

POLITICAL RECONSTRUCTION OF THE SOUTHERN LADY:

A CASE STUDY, 1856-1907

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by


Laura Odendahl

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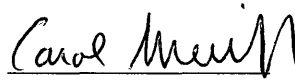
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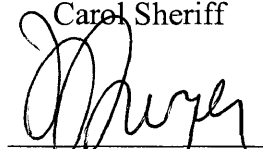
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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
ABSTRACT	v
INTRODUCTION	2
CHAPTER 1. BEFORE THE WAR	11
CHAPTER 2. THE WAR YEARS	19
CHAPTER 3. AFTER THE WAR	52
EPILOGUE	66
BIBLIOGRAPHY	77

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## ABSTRACT

Laura Lee and Mary Greenhow Lee of Winchester, Virginia, belied the stereotype of nineteenth-century white Southern women as completely dependent on men and reticent about engaging in the public sphere of politics. Their diaries and other documents revealed conflicted feelings regarding the reordering of identities and priorities that wartime conditions created for white Southern women. Their political identity as Confederate patriots began under the threat of war and continued to serve their needs afterwards. In the postwar South, white Southern women carved a more influential political role for themselves under the banner of Confederate patriotism.

Even before the Civil War, the Lees lived independently from men. The widow Mary Greenhow Lee headed the household and shared it with her two unmarried sisters-in-law, Laura Lee and Antoinette Lee. Together, the Lees raised two nieces and two nephews into adulthood. When lawsuits threatened their living arrangement, the Lee women publicly claimed their legal rights as single women to defend their property.

During the Civil War, the Lees embraced a new political identity as Confederate patriots while attempting to maintain their conventional identities as ladies and Christians. The town of Winchester alternated between Union and Confederate occupations, and the Lee women adjusted their behavior accordingly. Under Confederate rule, the Lees conformed to conventional gender roles. Whenever the Union army occupied the town, the Lee women behaved rebelliously as Confederate patriots, even when their actions went beyond the bounds of conventional behavior for “ladies.” They smuggled goods and letters through the lines, and their social snubbing of Union officers ultimately provoked General Philip Sheridan to banish the Lee household from Winchester.

After the war, Mary Greenhow Lee moved to Baltimore and opened a boardinghouse. Laura Lee joined her. For the next four decades, the Lee sisters lived together in this semi-independent arrangement as boardinghouse keepers and hotel proprietors. They held onto their conventional identities as ladies and Christians, as well as maintaining their identity as Confederate patriots.

White Southern women, including the Lee sisters, formed organizations to honor the dead, but also to honor women’s sacrifices and contributions to the war effort. The Confederate patriotism promoted by women also facilitated the reassertion of a racial caste system. In the postwar South, white Southern women were more influential in politics and more vocal in public discourses on Southern heritage and society than ever before.

POLITICAL RECONSTRUCTION OF THE SOUTHERN LADY:

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## INTRODUCTION

The Civil War was one of the bloodiest chapters in American history, yet generations have romanticized the war and its impact on Southern society. The image of the Southern lady was central to this romanticism, but Southern ladies may have been the least understood of all the participants in the Civil War. From their own writings, Southern ladies emerge from the past as women with complicated and conflicting identities and priorities.

The antebellum Southern lady should have been easy to identify; she was neither poor nor a woman of color. Instead, she was a white woman of some means. Her virtue was determined by her adherence to Southern values. She accepted Protestant Christian morality and conduct and held steadfast to the belief that the Bible sanctioned slavery. In addition to Christianity, she followed a Southern code of honor practiced by privileged members of society. Within this code, ladies received praise for their loyalty, sacrifice, and submission to a social-political-economic system that elevated white men to the position of masters over women, children, and slaves. Defenders of Southern values argued that the inequalities of the system were natural; any criticism of Southern values was an affront to God and biology. To maintain order in the household and in society, the Southern code of honor permitted white men to use violence practically with impunity against their dependants. Indeed, Southern honor demanded that elite men aggressively

defend their masculinity and dominance against perceived threats, whether they were Northerners, women, or slaves.

All women experienced limitations under this system of male dominance, but in certain situations, white Southern women could loosen the restrictions placed upon them. Such was the case with the middle-aged Lee women of Winchester, Virginia. They were either unmarried or widowed and therefore not subjected to male dominance by either husbands or fathers. Mary Greenhow Lee, a widow forty-three years old and the head of the household, resided with her unmarried sisters-in-law, Laura, thirty-nine, and Antoinette, forty-one. The women had no children of their own, but they raised two nieces and two nephews into adulthood.<sup>1</sup> At the outbreak of war, the nephews joined the military, while the unmarried nieces remained at home. This household of white, single women depended upon the domestic labor of slaves. Sarah, Emily, and Betty were single women enslaved at the outset of the war, and they remained with the Lees after their emancipation by Northern forces. The Lees previously owned two slave men, but Hugh and Evans ran off at the first appearance of the Union Army.<sup>2</sup> Notwithstanding considerable hardships, the Lee women managed to maintain their independent household until they provoked one too many Union officers and faced expulsion from their home in 1865.

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<sup>1</sup> The names of the nieces and nephews are as follows: Louisa Carter Burwell (b.1837, d.1883), P. Lewis Burwell, Jr. (b.1840, d.1909), Laura Lee Burwell (b.1842, d.1887), Robert Saunders Burwell (b.1844, d.1870?); Bureau of the Census, *Eighth Census of the United States, Virginia, Schedule 1: Free Inhabitants in Winchester* (Washington, D.C. 1860), 121; Florence Tyler Carlton, *A Genealogy of the Known Descendants of Robert Carter of Corotoman* (Richmond, Whitlet & Shepperson, 1982), pp.133-134. The birth and death dates of Hugh Holmes Lee (b.1814, d.1856) from the Mary Greenhow Lee Collection, microfilm (Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.).

<sup>2</sup> Laura Lee, "The History of Our Captivity," Diary, Special Collections, Earl Gregg Swem Library, College of William & Mary, Williamsburg, Va, 19 March 1862, 9; 22 March 1862, 9-10; and Mrs. Hugh

Laura Lee and Mary Greenhow Lee began their diaries on March 11, 1862, when Northern troops invaded Winchester for the first of a series of raids and occupations. Laura Lee knew that history was in the making, and she titled her diary “A History of Our Captivity.”<sup>3</sup> She wrote down each day’s activities without any introduction or explanation. Laura Lee wrote for an audience but did not specify who she expected would read it. Mary Greenhow Lee did not intend to begin a diary, but instead to write a letter to “pass away these dreadful hours of suspense, to tell some sympathizing friend the fluctuations of hope, fear & despair, during the last twenty-four hours.”<sup>4</sup> By the end of the first day’s account, Lee decided that she was writing to her friend Jeannie Mason. Jeannie Mason was the daughter of former U.S. Senator James M. Mason, who drafted the Fugitive Slave Act in 1850 and served as a Confederate ambassador to France. When Union forces seized James M. Mason and John Slidell from the British ship *Trent* in November 1861, the incident generated British sympathy for the Southern cause. Protests from Great Britain guaranteed the release of Mason and Slidell in January 1862. Mason and his family had no home left in Winchester after Union forces destroyed it in June 1862. Jeannie Mason spent the better part of the war in Richmond.

The next day, May 12, 1862, Lee decided to maintain a journal. If it proved impossible to send to Mason, Lee would keep the journal to “serve as a reminder of these days of darkness.”<sup>5</sup> Two years later, Lee sent the fourth section of her journal to Richmond for Mason and for Eddie, a female friend from Lee’s school days, to read. For

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Lee, (Mary Greenhow Lee), Diary, "Mrs. Hugh Lee Collection," Winchester-Frederick Historical Society, Handley Library, Winchester, Va., 22 March 1862, 20; 4 April 1862, 22.

<sup>3</sup> Laura Lee, Diary, 11 March 1864, 1.

<sup>4</sup> Mary Greenhow Lee, Diary, 11 March 1862, 1.

<sup>5</sup> Mary Greenhow Lee, Diary, 12 March 1862, 5.

Lee, the journal served as a “companion” as well as a “connecting link with the dear friends who are so far away and whom I have no prospect of ever seeing again.”<sup>6</sup> Mary Greenhow Lee anticipated her readers to be elite white women, and probably Laura Lee had similar expectations.

Since the Lee women wrote with readers in mind, they occasionally explained the changes to identities and priorities that they experienced or observed. The Lees and other white Southern women discovered that their identities as Confederate patriots frequently expanded, and occasionally negated, the antebellum behavioral prescriptions for ladies. The fervent passions of the Civil War transformed what Southern society had previously considered private, domestic activities performed by white women like the Lees into public acts of patriotism. No one promoted this reinterpretation of their activities more than the Lees, and this in turn, affected their sense of identity. Such transformations, however, may have been shocking to a reader unfamiliar with wartime conditions. After about a month of experiencing the war firsthand, Mary Greenhow Lee expressed concern that patriotism had taken over her identity:

Pray for me, Jeannie, that I may retain my Christianity & womanly attributes, as well as my patriotism.<sup>7</sup>

Lee gave precedence to her patriotism over her more conventional identities as a Christian and as a lady but would have preferred to balance all three.

After the war, Mary Greenhow Lee and Laura Lee continued to cherish their identity as patriots and worked for Confederate organizations. By invoking Confederate patriotism, white Southern women participated in the political realm without threatening

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<sup>6</sup> Mary Greenhow Lee, *Diary*, 15 September 1864, 683.

conventional gender ideals. Indeed, Lost Cause movements sought to reinforce conventional gender roles and to resurrect a racial hierarchy that elevated white persons over African Americans. Confederate patriotism claimed Southern women's allegiance at the expense reform-oriented causes, including woman's rights. Most members of Confederate women's organizations expressed reactionary sentiments, but the women were political participants nonetheless.

Historians debate the extent of Southern white women's public and political roles from the antebellum era through the Civil War and its aftermath. Many dismiss the political activities of women during the Civil War as merely a temporary breach in traditional gender codes, while other historians conclude that Southern white women became even more instrumental to post-war politics.

Anne Firor Scott ignited the controversy over the legacy of the Civil War for white women with her pioneering work, *The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics 1830-1920*. Scott declares the war a watershed for white Southern women, arguing that their participation in education, employment, and even politics increased dramatically from antebellum standards.<sup>8</sup>

In the following decades, historians responded to Scott's watershed thesis. Catherine Clinton, Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, George C. Rable, and Suzanne Lebsock warn against overstating the differences between the antebellum and post-Civil War periods for white Southern women. For instance, historian George C. Rable characterizes white Southern women's experience in the postwar South as "change

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<sup>7</sup> Mary Greenhow Lee, *Diary*, 22 April 1862, 75.

without change,” because white women were both victims and beneficiaries of the postwar South.<sup>9</sup> Their desire to maintain class and racial hegemony impaired their willingness to challenge sexual politics.

Whether implicitly or explicitly, historians have assessed white Southern women’s postwar achievements against those of white Northern women, and by and large, Southern women did not measure up. When the divergence between the white Southern female experience and that of their Northern counterparts took place is still under debate, however. Historian Cynthia A. Kierner suggests that after the American Revolution, Northern and Southern women followed different paths. White Southerners were less enthusiastic than Northerners were about Republican Motherhood, an ideal that gave mothers a political duty to educate their sons to be virtuous citizens. Kierner concedes that the American Revolution raised women’s political consciousness and that male public figures acknowledged women’s patriotism.<sup>10</sup>

With regard to antebellum politics, white Southern women’s participation was more extensive than previously credited. Historian Elizabeth R. Varon contends that white Southern women played an important role in Southern political life from the 1820s to 1861. Through their work in voluntary associations of the 1820s, white Southern women carved a role for themselves as mediators who claimed to rise above the corrupting influences of politics. By the 1840s, white Southern women balanced their

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<sup>8</sup> Anne Firor Scott, *The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics: 1830-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 79.

<sup>9</sup> Catherine Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress: Woman’s World in the Old South* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982); Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988); George C. Rable, *Civil Wars: Women and the Crisis of Southern Nationalism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 288.

role as mediators with that of political partisans as they became more prominent in political campaigns. As the sectional crisis intensified and Virginia considered secession, white women by and large pledged loyalty to the state, not the Union. Postwar forms of politics were extensions of antebellum forms, argues Varon, but white women's participation in politics became more circumscribed as conservative Southerners opposed women's direct participation in politics.<sup>11</sup>

For most historians, the Civil War was the clearest point of divergence between Southern and Northern women. According to historian Suzanne Lebsock, it was only after the Civil War that the status of white Southern women lagged behind their Northern sisters.<sup>12</sup> Historian Drew Gilpin Faust makes a similar argument. Southern women felt disillusioned by the Confederacy's failure to protect and to preserve their antebellum privileges of race and class: "Invented from necessity and born of disappointment and desperation, southern female assertiveness grew from different roots than that of their northern sisters."<sup>13</sup> Ultimately, fears of black emancipation and power made white Southern women reluctant to abandon the possible benefits of white male power and protection.

White Southern women were more complicated than the "mothers of invention" described by Drew Gilpin Faust. While most women held conservative views and would have agreed with Faust's assessment, historian Grace Elizabeth Hale counters that their

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<sup>10</sup> Cynthia A. Kierner, *Beyond the Household: Women's Place in the Early South, 1700-1835* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 3-8.

<sup>11</sup> Elizabeth R. Varon, *We Mean to be Counted: White Women and Politics in Antebellum Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1998), 171, 178.

<sup>12</sup> Suzanne Lebsock, *The Free Women of Petersburg: Status and Culture in a Southern Town, 1784-1860*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1984), 224.

“deterministic assumptions, however, absolved women of choice and agency.”<sup>14</sup> Hale demonstrates that white women and men of the middle class consciously conflated the plantation household with the post-Reconstruction white home in order “to ground their cultural authority within the power of the planter class” of the Old South. The fiction of continuity included recasting African American women as mammies serving the white home. Just as white women derived authority from the figure of mammy, white men justified their use of force by recasting African American men as potential rapists. Hale concludes that white women’s efforts to reconstruct their homes were just as important as white men’s commercial activities to maintaining white supremacy as the foundation of the Southern social order.<sup>15</sup>

Historian Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore also discovers female agency where previous historians declared none existed. Gilmore’s study of North Carolina uncovered the central roles played African American and white women during the disenfranchisement of African American men. White women were complicit supporters of white supremacy, but while they took an active role in the disenfranchisement campaign, their role was to declare passivity. African American women worked to weaken Jim Crow and served as ambassadors to the white community. Periodic cooperation between women of both races, however fragile, helped to achieve women’s suffrage and led the way toward the restoration of black men’s voting rights.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Drew Gilpin Faust, *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 256.

<sup>14</sup> Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998), 110.

<sup>15</sup> Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 256; Hale, *Making Whiteness*, 87, 92.

<sup>16</sup> Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press), xix-xxi, 93, 99,

The experiences of Laura Lee and Mary Greenhow Lee demonstrate white Southern women's conflicting identities and roles during and after the Civil War. The contradictions actually help to reconcile the historical debate over the legacy of the Civil War for white women. The Lees did not view their need to earn an income after the war as a watershed of opportunity, as Anne Firor Scott describes, but rather as an unpleasant reality. The postwar activities pursued by Laura Lee and Mary Greenhow Lee support Elizabeth Veron's contention that postwar forms of politics for white Southern women remained similar to antebellum forms, but conservative women, such as the Lees, felt their influence grow, not constrict as Veron claims. The Lee women would probably agree with Drew Gilpin Faust that circumstances caused women to react out of necessity, but the actions of Laura Lee and Mary Greenhow Lee also demonstrate the agency that Grace Elizabeth Hale and Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore describe. Although firmly grounded in antebellum forms, postwar political activities involved greater numbers of white Southern women who wielded greater influence than ever before.

## CHAPTER 1

### BEFORE THE WAR

During the war, Laura Lee and Mary Greenhow Lee demonstrated the courage needed to survive on their own, but even before the Civil War they experienced trials that tested their self-sufficiency. In order to protect their wealth, property and independence, the Lees had to defend themselves in the public realm of the courthouse. They made no claim to represent a political position beyond their private affairs, but their court trials brought into the public discourse issues regarding single women, including their legal rights.

According to nineteenth-century gender proscriptions, women had no place in politics. Women were to remain in the private, domestic sphere and leave the public sphere of economics and politics to men. Reality often contradicted this ideology of separate spheres. Many women worked outside as well as inside the home, and they brought “private” concerns to the “public.” Meanwhile, men’s political involvement served their own private interests.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Paula Baker, “The Domestication of Politics: Women and American Political Society, 1780-1920,” in *Unequal Sisters, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition*, eds. Vicki Ruiz and Ellen Carol DuBois (New York: Routledge, 1994), 100.

Southern society complicated the ideology of separate spheres further. Southern homes doubled as domiciles and as centers of production; workers were slaves and family members. As a result, Southern capitalists considered labor relations a part of the private sphere, whereas Northern employers and workers viewed such matters as public issues.<sup>18</sup> Northern abolitionists, such as Harriet Beecher Stowe, argued that the northern system of separate spheres was an “antidote” to the southern slave system and provided a “natural” basis for truly free men. Proslavery advocates, led by George Fitzhugh, disagreed with abolitionists, but supported women’s subordination to men in exchange for protection.<sup>19</sup>

By eliminating the gendered categories associated with separate spheres and by carefully defining “public,” an evaluation of women’s involvement in the public and in the political is possible. Social and political theorist Jürgen Habermas described “public” and “private” as historical categories that change in meaning over time and place. Habermas defined the public sphere as “a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed.” All individuals participate in the public sphere when they express their opinions through writings or conversations on matters of general interest. The public sphere, according to Habermas, is the place where “the public organizes itself as the bearer of public opinion.” The public sphere is not synonymous with the state, but rather mediates between the society and the state.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 38;

<sup>19</sup> LeeAnn Whites, *The Civil War as a Crisis in Gender: Augusta, Georgia, 1860-1890* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 10; Elizabeth R. Varon, *We Mean to be Counted: White Women and Politics in Antebellum Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1998), 1.

<sup>20</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger & Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of

Using this conception of the public sphere, historian Paula Baker defines politics as: “any action, formal or informal, taken to affect the course or behavior of government or the community.”<sup>21</sup> These definitions make it possible to recognize women as political actors in the nineteenth century.

The Lee women of Winchester were not radicals; they upheld white Southern society’s values despite the limitations imposed on women. They had been dutiful daughters, sisters, and, in the case of Mary Greenhow Lee, a wife. They had internalized Southern values and identities; they did not question slavery and their ownership of slaves. By the eve of the Civil War, the Lee women understood how to use the same Southern values and identities meant to keep them dependent to, instead, preserve their independence. Above all else, Mary and Laura Lee guarded their identity as Southern ladies and used it to their advantage, when necessary.

The antebellum lady belonged to the middle or upper classes, but identifying the social ranking for an individual is often difficult. Measurements based on property values have been the least useful determinant of class, according to historian James Oakes. Southerners made and lost fortunes quickly, resulting in a fluid class structure. Some of the wealthiest members of Southern society invested all their resources in land and slaves and possessed little personal property, while one-third of all Southerners possessed no property at all. In spite of these pitfalls, Oakes identifies three distinct groups of Southerners based on slave ownership. *Planters* owned at least twenty slaves

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Technology, 1989), 1-3, 43-67; and Jürgen Habermas, “The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article (1964),” *New German Critique* 5 (1974): 49-55, quoted in Mary P. Ryan, *Women in Public: Between Banners and Ballots, 1825-1880* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 10-13.

<sup>21</sup> Baker, “The Domestication of Politics,” 86.

and made up less than 5% of white families in 1860. *Middle-class masters* lived in cities or towns, ran businesses or practiced professions, and owned less than twenty slaves. *Small slaveholders* were particularly mobile and at risk of losing their property of less than twenty slaves. Women made up ten percent of all slaveholders.<sup>22</sup>

According to Oakes' typology, the Lee women of Winchester represented the middle-class by living in town and inheriting their six slaves from deceased male lawyers, but this was not how they perceived themselves. Historian Edward P. Thompson writes, "Class is defined by men as they live their own history, and, in the end, this is its only definition." The same applies to women, of course, and Mary Greenhow Lee perceived her family as socially superior to other families who lacked pedigree or education, but met Oakes' "middle class" standards. Lee referred frequently to her family ancestry among the FFV (First Families of Virginia) and to her prominent acquaintances that included politicians and intellectuals. Historian Shelia R. Phipps describes how Mary Greenhow Lee used the term "class" in relation to people outside her peer group, and the term "*connexion* . . . for people who met her requirements for social inclusion."<sup>23</sup> Laura Lee wrote in a similar fashion with regard to class, but did not use the term "connexion." Perhaps, she felt her status was not on par with her sister-in-law, or maybe she cared less about such distinctions.

The Lee women felt secure in their standing as ladies, and their economic self-sufficiency was notable. The unmarried Laura and Antoinette Lee had previously been

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<sup>22</sup> James Oakes, *The Ruling Race: A History of American Slaveholders* (New York: Vintage Books, 1982), 38, 50, 52.

<sup>23</sup> Shelia R. Phipps, "I Feel Quite Independent Now: The Life of Mary Greenhow Lee," (Ph.D. diss., College of William & Mary, 1998), 6-7.

under the economic and social protection of their father and then their brother, who was also Mary Greenhow Lee's husband. The deaths of the Lee men provided inheritances that made financial independence possible for the Lee women. Laura Lee's father passed away in 1833 and left a trust fund to support his ten children until the sons were raised and educated and the daughters married.<sup>24</sup> All four sons completed their education and pursued various professions, but only four out of the six daughters married. Two of the youngest daughters, Laura and Antoinette Lee, never married and were therefore entitled to the trust fund. They continued to reside with their mother, Elizabeth Lee, and brother, Hugh Holmes Lee. Mrs. Lee died in 1853, and when Hugh Holmes Lee died intestate three years later, the court appointed his widow, Mary Greenhow Lee, administrator of his estate. The two unmarried sisters and the widowed sister-in-law lived together and pooled their resources for their mutual support. Together, they owned real estate, investments, and six slaves.<sup>25</sup>

Historians have discovered that single women, such as the unmarried Laura and Antoinette Lee and the widowed Mary Greenhow Lee, increased in number in southern towns and cities by the mid-nineteenth century. For instance, the adult female population of one southern city, Charleston, South Carolina, was a third unwed and a fifth widowed

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<sup>24</sup> Will of Daniel Lee, *Will Book*, v.18, April 1833, (Frederick County Courthouse, Winchester, Va.), 53-54.

<sup>25</sup> Sources provide different values for the estates. Personal Property taxes assessed the combined estate of Laura and Antoinette Lee at \$10,767 in 1860, including the value of one slave. The estate had two slaves in 1861, and three in 1862. Mary Greenhow Lee's personal property was assessed at \$993 in 1861 and \$1793 in 1862, and included two slaves. *Personal Property Tax Lists*, 1860-1862, Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia. However, the Bureau of the Census, *Eighth Census of the United States, Virginia, Schedule 1: Free Inhabitants in Winchester* (Washington, D.C. 1860), lists the personal estates of Laura and Antoinette at \$6319, with joint ownership of three slaves. Mary Greenhow Lee held \$6,760 in personal property, \$2,790 in real estate, and three slaves.

in 1848.<sup>26</sup> In contrast, the national average of unmarried women for life was only 8 percent by the 1850s.<sup>27</sup> Urban pockets of single women in the South continued to outpace the national average during the second half of the nineteenth century. Suzanne Lebsock's study of Petersburg, Virginia, revealed that "by 1860, more than a third of the white women living in Petersburg were either widowed or had never married at all." Yet, the national average of unmarried, adult women had only increased to 11 percent by 1870.<sup>28</sup>

Single women in the South headed more households than previously believed. From the 1860 Federal Census of Petersburg, Virginia, Lebsock discovered that "37.1 percent of white women aged twenty-one or above either headed households or were listed directly beneath persons to whom they could not have been married."<sup>29</sup> Victoria Bynum's study of three counties in North Carolina tallied female-headed households at eleven to seventeen percent of all households in 1860.<sup>30</sup> The Lee household of single women was familiar in Southern society, but its wealth and independence made it notable.

The Lee women had to defend their inheritances in chancery court after the death of Hugh Holmes Lee, husband to Mary Greenhow Lee and brother to Laura Lee. Under Virginia's common law, married women held few property rights until 1877, but widows

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<sup>26</sup> Michael O'Brien, *An Evening When Alone: Four Journals of Single Women in the South, 1827-67* (Charlottesville, University Press of Virginia, 1993), 1-2.

<sup>27</sup> Lee Virginia Chambers-Schiller, *Liberty, A Better Husband: Single Women in America: the Generations of 1780-1840* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 3.

<sup>28</sup> Lebsock, *The Free Women of Petersburg*, 116; Chambers-Schiller, *Liberty*, 3.

<sup>29</sup> Lebsock, *The Free Women of Petersburg*, 286.

<sup>30</sup> Victoria E. Bynum, *Unruly Women: the Politics of Social and Sexual Control in the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 61.

and unmarried women had the same legal options as men.<sup>31</sup> The Lees exercised their rights when their brother-in-law, Chaplain Hedges, filed two lawsuits against them on behalf of his wife Mary R. Hedges, a sister to Laura and Antoinette Lee. The Hedges did not pursue legal action while Hugh Holmes Lee was alive; they may have believed the Lee sisters were more vulnerable.

In the first lawsuit, the Hedges wanted their share of Mary Greenhow Lee's inheritance that had originally belonged to her father-in-law's estate, specifically the house. Other relatives waived their rights to her inheritance, but the Hedges persuaded the court to force the sale of Mary Greenhow Lee's home. Undeterred by the spectacle of a public auction, Mary Greenhow Lee bought back her house with a small down payment and did not pay the remainder until she sold it twelve years later.<sup>32</sup> She was the sole bidder. This was no doubt the result of considerable efforts by Lee to garner sympathy and support for the household of single women.

The Hedges received nothing from the second lawsuit filed against Laura and Antoinette Lee. Chaplain Hedges argued for distributing their trust fund to all of Daniel Lee's heirs. Since Mary R. Hedges married in 1833, the same year her father died, she was ineligible to receive money from the trust fund. In 1860, the court ruled in favor of the unmarried Lee sisters. The trust fund remained intact, and the interest continued to support Laura and Antoinette Lee.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Lebsack, *Free Women of Petersburg*, 23, 262, n 2.

<sup>32</sup> *Winchester City Deed Book* 13, October 1856 – October 1861, (Winchester City Courthouse, Winchester, Va.), 275-277, 283; *Frederick County Order Book*, Circuit Court in Chancery, November 1860, (Frederick County Courthouse, Winchester, Va.), 200, *Winchester City Deed Book* 13, September 1872, (Winchester City Courthouse, Winchester, Va.), 344.

<sup>33</sup> *Frederick County Order Book*, Circuit Court in Chancery, June 1860 and November 1860, (Frederick County Courthouse, Winchester, Va.), 173, 199-200.

Because their diaries were devoted exclusively to the war years with few references to pre-war events, we do not know how Laura Lee and Mary Greenhow Lee felt about their legal battles. Certainly, after the lawsuits the Lee sisters understood their legal rights as single women as well as their economic vulnerability. They also learned that relatives, male and female, might not always act charitably toward them. By 1860, the Lee women had defeated legal challenges to their economic independence, but the greatest battles of their lives had yet to begin. Two years later, the Civil War reached Winchester, and the Lee women faced invasions by an enemy that threatened their entire way of life. One can only imagine that the Lee women drew upon their experiences at the courthouse to defend their property against Yankee threats and abuses.

## CHAPTER II

### THE WAR YEARS

On one level, the diaries of Laura Lee and Mary Greenhow Lee describe Southern white women's contributions to the Civil War and the daily anxieties felt by all the inhabitants of Winchester, Virginia. The townspeople experienced five nearby battles, four Union occupations, four Confederate occupations, as well as frequent troop movements through the town. Winchester held strategic importance as the northern gateway to the Shenandoah Valley by road and as a southern terminus by rail. The backdrop of war cannot be overlooked, but on another level, the diaries reveal important clues into Southern white women's identities, values, and attitudes during this tumultuous time.

The Confederate patriot was a new identity that represented white high-status Southerners' determination to protect their way of life. Prior to the war, privileged white Southerners considered themselves patriotic Americans, but Confederate patriotism developed rapidly, in part, because these same Southerners believed that they were upholding the republican ideals of the Founding Fathers. Indeed, many Confederates felt pangs of remorse that the American experiment in republicanism had not worked. Not all white Southerners were willing to renounce their ties to the United States; Unionists lived throughout the South even during wartime.

The majority of white Southerners shed their allegiance to the Union during the crucial years of 1859-1861, and women contributed to the formation of Confederate patriotism and the construction of Confederate Womanhood. Confederate Womanhood was an ideology that called for white Southern women to unite behind secession, prove their patriotism, and shame white Southern men to do the same.<sup>34</sup> The path to Confederate Womanhood began, according to Varon, after John Brown's raid. White women in Virginia started to express hostility toward Northern people in general, not just abolitionists. While men formed militias, women promoted a boycott of Northern goods and produced homespun clothing. Although Harper's Ferry was a major turning point in the sectional crisis, Varon disagrees with historian George C. Rable's contention that the raid sparked a political awakening for Southern women. Instead, "it accelerated an ongoing process of political reorientation, in which women cast off old political allegiances and came to embrace the cause of Southern nationalism."<sup>35</sup> At the Virginia State Convention called to debate secession, the spectators, including those in the ladies' gallery, heard extravagant praise for Confederate Womanhood. Male politicians and propagandists acknowledged white women's influence and encouraged them to embrace the ideology of Confederate Womanhood. After the firing on Fort Sumter, Virginia passed an ordinance of secession, and a month later Richmond became the capital of the Confederacy.

Once the war began, Confederate ideology linked women's roles as both patriotic exhorters and ministering angels to motherhood. Their duties included giving up their

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<sup>34</sup> Varon, *We Mean to Be Counted*, 153-155.

<sup>35</sup> Rable, *Civil Wars*, 42; Varon, *We Mean to Be Counted*, 138-140.

husband and sons with stoicism befitting “Spartan Mothers,” and tending to the needs of the troops with compassion as surrogate mothers.<sup>36</sup>

Southern women who adopted Confederate Womanhood felt pulled in different directions by other cherished identities. The Lee women were no exception, and they worried about how their acts of patriotism altered their conduct. On more than one occasion, Mary Lee described in her diary the difficulty of reconciling her prewar identities with her Confederate patriotism:

I hope I may bear it as a Christian, a patriot, & as a lady -- characters difficult to combine when there is so much to call forth feelings, unbecoming both a Christian & a lady.<sup>37</sup>

Since Jennie Mason, the intended recipient of the diary, belonged to one of the most prominent families in Virginia, Lee felt it necessary to explain her own behavior that did not conform to antebellum standards. The white women in the Lee household tried to balance these identities and the behaviors associated with them. Although they attempted to conduct themselves as Christians and ladies, their diaries emphasize their behaviors and exploits as patriots.

As a member of the Episcopal Church, Mary Greenhow Lee worried that Confederate patriotism compromised her Christian values of charity and forgiveness toward fellow Christians. Laura Lee, who was also a devout Christian and taught Sunday school, expressed no difficulties reconciling Christianity with Confederate patriotism. Their differences in perspective became evident as early as March 1862 when Mary Greenhow Lee wrote the following:

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<sup>36</sup> Varon, *We Mean to Be Counted*, 164-165.

<sup>37</sup> Mary Greenhow Lee, *Diary*, 28 March 1863, 340.

How it is raining and hailing, Lal wishes every hail stone was a pound weight, to fall on a Yankee's head; I would condense her wish & have all united in one great mass to destroy the leaders of this unholy war, or what would be more Christian wish, I would have them to turn from the error of their ways.<sup>38</sup>

Since she felt guilty wishing harm toward all Yankees, Mary Greenhow Lee singled out Northern leaders and wished for their conversion to the South. After two and a half years of warfare, Mary Greenhow Lee felt justified not only in her patriotism but also in her hatred of Yankees, because Northerners worshipped another god. "One not accustomed to these scenes will think them very unchristian, but I cannot even in Church feel charitably to the enemies not only of my country, my friends, but also of my God, for they respect neither God nor man."<sup>39</sup> In spite of Lee's rationale of different gods, she continued to express some uncertainty: "If I am wrong in my hatred of them (not as individuals but as a class) I fear I shall be punished yet by being humbled by receiving favors from them. I still hope I may be spared this degradation."<sup>40</sup>

Although the Lee women held different perspectives with regard to Christianity and patriotism, Laura Lee shared Mary Greenhow Lee's concerns that their behavior and that of other women in Winchester was becoming less lady-like, especially when contrasted with the futile conduct of the male citizenry. Over the course of the war, a pattern of behavior developed according to which army, if any, possessed the town. During Union occupations, the Lees and their nieces were insolent and rebellious; they felt powerful and important hiding contraband or delivering illegal mail. Just the opposite occurred when no occupying force was present. They felt powerless and

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<sup>38</sup> Mary Greenhow Lee, *Diary*, 24 March 1862, 22.

<sup>39</sup> Mary Greenhow Lee, *Diary*, 4 December 1862, 731.

ineffective because they had no opportunity to assist the Confederate cause. The presence of Confederate soldiers, however, motivated the Lee household to conform outwardly to prewar gender roles. They revived the role as gracious hostesses even when they had little to offer but their companionship.

During Union occupations, the Confederate women of Winchester took every opportunity to display their antagonism. They discovered that as females, they controlled unique weapons with which to rebuff the enemy. Their appearances, for instance, no longer remained a private concern or a status symbol, but became a political issue instead. “Ladies” were supposed to maintain their appearance by dressing carefully and assuming a pleasant demeanor. Through facial expressions, Southern women could provoke a reaction from the Yankees. This was a favorite tactic by Mary Greenhow Lee:

Scorn & contempt are such habitual expressions, that I fear they will not readily give place to more lady-like ones; I heard one Yankee say as I passed them, ‘she holds a d\_\_\_\_d high head.’<sup>41</sup>

When Southern white women did not appear “lady-like,” with their scornful looks or displays of snobbery, enemy soldiers took offense.

Perhaps the haughty looks by Mary Greenhow Lee and other ladies caused the Union army to overreact to female attire by attempting to regulate it on May 16, 1862. Laura Lee explained some of the practical reasons for the new clothing, but their Union occupiers interpreted the women’s motives differently:

Our sovereign master, Provost Phillebrown, says these ‘Secesh women’ shall not wear calico sun bonnets on the street, as they are intended as a disrespect to the soldiers, neither shall they wear white muslin aprons with bodies!! Calico and gingham sunbonnets are worn by all the ladies here,

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<sup>40</sup> Mary Greenhow Lee, Diary, 18 December 1864, 742.

<sup>41</sup> Mary Greenhow Lee, Diary, 23 April 1862, 78.

and styled secession bonnets. They were adopted for their cheapness and for their defense against staring soldiers, but they resent it, and say they are intended as an insult by intimating that we do not care how we dress while they are here.<sup>42</sup>

The women intended to use their bonnets as shields to defend against staring soldiers, but the enemy's response turned the bonnets and aprons into offensive weapons. In essence, a symbolic battle over dress ensued, and white Southern women continued to wear the "Secesh" clothing to provide protection from ogling Union soldiers and to demonstrate patriotism for the Confederacy.

The Provost felt his authority challenged by women's ability to make political statements through their appearances. By regulating female attire, he tried to assert his sovereignty over women in public places. No punishment was specified, and the Provost himself may not have known what, in any, punishment he would order.

At the same time as the sunbonnet incident in Winchester, a battle over women's behavior in public raged in New Orleans. Union Major General Benjamin Butler responded to Southern women's public insults by issuing General Order Number 28 on May 15, 1862:

As the officers and soldiers of the United States have been subject to repeated insults from the women, calling themselves 'Ladies,' of New Orleans, in return for the most scrupulous non-interference and courtesy on our part, it is ordered that hereafter when any female shall, by word, gesture or movement, insult or show contempt for any officer or soldier of the United States, she shall be regarded and held liable to be treated as a woman of the town plying her vocation.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Laura Lee, Diary, 16 May 1862, 32.

<sup>43</sup> Benjamin F. Butler, *Autobiography and Personal Reminiscences of Major-General Benjamin F. Butler; Butler's Book* (Boston: Thayer, 1892), 418, as quoted in Mary P. Ryan, *Women in Public: Between Banners and Ballots, 1825-1880*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 2-3.

Butler's order voided any special protection that "ladies" expected to receive from "gentlemen" and instead threatened to treat rebellious women as prostitutes, in effect relegating the entire female population of New Orleans to the lowest, most vulnerable rank in society. Reprinted in newspapers across the country and overseas, General Order Number 28 shocked readers with its flagrant disregard for conventional gender relations. The Parliament of Great Britain rebuked U.S. Secretary of State William Seward for Butler's infamous order.<sup>44</sup> Southern papers called Butler the "Beast," and the nickname stuck.

General Butler's order affected Winchester as well. Confederate troops had taken the town on May 25, 1862, but six days later, they began to withdraw. Butler's order gave both citizens and soldiers cause to worry, according to Mary Greenhow Lee:

I could not take in the idea that our soldiers were again leaving us to the Yankees, but they evidently think so, & are so grave about it; this proclamation of Butler's in New Orleans has shocked them, & they leave us with a fear they had not felt before.<sup>45</sup>

Lee implied that the retreating soldiers had not expected such behavior from the Yankees, but that the women of Winchester knew otherwise.

At the risk of antagonizing Union commanders, the Lee women continued their rebellious activities and sometimes described them in military terms. One of the most self-conscious uses of military language and symbolism by the Lees' occurred during a walk to the Union fortifications with their nieces and another young woman in the summer of 1862. Laura Lee related the walk and the meaning it held for the women:

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<sup>44</sup> Ryan, *Women in Public*, 130.

<sup>45</sup> Mary Greenhow Lee, *Diary*, 31 May 1862, 122.

This afternoon we walked out again to the battlefield. Kate Conrad was with us. When we were there last Saturday we piled up stones to mark the place from which the Louisiana Brigade charged from the hill upon the Yankees. The girls have been there several times since and each time have added to the pile until it has become quite a respectable monument. It is just facing the new fortifications, about half a mile distant. We observed several groups of men come a little way down the hill apparently watching us, and we amused ourselves running about collecting the stones with great apparent eagerness and then waving our sun bonnets and parasols when we added to the pile. We found an old fruit can which we fixed on the top pointing towards the Yankees. Mary wrote on a leaf of her pocket book, "Attention Yankees! This is a 'masked battery' and highly dangerous, we charge you not to take it. Rebels." We fixed it in the can for them to find.<sup>46</sup>

The women acted simultaneously inside and outside the bounds of acceptable behavior for ladies. Building a monument in tribute to the dead was a conventional role for women, but these ladies endowed their actions with symbolic aggression. The stones changed from a monument into a masked battery. Through the piling of stones and waving of parasols, the group of women released pent-up feelings of frustration and aggression toward the Union occupiers. The walks soon after became a frequent diversion with increasing numbers of women joining. They named their walking party the "Brigade."<sup>47</sup>

The Lee sisters and Burwell nieces went beyond symbolic displays of rebellion and took direct action for the Confederate cause. At the outset of the first Union occupation, Mary Greenhow Lee wrote half-jokingly, "I think I will open a Confederate Post Office"; actually, this was not far from reality.<sup>48</sup> Since the Union army censored all mail going south, townspeople preferred to send correspondence through an informal, yet

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<sup>46</sup> Laura Lee, *Diary*, 25 July 1862, 59.

<sup>47</sup> Mary Greenhow Lee, *Diary*, 24 March 1864, 573.

<sup>48</sup> Mary Greenhow Lee, *Diary*, 14 April 1862, 66.

reliable, network of letter carriers. Individuals who received passes to go through the Union pickets would conceal letters among their belongings or on their persons. Farmers who sold their goods in town were the most frequently pressed to smuggle letters. Since the Lee and Burwell women did not leave Winchester much, they did not bring in or take out the Southern mail. Instead, they participated in the Southern mail network by receiving the mail from the letter carriers. When others felt too frightened to distribute letters smuggled through the lines, Mary Greenhow Lee made a point of openly delivering the mail. Of course, the Lee and Burwell women also sent mail through this illicit network. They did so in order to convey military information to the Confederate army as well as to correspond with civilian friends about private matters. No matter how vigilantly Union officials searched for smuggled mail and punished offenders, citizens continued to subvert the censors.

The domestic sphere became political when the Lee women used their house to commit treasonous acts against the Union army. For instance, their home served as a warehouse for smuggled goods whenever the Union army occupied Winchester. They sent lists with friends who were willing to smuggle purchased goods across the lines, and they bought supplies from the Union army or its sutlers<sup>49</sup> by claiming the goods were for household consumption only. After purchasing supplies with their own money or with money sent by friends in Baltimore, the Lee and Burwell women would hide the items in their home or scatter the items among the households of fellow Secessionists.

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<sup>49</sup> Sutlers were camp followers with permission to sell goods to soldiers at reasonable prices. They were often restricted from selling to Southern civilians, but they frequently did so at their own risk.

They risked discovery whenever the Union army searched their home. The first Union search of the Lee residence was not for contraband, but for the rebel flag that they had previously waved from the front porch. Rebel flags were favorite souvenirs for Union soldiers to send home. On this occasion, Mary Greenhow Lee delayed the search by insisting that an officer must be present. When a major arrived to search the home, she would not let him through the door. He proceeded to climb through the window with six soldiers in tow. The major did not find the flag, and he wrote the Lees a certificate verifying that he searched the house.<sup>50</sup>

Subsequent searches uncovered no contraband goods. With only a moment's warning, the Lee and Burwell women prepared for inspections by concealing layers of clothing or cloth under their own clothes. After another search the following Spring, Mary Greenhow Lee gloated over the fact the Provost Marshall did not find anything treasonable when, in fact, hidden throughout the house were foodstuffs and clothing for the soldiers, and even her diary:

It amuses me so much to know how I outwit the Yankees; the Provost Marshal wrote his certificate at this portfolio, with only a blotting sheet between the paper, on which he was writing and my account book of the money received for Confederates & disbursements — and also this journal, containing the confession & execution of my treasonable plans, from the beginning to the present moment. Any page of it, if seen by Milroy, would send me through the lines; & I should be heartily glad, if it were not that those left behind would be troubled.<sup>51</sup>

In this instance, the women did not have time to hide everything, but the search was so perfunctory that the enemy overlooked evidence.

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<sup>50</sup> Laura Lee, *Diary*, 5 June 1862, 46; Mary Greenhow Lee, *Diary*, 4 June 1862, 132-133.

<sup>51</sup> Mary Greenhow Lee, *Diary*, 6 April 1863, 347.

Throughout the war, the Lees were conscious of their use of military language, and even delighted in describing the battles of everyday life in Winchester. For instance, Mary Greenhow Lee described the resolution of a conflict she had had with a Union surgeon with military phrases: "...I came off conqueror & was left in undisputed possession of the field, to distribute my pudding 'a discretion.'"<sup>52</sup> Lest anyone trivialize her daily activities, Lee wrote the following disclaimer a year later: "these are trifles to narrate but they show the state of things – to get a paper of pins requires as much diplomacy as to manage affairs of state."<sup>53</sup> The women felt important and powerful assisting the Confederate cause, and they may have equated power with manliness and soldiering. By 1864, Mary Greenhow Lee made this connection explicit when she called her activities "soldier work."<sup>54</sup>

In general, the bold behavior exhibited by Confederate women toward the Union army contrasted with the conciliatory stance taken by male Confederates. As early as the first Union occupation of Winchester, Mary Greenhow Lee wrote, "The creatures [Yankees] are grand cowards, & a bold front intimidates them, but I am sorry to say that, with few exceptions, the men cringe to them, & it is only the women, who maintain a defiant course."<sup>55</sup> According to the Lees, a public test of each Southern man's patriotism and manliness occurred whenever the Union army required oaths of allegiance from male citizens. Enforcement of the oath was difficult at best, and the Union army often compromised with face-saving measures. Such compromises, however, the Lee women

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<sup>52</sup> Mary Greenhow Lee, *Diary*, 7 July 1862, 167.

<sup>53</sup> Mary Greenhow Lee, *Diary*, 21 September 1863, 482.

<sup>54</sup> Mary Greenhow Lee, *Diary*, 24 March 1862, 572-573.

<sup>55</sup> Mary Greenhow Lee, *Diary*, 18 August 1862, 206.

viewed as degrading. Laura Lee expressed these sentiments in her diary during the second Union occupation of Winchester:

The oath of allegiance business is stirring again, and to our great indignation, most of the prominent men here, have agreed to compromise by taking a parole, which will exempt them from the regular oath, but is still a great concession to the Yankees. It is shameful!<sup>56</sup>

The Lee sisters made their opinions known, and a few days later Mary Greenhow Lee described the discomfort the men felt under the weight of their disapproval.

We are amused to find how these oath men try to conciliate us & are at the same time, so uneasy in our presence; Mr. Williams paid me a long visit to-night, but was nervous and embarrassed. They know how we talk about them.<sup>57</sup>

While the men felt uncomfortable, the Lee family felt resolute and enjoyed influencing Winchester's leading men.

Mary Greenhow Lee claimed that there were no effective male leaders in Winchester. Only Rebel women wielded power against the Yankees. She went so far as to declare, "This is surely the day of woman's power; the men are afraid to do, or say anything, & leave all to us."<sup>58</sup> Lee even imagined that she could take charge of Winchester if there was no occupying force in town, "Will we not be in a strange position, if the Yankees go away & Jackson does not come here[?] I think of establishing an independent monarchy, & assuming the dictatorship."<sup>59</sup> She revisited the idea of taking charge a month later, "I propose that we shall declare ourselves a separate & independent sovereignty, & elect a Queen to reign over us, the women having proved

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<sup>56</sup> Laura Lee, Diary, 22 August 1862, 66.

<sup>57</sup> Mary Greenhow Lee, Diary, 25 August 1862, 214.

<sup>58</sup> Mary Greenhow Lee, Diary, 1 April 1862, 47.

<sup>59</sup> Mary Greenhow Lee, Diary, 21 May 1862, 108.

themselves more valiant than the men.”<sup>60</sup> One can surmise who Mary Greenhow Lee thought would be the best candidate for an elected Queen! Although presented in a joking manner, Lee’s musings for a female dictatorship or monarchy illustrated the empowerment she felt while male leaders lacked authority.

In spite of Mary Greenhow Lee’s bravado, she did not assume leadership of the town when lulls occurred between occupations. The Union army returned after a brief hiatus of ten days, and Mary Greenhow Lee resumed her criticism of Winchester’s Southern men. She cried, “I wish I was a man, or that our men had some manliness.”<sup>61</sup> She felt disgusted with the Southern men in town as well as with her own passive role. Lee did not repeat these sentiments until March 1864, when the Yankees marched through every week for the past two months without occupying the town:

...what would I not give, if I were only a man & could help in this last great struggle – being only a woman & of no account, I have to fold my hands & try to keep quiet & calm when my heart is throbbing with excitement.<sup>62</sup>

If Laura Lee had similar desires to be a man, she kept them to herself and did not write them in her diary.

Several historians, including Drew Gilipan Faust and George Rable, have analyzed accounts of Southern women wishing they were men. Some women disguised themselves as men in order to fight. The vast majority of women who expressed a desire to be a man resigned themselves to supportive roles. Typically, Southern white women from privileged families did not directly challenge or question the male domain of

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<sup>60</sup> Mary Greenhow Lee, *Diary*, 2 June 1862, 127.

<sup>61</sup> Mary Greenhow Lee, *Diary*, 4 June 1862, 129.

<sup>62</sup> Mary Greenhow Lee, *Diary*, 3 March 1864, 565; also see 1 March 1864, 564, for similar sentiments.

combat. Their laments about not being men, according to George C. Rable, had “the paradoxical effect of reinforcing conventional gender roles while implicitly questioning the ability of men to act as southern men were supposed to act.”<sup>63</sup>

Although the Lee women described their activities with military expressions and Mary Greenhow Lee sometimes wished to be a man, they were not willing to give up their identity as ladies. The Lee and Burwell women manipulated gender proscriptions to their advantage. They expected special consideration as ladies by the Union army and demanded such respect when it was not forthcoming, but the Lee women refused to return the favor and acknowledge the Union officers as gentlemen. In one case, Mary Greenhow Lee ignored an officer’s attempt to perform a minor act of chivalry:

the gutters were almost impassable & at one place [a] Yankee officer called to his Orderly to get a plank to put across for me, but such is my natural aversion to receiving the slightest civility from them, that I often cross the street to another crossing without appearing to acknowledge or see his intentions.<sup>64</sup>

While the officer behaved properly toward Lee, acknowledging her status as a lady, she pretended not to notice his efforts and thereby publicly rejected his status as a gentleman. Her first priority was not to behave as a proper lady, but as a proper patriot. Such behavior exasperated the Union officers; they resented the manipulation by Southern ladies. In New Orleans, similar insults by women provoked General Benjamin Butler to issue his controversial order that threatened to treat women as prostitutes. In Winchester,

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<sup>63</sup> George C. Rable, “‘Missing in Action’: Women of the Confederacy,” in *Divided Houses: Gender and the Civil War*, eds. Catherine Clinton and Nina Silber (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 136; Drew Gilpin Faust, *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 221, 231-232.

<sup>64</sup> Mary Greenhow Lee, 16 December 1864, 740.

rebuffs of Union officers eventually contributed to the banishment of the Lees and their nieces in 1865.

When Confederates occupied the town, the Lee women and the Burwell nieces demonstrated their commitment to the Southern cause with behaviors befitting a lady: sacrifice, hard work, and sociability. As soon as the first company of Rebels entered Winchester, the Lee household prepared vast quantities of food and distributed their contraband goods. Then, the Lee sisters assisted wherever needed. An exhausted Laura Lee described her activities: “I have had a most fatiguing day. The Hospital in the morning, the Factory in the afternoon, and company at night.”<sup>65</sup>

Laura Lee dutifully recorded the names of Confederate visitors in her diary, and in this rare instance, she described the merriment:

Late in the evening Dr. Green and Capt. Brown came with Gen. Ewell’s carriage to take us to the fortifications to see the flag raised. We had a charming drive, and came home to tea. The two generals and most of their staff officers. We had tea in the yard, and then Gen. Ewell for an hour was receiving and sending dispatches, while we sat on the front porch with the officers who were not engaged with him, and the girls sang, and about ten they left here in two carriages, with half a dozen on horseback. Altogether it was a very pleasant evening.<sup>66</sup>

The party at the Lees’ was a public display of their stature as hostesses and as ladies. Of all the Confederate officers whom the Lee women welcomed into their home, General Stonewall Jackson gave them the most satisfaction. The Lee sisters considered his visit an honor, but he only stayed a few minutes and Laura Lee was not present to meet him.

When the Lee and Burwell women returned to their traditional role as gracious hostesses, they expected Confederate men to conform to prewar standards of decorum. If

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<sup>65</sup> Laura Lee, *Diary*, 12 September 1862, 74.

the conduct of their male visitors was unbecoming of gentlemen, the Lee sisters were not pleased. On one occasion Laura Lee reported, "A great many here again to night, among them Mr. Vizetelli, Dr. Barksdale and Dr. Cullen, all intoxicated to our great disgust and indignation."<sup>67</sup> The women made their disapproval known, and Laura Lee later wrote, "Mr. Vizetelli sent last night a note of humble apology for his conduct here Wednesday evening."<sup>68</sup> The three men had been disrespectful to the ladies of the house by acting improperly. Only Mr. Vizetelli, who asked for forgiveness, reappeared in the diaries.

Although the Lee women censured their intoxicated visitors, they were somewhat flexible toward other interactions between women and men that society redefined as acceptable under wartime conditions. Nursing duties required unmarried women to assist men, who were strangers, in ways that polite society considered indelicate before the war. Patients often were not fully clothed, and nurses sometimes had to be alone with them. This was not easy for Laura Lee, who had never been married and acted reserved around men. Mary Greenhow Lee derived amusement from observing her adjustment:

You will be pleased to hear that the shrinking Laura Lee can sit unmoved in the room where a man is in bed & whole leg perfectly uncovered to above the knee.<sup>69</sup>

Mary was poking fun at Laura's expense, but the diary entry also revealed that space between men and women, as well as the domains of public and private, were less distinct in places affected by the war, such as hospitals. By justifying changes, such as nursing, as temporary and necessary, even Laura Lee could adapt. Historian Drew Gilpin Faust

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<sup>66</sup> Laura Lee, Diary, 16 June 1863, 124.

<sup>67</sup> Laura Lee, Diary, 7 September 1864, 190.

<sup>68</sup> Laura Lee, Diary, 10 September 1864, 190-191.

<sup>69</sup> Mary Greenhow Lee, Diary, 6 April 1862, 55.

explores the ways in which white Southerners blunted “the impact and significance of women’s changed behavior by framing it within existing ideological categories.” Since nurses seemed to have the strength and intelligence of men, women who lacked the requisite ‘masculine’ traits were excused from nursing, while women capable of nursing were not expanding women’s roles beyond the present crisis.<sup>70</sup>

Laura Lee had some difficulty accommodating to nursing and sharing public space with men, but she accepted change to the local social structure more readily than her sister-in-law did. The war reconfigured Winchester’s social structure into two separate hierarchies for Secessionists and Unionists with each group perceiving the other as immoral. This mutual dislike turned into hostility, especially when one group received favors from the military forces occupying the town. Old measures of status, such as wealth, education, and family, had not been eradicated completely, but patriotic feelings created new social bonds. Confederate patriotism required acceptance of this new ranking system. In their separate diaries, Mary Greenhow Lee and Laura Lee both agreed that a new social structure based on political allegiance had emerged, but Mary Greenhow Lee dwelt on the strangeness of the new associations whereas Laura Lee celebrated the unification of Southerners in a common cause.

Mary Greenhow Lee was particularly conscious of her status as an FFV (First Families of Virginia), and her writings reflect her frequent reassessment of social relations in Winchester. Many of the new friendships forged during the war years were

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<sup>70</sup> Drew Gilpin Faust, "Altars of Sacrifice: Confederate Women and the Narratives of War," in *Divided Houses: Gender and the Civil War*, eds. Catherine Clinton and Nina Silber (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 186.

with women of a lesser social status, who had not previously received much attention from the Lees. Mary Greenhow Lee explained:

This war develops new friendships, & I fear, may destroy old ones; those who think & act alike, in the absorbing topics of the day are drawn together for mutual sympathy & support; while with those who are antagonistic, there is no intercourse; as the time for discussion is past, & the differences are no longer of opinion, but of deep feeling.<sup>71</sup>

Since Lee began her diary as a record for friends who had moved out of town to read, she may have felt a need to explain her associations with these women. Within the first month of Union occupation Lee remarked, “my visiting list is increasing rapidly; I must try to remember all the new friends I make . . . you would be amused to see how Mrs. Price manages me and how quietly I submit.”<sup>72</sup> Apparently, Mary Greenhow Lee would not have permitted Mrs. Price to “manage” her before the war, and she felt that the role reversal would amuse Jennie Mason, the person whom Lee originally intended to read the diary.

Mary Greenhow Lee sometimes dealt with the incongruity between her prewar and wartime social circles by classifying her new acquaintances as “war friends.” In such a manner, Lee first mentioned Mrs. Tuley in her diary. Five months later, Lee no longer described Mrs. Tuley as merely a “war friend,” but rather as “one of the most pleasant persons I know, now.”<sup>73</sup> Their friendship continued throughout the war.

Just as the Lee women had extended their circle of friends to women of more ordinary means, they also began to withhold their society from members of more prominent families who demonstrated conciliatory attitudes toward the Union officers.

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<sup>71</sup> Mary Greenhow Lee, *Diary*, 19 August 1862, 207.

<sup>72</sup> Mary Greenhow Lee, *Diary*, 31 March 1862, 45.

Some of these families still visited the Lees and tried to persuade the women to agree with their views. Mary Greenhow Lee explained how her family felt about this:

We are very much amused at our popularity, just now; our society is divided into various cliques, all of which are intimate with us, & visit here, more than any where else in town; it is strange, as they all know how decided we are; with some, & against others; Mr. Conrad leads one party; Barton and Williams the other, but all these families are quite violent in their demonstrations; we agree with the Conrads.<sup>74</sup>

The Bartons and Williams were Secessionists, but not as determined as the Lee women would have liked. Individuals who expressed staunch Unionist views were not allowed into the Lee house on any pretext. Not surprisingly, the Lee women claimed that the Unionists in town were not from the “better class” of people.

Yet, the Lees would forgive past transgressions of pro-Union sentiments and resume their social calls after the offenders acknowledged their folly. On one occasion, the Lee women enjoyed a social visit with Judge Parker who had changed his position toward the Union and secession.

. . . after tea, Nettie, Lal & I went up to Judge Parkers; Ev was in the country but we sat with the Judge for an hour. How he has changed; at the commencement of the war we barely spoke, on account of his Union proclivities; now he is a good Southerner, has joined the Church & is thoroughly congenial on many subjects in which we are deeply interested. Everyone is changed.<sup>75</sup>

Whether Mary Greenhow Lee referred to the Episcopal Church or the metaphorical church of the Confederacy was not clear, but in either case Judge Parker’s “conversion” reaffirmed her belief in the righteousness of the Southern cause.

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<sup>73</sup> Mary Greenhow Lee, *Diary*, 7 August 1862, 197.

<sup>74</sup> Mary Greenhow Lee, *Diary*, 30 August 1862, 219.

<sup>75</sup> Mary Greenhow Lee, *Diary*, 17 June 1864, 621. Nettie and Lal were nicknames for Antoinette Lee and Laura Lee, respectively.

While Mary Greenhow Lee contemplated the new divisions in society, Laura Lee focused instead on solidarity. She took pains to record instances when all Southerners, including the “country people,” worked together.<sup>76</sup> When the Union army made its first attempt to impose an oath of allegiance, Laura Lee joyfully recorded the failure in August 1862, “It is wonderful what a spirit is shown by all the classes - even down to the lowest and poorest - their men are unanimous in refusing, even though the alternative is banishment.”<sup>77</sup> Only with the help of “country people” could the illicit southern mail network succeed. Laura Lee explained their important role:

the market people, who are always escorted around by a guard, constantly have letters about them. This afternoon we were arranging with a woman to bring in letters from Newtown, while her guard stood at a little distance, looking on, but of course not knowing. The country people are eager to do anything which will outwit the yankees.<sup>78</sup>

Two years later, individuals from all social strata still came to the assistance of Confederate prisoners held in Winchester without food. According to Laura Lee, “The citizens have very little in their houses, and still less prospect of getting more when that is gone, but all classes give liberally to both wounded and prisoners.”<sup>79</sup> The townspeople gave what food they could, and Laura Lee heartily approved of the display of self-sacrifice and patriotism. She credited “all classes” for keeping up a united front against the Union occupiers.

Laura Lee praised all Southerners for their cooperative efforts against the Yankees, but some individuals grew disillusioned with the Confederate cause. Deserters

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<sup>76</sup> Laura Lee, Diary, 15 June 1863, 123; 27 September 1864, 195; 4 October 1864, 196; 12 October 1864, 197-198.

<sup>77</sup> Laura Lee, Diary, 2 August 1862, 61.

<sup>78</sup> Laura Lee, Diary, 6 August 1862, 62.

<sup>79</sup> Laura Lee, Diary, 21 September 1864, 193.

from the Confederate army wrecked havoc in the fall of 1863 and rattled the Lees' faith in the righteousness of all white Southerners. When three men dressed in gray attempted to steal a butcher's horse, a wealthy man intervened. The thieves attacked him with sabers and set fire to his steam mill. They shot at anyone who dared to show his or her face, and then stole the horse. Laura Lee could not believe that Southerners behaved so dishonorably:

It does seem as if we were already subjugated when three armed men can keep a whole community at bay. Some persons declare that the men were not yankees, but a portion of a band of thieves who, have been prowling and robbing in the mountains. If this is true it makes the conduct of our citizens still more unpardonable.<sup>80</sup>

The very next day Lee wrote, "To our great mortification, it is almost certain that the villains of yesterday are deserters from our army."<sup>81</sup> The Confederate deserters who stole the horse and burned the mill displayed a lack of patriotism. The steam mill was worth \$40,000, and its future output would have benefited Winchester's economy and even the Southern war effort.

Three weeks later, Laura Lee reported, "That [story] that man told us on Wednesday, was utterly false, and he was a deserter and horse thief."<sup>82</sup> Confederate deserters, horse thieves, and other outlaws complicated the Lee women's vision that all white Southerners were honorable, God-fearing people, and that the South was destined to win the war. Historian LeeAnn Whites interprets thefts from Southerners by other

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<sup>80</sup> Laura Lee, Diary, 24 November 1863, 142-143.

<sup>81</sup> Laura Lee, Diary, 25 November 1863, 143.

<sup>82</sup> Laura Lee, Diary, 18 December 1863, 146.

Southerners in Augusta, Georgia, as possible evidence of class hostility.<sup>83</sup> The same may have been true for Winchester, Virginia.

Confederate patriotism protected wealthy Southerners from Southerners of limited means as long as faith in a victorious South remained strong. After the Southern loss in the Third Battle of Winchester, September 19, 1864, the Lees admitted that the subsequent Union occupation seemed more permanent than previous ones, and they confessed that Southern defeat in the Valley was possible. As the Union army grew more powerful, the patriotic social system broke down.

The Lee women experienced a loss of prestige in public places. Their status as members of the social elite before the war and their reputation as patriotic rebels during the war, no longer shielded them from unpleasant encounters with individuals from more humble backgrounds. Mary Greenhow Lee described in great detail an encounter with two sulthers, a man and a woman named Smith, who yelled at Louisa (Lute) Burwell, a niece of Lee's, when they passed the Smith house. The woman shouted that Burwell "was no lady" and accused her of telling Confederate officers that the Smith house was "not a safe place to tell Southern news."<sup>84</sup> Lee described what happened next:

I was included in the violent tirade; we took no notice of their impertinence, except that Lute said, she had made the remark; they followed us to our own door, using the most insolent language; the man said I had reported him to Genl. Johnson & Genl. Kershaw; I told him it was an abominable falsehood whereupon he cursed me and told the woman to spit in my face. We sauntered slowly along, they following, pouring out a torrent of abuse; I was indignant but at the same time the whole scene was so preposterous, that I could not help laughing & that enraged them still more. It was something novel in my experience of life

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<sup>83</sup> Whites, *The Civil War*, 114-115.

<sup>84</sup> Mary Greenhow Lee, *Diary*, 29 September 1864, 697.

& so perfectly unprovoked & unfounded. I do not even know the people by sight, not having had seen them since Milroy's time.<sup>85</sup>

Mary Greenhow Lee reacted with laughter at the novelty of the situation, but it was no laughing matter to be denied recognition and respect as ladies. The social divisions that had begun to erode under the weight of patriotism, now meant less protection from insult for women who had had been shielded by their prewar social standing among the elite.

In addition to the lack of deference shown by their social inferiors, the Lees also felt insecure about maintaining their independent household. Money and supplies dwindled; necessities, such as food and firewood, became difficult to obtain. The Lees and their nieces experienced deprivation to a greater extent than ever before in their lives, and they tried to view their suffering as a patriotic burden that had to be borne. Even when the Lees had money, they could not always purchase the food or firewood that they needed. The situation worsened in December 1864 when Union General Philip Sheridan forbade sutlers to sell food, except corn meal and flour, to citizens.<sup>86</sup>

While the Lee family felt the deprivations of war, they watched the Union army consume foodstuffs and enjoy luxury items that southern women no longer possessed. Mary Greenhow Lee consoled herself by declaring the Yankees unworthy:

It puzzles me to know how these Yankee Officers have oyster pies very easily & vegetables & fruits put up in cans every day & what makes me most indignant, clean napkins & elegant damask table cloths at every meal. I do not expect the most of them ever saw napkins before unless they had sold them behind the counter. As a practical illustration of their vulgarity, I saw Major Parson, Sheridan's pet blow his nose in his fingers

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<sup>85</sup> Mary Greenhow Lee, *Diary*, 29 September 1864, 697. Union General Robert Huston Milroy occupied Winchester from January – June 1863.

<sup>86</sup> Mary Greenhow Lee, *Diary*, 22 December 1864, 745.

on the street today. Mrs. Melroy “et ilk” adopted the same primitive custom.”<sup>87</sup>

In Lee’s opinion, the possession of luxury goods and delicious foods did not negate the vulgarity of the Yankee class.

Many citizens who had declared themselves staunch rebels broke down under these circumstances and permitted Yankees to board at their homes. This decision not only provided an income, but also access to the firewood and food supplied by the Union army. Yet the Lee household held fast against Yankee boarders. They had experienced one previously, but he was forced on them, and they vowed never to endure the presence of another. Despite their patriotic justifications, Mary Greenhow Lee recognized that their refusal to accept Yankee boarders might have worked against the Confederate cause:

Nearly all our friends profit by having them in their houses. Wherever they stay they furnish an abundant supply of wood. It is a severe test of patriotism to freeze with cold when we might have roaring fires all over the house without any expense. The aggravation is that our sufferings do not benefit the cause. On the contrary the money saved for wood might buy groceries to have for the army next summer. Still I cannot [ ] have any dealings with the Yankees.<sup>88</sup>

Perhaps their stance against Yankee boarders was more the result of pride than patriotism. Even so, they repeatedly wrote of their want of necessities as a patriotic burden to bear.

The Union army knew the effect its abundance of supplies had on the morale of Southern families, and it took additional steps to undermine Confederate patriotism by

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<sup>87</sup> Mary Greenhow Lee, *Diary*, 12 January 1865, 769. Lee had heard a rumor that Mrs. Milroy, the wife of Union General Robert Huston Milroy, blew her nose in such a manner in 1862. She considered it an example of Yankee women’s indecency.

reestablishing traditional class alliances through fraternal organizations. Union army officers resurrected the Masonic Lodge in Winchester in December 1864. They invited all the prominent male citizens to join. According to Mary Greenhow Lee, the Masons succeeded in enlisting an unspecified number of Southern men through the officers' efforts to gain the release of Secessionists sent to Fort McHenry.<sup>89</sup> Although Lee raised her voice against the Masonic Lodge in Winchester, she was not averse to using Masonic ties to gain favorable treatment for Confederate prisoners.<sup>90</sup>

The Masonic Lodge bridged the political divide between elite Unionists and Confederates. In addition to assisting imprisoned Masons, the lodge hosted balls and other social events.<sup>91</sup> Membership in the Masonic Lodge was for men only. From the Lees' perspective, Winchester's men were the weak links that broke down under pressure from the Yankees.

Even the Lee women had found it difficult initially to deny that some Union officers were gentlemen, but by 1864, they no longer saw any exceptions to Northern inferiority. Mary Greenhow Lee wrote long tirades on Union officers' inadequacies and her determination to avoid all social interactions with them:

Now that the Officers are all here it is still more annoying. The privates are humble as dogs & get out of one's way by instinct, but these gaily dressed officers, with their white handkerchiefs & kid gloves offer the civilities of the pavement as if they were entirely at home & expected their courtesy to be acknowledged. It does me good never to seem to see them. I was indignant at

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<sup>88</sup> Mary Greenhow Lee, *Diary*, 6 January 1865, 751.

<sup>89</sup> Mary Greenhow Lee, *Diary*, 13 December 1864, 738.

<sup>90</sup> Mary Greenhow Lee, *Diary*, 6 February 1865, 778.

<sup>91</sup> *New York Herald*, 13 March 1865, p. 8. The article described a ball and emphasized the attendance by the "beauty and elite of the town." It further explained that the Lodge had received its charter over 100 years earlier and had enjoyed the company of George Washington.

church today to see Mr. Williams move up & make room for them to go in his pew.<sup>92</sup>

In public places, such as on the streets or in church, the presence of Yankees irritated Mary Greenhow Lee, but they also gave her a feeling of superiority. Lee no longer took notice of the exceptional Union officers, who came from the “better class,” but rather viewed all Yankees as members of a “vulgar” class.

Confederate patriotism reconfigured social circles in Winchester, and Southern women, such as the Lees, felt a loss of prestige during the last months of the war. Yet, the Lees continued to revel in their reputation as rebellious Southerners and took risks to aid the Confederate cause to the end. They were unwilling to compromise their identity as patriots, but the Lee women still felt uncomfortable about the potential abandonment of their more conventional identities as Christians and ladies. With every word spoken or action taken, Southern white women had to choose which identity would take precedence. Patriotism won time and again.

The women of the Lee household pushed the limits of a lady's identity and negotiated the difficult terrain of gender proscriptions with aplomb. Mary, Antoinette, and Laura Lee had their experiences before the war as single, independent women from which to draw. With war came new experiences: friendships based on political loyalties emerged, and notions of public and private domains became more muddled. Under the exigencies of war, Southerners redefined appropriate behaviors between women and men. These changes could be justified in part by claiming they were only temporary and created out of necessity. To an extent, the changes were short-lived. The Lee and

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<sup>92</sup> Mary Greenhow Lee, *Diary*, 18 December 1864, 742.

Burwell women gloried in their “soldier work” during Union occupations, but whenever Confederates were in town they felt reassured that they were still, after all, feminine Southern ladies. Friendships based on political loyalties instead of status, however, proved durable after the war.

The Lee and Burwell women sacrificed more than traditional identities in their patriotic fervor to the Confederate cause. They lost the security of a home and even each other. These women were not the only Confederate patriots in Winchester who sent letters and smuggled contraband, but General Philip Sheridan targeted the Lee household and two friends of the Burwell nieces, Virginia and Elizabeth Sherrard, unmarried sisters ages thirty and twenty respectively.<sup>93</sup> The Sherrard sisters received an order from Sheridan nearly identical to the one Laura Lee recorded in her diary:

Mrs. Lee, Miss Lee, and the Miss Burwells having been placed by the fortunes of war within the lines of this army, have given constant annoyance, either from a wish for notoriety, or a want of reflection, or from not being true to themselves. They are therefore ordered beyond the lines, and Maj. Parsons P.M. will have them conveyed to Newtown on Saturday morning.<sup>94</sup>

General Sheridan did not accuse the women of any crime, which he could have done, but instead he punished them for behavior not befitting ladies. Their actions were mere annoyances, yet serious enough to receive banishment. Sheridan followed the precedent

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<sup>93</sup> Virginia “Jennie” and Elizabeth “Lizzie” Sherrard were friends of the Lee’s nieces, Louisa and Laura Burwell. Virginia and Elizabeth resided with their parents, Anne M. and Joseph H. Sherrard, on the second level of the Farmers Bank, where their father served as cashier. Union forces seized the property during each occupation and the family had to live with the Yankee presence. Virginia and Elizabeth taunted the soldiers, apparently more so than their siblings, and these actions provoked Sheridan to banish them. They returned to their father’s home after the war and never married. Virginia Sherrard became a teacher and a schoolmistress. Bureau of the Census, *Seventh Census of the United States, Virginia, Schedule 1: Free Inhabitants in Winchester* (Washington, D.C., 1850); Bureau of the Census, *Ninth Census of the United States, Virginia*, (Washington, D.C., 1870); Garland R. Quarles, *Some Worthy Lives: Mini-Biographies, Winchester and Frederick County* (Winchester, Va.: Winchester-Frederick County Historical Society, 1988), 208-209.

set by General Benjamin Butler in New Orleans in 1862 and punished women who did not act ladylike. Although Sheridan did not proclaim that his army would treat insolent women as prostitutes, as Butler had done, he still denied the Lees, Burwells, and Sherrards the safety and security of their home.

The Lee women felt that their social snubbing of Union officers provoked the banishment. An irate Laura Lee wrote:

It is a cruel outrage, and perfectly undeserved. The only thing we have ever done against their orders, was to receive and send letters, and that is done by three fourths of the people in the town and the Yankees are perfectly aware of it, and know that they cannot prevent it. They have proved it on several persons, but never punished them. The true reason is, that we kept entirely aloof from them, asking no favors, making no acquaintances, and in fact perfectly ignoring their existence. We were among the few people who have been able to do it, and Sheridan determined to punish us, and humble our pride, if possible.<sup>95</sup>

Laura Lee failed to mention that they had also violated orders against supplying the rebel army with Union goods. Nonetheless, her explanation of social snubbing as the real offense appears valid.

Ladies, such as the Lee and Burwell women, discovered that socializing, or refusing to do so displayed a type of influence that could represent a political statement. This happened in New Orleans in 1861. Butler outlawed rude behavior by the women of New Orleans not because they flouted gender conventions per se, but because their actions were politically motivated.<sup>96</sup> In Winchester, General Sheridan recognized the snubbing by the Lees as similarly defiant and politically motivated, and he responded with a display of military power. One might suspect that the Lee women over-estimated

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<sup>94</sup> Laura Lee, Diary, 28 February 1865, 220. P.M. is Provost Marshall.

<sup>95</sup> Laura Lee, Diary, 28 February 1865, 220-221.

their social influence, but a false and sensationalized account in the *New York Herald* suggested otherwise:

A few days ago three Winchester families by the names of Sherrard, Lee & Burwell, were sent without our lines on the charge of disloyalty. It is alleged they conspired together to get up a sociable ball, to which Genl. Sheridan was to be an invited guest & that during its progress a detachment of Mosby's guerrillas was to seize the General, take him captive & deliver him to Richmond a la Kelly & Crook. The plan was frustrated & the ladies who concocted it are now in full communion with those for whom they have exhibited such a warm sympathy.<sup>97</sup>

Of course, the Lee women, their nieces, and the Sherrards, had no such plans, but it is revealing that Northerners considered Southern women dangerous.

Forced to leave their home with only a few days' notice, the Lee women tried to prepare for an uncertain future. They did not know if they had lost possession of their house and furniture, but they secured portable belongings in the bank and among friends. As refugees in Mount Jackson, Virginia, the Lees saw George Washington, a former servant who had joined Sheridan's staff. Washington told them that General Sheridan settled the fate of their house by pasting a written order on the property forbidding anyone to touch anything inside. This prevented the soldiers from plundering as they had intended to do. Mrs. Cochran, a Yankee, moved in with a Union colonel to protect the house. The Lees were surprised that Sheridan had shown them any consideration, but perhaps the general felt a twinge of guilt for banishing a household of single women.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Mary P. Ryan, *Women in Public*, 130.

<sup>97</sup> Mary Greenhow Lee, *Diary*, 21 March 1865, 804. A friend sent the news clipping to Mary Lee, and she recorded it in her diary as an example of "Yankee lies." Kelly & Crook were Union generals who had been captured in Cumberland Maryland by Confederate cavalry while asleep during the night of February 21, 1865.

<sup>98</sup> Laura Lee, *Diary*, 28 February 1865, 223.

The banishment did not break the Lee and Burwell women's defiant spirit. As soon as they crossed the lines, the women spread the news about the impending advance by Sheridan. Two days after leaving Winchester, they persuaded a soldier to travel to New Market and telegraph the news to General Early in Staunton. Meanwhile, Sheridan mobilized his forces, and swarmed Mount Jackson, the town in which the women hid. According to Laura Lee, the soldiers "were surprised to find what correct information we had given of their plans, and that they were very anxious to overtake us."<sup>99</sup> The army believed that the banished women had traveled farther, and it rushed to overtake them. The Lees learned later that General Early received their telegraph, but he could not react in time to halt Sheridan's overwhelming force. As the Confederates retreated, it became apparent that the South was losing the war in the Shenandoah Valley. Yet, the Lees held fast to their faith in an eventual victory.

Since the advance of the Union army destroyed bridges and canals, the women could not get to Richmond easily. They went as far south as Staunton and then decided to remain there for the time being. There were no other options, and this banishment caused the women to feel vulnerable. Mary Greenhow Lee seemed utterly despondent when she wrote, "We cannot afford to board in Staunton; the fact is we cannot afford to live at the present rates & I wish somebody would shoot me."<sup>100</sup>

Their welcome in Staunton was far from reassuring. When they had first arrived, young boys teased the women by calling them "refugees." Mary Greenhow Lee and the

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<sup>99</sup> Laura Lee, *Diary*, 10 March 1865, 227.

<sup>100</sup> Mary Greenhow Lee, *Diary*, 9 March 1865, 798.

others demanded that their guide shoot the next boy who insulted them.<sup>101</sup> The term “refugee” was an insult because it insinuated that the women lacked patriotism.

Historian Drew Gilpin Faust describes refugees as white Southerners, overwhelmingly female, who voluntarily left their homes in the search for safety and in an attempt to protect their property, especially their slaves. Many smaller slaveholders and poorer farmers resented the ability of refugees to run away from the war and judged them unpatriotic. According to Faust, Mary Greenhow Lee felt outraged at being called a refugee, because she had not chosen her course of action. The Yankees turned her out of her house against her will, and this gave her “morally superior status to those who could rightfully be called refugees.”<sup>102</sup> Notwithstanding insults from young boys, the stay in Staunton was not as terrible as the Lees, Burwells, and Sherrards had anticipated. Strangers surprised them with numerous kind acts, including taking the women into their homes.

The fall of Richmond in April 1865 was too much for Laura Lee to bear. Once she realized that the South would lose the war, she felt too demoralized to express her feelings. Instead, she simply wrote: “Richmond was evacuated by Gen. Lee last night, and this morning at ½ past 9 the yankees marched in. I have not heart to write more.”<sup>103</sup> Laura Lee scribbled two additional short entries, but these passages gave no sense of closure and did not indicate that April 5, 1865, would mark the end of her diary, titled “History of Our Captivity.” Historian Jane E. Schultz, who has studied a number of Southern women’s diaries, observes, “Some writers made a conscious decision to stop

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<sup>101</sup> Mary Greenhow Lee, *Diary*, 14 March 1865, 801.

<sup>102</sup> Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 40-41.

writing when the language they were accustomed to using no longer seemed adequate.”<sup>104</sup> Homeless in a defeated country, Laura Lee may not have had the language, the luxury, or the will to continue her diary.

The Lee women never gave up until the troops surrendered. With unflagging energy, Laura Lee and Mary Greenhow Lee assisted the Confederacy in sentiment and deed for the duration of the war. The Lees were *not* examples of women who subverted the Confederate war effort by losing their will to sacrifice as described by historian Drew Gilpin Faust. Perhaps the Lee women's prewar independence from men made them less likely than married or otherwise dependent Southern women to write gloomy letters urging male relatives to return home. Indeed, widows and spinsters were glorified and compared to nuns in the novel *Macaria; or, Altars of Sacrifice* written by Augusta Jane Evans in 1864. Faust analyzed this novel, but did not consider single women apart from all Southern women when arguing they had a role in hastening the defeat.<sup>105</sup>

Mary Greenhow Lee continued her diary until November 17, 1865, when she obtained a new place to live in Baltimore, Maryland. Until then, her future was completely unpredictable. The one certainty was that her life would never be the same again. Longing for the safety of her own home and companionship of female relatives, Lee wrote, “I do not suppose we five will ever have a home together again.”<sup>106</sup> The Lees were in dire financial straits after the war, but they hung onto their conventional identities

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<sup>103</sup> Laura Lee, Diary, 3 April 1865, 230.

<sup>104</sup> Jane E. Schultz, "Mute Fury: Southern Women's Diaries of Sherman's March to the Sea, 1864-1865," in *Arms and the Woman: War, Gender and Literary Representation*, eds. Helen M. Cooper, Adrienne Auslander Munich, and Susan Merrill Squier (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 74.

<sup>105</sup> Drew Gilpin Faust, "Altars of Sacrifice: Confederate Women and the Narratives of War," in *Divided Houses: Gender and the Civil War*, eds. Catherine Clinton and Nina Silber (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 171-199.

as Christians and ladies. In response to the postwar social order, Southern women similar to Laura and Mary Lee found some comfort by promoting Southern women's most recent identity as Confederate patriots.

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<sup>106</sup> Mary Greenhow Lee, *Diary*, 4 April 1865, 809.

## CHAPTER III

### AFTER THE WAR

The banishment of the Lees and their nieces from Winchester in February 1865 marked the end of their lives as a household of single, independent women. They now felt more vulnerable and insecure than before. Unable to remain a family unit without a home, each woman followed a different path. There were limited options for white Southern women to support themselves in 1865. Laura Lee returned to Winchester in July 1865, presumably to stay with friends. Meanwhile, Antoinette Lee, remained in Clarksburg, Virginia, where she had been visiting relatives at the time of the banishment. The Burwell nieces returned to Winchester in August 1865 and lived with their father.<sup>107</sup> The elder niece married while the younger one accepted a teaching position. Three years later, she also married. Mary Greenhow Lee, the widow, was in financial straits. Most of her money was gone, and the remaining currency had little value, but beginning in June 1865, friends in Winchester rented out her house and sent the payments to Lee. She spent three additional months as a refugee moving from town to town, staying with relatives and

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<sup>107</sup> Mary Greenhow Lee, *Diary*, 14 July 1865, 845; 17 August 1865, 856; 2 September 1865, 864; 14 October 1865, 880;

friends.<sup>108</sup>

Eventually, Mary Greenhow Lee decided to move to Baltimore and keep boarders. This decision was not easy for her to make. She could have gone to Winchester, where she still owned a house, but friends warned Lee not to return while the Yankees remained in town. Mary Greenhow Lee asked numerous friends and relatives in Richmond, Petersburg, and Baltimore for advice and information on houses to rent. The news was discouraging on all fronts until a letter arrived from Mrs. Jamison, a friend in Baltimore. Mrs. Jamison found a house in a good location, for moderate rent, but it required keeping a lady with a spinal condition as a boarder. Since Lee still hoped to reunite her family, she wrote to Laura and Antoinette Lee for their opinions. Laura supported the idea of moving to Baltimore, but Antoinette preferred to return to Winchester. Another letter from Mrs. Jamison convinced Mary Greenhow Lee to accept the offer in Baltimore.<sup>109</sup> She arrived on October 19, 1865, and immediately encountered obstacles. After weeks of fighting with a lawyer and a landlord, Lee gave up on the initial plan proposed by Mrs. Jamison. Lee decided instead to find another house to rent and to take in boarders. She finally settled on a house that suited her needs, but it was in an undesirable neighborhood. Fulfilling her promise to maintain the journal until she found a home, Lee penned the final entry: "I have an aversion to the location of the house, but I thought it the best I could do . . . so the die is cast, for a year, no one knows

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<sup>108</sup> Carlton, *A Genealogy* 133-134; Mary Greenhow Lee, *Diary*, 20 May 1865, 826; 2 June 1865, 831; 18 June 1865, 837; 18 August 1865-16 October 1865, 858-881.

<sup>109</sup> Mary Greenhow Lee, *Diary*, 29 September 1865, 873-874, 4 October 1865, 874-875, 6 October 1865, 876.

how I dread the new life before me.”<sup>110</sup> She concluded her journal with an additional line about a kind and sympathizing friend and their supper of fried oysters.

Drawing upon her experiences managing a large household during wartime shortages of food and labor, Mary Greenhow Lee had good reasons to anticipate success as a boardinghouse keeper. Laura Lee joined her in Baltimore, but Antoinette did not, and it appears that “Nettie” never again lived with Mary and Laura. Antoinette eventually moved north to Brooklyn, New York, where she died in 1881. She was buried in the Lee family plot in Winchester.

The Lees had to earn a living in Baltimore because they no longer received income from their stocks or from their emancipated slaves. Laura Lee’s trust fund fell in value, and during the succeeding years, it suffered further in the hands of a special commissioner who mismanaged it. Laura Lee pleaded in court for the proceeds, but distributions did not begin until 1901, and Lee died a year later.<sup>111</sup> Mary Greenhow Lee sold her Winchester house in 1872, but she had owed so much on it that she received little from the sale.<sup>112</sup>

The move to Baltimore signaled a new beginning, but the Lee sisters relied on old strategies that had proven successful prior to and during the Civil War. First, they knew that they could not expect assistance or protection from men. Instead, the Lees assumed the responsibilities expected of men. When Mary made the initial arrangements for the boardinghouse she experienced “a lonely feeling, running about this big city by myself

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<sup>110</sup> Mary Greenhow Lee, *Diary*, 17 November 1865, 891.

<sup>111</sup> *Chancery Causes Index, Frederick County, Virginia*, (Clerk’s Office Circuit Court of Chancery, Frederick County Courthouse, Winchester, Va.);

<sup>112</sup> *Winchester City Deed Book* 13, September 1872, (Winchester City Courthouse, Winchester, Va.), 344.

and doing a man's work."<sup>113</sup> Second, the Lees needed to reclaim their status as ladies. Their social status relied on gender, class, and race as much in post-war Baltimore as it did in antebellum Winchester.

The type of boardinghouse the Lees ran would reflect their social standing. Mary Greenhow Lee realized this and tried in vain to rent a house in a good neighborhood. She could only secure the Hamilton Terrace, a large house in what she described as a "bad neighborhood." Committed for a year, Lee looked forward to moving out before she even moved in. By 1868, she had moved to a better location at 188 St. Paul Street.<sup>114</sup> Their circumstances improved somewhat because the Lees ran a successful boarding house, and by the 1880s Mary Greenhow Lee became the proprietor of the Hotel Shirley.<sup>115</sup>

Five domestic servants resided also in the boarding house in 1870. They not only provided needed labor, but also presented race and class foils for the Lees. When Mary Greenhow Lee established her first boarding house in 1865, she asked Sarah to cook for her. A former slave of the Lees and loyal until their banishment, Sarah refused to leave Winchester.<sup>116</sup> Winchester was home, and she had family in the area. Sarah exercised her freedom by remaining stationary. Lee claimed that she engaged a replacement cook

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<sup>113</sup> Mary Greenhow Lee, *Diary*, 31 October 1865, 886.

<sup>114</sup> John T. Woods, *Baltimore City Directory* (Baltimore: J.T. Wood, 1868-1869).

<sup>115</sup> By 1870, Laura Lee was in the same household headed by Mary G. Lee according to the Bureau of the Census, *Ninth Census of the United States, Maryland, Baltimore City*, (Washington, D.C., 1870); Mary Greenhow Lee had originally rented the Hamilton Terrace in 1865, but by 1868 she had moved to 188 St. Paul according to John T. Woods, *Wood's Baltimore City Directory* (Baltimore: J.T. Woods, 1867), 311. By 1881, Mary Greenhow Lee had become the proprietor of the Hotel Shirley at 119 W. Madison according to John T. Woods, *Wood's Baltimore City Directory* (Baltimore: J.T. Woods, 1881). The Lee women remained at the Hotel Shirley until Laura Lee died in 1902, at age 79, "Certificate of Death" 24 June 1902, Office of Registrar of Vital Statistics, Health Department, Baltimore, Md. (Maryland State Archives, Annapolis, Md.).

<sup>116</sup> Mary Greenhow Lee, *Diary*, 25 October 1865, 885.

easily in 1865. Although Lee did not mention the new cook's race or gender, another African-American woman would most likely elicit no comment from her. Of the five domestic servants who lived with the Lee sisters in 1870, four were African American, and the fifth was Irish. The presence of black domestics may have reminded the Lee sisters of their antebellum slaveholding privileges as well as their current advantages of whiteness.

The Lees turned to their faith for comfort during these trying times and became involved with Episcopal Church organizations. Mary Greenhow Lee in particular supported mission work. She became the first vice president of the Maryland branch of Woman's Auxiliary to the Board of Missions. She also served as treasurer for her church's branch.<sup>117</sup> Laura Lee probably continued to teach Sunday school as she had done during the war, but no records of her church activities exist.

The Lees also maintained their identity as Confederate patriots which had brought them notoriety during the war. They discovered that their vaunted dedication to the Confederate cause permitted them to continue to engage in the political realm throughout the last decades of the century. The 1880s marked the dawning of women's patriotic Confederate memorializing, and Baltimore lived up to its pro-southern reputation with its Lost Cause organizations. Mary Greenhow Lee participated in Confederate organizations from the outset. Laura most likely followed Mary's lead, but written records only reveal glimpses into her activities.

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<sup>117</sup> "Mrs. Lee Rests Beside Husband, Venerable Lady of Old South Died in Baltimore Saturday," (*Winchester, Va.*) *Evening Star and Morning News*, 27 May 1907, pp. 1, 6.

Postwar patriotic Confederate organizations developed in two phases. The initial phase, called the “bereavement” stage by historians, consisted of memorial associations run by women to honor the Confederate soldiers who perished during the war. Men became more involved with the second, “celebration,” stage that generally began in the 1880s and continued until World War I. The second phase included dedications of monuments, but also celebrations to re-affirm the righteousness of the Lost Cause. Women played an important role in promoting the Lost Cause, but they also kept the male-led societies focused on charity work.<sup>118</sup>

Baltimore entered the “celebration” phase in 1871, earlier than most other cities, when the Maryland veterans founded a chapter of the Society of Army and Navy of the Confederate States. The society’s primary objective was to preserve material for a “truthful history” of the Civil War; charity was a secondary concern.<sup>119</sup> Other Confederate societies in Baltimore focused on charity and welcomed women’s participation. The Beneficial Association of the Maryland Line was one such organization. A board of five male managers and about fifty female visitors managed their main enterprise: the Confederate Soldier’s Home. This predominantly female group had lobbied the state of Maryland for use of the old arsenal in Pikesville for the home and for an annual appropriation of \$5,000.<sup>120</sup> In addition to managing the soldiers’ home, the

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<sup>118</sup> John M. Coski and Amy R. Feely. “A Monument to Southern Womanhood: the Founding Generation of the Confederate Museum,” in *A Woman’s War: Southern Women, Civil War, and the Confederate Legacy*, eds. Edward D.C. Campbell and Kym S. Rice (Richmond, Va.: Museum of the Confederacy, 1996), 137.

<sup>119</sup> Society of the Army and Navy of the Confederate States, In the State of Maryland, *Roster of Officers and Members of the Society*, (Baltimore, Sun Book and Printing Office, 1888), 5-8.

<sup>120</sup> *A Directory of the Charitable and Beneficent Organizations of Baltimore and of Maryland* (Baltimore: Charity Organization Society, 1891). The Soldier’s Home opened in 1888; three years later, it housed fifty-four residents.

Beneficial Association of the Maryland Line also gave money to the sick and destitute and buried the dead. By 1892, the all-female visiting committee had delivered nearly \$3,000 in relief to 274 former Confederates. The women raised almost all the money from their annual Confederate Relief Bazaar.

Bazaars were typically female-led fundraisers, and this annual event was probably no different. A program from the Confederate Relief Bazaar, held on April 11, 1898, described the items for sale and on exhibit at the Maryland Line Relic Room. Mary Greenhow Lee donated a bullet from the Winchester battlefield. In addition, the program listed two items on loan from Lee:

A 'sock, unfinished when Mrs. Lee was sent under armed escort by General Sheridan, from her home in Winchester, February, 1865, Knit of U.S. tent ravelled.' and a 'pen with which was signed Louisiana Ordinance of Secession.'<sup>121</sup>

We cannot tell how much money Lee contributed, but she evidently gave her time and treasured souvenirs to benefit the cause. She also did not miss this chance to remind her peers of her personal suffering during the war and her pre-war connections with the Southern elite.

Confederate women began to form their own societies in Baltimore during the 1880s. They probably gained confidence in their organizing abilities from the years they participated on auxiliaries and committees of male-led societies, and they may have felt that these societies' objectives did not serve their own interests adequately. The female

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<sup>121</sup> "Maryland Relic Room," Program, (Baltimore: Confederate Relief Bazaar, April 1898), Maryland Manuscripts Collection, Civil and Social Organizations' Records, University of Maryland, College Park, Md.

Confederate societies continued to make charity their first objective, but their work also demonstrated their desire for public recognition of their contributions.

The Confederate women of Baltimore formed the Ladies Confederate Memorial and Beneficial Society on May 14, 1883. Originally founded to assist with the annual Memorial Day services and to provide aid to disabled veterans and their families, the society expanded its mission six years later. In 1889, the Ladies' Confederate Memorial and Aid Association of Maryland opened and managed the Home for Confederate Widows and Mothers.<sup>122</sup> In effect, this aid society claimed that women's sacrifices during the war gave them a right to assistance similar to that bestowed on male veterans. The women who ran the home also demonstrated their competence with the most essential aspect of American politics: fund raising. By 1891, the home had received \$4,000 in donations and \$1,000 from the state to provide accommodations for ten residents.<sup>123</sup> Just as they had during wartime, the female organizers once again transformed the private feminine sphere of household management into public policy.

During the 1890s Confederate women's associations and auxiliaries across the South joined the umbrella organization of the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC). At its founding, the UDC declared its purposes were "social, literary, historical, monumental, benevolent and honorable in every degree, without any political significance whatever."<sup>124</sup> Notwithstanding its claims, the UDC was political. The women of the UDC were careful to *bend* rather than *break* gender roles. For instance,

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<sup>122</sup> *A Classified and Descriptive Directory to the Charitable and Beneficent Societies and Institutions of the City of Baltimore* (Baltimore: Charity Organization Society, 1885).

<sup>123</sup> *A Directory of the Charitable and Beneficent Organizations of Baltimore and of Maryland* (Baltimore: Charity Organization Society, 1891).

<sup>124</sup> Coski and Feely, "A Monument to Southern Womanhood," 138.

they used women's roles as instructors of the young to engage in public discourse.

Within its first year, the UDC endorsed a pro-southern textbook as a corrective to the northern texts used in schools. In 1899, the UDC began the movement to name the war of 1861-1865 the "War between the States." The UDC also sponsored scholarships to colleges for female and male descendants of Confederate veterans.<sup>125</sup> Because of these efforts, the UDC received credit for formulating the orthodox Southern interpretation of the Civil War.

Baltimore established a local chapter in 1895, the eighth society to join the UDC, and the Lees were active members. After helping to found the chapter, Mary Greenhow Lee held positions as either recording or corresponding secretary until her death in 1907. She also served as the Baltimore delegate to four national meetings.<sup>126</sup> Characteristic of Laura Lee, she joined the UDC as a founding member, but left the leadership to more outspoken women, such as her sister-in-law.<sup>127</sup>

Mary Greenhow Lee, however, earned a reputation for being an able organizer. On one occasion, when Lee declined the nomination of vice-president for a charity, she explained her reasons in a letter:

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<sup>125</sup> Coski and Feely, "A Monument to Southern Womanhood," 138.

<sup>126</sup> United Daughters of the Confederacy, (U.D.C.) *Minutes of the Fourth Annual Meeting* (Nashville: Press of Foster & Webb, 1897), held in Baltimore, Md.; U.D.C., *Minutes of the Sixth Annual Meeting* (Nashville: Press of Foster & Webb, 1899), held in Richmond, Va.; U.D.C., *Minutes of Tenth Annual Meeting* (Nashville: Press of Foster & Webb, 1903), held in Charleston, S.C.; U.D.C., *Minutes of Twelfth Annual Meeting* (Nashville: Press of Foster & Webb, 1905), held in San Francisco. Despite the evidence in the minutes, I question whether the 86-year-old Mary Lee actually traveled to San Francisco. She was definitely active in her eighties. I examined applications to the Baltimore chapter that Mary, as secretary, entered in 1901.

<sup>127</sup> United Daughters of the Confederacy, *Minutes of the Fourth Annual Meeting* (Nashville: Press of Foster & Webb, 1897). The 1897 meeting in Baltimore was the only year that published all members; other years listed officers and delegates exclusively. Since Laura was among the 1897 members, I speculated that she would have assisted Mary with forming the chapter in 1895.

I am familiar with the beginnings of so many enterprises in Baltimore, that I know all depends on the one at the helm. You should have the Vice-President, one who would head the list with a generous contribution -- I could only heap good will and a very limited portion of time. The Confederate home -- the Woman's Auxiliary and some other charities with which I have been associated for years, fill all the time that I have the right to take from house duties.<sup>128</sup>

Mary Greenhow Lee's lack of expendable cash and the duties of managing a hotel limited her ability to volunteer her time.

For reasons yet unknown, Mary Greenhow Lee and Laura Lee left the Hotel Shirley in 1900. Their health may have deteriorated and management of the hotel may have proved too taxing. They moved into a smaller building, around the corner from the Shirley.<sup>129</sup> In 1902, Laura died at age seventy-nine. At that time, Mary moved in with other relatives where she remained until her own death in 1907.<sup>130</sup> She lived for eighty-eight years.

Their funerals reflected the different personalities of Laura and Mary Lee. For the shy and retiring Laura Lee, a quiet funeral service was held in Baltimore with only intimate friends of the family attending.<sup>131</sup> Her remains traveled to Winchester for burial after a graveside service. According to her obituary in Winchester's *Evening Star &*

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<sup>128</sup> Mary Greenhow Lee to Mrs. Bagby, (date unknown), Manuscripts Collection, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Va. Since Mary used letterhead from "The Shirley," the letter was written sometime during her residence there between the late 1870s and 1900.

<sup>129</sup> The Lees resided at 714 Park Ave. Their nephew, Dr. Alfred H. Powell, lived on the next block at 805 Park Ave.

<sup>130</sup> Caroline P. Remington, *Society Visiting List*, (Baltimore, Press of Lucas Bros., 1906), 80, 170, 356. Mrs. Hugh H. Lee, Miss Laura Lee Davidson and Mr. Spencer L. Davidson all list 1119 Park Av. as their address. See also, *R.L. Polk & Co.'s Baltimore City Directory* (Baltimore: R.L. Polk & Co., 1905). Their deaths are documented by the following certificates: "Certificate of Death" 24 June 1902, Office of Registrar of Vital Statistics, Health Department, Baltimore, Md. (Maryland State Archives, Annapolis, Md.); and, *Certificate of Death*, Vital Records, Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, Baltimore, (May 26, 1907), C1369, Maryland State Archives, Annapolis, Md. Note that Mary Greenhow Lee's place of residence was the same as the "Informant," Spencer L. Davidson, at 1119 Park Ave.

<sup>131</sup> "Obituaries," *Baltimore Sun*, Morning Edition, Baltimore, Md., (June 26, 1902).

*Morning News*, “The casket was literally covered with handsome floral designs, the loving testimony of numerous friends of the deceased.”<sup>132</sup> Her tombstone was a simple marker with only her name, birth year, and date of death engraved upon it.

Mary Greenhow Lee’s funeral highlighted the identities that she cherished most -- the Christian, the patriot, and the lady. Not one, but two ministers conducted the service in Baltimore. The *Baltimore Sun* listed Lee’s obituary before all others that day and described status symbols befitting a Christian, a patriot, and a lady:

The attendance was large and there were a number of beautiful floral designs, among them notable pieces from the board of Managers of Baltimore Chapter of the Daughters of the Confederacy and the board of visitors of the same chapter. The former was a huge cross of red & white roses and the latter a large wreath of red roses and white carnations. The board of visitors and the board of managers attended the services.<sup>133</sup>

The obituary also listed four honorary pallbearers and six active pallbearers. Five of them were members of the Society of the Army and Navy of the Confederate States.<sup>134</sup>

Lee’s obituary in Winchester’s *Evening Sun* highlighted her Confederate patriotism:

Mrs. Lee gave her heart and soul to the Confederate cause. Winchester was a storm center, and Mrs. Lee’s home was a barometer of the fortunes of the Confederacy in this locality . . . Going to Baltimore immediately after the war, Mrs. Lee was naturally deeply interested in everything dealing with the perpetuation of the Confederacy ideals and memories. She was identified with practically every enterprise of that nature of the city.

The obituary then listed her participation in Confederate organizations, followed by her service to the Episcopal Church.<sup>135</sup> Mary Greenhow Lee could rest in peace with her

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<sup>132</sup> “Laid to Rest in Family Lot: Miss Laura Lee is Buried Today in Mount Hebron,” (*Winchester, Va.*) *Evening Star & Morning News*, 26 June, 1902, p. 1.

<sup>133</sup> “Obituaries,” *Baltimore Sun*, 27 May 1907, p. 7.

<sup>134</sup> Society of the Army and Navy of the Confederate States, In the State of Maryland, *Roster of Officers and Members of the Society* (Baltimore: Sun Book and Printing Office, 1888), 11-29.

identities as a Christian, a patriot, and as a lady memorialized in print. The only identity engraved on her tombstone, however, was that of wife.

At the time of their deaths, Laura Lee and Mary Greenhow Lee possessed little property. Laura Lee's death in 1902 again raised the issue of the trust fund that had been the subject of prewar lawsuits. The courts had difficulty disbursing the funds to her father's descendants because lawsuits regarding previous commissioners' mishandling of the trust fund tied it up in court. After Mary Greenhow Lee's death in 1907, appraisers valued her total estate at \$279. Luxury items, her most valuable objects, signified Lee's claims to upper class status. Her silverware, worth \$200, constituted the bulk of her estate. She hid and worried about her silver throughout the Civil War, and refused to sell it during the difficult postwar years. Mary Greenhow Lee owned no real estate; she had moved in with the Davidson family, the adult children of one of the Burwell nieces.<sup>136</sup>

The executor for Mary Greenhow Lee administered her estate in accordance with her will. To Laura Lee Davidson and Spencer L. Davidson, daughter and son of niece Laura Lee Burwell, and to Cora Powell Jr., daughter of Dr. Alfred W. Powell, Lee left her "new" silver and furniture worth \$124.<sup>137</sup> The majority of her estate, the "old" silver

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<sup>135</sup> "Mrs. Lee Rests Beside Husband, Venerable Lady of Old South Died in Baltimore Saturday," (*Winchester, Va.*) *Evening Star and Morning News*, 27 May 1907, pp. 1, 6.

<sup>136</sup> *Chancery Causes Index, Frederick County, Virginia*, (Clerk's Office Circuit Court, Frederick County Courthouse, Winchester, Va.); Inventory of Estate, Register of Wills for Baltimore City, (June 1, 1907), pp. 342-343, Maryland State Archives, Annapolis, Md., The inventory also assessed pictures at five dollars, parlor furniture at ten dollars, dining furniture and chinaware at eighteen dollars, and bedroom furniture at thirty-six dollars.; "Certificate of Death," Vital Records, Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, Baltimore, (May 26, 1907), C1369, Maryland State Archives, Annapolis, Md.

<sup>137</sup> Administration of Estate, Register of Wills for Baltimore City, (March 17, 1908), Maryland State Archives, Annapolis, Md.

and the pictures, went to Captain Tredwell Moore. Moore had married a daughter of Lee's half-brother, Robert Greenhow.<sup>138</sup>

The memory of Laura Lee and Mary Greenhow Lee lived on through the naming patterns of their relatives. Although neither of the sisters-in-law had children, the nieces who had resided with them in Winchester named their progeny after their aunts. The eldest niece, Louisa Burwell Cromwell, named her first-born daughter Laura Lee Cromwell.<sup>139</sup> Married into Baltimore's elite Poe family, Laura Lee Cromwell Poe named her only daughter Mary Greenhow Lee Poe. She, in turn, married D.M. Skinner and named her only daughter Mary Lee Cromwell Skinner. The younger niece and namesake of her aunt, Laura Lee Burwell, had married Spencer Livingston Davidson and named her only daughter Laura Lee Davidson. She never married, but resided with the Lee women in the Hotel Shirley, and later with her brother and Mary Greenhow Lee. Her brother, Spencer Livingston Davidson, Jr., eventually married and named two of his three daughters Mary Laura Davidson and Laura Lee Davidson.<sup>140</sup> Although Mary Greenhow Lee enjoyed more notoriety for her defiant spirit, the relatives of the Lee sisters also appreciated the quiet fortitude and generous disposition of Laura Lee. As testimony of their affections, both names predominate among their descendants.

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<sup>138</sup> Special thanks to Sheila Phipps, Appalachian State University, for explaining this relationship between Capt. Moore and Mary Greenhow Lee.

<sup>139</sup> Florence Tyler Carlton, *A Genealogy of the Known Descendants of Robert Carter of Corotoman* (Richmond: Whitlet & Shepperson, 1982), 133-134. Louisa C. Burwell Cromwell had a total of six children. The other five were named Josphine Cromwell, Louisa Carter Cromwell, Susan Lee Cromwell, Sarah Mellicamp Cromwell, and Lewis Warham Cromwell. Susan was named in honor of Louisa's mother, Susan Lee Burwell.

<sup>140</sup> Carlton, *Genealogy*, 133-134. Nephew P. Lewis Carter Burwell, Jr. married Sallie Bastable in 1866 and they had a son and four daughters. Two of the daughters were named Mary Burwell and Antoinette Lee Burwell. Another two daughters were named Louisa Burwell and Sarah Angelica Burwell.

Mary Greenhow Lee and Laura Lee must have shared their Civil War experiences with their Confederate friends and associates because stories told after their deaths sounded similar to their own. In 1915, eight years after Mary Greenhow Lee's death, and thirteen after Laura Lee's, a benefit show at Albaugh's Theatre called "Memories of the South" raised money for the Confederate Women's Home. The program included a "playlet" titled "A Virginia Heroine," set in Winchester, Virginia, with a small cast of characters that began with "Ruth Lee -- Loyal to the Cause."<sup>141</sup> Perhaps a coincidence, but more likely, the writers based this skit on the Lee women of Winchester. If this was the case, the Lees' story survived and influenced a new generation of politically active women.

However straightforward separate spheres may appear in theory, there was considerable overlap in practice. A conventional definition of politics denies the type of political activities Confederate women pursued -- with agendas similar to those of their male counterparts. From undermining Union war efforts to lobbying the state of Maryland for funds to support less fortunate Confederate veterans and widows, white Southern women, such as Mary and Laura Lee, made their influence felt.

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<sup>141</sup> "Memories of the South' for the Benefit of the Confederate Women's Home," (Baltimore, Md.: 20 May 1915), Maryland Manuscripts Collection, "Civil and Social Organizations' Records," University of Maryland, College Park, Md.

## EPILOGUE

During the Civil War, white Southern women reassessed their core identities and elevated patriotism above all else, but defeat on the battlefield did not destroy Confederate Womanhood. On the contrary, Southerners credited white women for keeping Confederate patriotism alive. They guarded southern values against undue northern influence, indoctrinated the next generation, and demanded respect for their wartime sacrifices. Many women who celebrated the Confederacy shared a desire to recreate antebellum society as much as possible in the postwar South. They joined with conservative men to reinforce conventional race relations and gender roles. While most white Southern women revered the Lost Cause, not all agreed with the conservative politics of the majority. Some non-conservative Southerners supported the efforts of Republicans, Populists, and the Readjusters of Virginia to forge alliances across the racial divide, while others supported women's suffrage. For conservatives and non-conservatives alike, gender served as a means to explain or justify political positions.

Placing little emphasis on the issues of slavery or "free manhood," white Southern women reinterpreted Confederate military service as the defense of Southern families and homes. Confederate men no longer fought the war to defend their domination over dependents who were no longer their slaves, explains historian LeeAnn Whites, but instead to defend their dependent women and children who continued to be loyal during

the postwar years.<sup>142</sup> White women's organizations built monuments to commemorate the sacrifices of Confederate soldiers and women, solicited donations and ran bazaars to support homes for Confederate veterans, widows, and orphans, and wrote "official" histories of the South and of the "War Between the States." Female novelists wrote about sectional reconciliation immediately after the war, often in the romance genre, but by the 1890s, they began to defend Southern distinctiveness.<sup>143</sup> Through their efforts on behalf of former Confederates and their beloved South, white Southern women participated in the public discourse on postwar politics.

Most female supporters of postwar Confederate organizations pursued conservative and reactionary political agendas. They participated in the public realm, and they felt influential. In spite of Southern defeat and her own uncertain future, Mary Greenhow Lee wrote in September 1865, "Political reconstruction might be unavoidable now, but social reconstruction we hold in our hands & might prevent."<sup>144</sup> White Southern women knew they wielded political power, not formally, but effectively nonetheless.

In order to prevent the social reconstruction feared by Mary Greenhow Lee, conservative women embraced nostalgic views of the antebellum South that included their conventional gender roles. Just as the image of the Southern Lady had been essential to the antebellum social-political-economic system, its resurrection was crucial

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<sup>142</sup> LeeAnn Whites, *The Civil War as a Crisis in Gender: Augusta, Georgia, 1860-1890* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995), 14.

<sup>143</sup> Elizabeth R. Varon, *We Mean to Be Counted* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 172.

<sup>144</sup> Mrs. Hugh Lee, (Mary Greenhow Lee), Diary, 13 September 1865, "Mrs. Hugh Lee Collection," Winchester-Frederick Historical Society, Handley Library, Winchester, Va. Also quoted in Faust, *Mothers of Invention* 248, 254.

to the postwar era. The Southern Lady accepted a subordinate role, recognized that the “natural” differences between men and women made her most fit for the domestic sphere, and in exchange, she received guidance and protection. By returning to antebellum gender roles, white Southern women and men attempted to prove to the world that Southern society was still morally sound and not completely defeated.<sup>145</sup> Single women, such as the Lees, continued to represent exceptions that were socially acceptable in conservative circles. The widowed Mary Greenhow Lee and unmarried Laura Lee depended on men for rent, but they remained relatively independent as boardinghouse and hotel proprietors.

The recasting of the Southern Lady was one part of the larger conflation of the plantation household with the postwar and post-Reconstruction white home by the rising middle class. Historian Elizabeth Grace Hale explains that women and men of the middle class sought “to ground their cultural authority within the power of the planter class” of the Old South. Hale further states that “images of integrated domesticity were central to this fiction of continuity as African American servants, symbolized and idealized most frequently as mammy, replaced slaves.” White women’s efforts to reconstruct their homes were just as influential as men’s commercial activities for the postwar South.<sup>146</sup>

The Mammy and the Lady were related figures of Old South mythology used to defend slavery before the war and to reinforce white supremacy after the war. Since the postwar Southern home remained a space of integration within an increasingly

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<sup>145</sup> Marjorie Spruill Wheeler, “Divided Legacy: The Civil War, Tradition, and ‘the Woman Question,’ 1870-1920,” in *A Woman’s War: Southern Women, Civil War, and the Confederate Legacy*, eds. Edward D.C. Campbell and Kym S. Rice (Richmond, Va.: Museum of the Confederacy, 1996), 168.

<sup>146</sup> Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998), 87, 92.

segregated world, argues Elizabeth Grace Hale, it was central to reproducing racial identities. All classes of white Southerners employed black domestic servants. The domestic service provided by African American women not only relieved white women from housework, but also permitted them to work in mills or other businesses for wages, or to pursue leisure activities outside the home. In the case of the Lee women in postwar Baltimore, they could not have contributed their time to Confederate organizations without the help of African American and Irish domestics. Black women even raised white children, thereby relieving white women from the time-consuming aspects of motherhood.<sup>147</sup>

Although black domestics were present in white homes, the image of the mammy and the sentimentality surrounding it was a middle-class construction to emphasize continuity between the Old and New South and to bolster white women's status as ladies. Hale concludes that because mammies crossed the color line, "white southern women could cross the gender line between the white home and the larger world without directly challenging the symbol of the southern lady."<sup>148</sup> By the turn of the century, fictional and non-fictional stories about mammies were all the rage. White women wrote in greater numbers than men about mammies, in part, because women exerted their authority from the home, while men had many locations beyond the home from which to ground their authority. The mammy stories influenced the culture of segregation and the meaning of whiteness in the New South.<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> Hale, *Making Whiteness*, 92, 105.

<sup>148</sup> Hale, *Making Whiteness*, 94, 102, 105-106.

<sup>149</sup> Hale, *Making Whiteness*, 88, 98.

While white women derived authority from their construction of mammy, white men based their authority on claims that African American men were sexual predators. White men declared that force was necessary to protect white women from the "black menace." During the war, such fears were not significant enough to keep white men at home; but decades later, exaggerated fears of rape and miscegenation justified racial segregation, disenfranchisement, and even lynching. With these tactics, white men reasserted their domination over black men *and* over white women. Even though the rhetoric kept white women dependent, it also conferred to them a sense of power, argues historian Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, because white women could demand certain behaviors from white men in public forums.<sup>150</sup>

The intersections between race and gender, and between public and private, were critical to the rise and fall of the Readjusters in Virginia. Beginning in 1879, this coalition of black and white Virginians ascended to power and governed the state until 1883. Committed to universal manhood suffrage, free public education, and tax relief, Readjusters appealed to non-privileged whites as well as to African Americans. Faced with race baiting by Democrats, Readjusters applied the language of separate spheres to race relations. When Democrats claimed that black suffrage would lead to interracial sex, Readjusters argued that the public realm could include black men, but the private sphere would remain segregated, thereby shielding white women and children from black men.<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 96.

<sup>151</sup> Jane Dailey, *Before Jim Crow: The Politics of Race in Postemancipation Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 86.

Readjusters made a distinction between political rights and social rights: the former they supported; the latter they did not. Determining the boundaries of public and private spheres was never easy, especially in the South, and the issue of interracial marriage demonstrated this difficulty and provoked opposite responses from black and white Readjusters. To white Readjusters, marriage was an intimate relationship, squarely situated in the private realm. To black Readjusters, marriage was a political and civil right.<sup>152</sup> Anti-miscegenation laws remained in effect, but the integration of public school boards raised similar fears about the power wielded by black men over white women and children. Democrats exploited the school board controversy, and defeated the Readjusters in 1883.<sup>153</sup> Democrats and other conservatives applied lessons learned with the Readjusters toward the Populist threat of the 1890s. First, they denounced their opposition; second, they usurped the opposition's platform; third, forced the opposition out of existence.<sup>154</sup>

Confederate patriotism reached new heights during the 1890s, just when the Populist movement gained strength and the woman's suffrage movement began to make inroads in the South. Populism displayed evidence of racial cooperation among farmers and workers, and woman's rights threatened conventional male dominance. The practice of invoking Confederate patriotism three decades after the war may well have been an attempt by conservative women and men to reign in the destabilizing elements of society by reminding them of past traditions and sacrifices. Postwar Confederate organizations also soothed class antagonism by opening membership, at least in theory, to all who had a

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<sup>152</sup> Dailey, *Before Jim Crow*, 86-89.

<sup>153</sup> Dailey, *Before Jim Crow*, 96-101.

Confederate veteran in their ancestry. Historian Grace Elizabeth Hale concludes that “participation in the war effort superceded class status in determining ‘Southernness,’” and that the Civil War was constructed as the “touchstone of modern ‘classless’ Southern whiteness.”<sup>155</sup> However, the “Cult of the Confederacy” that idolized the Civil War generation also criticized, implicitly, and at times explicitly, succeeding generations of white men. As historian Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore explains, “The wages of the fantasy served a psychic compensation for the South’s dire poverty.”<sup>156</sup>

Despite any criticism of white men imbedded in Lost Cause rhetoric, few white Southern women joined or openly supported the woman’s rights movement until the 1890s. The movement originated in the Northeast, and white Southerners had not forgotten its ties with abolitionism. Not only Southerners, but most Northerners as well, continued to glorify women’s duties in the private sphere. Many women felt reluctant to give up the basis from which they derived influence. Furthermore, the vote was central to male identity. Voting often took place in male-only spaces, such as barbershops and saloons. Torchlight parades and other rituals encouraged feelings of brotherhood between men.<sup>157</sup> The majority opinion in the post-war South and North agreed that women should not participate directly in politics.

Realities of day-to-day life in the postwar South may have persuaded white Southern women to look backwards at how they had effected change in the past rather than at the new form of power that suffrage would wield. The Civil War generation

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<sup>154</sup> Dailey, *Before Jim Crow*, 157.

<sup>155</sup> Hale, *Making Whiteness*, 69.

<sup>156</sup> Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*, 95.

<sup>157</sup> Paula Baker, “The Domestication of Politics: Women and American Political Society, 1780-1920,” in *Unequal Sisters*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, eds. Vicki Ruiz and Ellen Carol DuBois (New York: Routledge, 1994), 89.

viewed the lack of Southern men as a great concern; one-third of the white male population perished in the war. The numbers of widows and unmarried women were greater than before but far fewer had the means to support themselves without gainful employment. Even the Lee women, who had fought in court to maintain their wealth and independence before the war, worked for a living after the war. As widows and spinsters, they had the same property rights as men, and postwar reforms to married women's property rights occurred without suffrage. Southern women such as the Lees may have concluded that they did not need women's rights or suffrage.

White Southern women who wanted to join the northern-based woman's rights movement of the 1870s faced considerable difficulty remaining "respectable," but by the 1890s, a minority of Southern women emerged to organize for the suffrage cause. The Lees were not among their number. The Southern suffragists of the 1890s proved their respectability in part by supporting Confederate patriotism and even appropriating it for their cause. They were not much different from their conservative sisters, according to historian Marjorie Spruill Wheeler. Suffragists often had elite family pedigrees that included Confederate veterans, and they were themselves members of women's Confederate groups. They shared the same values with conservative women and did not challenge the righteousness of the Lost Cause. Instead, they used Lost Cause rhetoric to their advantage. Suffragists claimed to seek the vote in part to fulfill their traditional obligations as "Southern Ladies" within a society that had changed in the aftermath of the war. The South could restore white supremacy, suffragists argued, by passing legislation for white women to vote but with restrictions against African American women. Suffragists abandoned their "Southern Strategy" by the end of the century, because most

southern states had disenfranchised African American men.<sup>158</sup> They did not forgo race-based arguments altogether. Early twentieth-century white Southern Suffragists argued that legislators should grant suffrage to send a clear message that white women were superior to black men, or continue to undermine white supremacy.<sup>159</sup> By the 1920s, African American women and white women cooperated for the joint goal women's suffrage, but black suffragists viewed women's suffrage as a step closer to suffrage for all African Americans, while white suffragists did not.

Southern suffragists were not as successful as their counterparts in the North and in the West, but their attempts helped to bring about a major shift in American politics. Suffragists in all regions followed the same strategy of lobbying state assemblies to pass legislation for women to vote. Their efforts provided a model for other special interest groups to follow, and by the twentieth century, lobbying proved to be more influential on policy-making than the vote. Historian Paula Baker describes this dramatic shift, along with progressive governments' assumption of women's conventional concerns as the "domestication of politics." Baker concludes that once the vote became less influential in politics and less vital to male identity, women succeeded in obtaining voting rights.<sup>160</sup>

Women ultimately obtained suffrage, not through the state governments, but through the passage of Nineteenth Amendment to the Constitution in 1920. White Southern suffragists broke ranks over this tactic. Southern anti-suffragists stirred up old regional animosities by declaring the "Susan B. Anthony" amendment a threat to states'

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<sup>158</sup> Wheeler, "Divided Legacy," 168, 176-177; and Marjorie Spruill Wheeler, "The Woman Suffrage Movement in the Inhospitable South," in *Votes for Women! The Woman Suffrage Movement in Tennessee, the South, and the Nation*, ed. Marjorie Spruill Wheeler (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1995), 29.

<sup>159</sup> Hale, *Making Whiteness*, 108.

rights and white supremacy. Even some ardent suffragists changed sides to oppose the method of a Constitutional amendment. Other white suffragists, however, became disillusioned with Southern tradition and pride.<sup>161</sup>

Throughout the twentieth century, Southern politics continued to be bound to Southern patriotism. Women had initiated post-Civil War Confederate patriotism and then cultivated Southern pride for generations. Whether conservative or progressive, white women influenced Southern politics.

At first glance, the Civil War histories recorded in Southern women's diaries described transgressions in female behavior. That under the strain of wartime conditions, women acted in ways that they would not have during times of peace. Upon closer inspection, white Southern women wrote diaries, in part, to record their contributions as well as their sufferings for the Confederate cause. After the war, white women did not retreat from the public realm. They participated in the construction of white supremacy by emphasizing continuity over change. The replication of conventional gender relations, the formation of Lost Cause ideology and Confederate organizations, the representation of mammy in postwar Southern homes, and the cries for protection from African American men, all resulted from white women's creation or cooperation. From writing histories and novels to lobbying state legislatures, white Southern women defined and defended Southern history, society, culture, and politics to an extent unknown before the war. All the while, white Southern women declared no desires for change to their conventional roles; any differences perceived between postwar and antebellum gender

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<sup>160</sup> Baker, "The Domestication of Politics," 96-98.

<sup>161</sup> Wheeler, "Divided Legacy," 169, 185, 189-191.

roles resulted from social and economic circumstances created by the Civil War and Reconstruction. Time again, white Southern women denied their own agency, but their actions spoke louder than words. From the pages of their wartime diaries, the Lee women favored their identities as patriots over their conventional identities as ladies and as Christians. When peace returned, the Lees worked to balance all three. White Southern women built upon their wartime defense of their homes to play a central role in the reconstruction of the South, even if that role imitated an imagined past while reflecting the potential of the future.

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