Nothing Ought to Astonish Us: Confederate Civilians in the 1864 Shenandoah Valley Campaign

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Nancy Emerson lived in Staunton, Virginia, and kept a diary intermittently throughout the Civil War. Emerson was raised in Massachusetts and moved south with her brother, a Lutheran minister, in the late 1850s. They became Confederates, transplanting themselves and driving deep roots into the new soil around them. Emerson intended her diary to be read by her “northern friends, should any of them have the curiosity to read [it].” She felt increasingly sick with what she thought might be typhoid fever, so she directed that the journal “be forwarded to” her northern friends “at some future time.” She wondered what her friends in the North thought about the war and the South, and what they thought about the destruction of civilian property in Staunton and farther up the Valley in Lexington in June 1864. She wondered whether any of her friends in the North had even heard of the pillaging in the Valley and whether they favored “this unjust & abominable war.” She decided that she could not guess what they thought anymore — their distance of mind and spirit were too great. “Such strange things happen these days,” she concluded, “that nothing ought to astonish us.”

Confederate civilians in the Shenandoah Valley might have thought they knew what to expect of the war by 1864, but they soon found themselves taken aback by Union successes and Union aggressiveness, determination, and competence. They admitted to themselves that while nothing ought to astonish them, nearly everything in the summer and fall of 1864 did. The war changed from something largely distant and contained to something unpredictable and invasive. Union armies in the Valley were better led, more determined, and more hardened than before. Confederate armies in the Valley were less well led, less determined, and at times less courageous than in the past. Confederate...
ate civilians found themselves less sure of their security, their army, and their prospects.2

Valley civilians had good reason to be surprised at the changes in 1864. In the preceding years, they witnessed a more limited war, one in which Confederate armies swept enemy forces out of the Shenandoah and Federal forces never sustained a hard policy against civilians. In 1862, Confederate major general Thomas J. Jackson maneuvered and fought to clear the Valley of Union forces in a few short weeks. Panic shook Staunton in April 1862 when Union forces appeared nearby. One Confederate officer from Staunton called the excitement “exceedingly ludicrous and amusing.” He chuckled at “women and children and negroes and especially the men and more especially the office-holding men—Quartermaster and Commissioner” who “were seen running to and fro through rain.”3

Jackson’s decisive engagements and brilliant marches dazzled Confederate civilians and gave them unsurpassed confidence in the supremacy of their army, its commanders, and its cause. The leading citizens of Augusta County drafted a testimonial of appreciation to Jackson for “protecting their homesteads from desolation, and themselves and their families from insult and oppression.” The editors of the Staunton Spectator praised Jackson’s service. “Their advance guards were at our very borders,” the paper reminded readers, “and a general feeling of insecurity pervaded the community. In the midst of our apprehension, and when some of our citizens had begun to remove their families and property, a significant message was received from Gen. Jackson, urging our people to remain quiet, that the enemy were not yet in Augusta!” After the Valley was secure and Lee’s forces were winning battles around Richmond, Nancy Emerson reflected, “Public thanks were offered for their [the Confederate forces’] deliverance. Our help is in God & in him alone.”4

God’s role in the struggle seemed apparent to Confederate civilians in the Valley before the 1864 campaign. When Confederate forces drove Maj. Gen. George B. McClellan’s Army of the Potomac from Richmond in 1862, Nancy Emerson considered it evidence of God’s justice and plan for the Confederacy. “This judgment from God has fallen upon the North because of their declension from him,” Emerson affirmed. She could not “for one moment believe that a righteous God” would allow the Confederacy to “be trodden down as the mud of the streets, whatever our cruel and insolent invaders might threaten.” Emerson knew that her neighbors, fellow parishioners, and friends had prayed fervently for direction: “Too many prayers have been ascending to heavens
night & day for such an event to come to pass.” Later, in early 1863, Emerson reflected on the previous year’s events and concluded, “Blessed be the Lord who has not given us as a prey to their [Yankee] teeth. As a nation, we have in a measure acknowledged God, & he has appeared for us most wonderfully.”

Confederate civilians in the Valley believed they had been delivered in 1862 from desperate danger by the brilliance of Jackson as an instrument of their Christian God. Nancy Emerson continually referred to the dangers to the Valley in 1862. “We have much to be grateful for,” Emerson thought. “For months we were under frequent apprehensions that the Yankees would come in & get possession of the Valley, but the Lord mercifully preserved us from the danger, & has delivered us from the fear.” The southern newspapers were clear as well about the stakes in the war, informing citizens of the consequences of a northern victory: southerners, the editors predicted, would be “left without rights, without legal remedies, an inferior race creeping on the face of our own land.” Less dramatically, Jedediah Hotchkiss, the gifted cartographer who served with Stonewall Jackson and his successors, wrote his ten-year-old daughter, Nellie, that the Yankees “would come and destroy us and our country if they could.” Emerson also saw the dangers of a Yankee invasion, lamenting, “How many churches have they polluted, how many graves desecrated. How have they soaked our soil with the blood of our noblest & best. . . . May the righteous Lord plead our cause against an ungodly nation.”

Victories in the first half of 1863 reassured Valley Confederates and seemed to confirm their understanding of their role in the war. Lt. Gen. Richard S. Ewell’s triumph over Maj. Gen. Robert H. Milroy at Winchester on June 14-15, together with Robert E. Lee’s success at Chancellorsville in early May, caused Valley civilians to place their faith in the superiority of southern arms. When Nancy Emerson learned about Milroy’s defeat, she rejoiced, calling it “glorious news” and noting the capture of “several thousand prisoners & stores without number.” She had also heard comforting stories from Winchester about “an old negro who was kept on nothing but water for three days because he refused to work & said he was ‘secesh.’” The story described Federal officers putting the black man in hard labor breaking rocks and starving him into submission, yet he refused to give in and insisted he was secessionist to the core. “Noble fellow. It does one good to hear such instances,” Emerson affirmed with thorough sincerity, as if in 1863 even black slaves were completely unshakable in their commitment to the Confederate cause. The battle at Gettysburg, which marked the bloody culmination of Lee’s invasion of Pennsylvania in June and July, registered in the Shenandoah Valley as no more than a temporary setback. A Valley
newspaper called Gettysburg "one of the severest of the war, . . . a hard fought battle . . . in which we were successful, though with heavy loss." Southern newspapers gleefully reported that during the Pennsylvania campaign northern "fugitives . . . keep pouring into Harrisburg, Lancaster and other cities, in a state of complete terror, bringing their cattle, merchandise and household goods with them."

Because Valley civilians had not fully experienced the destructive nature of the war at the beginning of the 1864 campaign, they had yet to understand their vital role as witnesses and participants in a changing conflict. Confederates took the 1862 Valley campaign as a mark of God's deliverance and the victories in 1863 as further evidence of divine favor. When Federal troops returned to the Valley in 1864, Confederate civilians faced anew their fears and expectations of the war. Their capacity for vengeance and retribution surprised them. Both emotions unnerved them, drew comment, and forced self-examination—but did not alter their purpose. The war, however strange it had become, was to be fought out, and Confederate civilians in the Valley remained determined to see it through.

Confederate civilians took their bearings along lines of connection in their inner lives with family, neighbors, and God. They combined allegiance, friendship, and faith to find a fixed position on the war, and in so doing to better comprehend their reactions. As 1864 inaugurated more destructive capacities in the war, they were particularly attentive to the conduct of Confederate troops. When Confederate forces plundered farms, took the war to northern women and children, and exhibited reckless lack of discipline during battles, civilians became concerned about the rightness of their cause. Many Valley civilians expected their men in the field to act like southern Christian soldiers, in effect to represent the best values of the new nation. They defined Federal troops as barbarians, willing to set aside codes of morality, honor, and Christian faith and to behave in a reprehensible, immoral, and unchristian manner. "God grant that the day may soon come when we shall be separated from such a race," one Confederate wrote his wife in the summer of 1864, as he detailed the depredations of Maj. Gen. Philip H. Sheridan's Union cavalry. Later that fall, he encouraged her: "Don't you all feel discouraged. . . . Providence never will smile upon a people so lost to the best feelings of our nature and who conduct warfare in such uncivilized ways."

The Shenandoah Valley harbored strong Confederate allegiances that grew among civilians not only from their faith in the divine but also from their experience in worldly affairs. The Valley's counties stood among the richest in Vir-
ginia in 1860. Augusta, Rockbridge, Frederick, and Rockingham in particular stood in the top twenty counties in Virginia for improved acreage in farms, value of livestock, and cash value of farms. Valley civilians increasingly found their economy and social experience tied to the institution of slavery. The region boasted 17 percent of Virginia’s slaveowning households and 10 percent of Virginia’s slaveholders. Neighboring counties in the Piedmont, which led Virginia in slaveholding and value of real estate and personal property, exerted a strong influence on the Valley’s growth. With its rich farms and successful commercial development, the Valley, like most of Virginia, remained Unionist in sentiment throughout the secession crisis, but in 1861 the region committed itself to the Confederate cause. The depth of that commitment, while not as complete as in some other areas of Virginia, especially the Piedmont, placed the region overwhelmingly in the Confederate column. Enlistment patterns, for example, demonstrate that 65 percent of the eligible white men in the Valley joined the Confederate forces—compared to 75 percent in the Tidewater and 85 percent in the Piedmont. The Shenandoah Valley’s commitment to the Confederacy, like its increasing connections to the institution of slavery, were evident in the broadsides that encouraged civilians to become soldiers: “Your soil has been invaded by your Abolition foes, and we call upon you to rally at once, and drive them back.”

By 1864, after years of general success in the Valley for the Confederate army, civilians in the Shenandoah Valley experienced a sharp change in the conduct of U.S. forces in the region. Federal soldiers came in June to occupy previously private civilian space, letting residents of the Valley know that their enemy could control them and their homes and that no rebel army could free them. Often in the Valley campaign, this presence of Federal troops in and among civilians brought a new urgency to the war. For its part, the Federal army continually tried to calibrate its orders for destruction. For example, at various points in the Valley campaign Union officers ordered the destruction of Confederate supply installations but not civilians’ homes, the burning of a three-mile radius around the site of a particular killing, and the torching of barns with hay but not those without. These limitations were meant to maintain discipline and order in the Federal army as the war widened to include the destruction of civilian property.

orders for each of these operations developed more fully as well. He cautioned Sigel that "indiscriminate marauding should be avoided. Nothing should be taken not absolutely necessary for the troops, except when captured from an armed enemy." Grant's approach changed for the fall campaign. He directed Sheridan to "eat out Virginia clear and clean as far as they [Early's army] go, so that crows flying over it for the balance of the season will have to carry their provender with them."12

After Sigel's effort to control the Valley came to grief at the battle of New Market in May, General Hunter moved his force up the Valley with more purpose, defeating a hastily assembled Confederate force at Piedmont in Augusta County on June 5. The battle gave Valley civilians a taste of what the summer and fall would bring. It was a disaster for the Confederates, as two infantry brigades and the 3rd Battalion Valley Reserves tried to stop the more powerful and experienced Federal forces. The Reserves were local civilians, mostly boys and older men called into duty to protect their fellow citizens in an emergency. At the battle's crucial moment, Confederate cavalry failed to support the infantry, and the men ran from the battlefield in confusion. The cavalry picked their way south and east over the Blue Ridge at Rockfish Gap, leaving the entire Shenandoah Valley in Federal control for the first time in the war. Jacob Hildebrand, a Confederate supporter with three sons in the army, admitted that "from every indication we were routed." Two days later, Hildebrand went to the battlefield to help bury the dead but found only five bodies. He concluded optimistically that "the Yankees had more killed than we had." Joseph Waddell thought "no citizen of Staunton above the age of infancy, then living, will ever forget Sunday, the 5th of June, 1864." Waddell, a Confederate clerk, loaded all of his "valuable paper," mostly bonds and vouchers, into a trunk and headed for Waynesboro. He described the mood as "cheerful" and fully expected the Confederate army to regain supremacy in the Valley.13

A decidedly less optimistic atmosphere prevailed in Staunton, which Hunter occupied on June 11-12. For citizens of Augusta, like many others in the upper Valley, Hunter's army imposed the first major occupation of the war. The Federals entered the homes of civilians and took food and property. When northern soldiers arrived at the home of Nancy Emerson's neighbor, "they took everything they had to eat, all the pillow cases & sheet & towels & some of the ladies stockings . . . & destroyed things generally." According to Emerson, the soldiers "took off all the Negro men & boys they could, as well as all the horses" and "told the women they would take them next time they came." Waddell noted that "nearly all of the houses had been searched for provisions and
arms," that "a large number of Negroes went off with the Yankees," and that "some persons here suffered much from the Yankees in loss of property [while] others escaped entirely." “Almost everybody lost horses,” he reported. Waddell characterized the Federal army as full of “treachery” and “without motive, although characteristic of the people.”

Federal officers, for their part, considered the Confederate civilians equally full of treachery. They were unsure of some Confederate women, particularly those not in the elite class. Wealthier Confederate women often received guards at their houses and were treated with respect, but more common women, either on the yeoman farms or in the small towns, encountered suspicion and at times hostility. One Union soldier found “pretty girls abundant” in Harrisonburg but called them “detestable secesh.” David Hunter Strother, a Virginian who served as Hunter’s chief of staff during the Valley campaign, found himself in several discussions with women and girls along the army’s route. Early on in the campaign he decided “to have no more social intercourse with the people of the country” because it interfered with his “military duties” and brought him face to face with “outrage and distresses which awaken my sympathies but which I could not prevent.”

Wary Union soldiers found some evidence of cooperation from Valley civilians. Federal officers convened groups of prominent citizens to inform them of Hunter’s “retaliatory” orders against bushwhackers and guerrillas, asking them to identify the culprits. In Newtown, as in other towns, these citizens complied and “promised to give all the information in their power.” They pointed out a Mrs. Wilson’s house as a refuge for guerrillas, whereupon Hunter’s troops arrested her, charged her with “feeding and harboring guerrillas,” burned all of her possessions, and marched her six miles to a guard tent. When Hunter’s troops moved into Staunton, remarked one Federal, the women “greeted us pleasantly, waved their handkerchiefs, . . . and brought buckets of water or milk to quench our thirsts.” Some dressed up for the occasion in their “Sunday dresses” and handed out bouquets of flowers to the invading soldiers. Federal officers wondered whether this demonstration was “sincere and loyal” or meant to insult them.

Nancy Emerson called the Federals a “cloud of locusts from the bottomless pit.” She heard them say they would come back “to reap [the wheat harvest].” In telling the story of the occupation, Emerson described what happened at her home. She began her entry for July 9 with the intention of telling “about some Yankee raiders” and noted that General Hunter’s June occupation of Staunton “will not soon be forgotten in these parts.” When Federal troops arrived, they
demanded whiskey, flour, and bacon, in that order. Emerson watched as the soldiers ransacked the house. They took the shoes of her older male cousin because shoes were “nearly impossible to get.” In a moment of commercial bravery, the cousin bought the shoes back on the spot with a ten-dollar Ohio note. Emerson recorded her sister-in-law’s outrage that the Federal army was injuring “innocent persons who had taken no part in the war.” When she hurled this insult at the Federals, one responded, “You need not tell me that, I know all the people along here have sons in the army.” Emerson reported that her sister-in-law was “afraid to undress” that night and slept but a few hours, as the household took turns keeping watch.  

The presence of armed and rowdy Federal troops terrified some women. When Hunter’s forces pushed into Rockbridge County, Eva Honey Allen, a young woman living near Fincastle who had two brothers in Maj. Gen. George E. Pickett’s division, grew anxious. As Hunter slowly proceeded up the Valley, swirling rumors preceded his army like a drop in barometric pressure before a summer thunderstorm. Allen had yet to see her first Yankee, but she had heard that they were buying barrels of whiskey several farms away. “We shall be much more afraid of them now than ever,” she worried. Later that day, she finally saw
her “first Yankees!” and confessed to feeling “relieved.” They were polite and considerate, asking directions and moving off quickly, “shutting the gate after them,” a gesture that surprised her. By the next day, rumors of “their doings are as thick as blackberries,” Allen recorded. Allen was most troubled by “very alarming” rumors that “the Negroes” were spreading, one of which claimed that Hunter was approaching with “a very large army, including 8,000 Negroes.” Another story circulated that 200 or 300 Negro men from the Bedford area had joined the Federal force in the Valley. Still another report ran that the Federal army “can’t take the women off now, but will come back for them.”

Confederate civilians of means retreated to mountain hideaways to keep clear of the grasping invaders, taking personal property, slaves, and livestock with them. When Hunter’s army arrived in Lexington, David Hunter Strother observed “a great deal of smoke in the mountains.” When he inquired about it among the locals, they replied that “it came from the camps of the refugees who were hiding” from the army “with their Negroes and cattle.” Strother was surprised at the “satisfaction” that Confederate civilians expressed about their slaves’ loyalty. From his perspective, black people only feigned loyalty to their masters. “The Negroes take the first opportunity they find of running into our lines and giving information as to where their masters are hidden,” Strother noted.

When Federal troops swept into an area, Confederate men had much to fear. They often attempted to hide, running into corn or wheat fields or into the mountains. At the approach of Federal troops, Joseph Waddell evacuated Staunton and moved out of their path. He paid close attention to rumors about their return throughout the summer and fall, always ready to move again if necessary. In Winchester, the brothers of Matthella Page Harrison hid in their cornfield up to three times a day as rumors circulated about the imminent arrival of Federal troops. Even the Episcopal minister fled to avoid arrest. “The men & boys always kept out of the way,” Nancy Emerson recorded, “as they were sometimes taken off & did not know what treatment they might receive.” Some were shot down as they ran away; others escaped undetected and watched as Federal troops stood in their homes and yards. “They always fire upon those who run from them,” Nancy Emerson noted. The women, she added, “were left to shift for themselves as best they could.” She and her sister-in-law defended the home against Union soldiers who arrived on June 11. “Those who left their houses fared worse than others, at least their houses did,” Emerson concluded. Emerson’s brother Luther, a Presbyterian minister, abandoned the house to avoid capture by the Federal troops. The family considered the move wise be-
cause, according to Emerson, the northern army has “such spite against preachers & especially as he has written & spoken so freely, that his [pro-Confederate] sentiments are generally known.”

Contemporaries and later historians focused on Hunter’s attacks on prominent Confederate civilians who seemed to stand symbolically for the rebellion. In Staunton, Hunter ordered the destruction of the Walkers’ mill, Crawford and Young’s woolen factory, J. A. Trotter’s stables, and W. F. Smith’s mill. All of these men operated factories that directly aided the Confederate military effort, and their families supported the Confederacy. Joseph Waddell reported that the “people of Staunton have not suffered at the hands of the Yankees, except the owners of mills and factories.” Forces under Hunter targeted institutions and businesses that they considered clearly recognized extensions of the Confederate war machine. Hunter proceeded to Lexington, where he burned part of the Virginia Military Institute and Gov. John Letcher’s home, both of which were intimately connected to the southern cause. Confederate newspapers expressed outrage at the burnings and destruction of property. The Republican Vindicator condemned Hunter’s behavior at Lexington as “one of the most wanton and barbaric acts of the war.” The paper compared Hunter to Maj. Gen. Benjamin F. “Beast” Butler, whose occupation of New Orleans in 1862 stood in southern minds for graceless and mindless violence against civilians, especially women. When Confederate lieutenant general Jubal A. Early defeated Hunter at Lynchburg on June 18 and pushed him out of the Valley, the Staunton newspaper hailed the Confederates and jeered Hunter. “He has accomplished nothing,” the paper sneered, “as regards the overthrow of the Confederacy, having run away from the only point he could have materially damaged it.” The Shenandoah Valley remained largely free of a major Federal military presence from June 18 until early September.

In addition to its careful targeting of symbolic institutions and people, Hunter’s army directed considerable anger toward Confederate women—behaviors that Valley civilians, such as Eva Honey Allen, sometimes linked in excoriating their enemy. When Hunter issued a stirring statement from his headquarters in Wheeling, West Virginia, that his troops had accomplished $10 million worth of damage to Confederate property, Allen hoped Early “and his men will remember this, when they reach Pennsylvania.” Hearsay in Rockbridge County confirmed Hunter’s perfidy in her eyes. She learned from a reliable source “that one of his [Hunter’s] objects in this expedition was to degrade the Va. women, ‘that he was determined to break their proud spirit.’” Hunter, according to this source, thought “southern women had done more to bring
on this rebellion than the men and they ought to be made to suffer for it.” One older Rockbridge citizen told Allen that the Federal army’s “mode of warfare was something new in history.” He told her “a war between civilized nations was carried on by battles between opposing armies.” But the Federal army, he said, “fought by burning homes or robbing women & children.”

Hunter’s burning of V.M.I. and Governor Letcher’s home attracted the attention of the Confederate press, but his army’s actions against women and families struck more directly at the core of the southern household. Hunter’s troops executed a Confederate civilian in Rockbridge County for defending his home and family. “The execution will take place in a few minutes,” David S. Creigh wrote on June 10, in a last letter to his wife Emily. He explained that he was to be hanged and the house in which he was imprisoned burned around him. Creigh had shot a Federal soldier who ransacked his home and threatened his daughters. The soldier recovered from the wound, and Federal officers captured Creigh, imprisoned him, tried, and executed him. Micajah Woods, Creigh’s nephew and a Confederate artilleryman whose unit served in the area with Jubal Early, reported to his father, Creigh’s brother-in-law, that “Uncle David was certainly executed at Mr. Morrison’s near Brownsburg.” Federal troops buried Creigh in a shallow grave near the execution site. Family members, hearing of the execution, went to the place and “had him interred prop-
erly.” According to Micajah Woods, another man who tried to protect his home “was treated terribly,” and “his mind is said to be affected by the scenes he and his daughter have passed.”

Creigh’s case became a cause célèbre of the *Central Presbyterian*, a southern denominational newspaper and printing company, but it was not the only execution in Rockbridge. Fannie Wilson recorded the execution of Matthew White Jr.: “He was seen on Sunday afternoon marching out of town with a squad of soldiers, who shot him for bush-whacking.” She noted that Federal troops carried out the execution “all the time deceiving his parents.” When the parents asked about their son, they were told he was “at home.” Wilson seemed to consider the deception particularly noteworthy. After the Federals left the area, “his body was found unburied in the woods near Mrs. Cameron’s house.”

Many women drew clear distinctions between the honorable behavior of Confederate soldiers and the depredations of Federal troops. In Fauquier County in July, Lucy Johnson Ambler matter-of-factly recorded the destruction of her plantation. Federal soldiers “destroyed the mills. They burnt down our stacks of wheat. . . . They took the negroes’ clothes and any little thing belonging to them they wanted. The officers heard the firing of the guns as they were killing the sheep, but let it go on.” Ambler believed that the officers led and encouraged the destruction and turned a blind eye toward the inhumanity and cruelty of it. “All sense of shame and decency seems to have deserted them,” she observed. They acted “in the most Godless manner.”

Confederate civilians cheered when Early’s forces cleared the Valley of Federal troops and crossed the Potomac to threaten Washington. Mary Catharine Powell Cochran in Loudoun County followed the northern newspaper coverage of Early’s raid. “We have all enjoyed intensely the panic in Yankeedom,” she wrote in her diary on July 13. Cochran had heard some suggest that Early’s troops “should pillage and burn as the Yankees have done,” but she thought otherwise. “In our heart of hearts,” she confessed, “we can’t help feeling proud and pleased that they didn’t [burn and pillage].” Cochran believed that “such dirty work” would “defile” the “hands” of the Confederacy’s “sons and brothers and husbands.” She considered Early’s raid a “test” that would prove “Southern men cannot turn thieves and house burners at a moment’s notice.”

When Federal troops terrorized southern women, their male relatives often swore vengeance within the boundaries of honor. Virginia Military Institute cadet Lawrence Royster, for example, stated the matter plainly. “Mother lost absolutely everything,” he told his friend, John E. Roller. She was forced to be-
come a refugee, became sick, and lost all means of survival. “If I am ever spared to get into yankee land,” Royster swore, “I will respect nothing but a woman’s person, I’ll break, pillage and plunder.”

Given an opportunity to take such action in July, Early’s army respected little in their path. Early’s forces demanded levies from Frederick, Maryland, and Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, after they threatened Washington in late July. The burning of Chambersburg by Brig. Gen. John McCausland’s cavalry struck some Confederate civilians as neither wise nor honorable. Joseph Waddell thought the reprisal burnings sure to further enrage the northern people and revive their “war spirit.” “The Yankees,” Waddell predicted, “will come back and burn a hundred for one.” Waddell considered the Confederate raid bad policy because the Confederacy’s only hope lay with northern public opinion, which could demand an end to the war. He thought “it would be far better to let their [the Federals’] outrages stand out before the world . . . to the disgust of even some of their own people.” Waddell’s opinion on this matter hardened, and he later called the destruction of Chambersburg “a miserable affair, . . . horribly stupid . . . a blunder.” Yet Waddell admitted feeling a certain degree of pleasure that “the miserable Yankee nation, who have been burning and pillaging throughout our own country for so long, have now been made to suffer in their own homes.”

Other Confederates joined Waddell in experiencing a tangle of emotions regarding Early’s actions north of the Potomac River — vindication mixed with chagrin, joy with fear, and spite with abhorrence. Waddell reported in his diary that the retaliation provoked much discussion in Staunton among its citizens. Jedediah Hotchkiss explained the burning of Chambersburg to his wife as directly connected and proportional to Hunter’s burnings in Lexington. Hotchkiss observed that citizens of Chambersburg “laughed at General McCausland” and refused to pay the $100,000 demanded. Although Waddell filled several pages in his diary with the reasons he considered the raids misguided, some newspapers in Staunton and Richmond called the actions “just retaliation” and argued that a reciprocal policy would continue until the Federal army returned “to that mode of warfare practiced by all civilized nations.” Not all editors took this position. Some criticized the raid as “stupid” and feared its repercussions on the northern draft at a critical time when public morale in the United States seemed to be lagging. “As if to stimulate the tardy Pennsylvanians to rush to arms against us,” one disgusted southern editor lamented, “Chambersburg is burned down.”

Eva Honey Allen learned of the raid from northern newspapers and rumor.
“The Yankees do not find burning such a pleasant pastime,” she commented with relish, “when their own homes are in question.” She vowed not to “waste” any “sympathy or pity” on the northern people. The burning at Chambersburg led Allen to make a private confession in her diary. She had “never recorded the fate of the star spangled banner” that her brother brought her from Chambersburg after the Gettysburg campaign. She took the flag to her room, grabbed a pack of matches, locked the door, and burned it. “I took a ‘savage pleasure’ in burning that flag,” she confessed.30

Despite a growing hatred among Confederates for what the United States flag represented, even some southern officers expressed dismay at the behavior of Early’s troops in Pennsylvania and Maryland. Brig. Gen. Bradley T. Johnson, a cavalry commander under McCausland, filed a report with the office of the adjutant general on August 10, 1864, accusing Confederate forces of “outrageous conduct.” Johnson’s brigade had been routed in a small battle at Moorefield, and he was trying desperately to save his career. Jedediah Hotchkiss considered Johnson “culpably negligent” for the “extremely disgraceful” defeat at Moorefield. According to Hotchkiss, who served at Early’s headquarters, Johnson had been asleep when his brigade came under attack and “barely escaped, in his stocking feet & on the bare back of a horse.” Hotchkiss considered Johnson a “bold dashing fellow” who as an officer had “no discipline.” For his part, Johnson considered the undisciplined behavior of his men at Chambersburg offensive both to himself and “the cause.” “Every crime in the catalogue of infamy has been committed,” he wrote, “except murder and rape.” Johnson gave examples of outright robbery—even a Catholic priest was robbed of his watch on his way to service. “Thus, the grand spectacle of a national retaliation was reduced to a miserable huckstering for greenbacks,” Johnson concluded. Worse than this, Johnson reported drunken Confederate soldiers back in Virginia who “knocked down and kicked an aged woman who has two sons in the Confederate army.” After choking the woman’s sister, they locked her in a barn and set fire to it—all because the woman would not give them fresh horses.31

While civilians such as Waddell considered the Confederate raid bad policy, others had the sinking feeling that it symbolized something more—a turning point in the conduct of Confederate arms, and in the course of the war, that would lead to even more severe consequences for civilians. For these individuals, the raid too much resembled Hunter’s dishonorable, blatantly criminal campaign in June. The monetary levies appeared to be little more than highway robbery, and the burning of homes scarcely differed from what Hunter and his forces had done. Many civilians and soldiers had difficulty reconciling
the behavior of Early’s cavalry with Lee’s order issued from Chambersburg in 1863. Lee held that the Confederate army would “only make war on armed men” and could not “take vengeance for the wrongs our people have suffered without lowering ourselves in the eyes of all.” Lee presented his men with a clear statement that vengeance was for God not man, and he forbade “unnecessary or wanton injury to private property.” Newspaper editors at the time admitted that not all southerners agreed with Lee’s views. The Democratic paper in Staunton, for example, held that the only way to make “the mass of the Northern people see the outrageous impropriety of conducting the war on their uncivilized plan was to make them feel some of the burdens of that plan, and let them realize that plunder and destruction was not and could not be confined to one side alone.” The paper considered Lee’s orders the proper course of action but counseled that “the remembrance of wrongs so lately inflicted will cause many to feel disappointed.”

After Early burned Chambersburg, he telegraphed Lee, “I alone am responsible for this act.” Early’s actions in Pennsylvania and Lee’s clear position in 1863 set up a running dispute after the war regarding Confederate conduct. The Confederate Veteran noted that the burning of Chambersburg initiated “much controversy” and that “many believed it was accidental.” Southern civilians and soldiers who lived far from the Valley thought it an accident that seemed inconsistent with the conduct of Confederate armies. In 1884, a Baltimore lawyer who had served in McCausland’s cavalry tried to explain his conduct in the burning. He maintained that the cavalry consisted of the “very first young men of our State, . . . guided by the strongest instincts of principle.” He implied that such upstanding citizen soldiers would not behave in an immoral fashion; after all, they were now doctors and lawyers, prosperous, Christian, and dutiful. As for the fate of “your petty little town,” he wrote a Chambersburg resident, it was burned because it happened to be “the nearest and most accessible place of importance for us to get to.” This cavalryman had been captured at Moorefield and imprisoned: “For eight long, miserable, weary months we bewailed the day that Chambersburg was founded, built, and burned.”

Southern civilians wanted to see their young men as gallant and good Christian soldiers. Nancy Emerson considered the South more civilized than the North, and she pointed to its Christian faith as one of the main reasons. She railed against some Boston newspapers’ advertisements about the capture of 10,000 Bibles by blockading U.S. naval vessels. She thought it “outrageous for people calling themselves Christians to be chuckling over the infamous robberies of their countrymen.” As if to convince herself of the truth of her statement,
Emerson addressed the subject of northern perfidy. "If you ask me how I know that their soldiers are more profane than ours," she wrote, "I answer the same way that I know most things, by testimony, abundant testimony." Yet in the aftermath of the Chambersburg burning, some southern civilians questioned how God could favor such action on the part of their army and worried what the answer would mean for their future.

The Maryland campaign in the summer of 1864 gave Confederate civilians in the Valley some confidence that the war might end soon and favorably for their cause. Early's army cleared the Valley of Federal troops, threatened Washington, and delivered retribution on northern civilians. The crops were safe and abundant, money worth more after currency reform. Civilians read northern newspapers and their "talk about starving the South." Southern newspapers scoffed lightheartedly that there was plenty to eat: "The young rook is eaten in England, and as we know of no difference between the rook, and the crow, we do not see why young crows may not be eaten, or, indeed, in war times, old crows."

By the second week of September, Confederate hopes faded and civilians grew despondent. The fall of Atlanta on September 2 altered expectations about the war's course. "I have so much bad news to record," Eva Allen wrote, "that I scarcely know where to begin. . . . The general opinion is that the war is to be interminable now." Allen confessed a secret desire to "shut the book and sit me down and die." Other diarists recorded similar signs of collective depression. Waddell gave his first indication of anxiety on September 14, when he noted "a rather somber feeling in the community today—nothing to be hoped for from any peace party in the North." Waddell considered the Confederacy "about used up."

The state of depression among Confederate civilians deepened in September when General Sheridan’s army came into a region still rich in logistical production. General in Chief U. S. Grant famously instructed Sheridan to make the Shenandoah Valley a "barren waste" by carrying off or destroying anything of value to the Confederate military effort. The Valley in 1864 held large quantities of crops and supplies, despite the summer's long drought and the invasions of Union armies early in the summer. The Staunton newspaper reported in mid-July that the wheat crop was "of excellent quality and well filled." The paper predicted that the corn crop also would be successful. Hotchkiss wrote that Clarke and Jefferson counties had "abundance in them" of flour and noted that Early’s commissary had "100,000 bushels of wheat at his command." Waddell reported Augusta County to be "rich in all that is needed to sustain an
army. . . . The mills are full of wheat.” Waddell worried that if the Federal troops came “the loss to our army will be irreparable.” Even in late September, Sheridan reported from Harrisonburg that “the country from here to Staunton was abundantly supplied with forage and grain.”

Sheridan’s troopers set crops and barns on fire throughout the lower Valley in August and September. These Federals, noted Sheridan in his official report, operated under “the most positive orders . . . not to burn dwellings.” According to Waddell, northern troops in Staunton “entered very few private houses and committed no depredations,” but he heard of “great destruction in Rockbridge and all the Lower Valley.” “Women were wringing their hands and crying while the men were carried off as prisoners and the barns and hay stacks were burning,” Waddell wrote. Matthella Harrison witnessed the destruction at her family’s plantation. “Every head of stock driven off,” she dryly recorded: “Those young animals that refused to go were shot down.” When the enemy’s officers and soldiers came to her family’s plantation, she heard the sound of an uncontrolled mob — “the shouts, ribald jokes, awful oaths, demonical laughter of the fiends.” These soldiers also sought revenge. According to Harrison, their watchword was “Remember Chambersburg.”

From the top of Brown’s Gap in the Blue Ridge Mountains in late September, Early’s army, defeated recently in the battles of Third Winchester and Fisher’s Hill, defended its last toehold in the Valley while Federal cavalry carried out Sheridan’s orders to destroy Confederate supplies. The gap offered a particularly high vantage from which to see the destruction. Deployed in a close defensive perimeter along the ridge lines, soldiers could watch the fires on the Valley floor below. “Immediately in my view were burnt not less than one hundred hay stacks and barns,” one artilleryman wrote his father; “nearly every farm large or small has been visited by the torch.” This man admitted that the “whereabouts of the enemy” were “unknown precisely” and guessed that Federal cavalry bore responsibility for the burning. The Valley, he thought, was no longer “tenable” for any army, and he feared the same measures would be extended to the Confederate country as a whole.

While Confederates speculated on the enemy’s activities, Union soldiers and officers engaged in widespread destruction fueled not only by orders from Grant and Sheridan but also by determination to avenge Confederate guerrilla activity. When Lt. John Rogers Meigs, son of the Union quartermaster general and a favorite of Sheridan’s, was killed near Harrisonburg on October 3 by Confederate cavalrymen, Little Phil ordered a complete burning of all property within a three-mile radius of the site. “Since I came into the Valley from

Harper’s Ferry,” Sheridan concluded, “every train, every small party, and every straggler, has been bushwhacked by the people.” Rumors swirled that Confederate civilians, not uniformed cavalry, were responsible for Meigs’s death, and Federal troops, especially Sheridan, viewed the killing as a “murder.” The day after Meigs’s death, Col. William H. Powell informed the citizens of Page County that two Confederate prisoners of war would be shot or hanged for every Union soldier killed by a southern bushwhacker. Indeed, that very day Powell reported that he “had two bushwackers shot to death” in retaliation for the killing of one of his soldiers.42

Despite the intensity of various accounts of The Burning and the escalation of reprisal violence in the region, some observers mentioned the destruction only in passing—as just another strange happening in a long war. Jedediah Hotchkiss, an astute observer, only mentioned the burning of civilian property once in his journal. On August 17, he stated matter-of-factly, “We found the enemy gone this morning and the smoke rising from all parts of the Lower
Valley from the burning of barns and hay and wheat stacks by the retreating Yankees.” Hotchkiss’s emphasis at end of his statement was on the retreating Yankees. The smoke of the burning appeared more as evidence of their retreat than of their pillage. A month later, Hotchkiss returned home to Staunton to find “the people are busy sowing grain.” Shortly thereafter, he reported “some difficulty” gathering supplies “for the year” from his neighbors and friends. Even so, Hotchkiss thought that he “got along well.”

Hotchkiss’s optimism about the limited scope of the damage somewhat obscured the fact that the Federals had burned great quantities of hay and barns, driven off large numbers of livestock, and enlisted or emancipated hundreds of slaves. Only Rockingham County undertook a complete survey of the damage and losses to the civilian population. The county acted in response to a memo from the Office Recorder of Virginia Forces, appointed by Governor William Smith. The governor charged the office “to carefully ascertain what wrongs and injuries, contrary to the rules of war, have been committed upon the people of Virginia.” The offense considered “worse than all” was “offering insult, outrage, and violence to defenceless women.” Rockingham followed through on the request, one of the only counties in the Valley to do so. It reported in November that a committee of seventy-two citizens from every section of the county canvassed their neighbors and compiled a complete survey of the damage in the campaign. Their findings were part of the record of the county court and subject to the court’s scrutiny (see table 1).

Rockingham County’s estimate was, according to the newspaper, the conservative, lower total of the returns gathered by the committee. The newspaper put the estimate at more than $25 million in Confederate prices, or $5 million in real value. Rockingham County’s losses likely ranked among the most significant in the Valley.

Heavy as these losses were, Sheridan’s forces had inflicted limited and targeted damage that neither destroyed the entire Valley nor subjugated its population. The summer’s drought and the war’s loss of laborers lowered production levels from the 1860 highs, but perhaps by no more than 15 percent. Sheridan extravagantly claimed that his cavalry units struck so hard at civilian property that the Valley “will have little in it for man or beast.” His final report claimed that Federals destroyed or captured 3,772 horses, 10,918 cattle, 12,000 sheep, 15,000 hogs, 20,397 tons of hay, 435,802 bushels of wheat, 77,176 bushels of corn, 71 flour mills, and 1,200 barns. Rockingham apparently lost 450 of the 1,200 barns, 31 of 71 flourmills, and 6,000 of 20,000 tons of hay destroyed in the Valley. In Rockingham, where Sheridan’s cavalry admittedly visited
Table 1. Estimate of Rockingham County Losses in 1864 Valley Campaign Compared with U.S. Census Agricultural Schedule Data for Rockingham County

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Property Damage or Loss</th>
<th>Amount or Number</th>
<th>1860 U.S. Census Agricultural Production</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dwelling houses burned</td>
<td>30</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barns burned</td>
<td>45</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mills burned</td>
<td>31</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fencing destroyed (miles)</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bushels of wheat destroyed</td>
<td>100,000</td>
<td>358,653</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bushels of corn destroyed</td>
<td>50,000</td>
<td>684,239</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tons of hay destroyed</td>
<td>6,233</td>
<td>19,174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cattle carried off</td>
<td>1,750</td>
<td>13,299</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horses carried off</td>
<td>1,750</td>
<td>7,874</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheep carried off</td>
<td>4,200</td>
<td>13,364</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hogs carried off</td>
<td>3,350</td>
<td>37,307</td>
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<tr>
<td>Factories burned</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Furnaces burned</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Staunton Republican Vindicator, November 18, 1864; 1860 U.S. Census Agricultural Schedule, Rockingham County.

widespread destruction, the county’s conservative estimate of total losses represented less than a quarter of production levels in 1860. Federal troops in Rockingham burned and destroyed more barns, hay, and wheat than any other agricultural products. Hogs, cattle, and corn remained in significant numbers. Citizens in Rockingham dutifully reported these losses, fully expecting that the process would eventually result in compensation from the state or Confederate government. They had reason to believe that the state government would come to their aid; in 1862 and 1863 it had proved attentive to the demands of a citizenry at war.47

Through this destruction, Federal officers openly challenged the Confederate civilians’ sense of security and faith in their government. They destroyed Confederate supplies and buildings and threatened Confederate men. They also visibly demonstrated the weakness of Confederate institutions. When Federal troops occupied Staunton in September, an officer “offered for sale a Confederate $1,000 bond,” as if to dare Confederates to invest in their gov-
ernment’s shaky future. Waddell noted that after some time the seller “could find no purchaser.” In an elaborate display of magnanimity, the officer gave the bond to Andrew Hunter, cousin of the Federal general, “as partial compensation for the burning of his house.”

Not surprisingly, many black residents of the Valley did not see U. S. forces as menacing invaders. In Augusta County, for example, Nancy Jenkins Jefferson had lived before the war as a free black woman who made her living as a housekeeper. She had two children in her household and owned real estate and some property. Some time after the war she married a freedman named Thomas Jefferson. She claimed her sympathies “were all the time with the Union.” Nancy’s brother, presumably a slave, was “in the Confederate Army” and “was forced to wait on an officer.” “Our Loyalty is indisputable,” Nancy and Thomas claimed in 1877, “because we are colored persons.” In September 1864, Nancy harbored a Federal officer wounded in a nearby skirmish. “He was wounded at our door, and the Confederates would have stripped and murdered him after he was shot down, had he not been cared for by us,” they claimed. The claim investigator looked into the matter and concluded that Nancy acted “at considerable risk to herself and property [and] kept him [the officer] concealed from the rebel troops until he could be removed to a place of safety.” Nancy’s claim was for compensation and services rendered during the 1864 Valley campaign—including the care and hospitalization of a Federal officer and the loss of one 180-pound hog and eight barrels of flour.

Unionists in the Shenandoah Valley—whether free blacks, Dunkers, Mennonites, or independent-minded yeomen—could experience sharp treatment in 1864 from Confederate civilians, officers, and soldiers as well as from the invading Federals. In Winchester, Mordecai Purcell faced potential violence when a Confederate enlisted man promised to “shoot him if he did not give him a horse that he had and prove his loyalty to the Confederacy.” Purcell watched helplessly as the soldier took the animal. Confederate soldiers camped at the farm of Christian Landis, a Dunker in Augusta County, for four days in the fall of 1864. Landis’s son had been conscripted into the Confederate army in 1862, as Landis put it matter-of-factly, “against my will” and “by armed men from my house and was killed in the Wilderness.” When Federal troops came into Augusta at “the time of the burning,” they took his corn, and when Landis objected “threatened to burn my barn down.” The beleaguered Dunker gave them “hay, oats, bacon, and provisions,” and his wife “cooked for them all day.” Although the Federal troops spared Landis’s barn, they took his horses.
Unionists who objected to such seizures were told, according to one postwar claimant, "the less I said, the better for me."

Like many Unionists, Landis shepherded his sons and daughters north or west out of the reach of Confederate conscription agents. Confederates imprisoned these resisters when possible and enforced conscription, even shooting at Unionists who ran from them. Confederate civilians viewed these resisters as potential enemies, and indeed some of them were. When Unionists fled north or west to reach Federal lines, some of them joined the U. S. Army. John D. Stover, a farmer in New Hope near Staunton, received aid from Unionist David Myers, who "advised and encouraged me to go" through the lines to the Federal army. Stover left the Valley in 1864, joined the 6th Ohio, and returned to the Shenandoah in Sheridan's command. John Yates, another Unionist in Augusta, was imprisoned in Castle Thunder for "aiding refugees across the lines." Moved to Staunton in September 1864 to stand trial for treason, he was liberated by Sheridan's army.

When Federal troops moved through Rockingham and Augusta Counties, they did not just burn Confederate barns and liberate Unionists from prisons—they also freed many slaves. Although slaves had run away throughout the war, the pace picked up in the Shenandoah Valley in 1864. Civilians took notice, but newspapers only reluctantly admitted the hemorrhaging loss of black labor. The Staunton Vindicator offered no more than a veiled comment that "only white labor is available locally." Confederate civilians also took notice when the Union army began to use black troops in Virginia. Amanda Edmonds chastised Grant in June for bringing "the abominable wretches and negroes to the field." When black soldiers in the Ninth Corps suffered heavy casualties in late July during the battle of the Crater at Petersburg, some civilians in the Valley expressed paternalist pity. Mary Cochran described the black troops as "poor wretches stimulated with whisky and induced to think they would meet with no resistance." She considered the grisly result at Petersburg, which she attributed to poor conduct by the Federal officers, a sad betrayal of simple black men.

Many African Americans took the opportunity to join the Federal army when it appeared in the Valley. In late September, Sheridan's force impressed both free and enslaved African Americans in Staunton to tear up the railroad. According to Waddell, the impressed crew were "very indignant and did much less damage . . . than they could have done." In the next sentence, however, Waddell conceded that "a considerable number of Negroes" went off with the
Union army. Federal officers apparently promised to take any willing African Americans to Washington, where “they could work for a living.” Waddell, like Cochran, sneered at such a possibility and considered black men too deluded or infantile to know what was good for them. Confederate civilians simply could not admit to themselves that slaves felt no loyalty to either the southern cause or their masters.

Although they typically failed to come to terms with black disloyalty, Confederate civilians turned a more realistic eye toward their soldiers. Civilians felt connected to the army and watched its every move. Earlier in the war, they had taken pride in the fortitude and resilience demonstrated by Confederate troops at Fredericksburg and Gettysburg and in the boldness and power of southern soldiers who fought at Second Manassas and Chancellorsville. In 1864 as earlier, they expected their soldiers to punish the Federal transgressors and to sting the northern will.

Confederates in uniform were similarly connected to the home front, assessing reactions behind the lines in light of their own conduct. A soldier named John T. Cooley considered the South to be “in a war which we must fight out.” In September 1864, he cited the old maxim, “The harder the storm the sooner it will be over,” to give himself and his civilian relatives some comfort. In a letter to his cousin, Cooley listed three things he needed to stay in the field and keep up morale: “I can stand the storm very well if I get plenty to eat, and can enjoy good health, and be permitted to peruse the thoughts of my highly esteemed and affected cousin Julia!” In fact, this was not all Cooley needed. He went to prayer meetings, daydreamed about the “blue mountains” of southwest Virginia, and confessed to dreading another winter in the field. He feared “that we will suffer worse than we ever have.” “War is all that can be heard,” he admitted, “and everybody is tired of that.”

The battle of Fisher’s Hill caused Confederate civilians in the Valley to examine closely themselves and their army. On September 22, Early’s army fled the field at Fisher’s Hill in disastrous order. Soldiers referred to it as a “stampede,” “a panic” carried out “at breakneck speed” and in “the greatest confusion.” Elements of the army scattered over Massanutten Mountain into the Page Valley, not to return to the main body for weeks. Officers and soldiers alike understood how embarrassing the loss at Fisher’s Hill was for the Confederacy. They wrote home to offer explanations full of determination. One soldier, who shared his “darkest forebodings,” considered the rout “woeful to our young country and its cause.” Another blamed the “management of the command” and considered the army’s future in the Valley over. A third called the battle a
disgraceful stampede and pronounced the “cavalry so utterly worthless” that it could not stop a flank attack on the infantry under any circumstances. Yet this last witness sought to assure his mother that the soldiers had “quite recovered their morale.”

Civilians had their doubts. “To all appearance there is no help for us but in God,” Joseph Waddell lamented. Fisher’s Hill sent him into a spiral of depression. “A dull feeling of gloom seems to pervade the community,” he recorded; “. . . there is little to hope for in the future. It is like walking through the Valley of the Shadow of Death.” Incredulous at the depth of depression he witnessed, Waddell wondered whether any of his neighbors had not grown tired of the war. He claimed that “[a]nxiety and gloom were depicted on every countenance.” “For myself,” he confessed, “I feel staggered and overcome. Our cause seems to be desperate.” When Waddell’s sister heard that Sheridan’s forces had crushed the Confederates at Fisher’s Hill, she suffered “intensely from nervous apprehensions” and dreaded that “she and her children, would be slaughtered, or at least starved to death.” Waddell regarded the Christianity of the northern people as hypocritical because they seemed to take pleasure in the “alarm and suffering” of Confederate women and children. Evidence of that suffering lay all too readily at hand, whether in Staunton, where Federal troops “destroyed publick property,” or in the thirteen-mile stretch between Waynesboro and Staunton, along which one trooper in the 20th U.S. Cavalry traveled one night “guided along the way by blazing haystacks and large grangeries.”

When Sheridan’s army seemed poised to move out of the Valley in mid-October, Confederate civilians and soldiers could hardly believe what had happened to them. “I dislike very much to hear of our arms meeting so many reverses,” one young man wrote his brother, a cavalryman in McCausland’s brigade. The army previously had always won “victories.” Also incensed at the conduct of Federal troops in the Valley, the man remarked, “It is almost enough to make the blood boil in one’s veins to hear of the atrocities and vandalism Sheridan has committed.” He admitted that the “country” was in a “terrible crisis” but tried not to believe that the northern army’s cause would prevail. “Surely,” he thought, “the South can never be subdued by men who commit such outrages! The vengeance of a just God will most certainly overtake them sooner or later.” Joseph Waddell, an admitted pessimist, worried that “officials in Richmond” were in a “state of panic, . . . making no provision for the future.” Apparently, he had heard the government was “staking everything on a single throw [of the dice].” That strategy seemed desperate to Waddell, who prayed to God that the Confederates “may be humble, submissive, and trustful” even in
Federal soldiers cheer Sheridan as he rides past, with plumes of smoke from burning crops and buildings rising in the background. James E. Taylor’s sketch conveys strong images of Union triumph and destruction that would linger for years among the Valley’s residents. Courtesy of the Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, Ohio.

The battle of Cedar Creek, fought that October 19 near Middletown, proved Waddell wrong and shocked the Valley’s civilians. The Confederate army plundered the enemy’s camps after initial success and then ran pell-mell in the face of a counterattack. General Early criticized his men openly in the newspapers for their “misconduct” and “disgraceful propensity for plunder.” He released his postbattle address for publication in the press at the same time it was read to his soldiers, an example of how closely Early linked the home front and battlefield. His address sought to shame the men, daring those who plundered to show their spoils. For each man who dropped out of the ranks at Cedar Creek to ransack Federals camps, insisted Early, the plunder would represent “badges of his dishonor, the insignia of his disgrace.” Old Jube blamed officers as well as enlisted men for the turnaround loss. Success, he cautioned, came from discipline and from fighting with honor. In his last paragraph, Early appealed to the cause and to patriotism, calling on soldiers in the Army of the Valley “to do battle like men.”

the face of slaughter and loss. Waddell, though, came around to seeing cheerful news on the horizon. He took comfort in reports of successes west of the Mississippi, where he thought “the Confederates appear to have things their own way.” He thought things looked “a little brighter” on October 19.
With Early’s public pronouncement circulating through newspapers in the state, his soldiers wrote home to describe the battle and their role in it. Most characterized Cedar Creek as a “painful” and “disgraceful affair.” One young Virginia cavalryman admitted that “disaster after disaster attends this army.” He considered it “very galling” to have to “acknowledge all this” but thought it “folly to attempt to smooth things over.” After Cedar Creek, the trooper marched without a horse and tried to keep up with his unit on foot. He thought the army “demoralized” and suggested that Early should “sell out to another firm.” Some soldiers tried to play down the loss at Cedar Creek, telling their families that the battle should be considered a draw. The quartermaster in Thomas L. Rosser’s cavalry command mentioned “our Troops stopping to plunder their camps,” but in his tabulation—which did not square with reality—Early’s army came away from the field with the advantage in captured pieces and men.60

Word of Early’s losses spread quickly across Virginia and beyond. It reached troopers in the 1st Battalion Kentucky Mounted Rifles just days after Cedar Creek as they traveled through southwestern Virginia to join Confederate forces in the Valley. “Our men generally go on this expedition,” remarked Edward O. Guerrant, an officer in the unit, “with a heavy heart.” At the same time, Guerrant recorded in his diary signs of economic and social collapse during the two-week journey. On one twenty-mile march through several small towns and past many farms, he “saw nobody” except “the wondering little negroes and children and the girls at ‘Hollins Institute.’” He considered it “peculiar” to travel through so much of Virginia and see “not a face hardly.” The journey brought unsettling moments, as when the Kentuckians heard that their horses “will surely starve, so all say.” They marched through Augusta County, where Guerrant saw “not one in a dozen barns were left standing.” Later, above Harrisonburg, he witnessed “utter desolation.” “You might travel all day and night,” Guerrant marveled, “and not see a dozen [people]. They were closed in their houses if they had [any].” When Guerrant and his unit arrived at Early’s camp, they were directed to the lower Luray Valley to join Maj. Gen. Lunsford L. Lomax’s cavalry division. En route the Kentuckians encountered part of the Laurel Brigade, “most of them drunk.” Two days later, Guerrant noted, “Everybody joined in a Philippic against the war.”61

Civilians also observed the deterioration in Confederate capacity to continue the war. Joseph Waddell recorded in October that “a considerable number of men from the town and county have run off to avoid military duty.” When farmers were drafted into military service, some filed for a writ of habeas corpus in a local court “on the ground that the Government had entered into a contract
to release them from military service" in return for their selling their produce to the government at the approved prices. According to Waddell, many of these men were “probably hiding in the mountains.”

Soldiers who found the Valley’s destruction and the loss at Cedar Creek “humiliating” understandably feared that civilians would lose faith in the army’s ability to defend them. One deemed it embarrassing “to come back up the Valley after another thrashing.” As the fall campaign unfolded, Jedediah Hotchkiss urged his wife to spread word at home that the army would continue to fight. “Our men in the field have lost none of their accustomed courage,” he emphasized, “their leaders none of their accustomed skills, but our ranks are depleted.” He viewed the northern advantage as purely one of “numbers” of men, and exhorted those at home to “cheerfully come now, and in two months all will be well.” Especially before the disaster at Cedar Creek, Hotchkiss insisted that time might still be on the side of the Confederates. “If we are able to keep the enemy at bay,” he wrote home, “. . . we shall not be troubled by them another year.” Hotchkiss heard rumors from the North that public opinion would not support another year of war. He was “confident” in “a conclusion of hostilities with the ending of ‘Old Abe’s’ reign.” “Everything indicates a strong peace movement in the North,” Hotchkiss reported hopefully.

Lincoln’s reelection led many Valley civilians to question their prospects for victory. Most recognized that the Republican triumph meant “at least four more years of war.” Joseph Waddell thought the election would be “discouraging” for the Confederate soldiers “after all they have endured.” He also saw the election as evidence of a more determined foe in the North, where the people “have declared in favor of prosecuting the war, even to our extermination.”

Lincoln’s immediate call for one million men further discouraged Confederate civilians, leading some to consider the cause “hopeless” and others to encourage more drastic measures to win the war. “Many of our people are ready to give up,” Waddell observed, “especially the original secessionists.” He heard rumors that many secessionists wanted to strike a deal with Lincoln, ending the war for southern independence with a bargain that preserved some aspects of slavery in the South. Waddell found this sentiment reprehensible. “I would rather lose slavery and everything and become a serf to Russia,” he affirmed, than give up the cause. For Waddell, surrendering to save slavery was the ultimate admission of failure because it plainly revealed the emptiness of Confederate nationalism. An ambivalent supporter of slavery at best, Waddell preferred “independence without slavery” to capitulation with it. While Waddell considered the prospect of arming slaves to fight for the Confederacy,
women from neighboring Rockingham County petitioned the secretary of war to allow them to raise a regiment of female soldiers “armed and equipped to perform regular service.” The women affirmed their determination “to leave our hearthstones — to endure any sacrifice — any privation for the ultimate success of our Holy Cause.”

The war had yielded reversals of fortune, bitter harvests, and deep anxieties for its Confederate participants. Widespread destruction in the Valley and defeats on the battlefield left soldiers and civilians bewildered. A cavalry quartermaster named D. C. Snyder appealed to a “just God” and could not believe “that He will permit such a race of men to subjugate and destroy a people fighting for all that is dear to enlightened freemen.” He was convinced that “retribution will surely overtake” an opponent “so lost to the best feelings of our nature and who conduct a warfare in such uncivilized ways.” As the army moved to put detailed men into the ranks, Snyder voiced mixed emotions about leaving the security of his job and “fighting a foe that makes such warfare upon defenseless women and children.” He preferred to defend his family at home where it counted the most. Instructing his wife in November to take rations from the Federal army rather than become a refugee, he urged her “to provide for yourself and [the] children” and to stay at home. Snyder described the region around the Valley as a world apart from the year before when supplies were plentiful. “You can form no idea of how scarce everything is,” he warned, “and how much suffering must result the coming winter from the scarcity.”

While stationed in Rockingham County in December, Snyder was “surprised” that civilians who had lost so much “got along so well.” He was less sure of the army. “Qualification for office [in the army] now seems to be that of whiskey drinking, swearing, deceitfulness and anything else calculated to deceive and take advantage,” he lamented. “If this war is to continue until the morals of the army improve it will be of long duration.”

The Valley campaign of 1864 impressed upon Confederate civilians that the war and their perceptions of it were subject to constant negotiation. Many planters and yeomen saw their farms wrecked, barns burned, cattle driven off, and crops seized. The Confederate army conscripted nearly every available man, while it lost battles, cohesion, and moral direction. Eva Allen’s brother Henry wrote home from the trenches at Petersburg to tell of a strange story of a “Negro man belonging to old Capt. Breckinridge.” The former slave fled the plantation and “went off with Hunter” in June 1864. According to Henry, the man deserted from the Federal army and came over to the Confederate lines. He told them “he was ‘sick of soldiering,’ and said there were some other Botetourt Negroes in
his Regt. all anxious to get back home.” Henry was amazed at the strangeness of the report, not because a former slave in the Federal army had deserted to the Confederacy, but because slaves were actually fighting in the Federal army. “Who would have thought four years ago,” he wondered, “that the time would come when we would be fighting our neighbor’s Negroes?”

Confederate civilians found that they did not quite know themselves, that their astonishment knew few boundaries. As noted earlier, Amanda Edmonds criticized Grant when black Federal soldiers were first deployed in Virginia. She wondered whether the Confederates would “ever blot out such a foe?” Later in September her question changed: “Will kind Providence forsake us in this day of adversity? Will he permit one of the most beautiful countries in the world to become enslaved and subjugated?” The shift in her emphasis was subtle but startling. Confederate civilians, tired of the war but determined to fight it out, asked themselves in June 1864 whether they would eventually destroy the enemy, but by September they wondered whether they were forsaken. The answers to these questions eluded them, but the questions themselves hung in the autumn air. The Confederacy’s enemy demonstrated such determination and capacity for war in the Valley that civilians knew the war had altered course. At the same time, the Confederate army showed such failure of command and lack of discipline that civilians knew they could not rely on it for protection. Despite this reversal and their astonishment at it, Confederate civilians in the Shenandoah Valley held fast to their desperate, losing cause, hoping, praying, and believing that they would not be forsaken.

Acknowledgments

The author would like to thank Anne S. Rubin, Aaron Sheehan-Dean, Doug Smith, Bill Bergen, and Edward L. Ayers for their helpful comments and careful reading of this essay.

Notes

1. Diary of Nancy Emerson, July 9, 1864, Valley of the Shadow: Two Communities in the American Civil War, Virginia Center for Digital History, University of Virginia (http://valley.vcdh.virginia.edu) [item hereafter cited as Emerson diary, with date].

2. Stephen V. Ash’s When the Yankees Came: Conflict and Chaos in the Occupied South, 1861–1865 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995) traces the changing experiences of what he calls “three worlds” of the occupied South: garri-
soned towns, the no man’s land, and the Confederate frontier. Ash’s description of
no man’s land in 1864 as engendering alienation—“in a strange land”—was clearly
at work in the Shenandoah Valley. This essay, though, locates the processes at work
on Confederate civilians in a specific time and place, seeing how Confederate views
were shaped by their perceptions of their role in the war, the enemy’s actions, and the
conduct of the Confederate troops.

3. William H. S. Baylor to Mrs. Baylor, April 22, 1862, Special Collections Depart-
ment, University Libraries, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, Va.

4. Staunton Spectator, January 6, 1863; Emerson diary, June 30, 1862.

5. Emerson diary, July 4, 1862, January 1, 1863.

6. Jedediah Hotchkiss to Nellie Hotchkiss, December 17, 1862, Hotchkiss Family
Papers, Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library, University of Virginia,
Charlottesville [repository hereafter cited as UVA]; Emerson diary, March 6, 1863.

7. Emerson diary, June 26, 1863; Staunton Spectator, July 7, August 11, 1863.

8. Two recent studies of the experiences of Virginia civilians during the Civil War
are William A. Blair, Virginia’s Private War: Feeding Body and Soul in the Confeder-
acy, 1861—1865 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998) and Daniel E. Sutherland,
Seasons of War: The Ordeal of a Confederate Community (Baton Rouge: Louisiana
State University Press, 1995). For two less scholarly accounts devoted to the 1864 Val-
ley campaign specifically, see Michael G. Mahon, The Shenandoah Valley, 1861—1865:
The Destruction of the Granary of the Confederacy (Mechanicsburg, Pa.: Stackpole
Books, 1999) and John L. Heatwole, The Burning: Sheridan in the Shenandoah Valley
(Charlottesville, Va.: Rockbridge, 1998).

9. D. C. Snyder to his wife, June 22, October 26, 1864, D. C. Snyder Letters, James
Madison University, Harrisonburg, Va. See Ash, When the Yankees Came, 40—41,
on southern citizens’ views of occupation as degrading, polluting, and violating. For
an excellent overview of Confederate views on Christian soldiers, see Reid Mitchell,
“Christian Soldiers? Perfecting the Confederacy,” in Religion and the American Civil
War, eds. Randall M. Miller, Harry S. Stout, and Charles Reagan Wilson (New York:

10. Aaron Sheehan-Dean, “Give the Yankees Hell!: Enlistment and Service in the
Virginia Infantry” (paper, Annual Meeting of the Southern Historical Association,
Louisville, Kentucky, November 9, 2000); Edward L. Ayers and Anne Sarah Rubin,
Valley of the Shadow: The Eve of War (New York: W. W. Norton, 2000), 95. Some
historians, such as John L. Heatwole, have played down the role of slavery in the Val-
ley and the region’s commitment to Confederate nationalism, emphasizing instead the
strong Mennonite and Dunker presence in the area and the Unionist support in the
secession crisis.

argued that Union forces pursued a conciliatory policy toward civilians in the first
two years of the war, hoping to lure Unionists back to the government and not to fur-
ther alienate recalcitrant southerners. He viewed the “hard war” phase after 1863 as
proportional because soldiers were “thinking bayonets” who understood the calibration needed to defeat the South; they did not erase the line between combatant and noncombatant.


14. Emerson diary, July 13, 1864; Waddell diary, June 13, 14, 18, 19, 1864. In the lower Valley, Federal forces as well took horses and liberated slaves. See Mathella Page Harrison diary, August 10, 11, 1864, Mathella Page Harrison Papers, UVA: “We are again relieved from the hated presence but their visit has been very disastrous to us for they have carried off George who has hitherto been a faithful servant.”


17. Emerson diary, July 21, 1864. On the rarity of Union forces raping southern women, see Ash, When the Yankees Came, 200–201, who points out that twenty-two Union soldiers were executed for attempted rape, half of them black. Ash also points out that the far more common violation, or symbolic rape, of southern women was the complete invasion of private space in women’s homes.

18. Civil War diary of Eva Honey Allen, June 14, 15, 1864, folder 4, Gilmer Speed Adam Collection, UVA.


20. Harrison diary, July 28, 1864; Emerson diary, July 13, 1864.

21. Waddell diary, June 11, 1864; Staunton Republican Vindicator, July 22, 8, 1864.


23. Micajah Woods to John Woods, June 28, 1864, Micajah Woods Papers, UVA; “A

24. Lucy Johnson Ambler diary, July 27, 1864, UVA.
25. Mary Catharine Powell Cochran diary, July 13, 1864, VHS.
26. Lawrence Royster to John E. Roller, July 28, 1864, John E. Roller Papers, VMI.
27. Waddell diary, July 22, August 4, 1864.
28. Ibid., August 6, 1864; Jedediah Hotchkiss to Sara Hotchkiss, August 10, 1864, Hotchkiss Family Papers. See also Fielder C. Slingluff to Ephriam Hiteshew, August 1, 1884, *Confederate Veteran* 17 (November 1909):560: “I saw this confidence, almost amounting to contempt, on our march to your town. . . . Knots of men on the corners poked fun at our appearance and jeered us.”
29. *Staunton Republican Vindicator*, August 12, 1864; *Charleston Mercury*, August 16, 1864. See also the *Mercury* on September 28, 1864.
30. Allen diary, August 9, 1864.
31. Jedediah Hotchkiss to Sara Hotchkiss, August 10, 1864, Hotchkiss Family Papers; *OR*, 43(1):7–8. The *Charleston Mercury*, September 30, 1864, considered the raid a key factor in later losses in the Valley because it undermined discipline and morale in the army: “This excursion into the rich country of the enemy, the license allowed to officers and men, and the plunder that was secured, together with the free use of liquor since their return, have borne their natural fruit. Some of this fruit was gathered by the enemy at Winchester and Fisher’s Hill.”
33. *Confederate Veteran* 21 (July 1913):356; Fielder C. Slingluff to Ephriam Hiteshew, August 1, 1884, *Confederate Veteran* 17 (November 1909):560. I disagree with Beringer and others’ treatment of Confederate faith and religion in *Why the South Lost the Civil War*. They contend that civilian will was “undermined by doubts of religion” and “could no longer supplement the force of arms.” They suggest that Confederates considered fostering God’s grace by reforming or eliminating slavery. Letters and diaries from the Valley reveal no evidence to support this argument. Confederate citizens instead used the suffering inherent in their Christian faith to give them will and to sustain their spirit rather than to open doubts about their actions (Richard E. Beringer, Herman Hattaway, Archer Jones, and William N. Still Jr., *Why the South Lost the Civil War* [Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1986]: 293). See also the especially thoughtful essay by Harry S. Stout and Christopher Grasso, “Civil War, Religion, and Communications: The Case of Richmond,” in Miller, Stout, and Wilson, *Religion and the American Civil War*, 313–59.
34. Emerson diary, August 9, 1864.
northern women, particularly ethnic German civilians, to explain the making of the Chambersburg burning. Smith considers the 1863 Gettysburg campaign, when Lee's army was encamped in Chambersburg, as the crucial experience that led to the burning in 1864. Smith also focuses on the southern concept of honor and its implications for how Confederates expected to be treated in 1863. See also Blair, *Virginia's Private War*, 143, for an analysis of Virginians' views on Federal treatment of southern women and civilians, and John B. Gordon, *Reminiscences of the Civil War* (New York: Scribner's, 1903), 305, for a postwar view of the Chambersburg burning as having been against the orders of Robert E. Lee.

36. On Valley crops, see Allen diary, September 7, 1864, and Waddell diary, September 24, 1864. On the money supply and Confederate measures to reign in inflation, see John Monroe Godfrey, "Monetary Expansion in the Confederacy" (Ph.D. diss., University of Georgia, 1976). See also *Staunton Republican Vindicator*, September 9, 1864.

37. Allen diary, September 7, 1864, Waddell diary, September 14, 1864. For further evidence of collective depression and the endlessness of the war, see Ash, *When the Yankees Came*, 211–15.


39. *OR*, 43(1):50. Many homes were burned, especially in Loudoun and Fauquier where Lt. Col. John S. Mosby's raiders irritated Sheridan's forces. On August 13, 1864, for example, Mosby's force captured a wagon train near Berryville and a few days later attacked the 5th Michigan. The 5th was sent back to Berryville to burn houses and devastate the farms there. See *OR*, 43(1):822.

40. Harrison diary, August 17, 1864. See also Lucy Rebecca Buck, *Shadows on My Heart: The Civil War Diary of Lucy Rebecca Buck of Virginia*, ed. by Elizabeth R. Baer (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1997), 301.


42. *OR*, 43(1):508; Heatwole, *Burning*, 89–115. See also Kepner diary, October 4, 1864, which notes: "To retaliate for the death of Lt. Meigs the buildings near Harrisonburg were burned for miles around."

43. Jedediah Hotchkiss, *Make Me a Map of the Valley: The Civil War Journal of Stonewall Jackson's Topographer*, ed. Archie P. McDonald (Dallas, Tex.: Southern Methodist University Press, 1973), 222, 228–29. Jacob Hildebrand focused most of his diary notes on the concerns of his farm and family, but he did report on the burning in the Valley. He traveled to Winchester in late August to visit his sons in camp. On the way, he observed, "Yankees are burning Every barn they come across that has either hay or grain in it. I seen a good many that were smoking yet as I passed up the Valley Pike." Later in September, when he was home in Augusta, Hildebrand reported that "the Yankee cavalry took possession of Staunton about 3,000 — this afternoon the Yankees burned all the hay near the C.R. Road. I saw them set fire to Mr. J. H. Coiners
hay stacks.” And a few days later, he wrote “the Yankees made a General burning of
barns in the lower end of this county and the upper end of Rockingham county and also
some houses” (Hildebrand, Mennonite Journal, 228).

44. Staunton Republican Vindicator, July 29, 1864.


46. Michael G. Mahon’s recent account of the Valley campaign suggests that Sheri-
dan inflated his numbers to impress the public and Grant and that the destruction in
the Valley had little impact on the overall capability of the Confederacy to wage war.
He argues that the Valley was already depleted and no longer supporting the Con-
federate war effort. Mahon compiles little evidence to support his argument (Mahon,
Shenandoah Valley).

47. On the responsiveness of Virginia and the Confederacy to citizen concerns, see
especially Blair, Virginia’s Private War, 4–5.

48. Waddell diary, September 26, 1864.

49. Claim of Nancy and Thomas Jefferson, Southern Claims Commission, Augusta
County, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C. The claim
for the care of the officer was not allowed, but the claims for the hog and flour were.
Nancy and Thomas Jefferson received $42.00 in compensation.

50. Claim of Mordecai Purcell, Southern Claims Commission, Augusta County,
quoted in Patrick Maiberger, “Civilian and Military Interactions in Winchester Vir-
ginia” (undergraduate thesis, University of Virginia, 2000); claim of Christian Landis,
Southern Claims Commission, Augusta County.

51. Claims of David Myers, John Yates, and David W. Landes, Southern Claims
Commission, Augusta County (Landes’s claim addresses the shooting incident).

52. Staunton Republican Vindicator, September 15, 1864; Cochran diary, August,
1864; Amanda Virginia Edmonds diary, June 10, 1864, VHS. See Ash, When the Yan-
kees Came, 156–57, for further evidence of Confederate views that the Federal army
deluded slaves.

53. Waddell diary, October 10, 1864. See also, Allen diary for Eva Allen’s commen-
tary on the loyalty of her servants. On the number of runaways in Virginia during the
Civil War, see Ervin L. Jordan Jr., Black Confederates and Afro-Yankess in Civil War
Virginia governmental report, stated that as of 1863, 37,706 slaves out of a total popu-
lation of 346,848 had absconded successfully. The number only increased in 1864.
M. G. Harman, one of the largest slave owners in Augusta County, lost about half of his
slaves by early 1865 (Blair, Virginia’s Private War, 124).

54. Gary W. Gallagher, The Confederate War (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univer-
sity Press, 1997): 8–9. Gallagher asserts that the stunning successes of Lee’s army in
the spring of 1863 created a feeling of invincibility that carried civilian morale to the
end of 1864 and perhaps to the end of the war. Gallagher aimed his argument at histori-
ans who suggested that class tension, guilt about slavery, and women’s growing unease
about the war created a loss of will that destroyed the Confederacy. No evidence from
the Valley points to loss of civilian “popular will” for these reasons.

55. John T. Cooley to Julia, September 17, 1864, John T. Cooley Letters, VHS.
56. Micajah Woods to John Woods, September 23, 1864, Woods Papers; John Anthony Craig letter, October 15, 1864, VHS; William Francis Brand to Kate Armentrout, September 22, 1864, William Francis Brand Papers, UVA; diary of Capt. James M. Garnett, September 9, 1864, UVA.
57. Waddell diary, September 14, 20, 22, 23, 1864; Henry Chester Parry to his father, September 30, 1864, Henry Chester Parry Papers, VHS.
58. William Wilson to J. Francis Wilson, October 15, 1864, Elizabeth Ann Wilson Papers, UVA; Waddell diary, October 15, 19, 1864.
59. Staunton Republican Vindicator, October 28, 1864.
60. William Clark Carson to Jennie, October 23, 1864, William Clark Carson Letters, VHS; William J. Black diary, October 19, 1864, VMI; D. C. Snyder to wife, October 22, 1864, D. C. Snyder Letters. See also Robert Ryland Horne to Mollie Horne, October 29, 1864, Horne Family Papers, VHS, which mentions Early’s newspaper address on the conduct of his men.
62. Waddell diary, November 5, 1864.
63. Jedediah Hotchkiss to Sara Hotchkiss, October 11, November 5, August 20, September 3, 1864, Hotchkiss Collection; Garnett diary, October 26, 1864.
64. Waddell diary, November 12, 15, 1864.
65. Ibid., December 25, 26, 1864, January 16, 18, 26, 1865; Irene Bell, Annie Samuels, and others to Secretary of War Seddon, December 2, 1864, quoted in Gallagher, Confederate War, 77.
67. Allen diary, December 5, 1865.
68. Edmonds Diary, September 25, 1864.