a supply point for many western migrants. The town also became an important commercial nexus for shopkeepers and peddlers supplying the backcountry, and as a regional market for local farmers. This was an added benefit to military possession of the town during the Civil War: the "well peopled and productive" countryside that "suppl[ied] great quantities of provisions and forage" to the armies.²² Thus, this southern town became the site of

²¹Morton, 147, 148.

²²*Ibid.*, 30, 147, 148; Warren R. Hofstra, "Land, Ethnicity, and Community at the Opequon Settlement, Virginia, 1730-1800," in *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, 98, (1990): 423-448, 444.

border warfare, with change a constant through much of the war.

The patriotism of Winchester was both a boon and a bane throughout the war, depending upon who held the town. When Jackson first set up his headquarters in the Taylor Hotel in November of 1861, he found a town of mostly "patriotic women and loyal old men."²³ Unfortunately for Federal troops, this is what they found as well when they took possession the next Spring.

On February 27, 1862, General Nathaniel P. Banks, commander of the Union district that encompassed the Shenandoah Valley, crossed the Potomac at Harper's Ferry via a pontoon bridge and placed his 38,000 troops on the south side of the river, within reach of Winchester. Lincoln wanted the town.²⁴

Jackson had 4600 men at his disposal and knew he was no match for Banks, but his objective was not to attack and destroy. He wanted to make himself felt. Union General G. B. McClellan was camped with 200,000 troops near Washington, waiting for Spring when he could move on Confederate General Joseph E. Johnston's troops at Centreville. Jackson's mission was to cause enough alarm in Washington to stop McClellan from moving away from the

²³Cartmell, 322.

²⁴*Ibid.*, 328; Col. G. F. R. Henderson, C. B., *Stonewall Jackson and the American Civil War*, (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1949), 164.

capital. Furthermore, considering his relatively small number of forces, Jackson needed to avoid a confrontation.²⁵

To accomplish this, Jackson had to evacuate Winchester and place himself in a more defensive position. Banks's cavalry was just outside of town and the citizens knew it. They had become accustomed to the security of Jackson's army. Learning that Jackson was leaving while the enemy was just outside of town made them aware of their vulnerability to war. Additionally, the majority of Jackson's army consisted of Valley men. When the army left, so did fathers, husbands, brothers, and sons.²⁶

Jackson's army marched out of Winchester on March 11, 1862. Banks entered on March 12. "All is over and we are prisoners in our own houses," wrote Mary Lee on March 12th.²⁷

Of course, historians have come close to portraying nineteenth century women of Mrs. Lee's status as at least assigned to, if not prisoners in, their own houses. When historians began to take women's contributions to history seriously in the 1970s, they looked for frameworks that would aid in the task. The impressions of a French visitor to the United States in 1830 gave them the tool they were

²⁵Cartmell, 328; Henderson, 164-167.

²⁶Cartmell, 328.

²⁷MGL, 4, 5 (3/12/1862).

looking for to write nineteenth century women's history. Alexis de Tocqueville observed that married women in America tended to be assigned to boundaries that focused on the family, rather than the public world of economics. This private sphere referred mostly to women's place outside positions of authority, not as a notion of women being sequestered within the home. Tocqueville termed it "women's sphere" and historians have used that metaphor against which to measure women of the era.²⁸

Mary Lee was no prisoner in her home. She was continually going out "on the street to attend to some business." There was a period when she seemed to be going through a mild depression and, at that point, her lethargy made the act of leaving the house a chore. After making herself get up and go to church one Sunday, she found that the service had been canceled. She "was mad at having gone out unnecessarily, as" she had one of her "spells of apathy" that made "every exertion of mind or body... painful." But this was only a temporary condition because she was soon once again moving about in the public sphere, attending to business, and not necessarily the work needed to maintain her home. Some of her business "on the street" was subversive. "How strange it seems," she wrote, "for

²⁸Linda Kerber, "Separate spheres, Female Worlds: The Rhetoric of Women's History," in *The Journal of American History*, June 1988, 9.

ladies to go out by themselves at night, to find out the movements of their enemies....I have forgotten the sensation of fear."²⁹

If antebellum women thought of themselves as restrained within gendered boundaries, war--at least in Winchester--broke those bounds. As Mary Lee noted early in the war, she was surprised to find "timid, retiring women...who have kept off the Yankees, defended their property, & when depredations were committed have gone alone (for there are no men to go about with the women now) to" the Union commanders in town "for redress. They get none," she wrote, "but still it is not because they do not boldly maintain & claim their rights."³⁰

A normal day in a war zone can include intrigue, danger, military news, and the horrible sights of human mutilation. Midway through the war, Mrs. Lee "received an invitation, that, in former times, would sound strangely; 'Will Mrs. Lee go to Mrs. Brown's house-top, to see the bombardment.'" Mrs. Lee accepted the invitation and recorded the battle as seen from her vantage point, calling it "a magnificent sight," describing the "red glare & deep

²⁹MGL 60 (4/11/1862), 150 (6/20/1862), 164 (7/5/1862), 188 (7/29/1862), 60 (4/11/1862), 569-570 (3/16-17/1863), 602 (5/17/1864).

³⁰*Ibid.*, 54 (4/6/1862).

sound of the heavy siege guns" and the "shrill & rattling whish-shs-shs-shs of shells passing by."³¹

Thus did Mary Lee describe the Second Battle of Winchester in June of 1863. The First occurred at the end of the first Federal occupation of the town, in May of 1862. Between times, Mary Lee had seen much of what war was all about and had taken to referring to Winchester as "a village on the frontier," a valid description. Winchester's position and importance to the two armies kept it in turmoil throughout the war and placed it in a position much like the "frontiers" of Europe, the border between two nations. When the town was in Union hands, Mary Lee complained that she was in "Yankeedom," completely "cut off from all communication with both North & South." From Mary Lee's perspective, she was involved in an international conflict. All of the "energy & enthusiasm" she put into her warfare came from her love of "country," her "beloved southern Confederacy," suggesting that the war raging around her was no mere domestic dispute, but a foreign invasion of her homeland.³² The work she did to help repel this encroachment did indeed take a great deal of "energy & enthusiasm."

³¹*Ibid.*, 410 (6/14/1863).

³²*Ibid.*, 300-301 (1/23/1863), 49 (4/4/1862), 130 (6/4/1862), 814 (4/15/1865).

One of Mary Lee's goals was to build up a store of contraband goods with which to supply her army. For this she made use of what resources she could spare, all of which were sometimes stretched to their limits in her "frontier" environment. Even when Mary Lee had the finances and could find the necessary items, her competency level was tested. For one thing, the values of the various currencies she held fluctuated to such an extent that there were some merchants who eventually accepted only gold. At first, it seemed disloyal to use U. S. currency, until it became apparent that "Greenbacks" were the least likely to lose their value. But which money she used depended upon whom Mary Lee was purchasing from and what she bought. "Went out this evening," she informed her journal, and "amused myself playing the broker; I bought Va. money with Yankee, & Confederate money with Va.," and finally "invested \$25.00 Va. money in candles."³³

She then had to find ways to transport her larger purchases. Begging, borrowing, and demanding netted her

³³*Ibid.*, 452 (8/4/1863), 614 (6/4/1864), 620 (6/15/1864), 476 (8/30/1863), 519 (11/23/1863), 559 (2/19/1864); Cornelia A. McDonald, *Diary With Reminiscences of the War*, annotated by Hunter McDonald, (Nashville: Cellom & Glerter Co., 1934), 63. Mrs. McDonald was born in Alexandria, Virginia, on June 14, 1822, to Dr. and Mrs. Humphrey Peake. She was 39 years old when the war began, and was married to Col. Angus W. McDonald who served under General Jackson and died soon after the war was over. Mrs. McDonald left Winchester before the end of the war, and ultimately made her home in Louisville, Kentucky. She died in 1909 and was buried in Richmond.

everything from an ambulance, to a spring wagon, to a rail truck in order to move her supplies. At one point, the genteel Mrs. Lee even found herself in "the bar room at Stottlemeyer" where she finally secured a buggy.³⁴

At times her concerns might seem trifling as when she complained that "to get a paper of pins requires as much diplomacy as to manage affairs of state," but Mary Lee understood affairs of state more fully than most people do today.³⁵ Over a third of Mary Lee's journal contains world and national news. Although Mary Lee did not believe she could affect Confederate diplomatic negotiations with England and France, or direct troop movements throughout the South, or decide congressional debates over how to run the war while building a new nation, she had strong opinions on these issues. Neither geography nor gender kept Mary Lee from being interested, becoming informed, or forming opinions. As for military news closer to home, she listened, evaluated, then reported it to her generals.

Mary Lee was informed because she lived and breathed news of the war. If she could not obtain southern papers, she read northern ones. She also sifted through the "flying rumours" constantly coming her way to ascertain the true military positions of both armies. She counted a day

³⁴MGL, 654 (7/28/1864), 262 (11/25/1862), 522 (11/27/1863), 537 (1/3/1864).

³⁵*Ibid.*, 482 (9/21/1863).

lost when there was "no army news." When she could not read newspapers, Mary Lee "read" the events surrounding her, using her intuition and recent experiences to inform her. When northern papers were available, she only half believed them. When they were suppressed, she found hope. Keeping track of how long it had been since a northern paper had been available, Mary Lee suspected "there was something in them they did not wish us, or their army, to know."³⁶

Mary Lee also studied the faces of incoming Union soldiers for any signs of "exultation." If they "looked puzzled & harassed," she counted it good news for her own army. The enemy's activities in town were of immense interest to her as well. One day she noticed that her "street was thronged with wagons, with the horse's heads to the Depot, & those wagons were heavily laden...as if they were meditating a retreat." And just before the Union's first occupation of Winchester ended, Mary Lee noted that "the Hospitals were cleared to-day, of all who could be moved. They are preparing for a battle, or an evacuation. I believe the latter." She was right.³⁷

Throughout Mary Lee's journal a pattern emerges. When there was no army in town, Mary Lee was in a state of

³⁶*Ibid.*, 146 (6/15/1862), 534 (12/26/1863), 19 (3/18/1862), 71 (4/19/1862).

³⁷*Ibid.*, 32 (3/25/1862), 57 (4/8/1862), 109 (5/23/1862).

anxiety and/or depression. When Confederates held the town, she came alive as a southern woman, entertaining and socializing. But when the Union occupiers were in charge of Winchester, her personality became charged with patriotism, led by her Confederate self. Mary Lee was not one woman. She was several, as much in turmoil within as she was surrounded by it. The conflict, at times, seemed to fatigue her senses.

During one of her periods of depression, "weary & worn out," she informed her journal that her low energy level came from having the opposition gone. "When the Yankees were here," she writes, "their outrages roused such a feeling of resistance that I was nerved for anything." In between occupations, however, uncertainty drained Mary Lee's reserves of energy. She became almost cynical about the changing military character of her town. "Who will we belong to to-morrow," she would ask absentmindedly. Or she would be merely "curious to see which party" would "take possession" the next morning. She even reached a point where she was little concerned to see which army had possession because she knew it would be only temporary. One morning she awoke to the "clanking of sabres & dash of Cavalry," but had become so inured to the unpleasantness of war that she "did not get up to see whether" Confederate or

Federal soldiers were making the noise. Instead, she went back to sleep.³⁸

Winchester was a border town not only because of geography, but also sentiment. While opposing armies stayed busy reclaiming the town, the residents themselves remained divided over the secession issue. The Confederacy had not infiltrated the town completely. Mrs. Lee fought enemies from without and within, enemies who were also her neighbors: the Unionists.

At first she was optimistic that the authoritarian actions of the invading army would make "more Secessionists than Union people" in Winchester, determining that the few who still maintained their stand against rebellion would change their minds once they came face-to-face with the enemy. But when the occupying Provost Marshall was ordered to require all citizens to take an oath of allegiance or be banished or imprisoned, several Winchester residents found their new patriotism fading. There were others who remained loyal to the Union from the first. But those who wavered and caved in to the threat Mary Lee dubbed, "cowardly wretches." Much later, when Unionists in the town began singling Mary Lee out and working against her,

³⁸*Ibid.*, 472-473 (9/8/1863), 444 (7/26/1863), 454 (8/8/1863), 206 (8/19/1862).

she termed them "Union fiend[s]" who were "worse than the Yankees."³⁹

One Winchester Unionist's diary that has survived was written by Julia Chase, originally from Maine, whose ailing father, Charles S. Chase, was put under guard for a time by the Confederate army. Julia Chase's impressions of the Secessionists in Winchester sheds light on the tensions in this border town, especially between the women. She commented that the Secessionist women "have all adopted sun bonnets,...some with long curtains called Jeff Davis bonnets. They put on many airs and frowns and sneers, and try in every way to put down the Union people. They are certainly bold and impudent."⁴⁰

Julia Chase's diary also tracks troop movements, but is almost a mirror image of Mrs. Lee's journal. "Our troops" have to be defined as "Union" when coming from Miss Chase; and her "Glorious News!" was reported as "too terrible" by Mrs. Lee.⁴¹ And, of course, God got different sets of instructions from each.

³⁹*Ibid.*, 18 (3/17/1862), 21 (3/20/1862), 77 (4/24/1862), 82 (4/28/1862), 87 (5/2/1862), 669 (8/20/1864).

⁴⁰Julia Chase's entry for May 16, 1862, page 40 of her diary, is quoted in Quarles, *Occupied*, 40.

⁴¹MGL, 3 (3/11/1862); Julia Chase's entry for March 12, 1862, on page 34 of her diary, is quoted in Quarles, *Occupied*, 40.

More telling perhaps is that the "Yankee flag" that upset Mary Lee was, to Julia Chase, a relief. "The glorious old flag is waving over our town," she reported on the day of Winchester's first occupation by Federal troops.⁴² Winchester was "our town" to both of these women, but war had changed the meaning of "our" from community to contention. The character of this border town took on all the tensions and conflict, among both citizens and soldiers, of the whole war, though on a smaller scale.

War, at least for Mary Lee, changed the criteria she used to determine her circle of friends as well. Early on she was delighted to report that "even...the lower classes & servants" held "little Union feeling," suggesting that her own social circle would be more inclined to recognize the impropriety of such sentiments. Her status as a member of one of the First Families of Virginia (an F.F.V.), a middle-class white woman who had had all the privileges of a comfortable, politically powerful family and an extensive education, had been her way of locating her position within her town. But later, whether or not war had dissolved these class lines, she found she enjoyed the company of those she would never have given time to before. Mary Lee found one woman in particular, Mrs. Sperry, an "uneducated

⁴²MGL, 5 (3/12/1862); Julia Chase's entry for March 11, 1862, on page 34 of her diary, is quoted in Quarles, *Occupied*, 40.

woman," to be "very smart...& very entertaining."⁴³ Mrs. Lee began choosing her friends by their Confederate sympathies more than on background, wealth, or social position.

As the war ground on, money had less to do with social position for Mary Lee than it might have before. She had spent so much on her contraband supply that she had almost no money left, "endur[ing] any privation to become a beggar" for the Cause. She even admitted to having stolen "some delicious little ginger cakes" while visiting a friend to take home as a treat for her nieces, hardly an action of an F.F.V. lady. The old measurements of class fell away and a new one took over, at least for Mary Lee. Now national sentiment and patriotism drove her away from old friends and propelled her toward new ones.⁴⁴

Although the war surrounding her had moved her into friendships with Confederate women of poorer, less-connected circles, she refused to extend her social self to those of her own status in the enemy camp. As a Lady of an "F.F.V.," Mary Lee understood that she had something the Union army could never take from her. Union officers had threatened to take over her house. At one point a "6" was chalked onto her gate, telling her what position her house

⁴³MGL, 18 (3/17/1862), 614 (6/4/1864).

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 814 (4/16/1865), 559 (2/19/1864), 100 (5/15/1862), 783 (2/14/1865).

held in the schedule to be burned. The occupying army also threatened to take her fences and outbuildings. But what they could not forcibly requisition from Mary Lee was her acceptance of them into polite society, even those officer who "under other circumstances" she would have entertained in all "civility."⁴⁵

Mary Lee kept watching for news that "the tardy dame across the waters" had granted formal recognition of the Confederate States of America. She wanted more than anything for England to give a diplomatic nod to her new nation. On the other hand, Mrs. Lee tenaciously refused recognition to northern officers into "the society of Southern women," something she was convinced "they would prize so highly."⁴⁶ For one thing, this was a way Mary Lee could chastise these men for their disruption in her life. But she also saw it as a way to play both her patriotic and female roles. Mary Lee believed that withholding her acceptance of the Union officers into her company was one of her most powerful weapons against them.

In fact, this particular "military" action might have been the main reason for Mrs. Lee's banishment. She learned later that "Sheridan was very unwilling to send"

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 18 (3/17/1862), 329-39 (3/16/1863), 37 (3/26/1862), 715 (11/1/1864), 746 (12/23/1864), 152 (6/22/1862), 164 (7/5/1862).

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 259 (11/17/1862), 99 (5/14/1862), 108 (5/21/1862), 170 (7/11/1862), 811 (4/7/1865), 715 (11/1/1864).

her "out but...was persecuted into it by his staff because" the Lee women had held themselves "aloof & treated them with scorn & contempt."⁴⁷ Mrs. Lee had used her status as an effective weapon against the enemy. It might have been her undoing.

Mary Lee's enthusiastic warfare could be seen, too, as a continuation of the reform spirit that had gained momentum before the war. Antebellum women, during the changes brought on by the Industrial Revolution, began forming religious organizations and reform groups, not just from religious zeal, but out of a need to adapt to changes in the nation. Faced with the threats of disruption, especially in the North where industrial capitalism intruded so forcefully, women looked to God and sponsored missionaries to come into their areas to restring the web of community. Associations followed, women's charitable societies that bridged the gender gap in public life by allowing women a taste of authority through office status within their groups.⁴⁸

Although historians had believed that the plantation economy of the South hindered the growth of benevolent organizations there, more recent research has refuted this

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, 813 (4/14/1865).

⁴⁸Nancy F. Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: Women's Sphere in New England, 1780-1835* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977) 138; Suzanne Lebsock, *Virginia Women, 1600-1945: "A Share of Honour,"* (Richmond: Virginia State Library, 1987) 65.

earlier assumption. In Virginia women began forming organizations, not so much to correct the corruption brought on by capitalism, but to take up where communities and churches had left off around the turn of the century. According to Suzanne Lebsock in her survey of Virginia women, "local governments in the nineteenth century became tightfisted," and the poor "could not rely on any form of governmental assistance." Economic depressions during the first part of the century increased the need for someone to help. Women filled that need. "For innovation, dedication, and persistence in the field of social welfare," argues Lebsock, "women were definitely in the vanguard."⁴⁹

In her study of Petersburg, Virginia, Lebsock found that women, although almost excluded from the economic sphere "created a public world of their own," writing constitutions for their benevolent organizations, electing officers, and raising money. "By mid-century they were expanding the boundaries of their public world," not as a "rejection of women's sphere," but as "an attempt to give institutional form and public importance to its most

⁴⁹Drew Gilpin Faust, "The Peculiar South Revisited: White Society, Culture, and Politics in the Antebellum Period, 1800-1860," in *Interpreting Southern History: Historiographical Essays in Honor of Sanford W. Higginbotham*, ed. by John B. Boles and Evelyn Thomas Nolen (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987), 454-509: 92; Lebsock, *Virginia*, 61.

positive features," a nurturing and selfless concern for others.⁵⁰

Mary Lee's war work took on a nurturing character, feeding her soldiers when they were in town and nursing the wounded, not unlike the extension of women's work found in antebellum associations. It is not certain that Mary Lee was involved in reform organizations before the war, but she was active in several such associations at the beginning of the conflict, the County Society and the Harmon Society, to name two. After the war, when she finally settled in Baltimore, she was instrumental in forming that chapter of the Daughters of the Confederacy, and served as Secretary for the Southern Education Association, organized to help rebuild schools in the South.⁵¹

If Mary Lee's work for the war effort was on the same level as women's extensions into reform before the war, then this might be an explanation for her enthusiasm. Changes in her society required her attention. Whatever the needs of her community, Mary Lee sought solutions, within her particular place, and with her individual skills and character. Winchester was Mary Lee's place, and strength and intelligence were her skills. The turmoil in

⁵⁰*Ibid*, 70; Suzanne Lebsock, *The Free Women of Petersburg: Status and Culture in a Southern Town, 1784-1860* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1984) 211.

⁵¹MGL 47 (4/1/1862); Hopkins, 380.

Winchester affected Mary Lee's personal life, but not her personality. She put herself wholeheartedly into reforming this "village on the frontier."

CHAPTER II

132 NORTH CAMERON STREET: "SECESH LIVES HERE"

Ashby's cavalry left town about 8 o'clock this morning....For about an hour, a death-like stillness pervaded the town, & then music and some cheering announced their approach; the Yankees came in on different streets, more quietly than I had anticipated;...they are ashamed to make violent demonstrations, when sneaking into a town they had been afraid to fight for....Several companies have passed...but, I am glad to say, the doors & windows are all closed & they look quite depressed.

Mary Greenhow Lee
Winchester, Virginia
March 12, 1862¹

When General Nathaniel Banks entered Winchester on March 12, 1862, staking the Union's first claim on the town, Mary Lee noted with sorrow that "the Yankee flag [was] waving over the Court House & Hotel."²

Less than a year before, the "Yankee" flag flying above the Frederick County Courthouse in Winchester had been the symbol of her nation to Mary Lee. Her national identity, however, had changed in the span of months. Now a citizen of the Confederate States of America, the Union flag symbolized foreign invasion and occupation for her.

¹Mary Greenhow Lee, 4 (3/12/1862). [Hereafter MGL]

²*Ibid.* 4, 5 (3/12/1862).

Mary Lee's identity as a southern woman had been merged with the identity of a Confederate national, specifically a "Secesh," the name Union soldiers gave to the Secessionists. This extension to her personality was born at the onset of war, grew during the first Union occupation, and matured as she waged her own style of warfare throughout the war. The core of her identity, her southernness, gave her reference points by which to judge the rightness of her actions. The war exercised that southern spirit. Her journal helped her make sense of the changes in her life.³

Whether or not Confederate nationalism was present at the time of secession, there was at least a nationalistic impulse present in the Lee home on North Cameron Street in Winchester, Virginia. Mary Lee's Confederate identity was not new at war's end, when she was associated with all the other Secessionists in defeat. It was born at the beginning, when President Abraham Lincoln denied the South's right to secede. More important to this study, her journal also provided Mary Lee with a mirror in which she could watch her nationalism mature.

On May 4, 1862, with less than a month of Union occupation behind her, Mary Lee wrote in her journal: "I

³See Philip Gleason, "Identifying Identity: A Semantic History," in *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 69, No. 4 (Mar 1983), 911, 914; and Erik H. Erikson, "Ego Development and Historical Change," in *Psychoanalytic Study of the Child*, Vol. 2 (1946), 393; Gleason, 918.

never felt more confident, of the final & speedy success of the cause, than now, though we are passing through our dark days." On April 16, 1865, even after Mary Lee knew of General Lee's surrender at Appomattox, she recorded: "I do not despair even yet [and] I shall not give up till terms of peace have been accepted by the whole Confederacy." Her identity as a Confederate had not altered, unless possibly strengthened. This is not to say she had been free of external pressures. In fact, the conditions of her life, such as never knowing which army would control her town the next morning, made routine the unexpected and change the norm.⁴

Mary Lee was able to survive the emotional trauma that upheaval can initiate by consistently reaffirming her identity in her journal, yet denying her enemies theirs. Early on Mary Lee reported gleefully that "regiment after regiment [of the Union forces] pass every day *but not a face do they see*, at our house or our whole square. They gaze at the windows as they pass, while we, unseen, enjoy their mortification." This was during an occupation phase. During one of the many Union retreats, however, she reported, "we went to watch the faces of the Yankees when driven through town. I came back to our own porch and pavement *where I could be seen there*."⁵

⁴MGL 89 (4/4/1862), 815 (4/16/1865), 544 (1/1864).

⁵*Ibid.* 18 (3/1862), 652 (7/24/1864). Emphasis added.

Although Mary Lee may not have been conscious of it, she knew intuitively that reactions of the "others," her enemy, were important to her analysis of the war that she was waging against them. She also knew that depriving them of *her* reactions would deny her enemies of *their* identity: a conquering army. She refused to participate, especially when she felt that her acknowledgement would benefit the enemy.

By April Mary Lee had formed a structure for her journal. It was to be "one of events, not of feelings." After September 4, 1862, when she sent her first installment to her friend, Mary Lee continued to keep her journal, no longer sure she would send it out but writing from "habit."⁶ By March 1, 1864, after sending off the third installment of the journal, Mary Lee had realized the importance of it in her own life. "What I shall write now is merely for myself." By the end of the fourth division of the journal, it had become "a companion."⁷ It had also, quite probably, become a mirror and her way of maintaining the most important part of her identity: a "Secesh" woman of Winchester.

On March 17, 1862, five days into Winchester's first Union occupation, northern peddlers came to Mrs. Lee's door to sell her "their cheap goods...which I was too patriotic

⁶*Ibid.*, 73 (4/20/1862), 224 (9/4/1862).

⁷*Ibid.*, 564.

to buy." As they left her door, she heard one of them say, "Secesh lives here."⁸ Mary Lee embraced that notion. To be identified as "Secesh" became her goal for the remainder of the war.

Being a Secesh became a thread of continuity for Mary Lee. Psychologists advise those who are undergoing a series of ruptures in their lives to keep a journal. One goal of a journal is to create a narrative that links change to something familiar. The account can then connect the events of chaos to the core of the identity, producing some semblance of order by maintaining the one constant a person can cling to: the Self. Additionally, the more extensive our vocabulary, especially the more skilled we are in variation and grammar usage, the easier it is for us to personify the Self we want to portray in difficult situations.⁹

Clearly Mary Lee's education had been extensive. She peppered her journal with French phrases and had definite opinions on everything from politics to society. To pass the time, she and her family read to each other from classics such as *King Lear*, which they read by assuming the various characters, and from current works such as *Les*

⁸*Ibid.*, 17.

⁹See Nelson N. Foote, "Identification as the Basis for a Theory of Motivation, in *American Sociological Review* Vol. 16 (Feb 1951) 15-21: 15-16, 18.

Miserables, which Mrs. Lee deemed "a stupid book."¹⁰ It is not surprising then that Mary Lee was equipped to use her journal as a canvas for portraying her "Self" as a Secesh, especially as she perceived "others," her enemies, were viewing her.

While Mary Lee cited Confederate leaders and soldiers as "God-fearing," "God-trusting," and "noble," she always referred to Union soldiers as "Yankees." She would at times strip them of manliness, at least in her view, by calling them "dandies." They were "vile wretches" to her, merely "creatures," the "vilest race under the sun." Laura Lee used similar types of metaphor in her descriptions of Union troops. The soldiers had taken over one of the houses in town as both a barracks and a stable. In describing the arrangement she wrote, "the horses... quartered on the first floor, the other brutes above." Mary Lee's observations of officers were just as harsh. Major Generals Philip Sheridan and George Custer were both "common looking vulgarrians" in Mary Lee's opinion.¹¹

Mrs. Lee gives clues to why she thought of these men in such terms. During the first occupation of Winchester she quickly developed an attitude by which she could exist within a society where the rules had suddenly changed. A

¹⁰MGL, 301 (1/1863), 587 (5/1864).

¹¹*Ibid.*, 564 (3/1863), 11 (3/1862), 10 (3/1862), 654 (7/1864), 54 (4/1862), 747 (12/25/1864), 754 (1/2/1865), 765 (1/17/1865); Laura Lee, April 19, 1862. [Hereafter LL]

slaveowner and notable member of Winchester society, Mary Lee was not accustomed to feelings of insecurity and oppression. Her world had turned upside down and she felt herself subject to the whims of people who neither recognized her nation nor her own place in it. By labelling the invaders in terms which questioned not only their authority but their very humanity, she was using a defensive mechanism to protect herself from the shifting of social place she sensed around her. "I cannot get up a feeling of fear for the Yankees; I have such a thorough contempt for them that I do not realize they are human beings & I feel able to protect myself from them."¹²

On the other hand, epithets coming at her from the other side merely reinforced her goal to create and maintain an identity of opposition. She referred to herself as a "rebel," "Confederate," "Secessionist," and "true Southerner." She also informed her opposition openly that she "was their enemy." When Union General Nathaniel P. Banks "demurred" at the right of the Winchester women to carry the title "ladies," Mary Lee did not blanch.¹³ As long as she was making life difficult for the "Yankees," she was furthering the Confederate cause.

Mary Lee was always conscious of how she appeared to her enemies, jotting down their reactions to her. It was

¹²MGL, 30 (3/25/1862).

¹³*Ibid.*, 290 (1/4/1863), 62 (4/1862).

a way of checking her role, the expectations she had of her "Self," and her impact on the "Other." When individuals find themselves in new situations, they first have to look for familiar reference points from which to proceed. They then draw from their repertoire the one role they deem most appropriate for the situation. In other words, the more convinced a person is of the role that he or she should play in an unfamiliar scene, the more confidence they will feel.¹⁴

Of course, Mary Lee was aware that Secesh was not the only identity that gave her a sense of control. To face the enemy, Mary Lee relied upon her more familiar roles as a white woman, daughter of a prominent Virginia family, widow of a respected member of Winchester society, and combined them with her new role as a proud Secesh. But it took both Confederates and Federals in her environment to help Mary Lee create her Confederate "Self." Writing in her journal provided her with briefing and debriefing periods to plan her behavior, assess its results, and measure her status in the group by the reactions of the opposition. Then her perceived success rate gave her confidence for the next series of encounters.¹⁵

In Mary Lee's view, there must have been something lacking in northern citizens that would cause them to

¹⁴Foote, 15-16, 18.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 17-19, 20.

disregard a state's right to join with another government. Only the unenlightened and uncivilized would pursue the horrors of war in an attempt to prohibit a just separation. The South had history on its side for this argument, a history that the North should have remembered. Southerners explained their movement toward secession, according to Drew Gilpin Faust, in terms of "a continuation of the struggle of 1776." Their model of a "nationalist movement...paradoxically yet logically...[was] the American War of Independence."¹⁶ They were not departing from their historical beliefs but ensuring they would not lose them.

In January of 1861 an article appeared in *DeBow's Review*, an agrarian and sectional journal of the South, which argued that the United States had been from the beginning two distinct sections, artificially yoked by a constitution that deprived the South of two-thirds of her representation, her pride, and her spirit. "Loss of independence," according to the article, and "extinction of nationality" would be far worse than civil war.¹⁷

On August 21, 1863, Mrs. Lee observed the day of fasting and prayer as it was so appointed by her "President," Jefferson Davis. She wrote: "I have gloried,

¹⁶Drew Gilpin Faust, *The Creation of Confederate Nationalism: Ideology and Identity in the Civil War South*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), 14, 21.

¹⁷*DeBow's Review*, "National Characteristics: The Issue of the Day," XXX (January 1861) 42-53: 45, 43, 46, 52.

even in my sufferings...from enthusiastic devotion to my beloved country, struggling against tyranny and oppression."¹⁸

Eric Hobsbawm argues that an *a priori* approach to nationalism is more productive than listing what "a nation" is, insisting that the ideal of "a nation" can precede classic commonalities normally ascribed to them (ie., geography, language, history, race, or a combination). According to Hobsbawm, the "nation" is a "historically novel construct," based on the assumption that loyalty to one "nation" replaces all other loyalties.¹⁹

Hobsbawm notes that the transformation into a nation "appeal[s] to a variety of means of asserting or symbolising group membership and solidarity in the most emotionally charged personal sense." Nations are not invented but evolve naturally "out of pre-existing historical materials." In order to fix a central loyalty, however, a new nation must eliminate other centers and fill the void with "symbols of patriotism;" give the new citizen a sense of obligation, such as military service; and "emphasise those things which distinguish their citizens

¹⁸MGL, 462.

¹⁹Eric Hobsbawm, "Some Reflections on Nationalism," in *Imagination and Precision in the Social Sciences: Essays in Memory of Peter Nettl*, ed. T. J. Nossiter, A. H. Hanson, and Stein Rokkan, 384-397, (London: Faber & Faber Ltd., 1972), 386, 388.

from other states."²⁰

When southerners watched the "Stars and Stripes" lowered for what they believed to be the last time, many were subdued and somber. That flag had signified their history, their traditions, and their national pride. It is not surprising then that in a contest to create the Confederate flag, hundreds of citizens entered designs very similar to "Old Glory."²¹

Unfortunately, the design officially chosen, the "Stars and Bars," was not distinctive enough from the Union flag to readily be recognized in battle. A battle flag was quickly designed and is now known as the "Rebel Battle Flag" or "Southern Cross," a red, square field with a blue saltier (cross) containing thirteen stars. Never officially adopted by the Confederacy, it was, however, the flag under which southern troops most widely fought. With the two extra stars, the flag reflected the optimism for, but not reality of, Missouri and Kentucky joining the other rebellious states. Testimony to the success of the "unofficial" battle flag of the Confederacy is given in the fact that it is still used as a regional symbol in the

²⁰*Ibid.*, 389, 392, 393.

²¹Boleslaw D'Otrange Mastai and Marie-Louise D'Otrange Mastai, *The Stars and the Stripes: The American Flag as Art and as History from the Birth of the Republic to the Present*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1973), 124; Faust, *Creation*, 8; D'Otrange Mastai, 130.

South.²²

Mary Lee spent quite a bit of space in her diary describing the adventures of her flag. She hid it on March 11, 1862, before the town was taken by Federals. When Union soldiers came to her door on the 13th, demanding her "secession flag," she told them she had sent it to a "place of safety." They wanted to search her house. Standing her ground, she informed them it would require higher rank than theirs to force her to allow them into her home. Mrs. Lee was asked again the next day, and again she denied having a flag. She admitted to her journal, however, that "our bonny red flag shall yet wave over us." Even as late as February 1864 the flag was a source of intrigue. When her house was searched at that time, the flag was still not found. One of Mary Lee's nieces was "wearing" it under her clothes.²³

Cornelia McDonald, another Winchester resident, found a portion of her house taken over as a Federal headquarters. Although Mrs. McDonald managed to withstand the strain of caring for her family amidst the enemy, there was one intrusion galling enough to prompt her to complain. She informed the officer in charge that as long as the Union flag flew over her front door, she would be forced to

²²David Eggenberger, *Flags of the U.S.A.*, (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1959), 141-2; D'Otrange Mastai, 130.

²³MGL, 1, 6, 7, 9, 11 (March, 1862), 554 (2/9/1864).

use the back one. "In the afternoon I noticed the flag had been removed and floated some distance from the house," she remembered.²⁴

Kate Sperry, a younger Winchester Secesh, reported that she and her friends angered the occupying troops by refusing to walk under the Union flag. They would, instead, purposefully leave the sidewalk and proceed through the mud; or, when a large Union flag had been suspended across the street, they circled to the back of the building.²⁵

Days of fasting and prayer and allegiances to a flag are outward, patriotic observances. They do not, however, explain deeper foundations of nationalism. The debate among southern historians over the existence of Confederate nationalism has varied from those who propose the South lost the war because it had little or no nationalistic base, to others who assert that the ideology which forced the split is still present today.

²⁴Cornelia A. McDonald, *Diary With Reminiscences of the War, annotated by Hunter McDonald*, (Nashville: Cellom & Glertner Co., 1934), 45.

²⁵Kate Sperry, "Surrender, Never Surrender!" Typescript, 146-148, The Handley Library, Winchester, Virginia. Kate Sperry was 18 years old during the segment of the war used for this paper. She lived with her grandfather, Peter Graves Sperry, and her Aunt Mary W. Sperry. She married Dr. E. N. Hunt of the 2nd Mississippi Regiment and moved to a "plantation home" at Cedar Hill, near Ripley, Mississippi. She died in 1886. See the introduction to her typescript by her daughter, Lenoir Hunt.

On one side of the debate are those who believe southern cohesion stemmed from emotionalism rather than nationalism. They argue that mistrust of the North and fear of slave insurrections made southern whites feel not only isolated but defensive and that southern political unity came from a sense that congressional power was shifting away from them. Hysteria after Lincoln's election rather than firm ideological convictions impelled the South into war. Still others argue that although the main difference between the North and South was its peculiar institution, slavery had become so charged it appeared as a distinct ideology.²⁶

On the other side of the debate are historians who assert that southern culture was distinctive even at the time of the Constitutional Convention. James Madison noted at the time that complications surfaced which were as much a product of dissimilarities between northern and southern states as from large and small.²⁷

²⁶C. Vann Woodward, *The Burden of Southern History*, rev. ed., (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1968), 62; David M. Potter, *The Impending Crisis: 1848-1861*, completed and edited by Don E. Fehrenbacher, The New American Nation Series, (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1976), 471-72, 461, 469; Kenneth M. Stampp, *The Imperiled Union: Essays on the Background of the Civil War*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 252, 255, 258; and John McCardell, *The Idea of a Southern Nation: Southern Nationalists and Southern Nationalism, 1830-1860*, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1979), 3.

²⁷Carl N. Degler, *Place Over Time: The Continuity of Southern Distinctiveness*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977), 9-10.

Southern distinctiveness was acknowledged also by Thomas Jefferson in his *Notes on the State of Virginia*. To the question of what "particular customs and manners...may happen to be received in [your] state," Jefferson chose slavery as a custom unique to his "nation." He recognized that slavery necessarily created a different character in the inhabitants exposed to it. Jefferson believed that when children witness their parents treating other humans in a despotic way, there can be a certain detrimental effect on their manners. He also suggested, however, that southerners would view these manners as normal after several generations.²⁸

It might be argued that if slavery was the only unifying force in the South, the institution was, at least, a uniquely southern problem that northerners did not share. Whether united in defense of it or fear of its repercussions, slavery was a southern characteristic. Jefferson's hint at behavioral distinctions within a slave society adds weight to the argument. In fact, Carl Degler has argued that "there is little evidence of hostility of nonslaveholders toward slaveholders," in the Old South, and that nonslaveholders hoped "to achieve the same status one day." If, as Hobsbawm suggests, nations are aware of homogeneity in their numbers, then generations of slave

²⁸Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, ed. William Peden (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1982) 162-163.

owners and those wishing to become slave owners might have evolved into a distinctive people.²⁹

On March 22, 1862, the Lees' slave Evans ran off, as did several others in town. Laura Lee was in "shock" from disappointment and had to lie down. She had been sure he would be "faithful." Mary Lee, however, was not surprised. She wrote, "I have never had the least confidence in any negro." She considered him "ungrateful." On April 5, Mary Lee noted that she "miss[ed] Evans...every hour," and that she had heard he was having problems with his leg. "If so, I know he has often wished he was at home, where he was as carefully nursed as any other member of the family."³⁰

Neither of these women could realize that if Evans had felt like "any other member of the family," he would not have left. Their lives had always included people they looked down upon and sheltered. The fact that Mary Lee used the word "ungrateful" means she thought of herself as Evans's protector as well as his owner. And Laura Lee's use of the word "faithful" also suggests a connection based on more than ownership, possibly even friendship. This complicated relationship between the races was very much a uniquely southern characteristic but not necessarily a Confederate one.

In Winchester, at least, slavery and fear of slave

²⁹Degler, 73, 81.

³⁰LL, Mar 22, 1862; MGL, 26, 53.

revolts do not explain Confederate nationalism. Granted, Mary Lee was scornful of emancipation, dreaded manual labor when the "servants" were gone, and "was near fainting and more unnerved than by any sight I have seen since the war" when she encountered a Union "company of negro Infantry" in April 1864.³¹ These were not, however, uniquely Confederate fears.

Julia Chase was one of Winchester's "Unionists" for whom Mary Lee had considerable contempt. These two women did have some things in common, however. Julia Chase was neither fond of abolitionists nor of Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation. Furthermore, Miss Chase was as apprehensive about the appearance of the black regiment as was Mrs. Lee. When she learned they were in Winchester to "conscript all the able-bodied negro men in the County," she wrote, "I don't know how we are to get along. [We] shall have no one to do anything for us." Julia Chase was not alone. Mary Lee reported that "this emancipation bill in Congress is furthering our party in all the border states, where the Union men own slaves."³²

Of course, there are historians who have measured the differences between the North and South with an economic

³¹*Ibid.*, 21 (3/19/1862), 262 (11/24/1862), 575 (4/3/1864).

³²Julia Chase's entries for October 19, 1862 and April 3, 1863 are quoted in Garland R. Quarles, *Occupied Winchester: 1861-1865* (Winchester, Va: Farmers & Merchants Bank, 1976) 41, 43; MGL 57-58 (4/8/1862).

yardstick, one that invariably takes slavery into account. Although Eugene Genovese has agreed that the South's connection to world trade through export crops requires at least a nod toward capitalistic tendencies, he has maintained that the South's economic distinction comes from its precapitalist reliance on slavery. Slavery, in turn, not only supported a different economic base, but created distinctions in class and power structures as well. Paternalism, for Genovese, made the South culturally distinct, economically backward, and vulnerable to the increasing capitalism of the North.³³

Recent scholarship, however, shows that the South was actually experiencing economic growth during the antebellum period, and was not becoming dependent upon the industrializing North. They have determined that slavery, rather than becoming a burden, was still a viable economic tool for the South. Still others have suggested that the worldwide demand for cotton was the reason for the South's economic prosperity and that slavery could have survived for some time as a rational way to maximize profits in an

³³Drew Gilpin Faust, "The Peculiar South Revisited: White Society, Culture, and Politics in the Antebellum Period, 1800-1860," in *Interpreting Southern History: Historiographical Essays in Honor of Sanford W. Higginbotham*, ed. by John B. Boles and Evelyn Thomas Nolen (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987) 78-119: 79-81.

area where the labor supply was slim.³⁴

Whatever the economic argument has been, however, historians who have tried to study the South's economy separate from its culture have found the task difficult. Even those who have discovered that profits from manufacturing were proportionately high in the South, supporting the argument that the region was not economically backward, have had trouble explaining why few of the southern economic elite were willing to take part in it. They have been forced to conclude that cultural and regional values were the reasons more southerners refused to take entrepreneurial risks. Fred Bateman and Thomas Weiss found economic conservatism and caution in the South, finally conceding that "southerners indeed were different from their Yankee brethren."³⁵

There are two problems with trying to identify distinctions in another culture. Members of a culture are too familiar with their own customs to name them; and those

³⁴Jeremy Atack and Peter Passell, *A New Economic View of American History from Colonial Times to 1940*, Second Edition (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1994), Chapter 11, "Slavery and Southern Development;" Edward Pessen, "How Different from Each Other Were the Antebellum North and South?" in *American Historical Review*, LXXXV (December, 1980), 1119-1149; and Gavin Wright, "The Efficiency of Slavery: Another Interpretation," in *American Economic Review*, LXIX (March 1979), 219-226.

³⁵Faust, "Peculiar," 86. Fred Bateman and Thomas Weiss. *A Deplorable Scarcity: The Failure of Industrialization in the Slave Economy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981), 163.

who are studying the culture often lack sufficient understanding to take the distinction seriously. For instance, when Thomas Jefferson was asked by the secretary of the French legation at Philadelphia, Francois Marbois, what were "the particular customs and manners that may happen to be received in" Virginia, Jefferson finally arrived at slavery as a distinction. But he prefaced his answer by stating, "It is difficult to determine on the standard by which the manners of a nation may be tried," adding that it "is more difficult for a native to bring to that standard the manners of his own nation, familiarized to him by habit."³⁶ In other words, cultural distinctions are normally not apparent to the culture being asked.

On the other hand, those studying a culture could be blinded from seeing the distinctions by a lack of empathy toward that culture's history. Hobsbawm suggests that criticism is "tempting and easy."

What nationalists said and say about nations and nationalism, especially their own, is generally so unconvincing to anyone who does not share their emotional commitments, and may be so inconsistent with rational enquiry, as inevitably to provoke extended expressions of scepticism, muffled only by politeness, diplomacy or caution.³⁷

After General Lee's surrender at Appomattox, while Mary Lee was facing up to defeat in the pages of her

³⁶Jefferson, 162.

³⁷Hobsbawm, 385.

journal, she stated: "All the energy & enthusiasm of my nature...was warmed into full development for my country, my beloved southern Confederacy."³⁸ Whether or not historians believe the South was distinct from the North might depend upon who they ask. If they ask Mary Lee, she would give them little room for doubt. Much of Mary Lee's nationalistic spirit, however, was grounded in her belief in Virginia's right to secede more than with climate, history, traditions, or slavery.

Historian David Potter made the intriguing observation that "the United States is the only nation in history which for seven decades acted politically and culturally as a nation...before decisively answering the question of whether it was a nation at all." Since the issue of state sovereignty had been so divisive at the 1787 Convention, it had been tabled indefinitely. "We the people" became sovereign, leaving the question open as to who the "people" were. Potter reminds us that the "citizens of the Old South" had "never transferred the sovereignty itself" from the states to the nation. In fact, "Virginia's ratification, June 27, 1788, specified that 'the powers granted under the Constitution being derived from the people of the United States may be resumed by them whensoever the same shall be perverted to their injury or

³⁸MGL, 814 (4/15/1865).

oppression." ³⁹

Whether or not Mary Lee was aware of the conditions Virginia set forth when joining the Union, the culture under which she grew up and the independence at the core of her identity made her a believer in Virginia's right to leave the Union. On April 17, 1862 she noted that it was the anniversary of "dear old Virginia['s] secession." The war was brought on, in her opinion, by the Union's failure to recognize Virginia's right to leave. "The fault" for all the bloodshed "is theirs, not ours." Furthermore, she was not willing for France or England to lend a hand in the war until the Confederacy had won spectacular victories on its own so that the new nation could be recognized by those foreign nations "as an equal, & not as a dependent inferior."⁴⁰

Being thought of as inferior was new to Mary Lee. Being restricted beyond the bounds genteel society set was also alien to her. At certain times under occupation she was ordered not to wear a sunbonnet, not to sidestep around the Union flag, and not to go the hospital to care for the Confederate wounded. She disobeyed all of these orders. She was also advised she would have to give up some of her

³⁹David M. Potter, *The Impending Crisis: 1848-1861*. Completed and edited by Don E. Fehrenbacher, The New American Nation Series (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1976) 479, 482n.

⁴⁰MGL, 68, 67, 77 (April 1862).

rooms as office space for Union commanders. She argued the officer out of the parlor he wanted and into a room in an addition of the house, the "wing," thus being able to truthfully state that "Yankees" had never been permitted to stay under her roof.⁴¹ If she had given in to these demands, or had acknowledged at all the power the occupation government had over her, she would have felt that she was admitting the Union's right to prevent Virginia's secession.

Whether or not Mary Lee was a Confederate national, she was a Confederate citizen. Historians have argued that the South's only distinct history is one of defeat. For many southern historians, distinctions arose at the end of the war, when the South lost, not at the beginning.⁴² If this is true, what gave Confederate men and women the will to fight? Others have suggested that when Confederate women lost faith in the Cause, the Cause was lost. But Mary Lee tenaciously retained her faith in the Cause to the end.

Mary Lee's conception of the Confederacy began at secession. Her realization of national distinctions came

⁴¹*Ibid.*, 102 (5/1862), 314 (2/15/1863), 448 (7/31/1863).

⁴²C. Vann Woodward, "The Search for Southern Identity," in *Virginia Quarterly Review* Vol. 3 (Summer 1958), 333-335; Drew Gilpin Faust, "Altars of Sacrifice: Confederate Women and the Narratives of War," in *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 76, No. 4 (March 1990) 1200-1228: 1228.

when secession was denied. A Union surgeon asked her once what she felt to be the difference between the North and the South. She replied, "it was the difference between the oppressor and the oppressed."⁴³ Drew Faust has contended that when southerners began moving toward secession, they carried out their debate in print, and continued the written discussion after the war began. Explaining "themselves to themselves," Faust suggests, has provided some explanations for us.⁴⁴ As Mary Lee explained herself to her "Self," she was a Secessionist. Both overtly and covertly she defiantly fought the war by maintaining her independence from any foreign authority.

On February 2, 1865 Mary Lee spent part of her day "distributing Southern letters--passed by Sheridan's Hd. Qrs. with my pockets full notwithstanding his stringent orders against such treason." Two days later she was at it again "on a contraband errand, to carry two flannel shirts and a hat to be sent to the boys & letters to both Genls. Early's and Gordon's Hd. Qrs. full of treason." By the end of that month, Sheridan had had enough of Mrs. Lee's "constant annoyance, either from the sake of notoriety or from want of reflection or a want of being true to" herself. Without realizing exactly how much reflection Mary Lee had subjected her "Self" to, nor how true she was

⁴³MGL, 50 (4/1862).

⁴⁴Faust, *Creation*, 7, 84.

being to her "Self," Sheridan had her banished from Winchester, dropped off five miles south of town with her family, the equally rebellious Sherrard family, "two ambulances & an army wagon piled up with baggage," and "an escort of over twenty men."⁴⁵

Mary Lee ultimately settled in Baltimore and did not return to Winchester until after her death in 1906, when she was buried next to her husband in Hebron Cemetery. The work she did for the South and southerners from her home in Baltimore suggests that clearly Mary Lee never lost her Confederate identity nor her will to work for the Cause. Her journal was a place for her to construct that identity, to observe it, and to preserve it. At 806 Saint Paul Street, Baltimore, Maryland: "Secesh lives here."⁴⁶

⁴⁵MGL, 776, 789 (2/1865); C. A. Porter Hopkins (Ed.), "An Extract from the Journal of Mrs. Hugh H. Lee of Winchester, Va., May 23-31, 1862," in *Maryland Historical Magazine*, Vol. LIII, The Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore, 1958, 380-393: 380.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 381.

CHAPTER III

"THIS IS SURELY THE DAY OF WOMAN'S POWER:" GENDER IDEOLOGY IN THE CIVIL WAR SOUTH

I have never known till lately how brave women, with right on their side, can make villains quail & tremble.

Mary Greenhow Lee
Winchester, Virginia
April 23, 1862

Parasols are a great comfort now, as they form an effective screen for the face; mine seems to amuse the Yankees.

Mary Greenhow Lee
Winchester, Virginia
May 11, 1862¹

To scholars who have studied southern women's experiences through the Civil War, the ladies of Winchester, Virginia might seem an anomaly. Their contemporary visitors from the North hoped that they were. Returning to Washington after a tour of the Kernstown Battlefield, Secretary of State William H. Seward was asked how he found Union feeling in Winchester. His reply: "The men are all in the army, & the women are the devils."²

The "Secesh" women of Winchester gained a reputation among the Union soldiers for their defiant rebel spirit.

¹Mary Greenhow Lee, 76, 95. [Hereafter MGL]

²*Ibid.*, 48 (4/2/1862); Laura Lee, April 7, 1862. [Hereafter LL]

They took up the habit of wearing thick veils and sunbonnets and carrying parasols to keep their faces from revealing any signs of acknowledgement. If there was need for contact with the enemy, the facial expressions of the ladies were to register disinterest or disrespect. Writing about the effect of the "Secesh" women of Winchester on the Union soldiers, Mary Lee wrote, "I am delighted to hear that they...say they were never treated with such scorn as by the Winchester ladies."³

Mrs. Lee had no part in the decision to go to war, nor in the decisions made in waging the war, but found herself and her family smack dab in the middle of it for almost four years. How does a woman wage war when she is expected merely to be passively patriotic, to sacrifice male family members and friends, to sew flags and uniforms, and to remind God constantly whose side He should be on?

She wages war by taking advantage of her status in society and by pressing contemporary gender ideology to its limits. Mary Lee recognized that as a woman, she had some limitations, but being a woman also afforded her a way to wage war against male northern invaders that her male Confederates did not have. Mary Lee took advantage of this difference from 1862 through 1865.

Raised in a patriarchal society, Mary Lee knew the

³MGL 15 (3/16/1862), 37 (3/27/1862), 95 (5/11/1862), 102 (5/16/1862), 12 (3/14/1862).

rules. Her femaleness restricted her rights but, because she was white and enjoyed a high social status, also afforded her protection and a certain deference from gentlemen. She waged her warfare based on those assumptions. Paradoxically, her success, as she "watched" it unfold on the pages of her journal also revealed cracks in the patriarchal system she relied upon in her battles.

Mary Lee worked out a system of warfare for herself within the confines established by society. Building upon the acceptable standards for being a "good" woman, Mary Lee recreated herself into a "good" Confederate as well. Following her through the war we can see that Mary Lee never lost faith in the Cause. On the contrary, she was a "good" Confederate until she died. What changed for Mary Lee was her definition of what it meant to be a "good" woman. The Civil War was an indirect cause of the change. A more immediate reason was the battle of the sexes she waged in Winchester. As Mary Lee informed a "Yankee" late in the war, the occupying army's "warfare was with women & noncombatants & not with...soldiers."⁴

According to psychologists Claudia Bepko and Jo-Ann Krestan, many American women have an emotional stumbling block they refer to as "female shame," a term they give to the "collective legacy of womanhood" which subliminally suggests that being a woman means being "not fully valid as

⁴*Ibid.*, 772 (1/26/1865).

a human."⁵ This female shame has been a "societal leverage" that kept women in their place for centuries; and a tacit "Code of Goodness" has evolved as a prescription for that shame, to compensate for being less important to the community, to focus on others rather than on self, taking pride in what they *do* as women rather than who they *are* as humans.⁶

Bepko and Krestan have classified five major injunctions within this Goodness Code that, at varying levels, "good" American women try to achieve even when they are unaware of the motivation for their behavior. These injunctions are to: "Be Attractive, Be a Lady, Be Unselfish and of Service, Make Relationships Work, and Be Competent Without Complaint."⁷

Of course, this Code of Goodness is a term used to describe twentieth-century, not nineteenth-century, gender ideology. Or is it? Consider the Cult of True Womanhood that historians of women's history have identified as the standard for women in nineteenth century American society. According to prescriptive literature, upper- and middle-class white women were to live within the confines of a "woman's sphere," leading a pious life, working primarily

⁵Claudia Bepko and Jo-Ann Krestan, *Too Good for Her Own Good* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1991) 43.

⁶*Ibid.*, 49, 53.

⁷*Ibid.*, 9.

for others, giving of themselves. The ideal woman was not required to be a mover and shaker, not involved in the political or economic world, or "public sphere," but was to be a full-time wife and mother, in charge of her domestic realm.⁸

This ideal nineteenth-century woman was expected to create a safe and cheerful atmosphere at home, a refuge from the dirty, competitive economic world her husband and sons were facing during the flexing and pulsing changes brought on by the increasing interest in industrial capitalism. Home was woman's place and her responsibility. She should also be the "relational expert," in charge of the psychological leadership of the family, focusing on the emotional well-being of family members, being submissive to her husband and tempering her anger. At the same time, she was to be the comforter of the sick. As Barbara Welter writes, "the sickroom called for the exercise of her higher

⁸Rosemarie Tong, *Feminist Thought: A Comprehensive Introduction* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1989) 137. See also Nancy F. Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977); and Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860," in *American Quarterly*, Vol 18 (1966) 133-155. Bepko and Krestan do not distinguish whether or not their theory applies to women at certain levels of American society but the women they describe are both married and unmarried, fall into young- through middle-aged groups, are full-time homemakers and mothers or professionals. None of the women they describe would be classified as poor or laboring class. Certainly, however, women of Mary Greenhow Lee's social status would fit the profile of the women Bepko and Krestan studied.

qualities of patience, mercy and gentleness as well as her housewifely arts," fulfilling her "dual feminine function-- beauty and usefulness." As Mary Lee assured Jeannie Mason, "I know you are *living for others, & doing good* to all around you."⁹ Mary Lee knew what it meant to be a good woman.

Of course, the South gave a distinctive accent to the Cult of True Womanhood. Although middle- to upper-class southern women were still expected to be attractive, pious, submissive, and in charge of making the home a cheerful refuge, they had yet another responsibility, due to the economy. Rather than a diversified commercial basis, the South's economy stood on a foundation of staple crops, predominantly tobacco, indigo, rice, sugar, and cotton, produced primarily by slaves. For many white women in the South, their "households" included slaves. Rather than nurturing their families and creating a pleasant domestic sphere apart from the public world, these white women also had to manage slaves and be assistants to their husbands in a family economy that did not keep the public and private spheres separate. The myth of the "Southern Lady" evolved

⁹Welter, 135, 141, 143, 145; Bepko, 32; Cott, Chapter 2, "Domesticity;" MGL 157 (6/28/1862), emphasis added. See also Mary P. Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790-1865* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

from the notion of "True Womanhood" with a southern accent.¹⁰

Slavery not only affected women's sphere in the South, but also had a great deal to do with both sides in the gender ideology there. Bertram Wyatt-Brown has identified the "Code of Southern Honor," as both a solution to woman's physical weakness and a reason to keep her restricted politically and economically. Almost from the beginning of stable settlement in the South men's competitive spirit was normally released in games of chance such as horse racing and cock fighting. Competition in the economy was tempered through organized, representative competition in sport. Slavery became an economic tool for the most competitive planters and racism became a buffer that lessened the friction between whites of different economic classes. As southern culture matured, and as tensions grew between sections from the increases in northern industrial capitalism and northern criticism of slavery, the Code of Honor became more entrenched. As Drew Gilpin Faust has argued, "protecting white women from threats posed by the slave system upon which white male power rested was an inextricable part of planters' paternalistic

¹⁰Anne Firor Scott, *The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics, 1830-1930* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1970) Chapters 2 and 3; Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988) Chapter 1.

responsibility."¹¹

This was the male side of gender ideology in the nineteenth-century South. If there are roles and rules for women to adopt, there are also a set for men. According to Bepko and Krestan, these rules "that develop between men and women are patterns in a dance choreographed by the society" in which they live. Today's term for the male steps in this dance is "Man's Code of Strength," which include "Be a Warrior/Protector," "Be the Master," and "Be the Provider." These injunctions could easily be applied to antebellum southern men as well, injunctions within the Code of Honor that men probably found equally as burdensome as women found theirs at times.¹² Realistically, southern men must have questioned the Code they lived by, especially when going to war. On the other hand, those who did not fight were put on the defensive in comparison to other men. As one young Winchester man who found himself in the position of clerk instead of soldier wrote, "I hope that you do not think that I would not be willing to stand the hardships of camp life or would fear to go into battle My

¹¹Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982) 227; T. H. Breen, "Horses and Gentlemen: The Cultural Significance of Gambling among the Gentry of Virginia," in *William and Mary Quarterly* 34 (1977) 239-257: 239-241; Drew Gilpin Faust, "Altars of Sacrifice: Confederate Women and the Narratives of War," in *The Journal of American History* Vol. 76, No. 4 (March 1990) 1200-1229: 1213.

¹²Bepko, 166-167.

Dear Mother."¹³

In fact, as tensions between the North and South moved toward war, the myth of the Southern Lady grew as well. Historians debate whether or not southern women were unhappy and frustrated with the institution of slavery because it was immoral or because it was annoying, but almost all agree that slavery had become a burden to many southern women. Criticisms from the North, however, drove both men and women to defend the institution. Suzy Clarkson Holstein has suggested that "to inspire the southern man and to obviate any potential threat to his tenuous power," southern women chose to express "their dissatisfaction only in private," and to "embrace the mythical identity" of the Southern Lady, upholding the "chivalric codes the South needed for its identity."¹⁴

Although Mary Lee does not mention the Code of Goodness or the Code of Strength in her journal, neither does she refer to the Cult of True Womanhood or the Code of Honor by name, but she does describe the characteristics suggested by both of these nineteenth- and twentieth-century terms. For the sake of brevity, "the Code" will be

¹³Charlie Powell, quoted in "Those Who are Compelled to be Employed: Women, Work, and Education in the Powell Family of Virginia," M.A. Thesis, by Katharine V. Graydon, College of William and Mary, 1992, 39.

¹⁴Suzy Clarkson Holstein, "'Offering Up Her Life': Confederate women on the Altars of Sacrifice," in *Southern Studies*, 1991 2(2) 113-130: 121.

the term used in this paper to represent societal expectations of both men and women in their gender roles.

In wartime, surrounded by armies and hearing the sounds and seeing the devastating effects of battle, female shame would necessarily be heightened. Men fought. Women did not. Men risked their lives. Women merely risked their men. As Mary Lee wrote, "if I were only a man," but "being only a woman & of no account, I have to fold my hands & try to keep quiet & calm." Although Mary Lee found war to be a "barbarous mode of settling national disputes," southern literature had persuaded her that she had a role to fill in the war. The rhetoric of the South that attempted to fuel her patriotism, and the Union soldiers occupying her town, had brought Mary Lee to conflicting emotions about war and her part in it. According to Faust, this conflict occurred within many women of the South, a "discontent new to most Confederate women," representing "a potential threat to existing gender assumptions."¹⁵ But women experienced the Civil War collectively on only one level. Each woman had continually to adjust to the changes the war brought to her own life.

Women who follow the injunctions in the Code without realizing that these rules are socially constructed and not intrinsic to their sex are said to be in a "trance,"

¹⁵MGL 565 (3/1863), 185 (7/1862); Faust, "Altars," 1201, 1207.

meaning "to be unconscious of the rules that drive" them. It is usually only during a crisis that women begin to question their motivations and are susceptible to a "click, or trance-breaking experience." During this time they come face-to-face with the rules they have been living by and realize that they have the power to direct their own behavior.¹⁶

The warfare waged by the women of Winchester, according to Mary Lee, escalated correspondingly with the length of the war. Having the enemy in their midst merely made the women more determined to annoy them. "The feeling against the women is increasing every day," Mary Lee wrote, and "they say 'the revolution can never be quelled, till the Secession women are subdued'." Near the end of the war, Mrs. Lee took pride in learning that Union soldiers stationed in Staunton, about a hundred miles south of Winchester, were comparing the women there to Mrs. Lee and her cohorts, finding "their reception" in Staunton much more cordial than "the closed doors & contempt of the Winchester women."¹⁷ Warfare for Mary Lee and her neighbors consisted not of weapons but of words and an attitude of disrespect. They fought as women, not as soldiers.

Mrs. Lee worried about how far this would go. "Scorn

¹⁶Bepko, 8, 95.

¹⁷MGL, 79 (4/26/1862), 623 (6/20/1864).

& contempt are such habitual expressions, that I fear they will not readily give place to more lady-like ones."¹⁸ Suspecting that she could lose her gentility while maintaining her patriotism, Mary Lee began questioning early on the contradictions within society's expectations of women, especially while meeting the exigencies of war.

Historians have theorized that women lost faith in the Cause and then the Cause was lost, placing the blame on a counterfeit patriotism that women finally found burdensome. The argue, too, that when the protection promised to women under the patriarchal system broke down because their men were either gone, dead, or too old and feeble to hold up their end of the bargain, women wanted the war over, won or lost. But, if we look at these journals from the perspective of female shame and the compensatory Code, we can see that the crises in their lives which plunged them "headlong into a click, or trance-breaking, experience" might have had more to do with the contradictions in the Code as it was revealed by the war, than with patriotism, real or otherwise. In this way, historians could search through southern women's journals to discover individual "clicks" against the Code that we have misinterpreted to be a collective "click" against the Cause.¹⁹

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 78, 76 (4/23-24/1862).

¹⁹Faust, 1227-1228. See also George C. Rable, *Civil Wars: Women and the Crisis of Southern Nationalism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989).

Confederate prescriptive literature enjoined southern women to write cheerful letters to their men in the army, putting women in charge of morale. But how were they to mail letters through enemy lines? The first words in Mary Lee's journal state her problem: "I know not how a letter can be sent, or to whom to address it, as our Post Office is removed to Harrisonburgh."²⁰

Initially she relied on friends or acquaintances heading south, but this became a problem. One such acquaintance, an Englishman named Buxton, offered to take letters for her, and ultimately caused Mrs. Lee a great deal of apprehension when she heard a rumor that he was a spy. The rumors flew back and forth for several days, intimating first that he was a Yankee spy, then a double agent, first a reporter for the *Herald Tribune*, then a "correspondent of the *London Chronicle*." But she grew weary of sorting out rumors and finally decided, "whether he is a Spy or not, if he carries my letters, I will make use of him." Ultimately, although she termed him a "will-o-the-wisp," she decided he could be trusted.²¹

Mary Lee needed to trust her carriers because she found a way to put herself at risk without donning a soldier's uniform. "I have written to Turner Ashby," she

²⁰Bepko, 95; Faust, "Altars," 1211; MGL, 1 (3/11/62).

²¹*Ibid.*, 39 (3/28/62), 40 (3/28/62), 52 (4/4/62), 60 (4/11/62), 61 (4/12/62), 87 (5/2/62), 57 (4/8/62).

wrote, "telling him of traitors in his camp, & I have sent my letters & lists of killed & wounded to Genl. Jackson." She also informed Ashby that "one of his men, had deserted" and was scheming "with the Yankees...to lead a Cavalry force to his camp, for the avowed purpose of capturing him." Mary Lee, in effect, took on the role of spy herself.²²

A woman by the name of Julia Kurtz was Mrs. Lee's first "mail bag" for her "underground train" and word soon got out that the Lee house could be counted on as a "Confederate Post Office" that possessed a "secret means of communication with Dixie." Mary Lee became creative in sending out her packets of mail, secreting some of them away in pin cushions. Within one month of Winchester's first Union occupation, she had sent over fifty letters from her house via one route or another. Eventually federal detectives began investigating subversive activities in Winchester, making her certain she would be caught, even to the point of packing a trunk in case she needed to leave in a hurry. But Mary Lee refused to avoid the risks.²³

Early on, her motivation was simply patriotic

²²*Ibid.*, 52 (4/4/62), 65 (4/14/62).

²³*Ibid.*, 86 (5/2/62), 66 (4/14/62), 192 (8/2/62), 66 (4/15/62), 219 (8/30/62), 341 (3/29/63), 88 (5/3/62), 40 (3/28/62), 304 (2/2/63), 210 (8/22/62).

enthusiasm. It was new, exhilarating, almost fun. "Outwitting the Yankees is my only amusement," she stated early in 1863. But it became a pattern in her life and by the end of the war she had become adept at the subterfuge. She still found it "a pleasure to outwit" men like General Sheridan, the last Union commander in Winchester, and declared herself "not afraid of anything," but she also became more prudent in her movements and more protective of her cohorts. When a young black came to her door to ask her to send a letter for him, she suspected a trap and denied him the favor. She also discontinued naming her carriers for their own safety. Ultimately, she was warned by a friend that the Provost Marshal knew of her postal activities and vowed that "the first fine day some of the very nicest ladies in town [would] be sent through the lines." Her friend was right. General Sheridan banished Mary Lee from Winchester within days of the warning.²⁴

For most women whose husbands were away soldiering, war magnified the societal expectations of women to be selfless and competent without complaint. Although Mrs. Lee had a house full of women relatives and slaves, the work she took on for the Cause was remarkable. Soon after the first occupation of Union troops began in March 1862, her two male slaves liberated themselves and joined the

²⁴*Ibid.*, 68 (4/16/62), 300 (1/20/63), 772 (1/26/65), 729 (12/1/64), 785 (2/18/65), 778 (2/7/65), 783 (2/14/65).

Federal ranks. The women had to take over all of the chores. On one summer day Mary Lee had her household working in the garden where they "dug the manure & wheeled it down to the bed." Union soldiers watched as the women worked and she was certain the soldiers were "very much amused to see the Secesh, the F. F. Vs working like day labourers."²⁵

Mary Lee was always conscious of how she appeared to her enemies, and noted it continually in her journal. It was a way of checking her role, the expectations she had of her "Self," and her impact on the "Other," her successes giving her confidence in her warfare, and energy for her work. She needed the additional energy to fulfill her commitment to being competent and unselfish. According to Bepko and Krestan, one of the deepest beliefs that drive women in the rule of unselfishness is that women's "most important role in life is to give of" themselves to others. "Culturally," women's "entire sense of [them]selves is to be structured around the behavior of nurturing and selflessly giving to a dependent, needy other."²⁶ In Mary Lee's case, this meant providing food and uniforms for her soldiers, taking care of the wounded in the hospitals, and delivering letters and collecting supplies, over and above her responsibilities to her immediate family.

²⁵*Ibid.*, 23 (3/21/62), 26 (3/22/62), 399 (6/8/63).

²⁶Bepko, 25.

Mary Lee sacrificed all of the money and labor she could spare to build up a store of supplies for the soldiers and the patients in the hospitals. Besides the "tea, coffee, bread, flaxseed tea & lemonade," the "hot biscuits & (rusks)," or the "sago" and "blanc mange and marmalade" she took to the hospitals, she also begged others for "some lemons for [her] wounded men" and treats "of apples and--onions." She set her nieces to rolling bandages, and found furniture and sheets for the hospitals. By the end of the war, Mary Lee had become somewhat of a hospital administrator. "I staid some hours distributing supplies & running about to collect more....By to-morrow," she wrote, "I hope things will be more in order & some stores collected."²⁷

For the army, she built up a contraband store in her home and other sites around town so that when the soldiers were close by, or when she could send supplies through the line, she would have the items they needed. Shoes, uniforms, blankets, ink, mutton, sugar, tea, and whiskey were among the several items she was constantly trying to stockpile.²⁸

One of the side effects in today's world for women who

²⁷MGL, 33 (3/25/62), 36 (3/26/62), 138 (6/9/62), 416 (6/17/63), 502 (10/26/63), 435 (7/15/63), 742 (12/17/64), 746 (12/23/64), 63 (7/4/64), 724 (11/21/64).

²⁸*Ibid.*, 419 (6/20/63), 452 (8/4/63), 641 (7/18/64), 344 (4/4/63), 522 (11/27/63), 537 (1/3/64), 654 (7/28/64), 39 (3/27/63), 346 (4/6/63), 365 (4/24/63).

live under the Code of Goodness is addiction, depression, or suicide. Women believe they have to do it all without looking "overwhelmed" while doing it. Of course, the reality is that it can never all be done. Women in the nineteenth century were no different. White women on plantations were responsible for managing their household chores, even when they were not doing the actual work. If we add to the exigencies of running a home the intricacies of outwitting an enemy and the logistics of supplying an army, we can see why Mary Lee would finally admit to her journal, "I wish somebody would shoot me."²⁹

Mary Lee's competency threshold seems to have been quite high, however, considering the extent to which she succeeded and the obstacles she overcame. Although she had various financial resources, interruptions in mail delivery kept some of that money from coming in until there were times when she was past hoping for it. After assessing her situation one evening she figured she would "have but twenty-seven cents" for two months' expenses. Eventually, however, her investments dribbled in, or friends in Baltimore sent money to contribute to her war efforts, but then she had another problem. "It is tantalizing," she

²⁹Bepko, 60, 49-50; Fox-Genovese, Chapter 2; MGL, 798 (3/9/65).

wrote, "to have plenty of money & nothing to buy with it."³⁰

War interrupts commerce in no small way. In Winchester, the occupying government did have supplies on hand. But citizens had to apply to the Provost Marshal for a permit to purchase goods from the sutlers who followed the army.³¹ There were several reasons for this. They wanted to assure that enough supplies were first available to their army. They wanted to deter hoarding. And they guarded against hostile citizens supplying the enemy.

Mary Lee was able to get around this to an extraordinary degree. After a year in the military environment, she wrote, "it is strange how those people [sutlers] all sell to me; I have bought six or seven hundred dollars worth from them, without permits." She had other means of supply as well. If friends obtained a pass or planned to run a blockade, they asked her for a shopping list they might fill. At one point she had "eight different lists out, some, months old."³²

Mary Lee was fairly forthcoming in her journal about where she kept all of the contraband she gathered. Some of

³⁰*Ibid.*, 519 (11/23/63), 520 (11/24/63), 523 (11/28/63), 614 (6/4/64), 620 (6/15/64), 735 (12/10/64), 500 (10/24/63), 263 (11/26/62).

³¹*Ibid.*, 320 (2/25/63), 325 (3/8/63), 344 (4/4/63), 370 (4/29/63).

³²*Ibid.*, 370 (4/29/63), 320 (2/25/63), 625 (6/23/64).

it was in a "black hole" in her rental house next door, without the renters' knowledge. Some of her friends stored supplies for her; some were under planks in her floors, under her beds, and, at times, "worn under our hoops." But she also kept them in plain sight, "mixed together in most natural disorder" among her own household supplies.³³

All of these activities created a great deal of concern for Mrs Lee. Her house was searched on a number of occasions but she was always able to keep her cache a secret. She was aware that if the Provost knew of her "occupation, [she] would be sent to Fort Delaware." But awareness of the risks never seemed to hamper her ability to compensate for not being a male in a war zone. She merely played her role as female to the highest degree and assumed that the Union military commanders would follow the same rules of genteel society that she did.³⁴

She had reason to believe this was true. Because she graciously invited the Provost to search her house, for instance, he did so carelessly, and even provided her with a certificate against further searches, stating that her house was free of contraband, and signing the certificate on the same desk that held her journal, with "only a blotting sheet between the paper, on which he was writing"

³³*Ibid.*, 339 (3/27/63), 365 (4/24/63), 554 (2/8/64), 592 (5/5/64), 346 (4/6/63).

³⁴*Ibid.*, 320 (2/25/63), 338 (3/25/1863).

and her "account book of money received for Confederates & disbursements."³⁵

The Code for nineteenth century women enjoined them to be attractive and to be a lady.³⁶ Mary Lee was nothing if not a Lady, her sense of decorum and propriety seeming almost innate. She knew, for instance, that woman's half of the Code called for good manners and a pleasant appearance. Her efforts meant that she respected and appreciated the man or men in her company and should receive the same in return. Whenever Mary Lee was forced into dealings with the enemy commanders in town, she admitted that she dressed herself "more carefully, because they are far more respectful to one well dressed, than in dishabille."³⁷

Cornelia McDonald made use of the same rule when visiting the Provost Marshal's office to ask a favor. She arrived "stylishly dressed," she wrote, and believed that the officer "was perhaps influenced by the better clothes" she wore, and more inclined to treat her with the respect

³⁵*Ibid.*, 346 (4/6/1863).

³⁶Anne F. Scott, *Southern Lady*, 70. Psychologists are finding that deeply embedded in both of these injunctions is the rule that a "good woman stays in control." She "controls her impulses" and does not get angry. She "looks desirable," is "calm, kind, [and] patient," and does "not express too much passion or strong emotion." And, "finally, a lady doesn't have needs." Bepko, 18-21.

³⁷MGL, 697 (9/30/1864).

due a lady.³⁸

On the other hand, when Mary Lee sensed that she needed nothing from the enemy, she sometimes took pains not to look her best. Although she made sure all the women in the household donned "skirts and shawls" to look pretty and show their respect when Confederate troops came to parade in front of her door, for the enemy, she did the opposite. On one occasion she wrote that she "went down to the parlor windows entirely in dishabille to enjoy my favorite sight--the retreat of the enemy." In fact, that was the purpose of the Winchester ladies wearing sunbonnets and aprons on the street. It was their uniform. "The Provost says," she reported, that "the ladies shall not wear sunbonnets & aprons on the street, because they only do it to insult the soldiers."³⁹ Mary Lee and her friends were using gender ideology in their battles with the enemy.

Mary Lee was a "good" Confederate because of what she did for the Cause. She also was "good" because she was self-sacrificing, and led those in her household to be so as well. Moreover, she was "good" because she was in control of the situation at all times, at least in her estimation. She made her position clear to enemy commanders when she told them that even though she and her

³⁸Cornelia A McDonald, *Diary With Reminiscences of the War*, annotated by Hunter McDonald, (Nashville: Cellom & Glertner Co., 1934) 49.

³⁹MGL 668, 666 (8/1864), 102 (5/1862).

family were "rebels," she "expected as citizens to be treated according to the usages of civilized warfare," and, as women, "the courtesy that every lady has the right to expect from every gentleman." When the commanders bowed, seeming to agree with her, she "assumed a very lofty tone" and thought she had "inspired them with some respect for the determined & openly avowed rebel."⁴⁰

Her journal gave Mary Lee a way to keep track of her success in her role as Confederate "Self," although she never acknowledged that her success at being a "good" Confederate, achieved by stressing the standards of gender ideology, hinged a great deal on the opposition being "good" gentlemen as well. The fact that neither Mary Lee's home, nor her family members were ever violated suggests that Union commanders in Winchester were following the rules of genteel society, even though Mrs. Lee must have severely tested their faithfulness to the Code at times. According to Mary Lee, her reputation among the Union officers was awesome. "I know I can cow them" she stated, and "make them afraid of me whenever we come in collision." Paradoxically, although Mary Lee expected Union commanders to be gentlemen, suggesting they respect her "Lady" self, she also wanted them to fear her as a Confederate.⁴¹

There were times when Mrs. Lee used bribery or direct

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 484 (8/23/63), 290 (1/4/63).

⁴¹*Ibid.*, 188 (7/29/62), 312 (2/13/1863).

challenges to get her way. She openly lost her temper at times, as in the instance when "two Yankee negroes" refused to move horses from her path and called her "a God damn rebel woman." She became "so indignant that" she "flew up the street at rail road speed, scorning the Yankees by" her "looks so completely that they gave way right and left before" her. But more often Mary Lee followed the injunctions of the Code and remained a lady in control.⁴²

For example, when the Union commander demanded rooms in her home for offices, she drew on her most practiced role as a woman of high social status to create a perception of control. "I kept my eye fixed on his face," she wrote, and "with a very bland manner assured him I had not gone to him to argue the question, nor to ask a favour, but simply to demand the protection that every woman had a right to demand from every man." Colonel Stanton finally gave in, stating, "I must confess myself out-Generaled." But a good woman must control without seeming to be aware of her power. When Mrs. Lee won her point, she "could scarcely restrain [her] exultation," but instead said "something civil about its only being by a woman." To maintain her strength, Mary Lee had to emphasize her weak position in the relationship.⁴³

⁴²*Ibid.*, 448 (7/31/1863), 715 (11/2/1864), 734 (12/12/1864); Bepko, 19.

⁴³MGL 329-39 (3/16/63).

That Mrs. Lee felt herself to be waging warfare is obvious from her choice of metaphors and imagery. She "armed" herself with a basket of food when she knew her presence at the hospital would be challenged. During another conflict at the hospital she *"took the position of the Cavalry & brought up the rear, protecting the retreat"* of her allies. At still another time when she was denied the right to take pudding to her wounded men, she debated the issue until she finally *"came off conqueror & was left in undisputed possession of the field."* At times even nature seemed to be her enemy. When she got stuck in a snow drift, she described her reaction to the contretemps in military terms: "I almost cried from fatigue, cold & the dread of either *advancing or retreating*," and finally *"had to fall back very much demoralized."*⁴⁴

Mary Lee had taken on the patriotism expected of her. Additionally, she had ascribed to and demonstrated the goodness expected of her in the Code. But as the war continued, these obligations and expectations came into conflict with each other. Whether Mary Lee was aware of it or not, she began "clicking" out of her ideological trance.

According to Drew Faust, "women...began to regard their difficulties as a test of the moral as well as the bureaucratic and military effectiveness of the new nation."

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 448 (7/31/63), 38 (3/27/62), 167 (7/8/62), 779 (2/9/65), emphases added.

Faust sees women's loss of patriotism as the result of the contradiction between "sacrifice as a means of overcoming uselessness" in the propaganda offered to them at the beginning of the war, and the reality that their efforts were failing. When women demanded that their men come home and when they rioted for food, Faust argues that this was a sign that women lost interest in maintaining and sustaining the Confederacy because it was not giving enough of a pay-off relative to the effort involved.⁴⁵

Although this is part of the explanation, the conflict was not experienced collectively and the contradictions in the Code were felt more deeply than were national ones. These conflicts were individual and at a much deeper level than prescriptive literature was capable of reaching or overcoming. Mary Lee read *Macaria*, a novel by Augusta Evans, published in 1864, that points to the ambiguous nature of women's lives while it prescribes the sacrifices women should make for the war. Faust points out that the novel "acknowledg[ed women's] fears of uselessness," useless because they might remain single or become widows, suggesting they could be fulfilled as women only if they were partnered with men. But, as Holstein argues, the novel also admits that "women were attracted to a new language of self-determination." Although Mrs. Lee found "the last part [of the book], about the war," admirable,

⁴⁵Faust, "Altars," 1223, 1228.

she found the rest to be a "mass of pedantic nonsense."⁴⁶

Mary Lee needed no one to tell her that a woman's life was to be one of selflessness. She had been raised for that role and was becoming exhausted living it out through the war effort. By the time she read *Macaria*, she had been in a war zone for over two years. If women were fulfilled only when they could define themselves in relationship to men, then Mary Lee had a problem.

For instance, when rain had filled the gutters in the streets and a Union commander ordered one of his men to "get a plank to put across for" Mrs. Lee's benefit, she "cross[ed] the street to another crossing without appearing to acknowledge or see his intentions," refusing to receive even "the slightest civility" from men of the opposition. When General Philip Sheridan met her on the street one day, he "had the assurance to bow," a bow that was, of course, "not returned." Warfare for Mary Lee meant expecting, but not always accepting, the rules set down in the Code when dealing with male enemies. On the other hand, she would have been happy to accept masculine aid from her Confederate gentlemen, if they had been available. One day, as the war ground to an end, visiting gentlemen did drive away a "Yankee" who had come into her yard. She found it "a new & singular sensation to have anyone" take

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 1219; Holstein, 123, MGL 616, 620 (6/1864).

her "part or act as protector against the enemy."⁴⁷

Mary Lee was finding that the men who were supposed to protect her were not, and, as she worked out her "military" successes in her journal, found little reason to respect the enemy as men, felt she was outwitting them, and found that the roles she was playing were contradicting each other. According to Confederate generals, the women of Winchester were "women worth fighting for." According to the Union commanders, these women were the "devils."⁴⁸ Click.

For instance, how could the Lady "Self" sustain her nurturing capacity without sacrificing her Confederate "Self" when wagons loaded with wounded enemies were brought into town? Mary Lee had vowed never to have anything to do with "Yankees," but when her wounded soldiers were hospitalized with the Union wounded, she found herself "down on the floor, by the Yankees, feeding them." It became a crisis for Mary Lee because she was being torn between her Lady and her Confederate selves. "I am trying to do good even to our enemies," she wrote, "but it is a wearisome life."⁴⁹ We might suspect that northern military leaders used gender ideology to manipulate the women,

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, 740 (12/16/1864), 777 (2/6/1865), 704 (10/11/1864).

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, 120 (5/29/1862), 201 (3/12/1862), 411 (6/15/1863), 12 (3/14/1862).

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, 34 (3/25/1862), 37 (3/27/1862).

placing their wounded in sight of the southern women intentionally, understanding on some level that the nurturing role would overpower the patriotic one.

In any event, Mrs. Lee and other Secesh women of Winchester took care of enemy patients. The woman who imagined she would have nothing to do with "Yankee" hospitals and who upheld the standards of propriety, found herself not only caring for an enemy in pain, but carrying a northern man's amputated leg out of the hospital. Additionally, she was amused by men who were upholding the old Code while she had had to modify hers. One of her patients, a colonel, became embarrassed when she was tending him because he had "to be considerably disrobed." She was not disconcerted. "I have seen so much in the last year," she wrote, "that I am nerved for everything."⁵⁰ Mary Lee's "click" was evolutionary, not revolutionary, but by the end of the war she had "watched" herself in her journal incorporate contradictory roles into her identity that she would never have imagined before the war.

It can be argued that women have always stepped into roles that fulfilled the requirements of a crisis, no matter what the dictates of society at the moment. But when that crisis is sustained, as in war, it can also be argued that women have more time to question society's

⁵⁰Kate Sperry, "Surrender, Never Surrender!" 154; McDonald, 54; MGL 412 (6/16/1863), 654 (7/26/1864), 55 (4/6/1862), 258 (11/12/1862), 120 (5/29/1862).

rules. A "good" woman in the Civil War, for instance, was supposed to continue to pray for the Cause. When the men who had remained in Winchester were afraid to challenge the Federal order not to hold prayer meetings as requested by Jefferson Davis, Mary Lee challenged not only the enemy but also her male leaders and conducted her own prayer services. She also began to question just which gender had the most strength and the larger capacity for protection in the patriarchal order. Mrs. Lee found the "dear old men of this town...too cautious" and declared that "this is surely the day of woman's power" because "the men are afraid to do, or say, anything, & leave all to us."⁵¹

Early on, at one of those times when the Confederate army had just left, and before the Union troops reoccupied the town, Mary Lee noted that her army had left twelve wagons of powder in the magazine. She suggested to the men of the town that they blow up the magazine to keep the Union from getting their hands on it, promising to take responsibility for the action with General Jackson if the need arose. "But no one would do anything," she grumbled, and "now, the Yankees are here & have put a guard round it immediately." She estimated that "there is enough powder there to blow up the whole town. I wish I was a man, or

⁵¹*Ibid.*, 102 (5/16/62), 314 (2/13/63), 7 (3/13/62), 47 (4/1/62), 6 (3/31/62), 206 (8/19/62), 571 (3/19/64).

that our men had some manliness."⁵²

The reality of the situation, of course, was that the Union commanders perceived that the men of the town were necessarily more dangerous than were the women. Winchester men understood this part of the Code, as well, and would have had to be more circumspect in their behavior.

Mary Lee was not uncritical of her soldiers, either. In particular, she was not fond of General Jubal A. Early. On July 2, 1864, Mrs. Lee played hostess to several Confederate officers, including General Early, whom she reported was, "very stupid, as he always is." Perhaps he did not fit her definition of "gentleman" because he was, in the words of historian Clement Eaton, "somewhat of an eccentric, an old bachelor of biting and sarcastic tongue who acquired the reputation of outcursing any man in the Confederate army."⁵³

Time did nothing to improve her opinion of Early, however. After her banishment, and as she wandered toward Mt. Jackson, a stop she made while deciding whether or not she could make it to Richmond, Mary Lee took note of Union troop movements and locations along the way and sent the information to Early so that he and his men could avoid Sheridan's more numerous forces. He did not heed her

⁵²*Ibid.*, 129 (6/4/1862).

⁵³*Ibid.*, 630; Clement Eaton, *A History of the Southern Confederacy* (New York: The Free Press, 1954) 285.

warnings, with the capture of 1200 Confederates near Staunton the result, as Sheridan bore down to wage total war against the Shenandoah Valley in the same way Sherman's forces were terrifying citizens in the lower South. "I have done fighting Early's battles," wrote Mary Lee. He "received my dispatch sooner than any other & it was his fault that he was not prepared."⁵⁴

Near the end of her journal, as she began to lose hope, Mary Lee also found others to blame: "unpatriotic farmers" who had not "given up their supplies" to their army, and "our Congress," who, in her opinion, had "whipped themselves." She placed no blame on the army or the women.⁵⁵

According to psychologists Bepko and Krestan, when women try to assume control of their lives, there is an interim period during the transformation when they feel a sense of emptiness, "confusion, anxiety about what to do with" themselves, "or a lot of sadness." They might even "experience a terrific desire to go out of control." Women are vulnerable during this period and sometimes consider changing back to fill the void that used to be the person they were expected to be, rather than work toward being the

⁵⁴MGL 792 (3/1865), 796-799 (3/6-11/1865).

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, 810 (4/6/1865), 813 (4/12/1865), 816 (4/20/1865).

person of balance that would make them whole.⁵⁶ We should consider that many of the weary comments in women's Civil War diaries, and even outbreaks such as the Richmond bread riots, might have been in part responses to change rather than merely disillusionment with the Cause.

We might also consider that this vulnerable moment, along with a depression coming from the huge loss of life and property, compelled women to take on the mantle of the Lost Cause. They might have done so collectively because of public rhetoric, or individually through their family's narratives of the war, both of which were so emotionally charged that they were easily converted into a social psychology. What ever the source, the power of the trance came over many women of the South at the end of the war. But there were others who did not fall under its spell.

In May of 1862 Mary Lee proposed to her journal at a singular moment when both armies were absent from Winchester that "we shall declare ourselves a separate & independent sovereignty, & elect a Queen to reign over us, the women hav[ing] proved themselves more valiant than the men."⁵⁷ In less than three months of living in a war zone Mary Lee had already begun questioning the standards that placed men in charge. She was, of course, not taking into account that the men of the town were not protected from

⁵⁶Bepko, 153-154, 78, 86.

⁵⁷MGL, 127 (6/3/62).

the enemy by the gender rules. At the end of the war, Mary Lee was even more convinced that women had done more than their part for the Cause. She stated, "I hear the women of Richmond are maintaining the honor of the Confederacy--but not the men."⁵⁸

Early on, as she emphasized her patriotism on the pages of her journal, Mary Lee decided she would protect her family and her town, normally the responsibility of gentlemen, by being a good lady. But the contradictions that troubled Mary Lee the most were the ones which forced her to play at one gender's role in order to achieve the goals expected of the other. It might be true that a majority of southern women lost faith in the idea of the Confederacy, unable to withstand the sacrifices they were being asked to make. As one southern woman put it, "the mother and helpless woman triumph[ed] over the patriot."⁵⁹ But this sentiment cannot be found in the pages of Mary Greenhow Lee's journal. She had compensated for "being only a woman & of no account," and felt no shame in it. What Mary Lee lost faith in was the Code, not the Cause.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*, 206 (8/19/1862), 818 (4/28/1865).

⁵⁹Quoted in Faust, "Altars," 1220.

CONCLUSION

Many southern women took up pen and what paper they could find to record their experiences throughout the Civil War. Mary Chesnut's war journal is well-known, but the journal that went into print was not the one she wrote during the war. For almost twenty years Chesnut stewed over how she should present her account of the war to the public. According to the standards of model behavior for nineteenth century women, Chesnut felt she should not have a public voice, so she worked at leaving references to her own feelings out of her journal, yet still recreating her wartime experiences.¹

According to Melissa Mentzer, Chesnut's solution was to assign some of her own judgments to that of a friend, thereby exposing her opinions to public view without risking condemnation for having them, and left some of her opinions completely out of her published work. For example, the edited journal does not disclose that she had wondered "if it be a sin to think slavery a curse to any

¹Melissa Mentzer, "Rewriting herself: Mary Chesnut's Narrative Strategies," in *Connecticut Review* 1992 14(1): 49-56, 50.

land" or that she agreed with Charles Sumner's views on "this hated institution." The public does read that a woman (not necessarily Chesnut) "criticizes women's lack of power in their society, and asserts that all women are 'bought and sold' in a patriarchal system." As Mentzer so aptly puts it, Mary Chesnut had to "speak from the margins of her text rather than the center as women speak from the margins of society, sometimes claiming an identity, sometimes anonymously."²

Mary Lee, however, had no problem claiming her identity, even suspecting that her journal might be eventually made public. Her entry for October 27, 1862 begins: "What do you think--all you who may hereafter read my journal, what do you think has happened to-day--I must lead you to it by degrees," introducing her account of a visit from General "Stonewall" Jackson.³ She was already gaining a reputation as a staunch Confederate and assumed Jackson's visit to be a compliment to her for her efforts. The beginning of her entry for that day reveals she had begun to imagine a wider audience. Clearly not shy about revealing that she had opinions on public policy, Mary Lee was learning to create a dramatic effect to reflect the position in which she perceived her "self" to be.

After the war, as she renewed acquaintances in

²*Ibid.*, 51, 52.

³MGL, 246.

Richmond before resettling in Baltimore, Mary Lee's identity remained unchanged. Still a staunch Secesh, she visited hospitalized Confederate soldiers, treating them with gifts of oranges, and reported with pleasure that "there is a stronger & more united feeling against the Yankees than existed a year ago." Mary Lee felt no reticence in agreeing with "old & young men" alike who "fire with wrath at our present condition & are ready to side with any party who will chastise our tyrannical foe."⁴

Although remaining a Secesh to her toes, however, Mary Lee was no longer fighting a battle of the sexes, but putting all of her energy into helping the men of the South regain their power. Instead of a war of weapons, she found the South engaged in a political battle and, without hesitation, proclaimed her opinions on the way to go about winning. Chafing under Reconstruction policies, she stated her case with men of "different interests; some the monied, some the mercantile, the literary, the agricultural & professional," and found many who agreed with her "views about the proper course for the South to pursue." She believed that in "every election where the semblance of free voting is allowed, we should vote for our soldiers even though we know they will not be allowed to hold the

⁴*Ibid.*, 874 (10/4/1865), 877 (10/8/1865).

Office."⁵ Clearly Mary Lee was convinced that males who voted for what she believed in were casting her votes.

Historians are now beginning to question if all of the national tensions before the war were merely between the North and South or if there was also growing discontent among southern women with the patriarchal system they were under, still debating whether or not the war halted or escalated women's questioning their place in society. War created more work and worry for women, but, according to Anne Firor Scott, also allowed them to "do business in their own right, make decisions,...and in many other ways assert themselves as individual human beings." But the myth of the Lost Cause arising after the war is credited for postponing an organized women's movement in the South. The question is whether historians are describing the myth or perpetuating it. As Sandra Gioia Treadway has put it, "it is fair to say that the Virginia women of the Civil War era are as obscured today by the spell of the Lost Cause as they were in the 1860s and 1870s."⁶

Part of the South's distinction came from its Code of Honor, with the Southern Lady sitting at the top of the

⁵*Ibid.*, 873 (9/28/1865), emphasis added.

⁶Anne Firor Scott, "Women's Perspective on the Patriarchy in the 1850s," in *Half Sisters of History: Southern Women and the American Past*, Catherine Clinton, ed. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994) 76-92: 78, 87; Sandra Gioia Treadway, "New Directions in Virginia Women's History," in *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol. 100 no. 1 (January 1992) 5-28: 18.

Code, the reason for white men to assume and maintain their power. When the men lost the war and then had to fight through Reconstruction to regain power, southern ladies could not think of struggling against their men for a change in the social order at the same time.

As strong and as opinionated as Mary Lee was, it did not occur to her to struggle for a political voice for her own sex. For Mary Lee, the course to follow was to bring power back to the men who had led the South politically before and during the war. Even as she was preparing to leave Virginia for good, she remained proud of her "grand old State," which she was sure would "weather this storm even yet, if her true men can get the ascendancy."⁷

The myth of the Lost Cause did not deter Mary Lee from having opinions about the South's chances to gain power, nor from a belief that the Confederacy's cause had been just. Although she was filled with misgivings about her own future, she did not doubt the future of Virginia.

After a torturous trip and a month of searching for a house and wrangling with lawyers, Mary Lee ultimately resettled in Baltimore with the intentions of running a boarding house in order to make a living. There were times when her feet ached after having traversed the city on errands, often feeling "very alone" and close to tears. At the same time, however, she felt "perfectly independent"

⁷MGL 878 (10/10/1865).

and began to see herself as "a mere adventuress."⁸ This identity of independence that would help Mary Lee face the difficulties in building a new life was the one that had aided her in fighting the Civil War in Winchester.

She was invited to dinner by a Baltimore friend who, having heard of Mrs. Lee's activities during the war, greeted her warmly and offered her services whenever Mrs. Lee might need them. The warm reception made Mary Lee feel as if she "were a Confederate soldier" and she acknowledged that she "appreciated the feeling" of being included in that group.⁹ From the picture portrayed in the pages of her journal, Mary Lee had fought the Civil War with all of the weapons that social constraints and her own resources had allowed. The South had lost the war but Mary Lee had won the right to claim the identity of not only a Confederate, but a soldier.

⁸*Ibid.*, 882-891 (October 19, to November 17, 1865).

⁹*Ibid.*, 888-889 (11/8/1865).

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