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FOR HOME AND COUNTRY: CONFEDERATE NATIONALISM IN WESTERN NORTH
CAROLINA

by

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B.A. University of Mississippi, 2007

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ABSTRACT

This study examines Confederate nationalism in Western North Carolina during the Civil War. Using secondary sources, newspapers, civilian, and soldiers' letters, this study will show that most Appalachians demonstrated a strong loyalty to their new Confederate nation. However, while a majority Appalachian Confederates maintained a strong Confederate nationalism throughout the war; many Western North Carolinians were not loyal to the Confederacy. Critically analyzing Confederate nationalism in Western North Carolina will show that conceptions of loyalty and disloyalty are not absolute, in other words, Appalachia was not purely loyal or disloyal.

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INTRODUCTION

In the fall of 1860, Western North Carolinians watched anxiously as the secession crisis deepened throughout the South. With the election of Abraham Lincoln seemingly imminent, most Appalachian citizens were not inclined to consider secession from the Union.¹ For the most part, Western North Carolinians did not view President Lincoln's election victory as reason to secede from the Union. Holding firm to their belief that the institution of slavery was protected by the United States Constitution, most in the region remained unmoved by the new president. But the events of April 12, 1861, destroyed the hopes of many that North Carolina could avoid secession. Looking on as the battle raged in Charleston Harbor, Western North Carolinians were shocked when the Lincoln administration called for 75,000 volunteers to invade the new Confederate States. After months of standing firm with the Union, Appalachian citizens were now ready to become Confederates. The once ardent Unionist William Holden summed up the sentiments of many when he wrote in his newspaper, the *North Carolina Standard* that "the proclamation of Mr. Lincoln has left no alternative but resistance or unconditional submission. The Southern man, who would quietly submit to the doctrines enunciated in that document, is only fit for a slave." Western North Carolinians' transition from Unionist to Confederates took shape with rapid speed. Months of holding out against secession eroded in a mere matter of days. Appalachian citizens viewed Lincoln's call for troops as a threat to their communities. The fear

¹ Use of the term "Appalachia" or "Appalachian" refers only to Western North Carolina unless noted otherwise.

of an invasion gave credence to the months of campaigning by secessionists. North Carolina responded to Lincoln's call for troops by seceding on May 20, 1861.²

Lincoln's reaction to Fort Sumter created a groundswell of Confederate patriotism in Western North Carolina and throughout the entire state. Approximately 130,000 North Carolinians would enlist into Confederate service, 24,000 (eighteen percent) of these men came from Western North Carolina. In total, 40,000 North Carolinians would die in Confederate service. The tremendous sacrifices of Confederate soldiers and their subsequent failure to win independence created a quandary for Civil War historians. Throughout the twentieth century, historians juggled the problem of understanding Confederate nationalism in the face of the fact that the Confederacy lost the war. Contending with the reality that the Confederacy failed to achieve independence, many historians argued that Confederate nationalism in the South was not strong enough to win a war. Thus, they have concluded that an inherent deficiency in the southern will to win the war aided the United States in their victory over the South. Until the mid-1990s many historians concluded that the Confederacy lost the Civil War because they lacked the will to win. Historians were prone to argue that internal dissent within the South claimed the life of the Confederacy. They argued that the Confederacy was destroyed from within by a southern populace who were disgruntled over the war. However, towards the end of the twentieth century, some historians began to reconsider and challenge the internal dissent thesis. In 1997 Gary Gallagher, in *The Confederate War*, argues that although "class tensions, unhappiness with intrusive government policies, and war weariness all form part of the Confederate mosaic, they must be set against the larger picture of thousands of soldiers

² Marc Kruman, *Parties and Politics in North Carolina, 1836-1865* (Baton Rouge: University of Louisiana Press, 1983), 219; "Editorial," *North Carolina Standard*, (Raleigh) May 8, 1861.

persevering against mounting odds, and civilians enduring great human and material hardship.” Gallagher makes a point, that despite the apparent internal fissures, most southerners were loyal Confederates. He argues that historians have too often “worked backward from Appomattox.” *The Confederate War* revitalized a stagnant historiography and paved the way for more complex studies of identity and nationalism in the Confederacy.³

Although historians who support the internal dissent thesis continue to provide contributions to the Confederate nationalism historiography, historians following in Gallagher’s footsteps have begun to consider more complex and nuanced understandings of Confederate nationalism.⁴ Historians have started to understand that it was quite possible for southerners to be disgruntled with the Confederacy, but simultaneously support the cause. Signs of dissent among civilians and soldiers do not necessarily equate to a failure of an individual’s Confederate nationalism. Accepting that the Confederacy had adopted the loyalties of a substantial portion of the southern population has allowed historians to engage in more complex studies over how southerners identified with the Confederate nation. Moving away from older debates over the existence of nationalism in the Confederacy, many historians now recognize that most

³ Terrell Garren, *Mountain Myth: Unionism in Western North Carolina*. (Spartanburg: Reprint Company, 2006), 84; Gary Gallagher, *The Confederate War: How Popular Will, Nationalism, and Military Strategy Could Not Stave Off Defeat* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 3-4; For works that emphasize internal dissent, see; Frank L. Owsley, *State Rights in the Confederacy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1925); Georgia Lee Tatum, *Disloyalty in the Confederacy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1934); Paul D. Escott, *After Secession: Jefferson Davis and the Failure of Confederate Nationalism* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978); Richard Beringer. *Why The South Lost the Civil War*. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1987); Drew Gilpin Faust, *The Creation of Confederate Nationalism: Ideology and Identity in the Civil War South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988).

⁴ For recent works that emphasize the internal dissent argument see; David Williams, *Bitterly Divided: The South’s Inner Civil War* (New York: New Press, 2008); David Williams, *The Civil War: A People’s History of the Civil War: Struggles for Meanings of Freedom*. (New York: The New Press, 2005); William Freehling, *The South vs. The South: How Anti-Confederate Southerners Shaped the Course of the Civil War*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); James Alexander Baggett, *The Scalawags: Southern Dissenters in the Civil War and Reconstruction* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Press, 2003).

southerners identified with the Confederacy, however, their commitment to the Confederacy was not necessarily equal or constant. Recognizing that Confederate nationalism existed throughout much of the Confederacy has allowed historians to take on more intricate studies on how southerners perceived their new nation. Working within this robust historiography, this study attempts to contribute further to the historical understanding of Confederate nationalism. Showing that Confederate nationalism existed among most Western North Carolinians, this study will demonstrate that their loyalty was not without dissent. In their effort to prosecute the war, the Confederate government was bound to have conflicts with the southern populace. However, southerners were capable of expressing their dissent toward the Confederacy while still hoping and/or fighting for Confederate victory.⁵

In between these facets of loyalty and disloyalty, there were southerners who lay somewhere in the middle. In other words, not all southerners were ardent Confederates or Unionists. One cannot assume that all southerners fit neatly into either a category of “loyal” or “disloyal.” In his study on the North Carolina Piedmont, historian David Brown explains that North Carolinians, “just like countless others across the South, did not fit neatly into either one of these positions.” He continues to explain that wartime “situations can elicit an extraordinary level of sacrifice and unshakeable commitment, but for every southerner who was staunchly Unionist or Confederate,” there were others lying the middle. Western North Carolinians, as with

⁵ William Blair, *Virginia's Private War: Feeding Body and Soul in the Confederacy, 1861-1865* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 5; For recent works that challenge the internal dissent thesis see; Gallagher, *The Confederate War*; Robert E. Bonner, *Colors and Blood: Flag Passions of the Confederate South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002); Aaron Sheehan-Dean, *Why Confederates Fought: Family and Nation in Civil War Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007); Jacqueline Glass Campbell, *When Sherman Marched to the Sea: Resistance on the Confederate Home Front* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

Piedmont North Carolinians and most other southerners, reacted to the war differently, expressing varying degrees of loyalties. Historians have begun to come full circle in our understanding of loyalty and disloyalty. Although southerners may have had a national identity, not all were equally loyal.⁶

Shortly after Lincoln's call for troops, almost all Western North Carolinians quickly transitioned from Unionists into Confederates, creating a new Confederate American identity for themselves. But, in order to understand why Appalachian Confederates decided to fight for the Confederacy, it is pertinent to have an understanding of how and why they identified with the Confederacy's cause. This study attempts to dissect and uncover the nature of Confederate identity in Western North Carolina. As the figure below shows, this study classifies Western North Carolina as the twenty-six most western counties in the state (see fig. 1).⁷ In recent years, historians have begun to focus their works on single communities or regions. Studying only one region, Western North Carolina, will provide a more clear understanding of how Appalachian citizens understood their national identity. Additionally, studying Confederate nationalism on a regional or state level provides a more concise picture of how communities interpreted the war. Historian Andrew F. Lang explains that "Local studies provide a color and texture to the larger Confederate experience and serve as a practical and effective means of approaching larger historiographical problems." He concludes that focusing on one area can "illuminate the complexities and nuances of the larger story of Confederate nationalism." An in-depth study of

⁶ David Brown, "North Carolina Ambivalence: Rethinking Loyalty and Disaffection in the North Carolina Piedmont." In *North Carolinians in the Era of the Civil War and Reconstruction*, ed. Paul Escott, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 8.

⁷University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, "North Carolina Maps," University of North Carolina Libraries, http://www.lib.unc.edu/dc/ncmaps/browse_location.html#Region (Accessed September 1, 2010)

Appalachia during the Civil War is revealing of how citizens and soldiers struggled to maintain their national identity while preserving their communities and homes.⁸



Figure 1: North Carolina County Map

⁸ Andrew F. Lang, "Upon the Altar of our Country: Confederate Identity, Nationalism, and Morale in Harrison County, Texas, 1860-1865." *Civil War History* 55 (June 2009), 280; For additional regional studies, which examine Western North Carolina, see; Brown, "North Carolinian Ambivalence: Rethinking Loyalty and Disaffection in the Civil War Piedmont," in *North Carolinians in the Era of the Civil War and Reconstruction*; Frances H. Casstevens, *The Civil War and Yadkin County, North Carolina*. (Jefferson: McFarland Press, 1997); Sean Micheal O'Brien, *Mountain Partisans: Guerilla Warfare in the Southern Appalachians, 1861-1865*. (Connecticut: Praeger Press, 1999); Inscoc, *The Heart of Confederate Appalachia: Western North Carolina in the Civil War*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); Martin Crawford, *Ashe Counties Civil War: Community and Society in the Appalachian South*. (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2001); W. Todd Groce, *Mountain Rebels: East Tennessee Confederates and the Civil War, 1860-1870*. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1999).

Appalachian citizens became Confederates because they believed it was the best way to protect their homes, communities, and way of life. Lincoln's call for troops created a sense of urgency and fear among Western North Carolinians. A belief that fighting for the Confederacy was the best way to protect their homes would be at the forefront of their identity. This new Confederate identity in Western North Carolina was a conglomerate of varying loyalties. Almost fifty years ago, David M. Potter noted that:

Historians frequently write about national loyalty as if it were exclusive, and inconsistent with other loyalties, which are described as "competing" or "divided," and which are viewed as detracting from the primary loyalty to the nation. Yet it is a self-evident fact that national loyalty flourishes not by challenging and overpowering all other loyalties, but by subsuming them all and keeping them in a reciprocally supportive relationship to one another⁹

Potter's analysis pins down how Confederate nationalism existed in Western North Carolina.

The citizens of Appalachia had many different loyalties prior to the Civil War. First and foremost, loyalties lay with their families, and extended outward to their community and state.

Andrew F. Lang explains that nationalism "was an intricate combination of local and state loyalties that functioned simultaneously and were fused together with adherence to the actual nation."¹⁰ Appalachian Confederates chose to fight for the Confederacy because they perceived the imminent Union invasion of the South as a threat to their homes and communities. Western North Carolinians viewed the Confederacy as the best way to protect their homes.

Before one can understand how Western North Carolinians understood their new national identity, it is important to have a concrete understanding of the secession crisis in North

⁹ David M. Potter, "The Historians use of Nationalism and Vice Versa" *The American Historical Review* 67 (July, 1962): 932.

¹⁰ Lang, "Upon the Altar of our Country: Confederate Identity," 280.

Carolina. During the secession period, Western North Carolinians would maintain a slightly greater commitment to the Union than other areas within the state. The region's persistent Unionist feelings can be attributed to two factors that were exclusive to Western North Carolina. Sharing borders with four states, Appalachia was coherent of the events going on in the surrounding states. As their neighbors slowly exited the Union one by one, many mountain residents chose to wait and see how the secession events would unfold. Historian John Inscoe contends that geography "remained a central factor in shaping the debate in Western North Carolina. Living in the only section of North Carolina that bordered all four of the state's neighbors, mountain residents were particularly sensitized to developments in those neighboring states." Sharing their longest border with East Tennessee made many citizens weary about the potential conflicts that could emerge between the two states. With much stronger Unionist feelings, many Western North Carolinians were foreboding of a potential conflict between the two regions.¹¹

¹¹ John Inscoe, *The Heart of Confederate Appalachia*, 45.

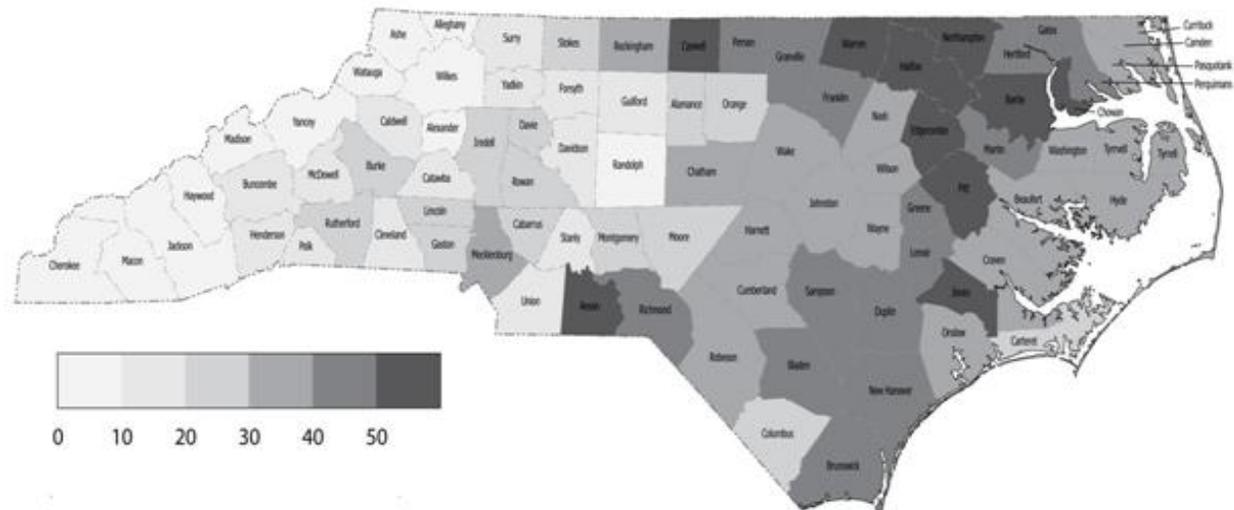


Figure 2: 1860 slave populations in North Carolina

Although geography of the region played a role in influencing the attitudes of some Western North Carolinians, the politics of slavery in the region also had a strong sway over Appalachians’ feelings. From its beginning, Western North Carolina always had a minimal slave population, which can largely be attributed to the reduced anxiety highlanders expressed over Lincoln’s election and the fear over emancipation. Of the 331,059 slaves living in North Carolina, only 37,313 (eleven percent) resided within the Appalachians.¹² Most Western North Carolinians did not believe slavery’s existence was endangered by the election of the Lincoln, arguing that slavery “was far safer within the Union and protected by constitutional

¹² University of Virginia, “Historical Census Browser.” University of Virginia Library, <http://mapserver.lib.virginia.edu/php/start.php?year=V1860> (Accessed September 1, 2010).

guarantees.”¹³ In 1860, Appalachia would have far fewer slaves than the rest of the state (see fig. 2).¹⁴ Unlike neighboring regions, slavery in Western North Carolina “made up a considerably smaller proportion of the populace than was true for most of the South.” In Western North Carolina, slavery was much more diluted than other areas of the South, with most slave owners only owning one or two slaves. In his study, John Inscoc found that eighty-three percent of slaveholders owned fewer than ten slaves. As the table below reveals, slaveholders made up only a small minority of the region’s free population. The numbers also reinforce Inscoc’s findings that most slaveholders in the mountains rarely owned more than two slaves (see tab.1).¹⁵ Because of its geographical differences from the plantation belt, Western North Carolina was destined to have fewer slaves than other areas within the state and the South. With an elevation that did not favor the production of cash crops such as cotton or tobacco, Western North Carolina would become a region filled with yeomen farmers. However, the region would also become a center for manufacturing and mercantile production. Western North Carolinians would develop an economy unique from the rest of the state. Despite the limited slave population, many small farmers did still depend on slave labor. Throughout the region, subsistence farmers depended on seasonal slave labor on their farms. Allowing for non-slaveholders to borrow slave labor helped insure slavery would remain an integral part of Appalachian society.¹⁶

¹³ Inscoc, *The Heart of Confederate Appalachia*, 49.

¹⁴ University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, “The Geography of Slavery” University of North Carolina School of Education, <http://www.learnnc.org/lp/editions/nchist-antebellum/5347> (Accessed September 1, 2010).

¹⁵ Inscoc, *The Heart of Confederate Appalachia*, 16; University of Virginia, “Historical Census Browser.” University of Virginia Library, <http://mapserver.lib.virginia.edu/php/start.php?year=V1860> (Accessed September 1, 2010).

¹⁶ Inscoc, *The Heart of Confederate Appalachia*, 17-18.

Table 1: Slave Populations and Slave Holders by County.

Counties	Total Free Population	Total Slave Holders	Total Slave Population
Alexander	5,411	136	611
Allegheny	3,384	55	206
Ashe	7,565	82	391
Buncombe	10,721	284	1,933
Burke	6,866	210	2,371
Caldwell	6,409	175	1,088
Catawba	9,065	300	1,664
Cherokee	8,647	96	519
Cleveland	10,217	383	2,131
Gaston	7,108	360	2,199
Haywood	5,488	63	313
Henderson	9,066	209	1,382
Iredell	11,170	587	4,177
Jackson	5,247	43	268
Lincoln	6,080	283	2,115
Macon	5,485	82	519
Madison	5,695	46	213
McDowell	5,815	213	1,305
Mecklenburg	10,833	846	6,541
Polk	3,423	88	620
Rutherford	9,182	351	2,391
Surry	9,134	210	1,246
Watauga	4,853	31	104
Wilkes	13,541	228	1,208
Yadkin	9,278	162	1,436
Yancey	8,293	62	362
Total	197,976	5,585	37,313

Beginning in the early 1830s, the Whig party gained a foothold in the mountains that remained intact through 1860. Appalachia was a mixed region of subsistence farmers as well as mercantile, manufacturing, and tourism operations. Unlike neighboring regions of the plantation South driven by cotton production, Western North Carolina had a diverse economy which “separated southern highlanders by the late antebellum era.” Appalachia was a distinctive “section of North Carolina, with priorities, goals, and needs unlike those of other parts of the state.” Recognizing that the mountains had different needs from the rest of the state, Whigs capitalized on the opportunity to win the loyalties of highlanders. Inscoc explains that far more “significant to Western North Carolinians than either free suffrage or ad valorem taxation in both popularity and long-term impact were internal improvements. The Whigs’ strong endorsement of government funding and sponsorship of various transportation projects led the majority of mountain voters into the party in the late 1830s.” Seeing the success of the Whigs, Democrats began to advocate for internal improvements as well. This strategy was effective in winning over many voters, but Whigs would continue to maintain a slight majority over the Democrats in the region. The debate over secession and southern rights in the mountains fell along these traditional party lines. Within North Carolina, pro-secession advocates were generally from the Democratic Party, while Unionists emerged from the former Whig Party. Because Whigs had a slightly greater hold over mountain voters, enthusiasm for the Union was reflective of their dominance in Appalachia.¹⁷

During the secession crisis, North Carolinians participated in two official votes, which both played a role in delaying the state’s exit from the Union. Additionally, the outcomes of both

¹⁷ Inscoc, *The Heart of Confederate Appalachia*, 29; Inscoc, 31; Inscoc, *Mountain Masters, Slavery and the Sectional Crisis in Western North Carolina*. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1989), 177.

votes reveal that persistent Unionist sentiments remained resilient in Appalachia during the secession conflict. The first vote was for the president of the United States in the 1860 election. The split between secessionist and Unionist sentiments seen during the vote underlined how Appalachian citizens were nearly divided over secession. In North Carolina, the race for the presidency quickly boiled down to a two-man race. North Carolinians were divided between the pro-southern rights candidate, John Breckinridge and the Constitutional Unionist, candidate John Bell. In the end, the pro-South candidate John Breckinridge won the electoral votes from North Carolina, narrowly defeating John Bell. Throughout the whole state, Breckinridge only defeated Bell by 848 votes, receiving 50.4 percent of the vote. Western North Carolina mirrored the vote, with the region nearly split between Bell and Breckinridge. The close election results underline how North Carolinians were torn between pro-Secession and pro-Unionist convictions. But despite the popularity of both candidates in North Carolina, neither would come close to winning the presidency. The divided electoral votes in the South hindered its ability to affect the outcome of the election, allowing Abraham Lincoln to win.¹⁸

¹⁸ James McPherson, *Ordeal by Fire: The Civil War and Reconstruction* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2001), 137; John Inscoe, *Mountain Masters, Slavery and the Sectional Crisis in Western North Carolina* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1989), 221.



Figure 3: Convention vote in Western North Carolina.

Secessionists in the state house and senate hoped that the election of Lincoln would bolster secessionist sentiments in the state. In hopes of this surge, they prepared a bill calling for North Carolina to vote on whether to call a secession convention. The bill stipulated that North Carolinians would vote on February 28, to decide whether to have a convention. The results of the convention vote reveals how deeply divided North Carolina had become in the spring of 1861. The surge in secessionist enthusiasm hoped for was not enough to pass the convention bill. Although secessionists won forty-seven of the eighty-two North Carolina counties, they narrowly lost the popular vote. In total, 94,009 North Carolinians cast ballots, of which 47,338 (fifty-one percent) voted against the bill. Unionists won the vote by a narrow 667 votes. In Western North

Carolina, the margin of the Unionists' victory was slightly greater. Of the 26,962 voters in Appalachia, 15,825 voted against the bill. Unionists carried the day by a margin of fifty-eight percent. Within Western North Carolina, twelve counties voted to have a convention, while fourteen opposed the bill (see fig. three).¹⁹ The victory of Unionists in Appalachia is revealing of how Western North Carolinians viewed secession before the firing on Fort Sumter. Unshaken by Lincoln's election, North Carolinians had decided to wait out the secession crisis, hoping for an eventual reconciliation of the Union. But events soon to come changed the attitudes of nearly all North Carolinians. After South Carolina fired on Fort Sumter, Western North Carolinians watched in anxiety for the response of the United States, but "it was Lincoln's response three days later that ended any complacency or reluctance on the part of the vast majority of conditional Unionists in the region." John Inscoe explains that the Unionist allegiance to the United States was based upon the belief that if North Carolina stayed in the Union, they could avoid a war. In Western North Carolina, Unionists insisted that the "government's use, or even the threat, of military force was foremost among the conditions that would lead them to abandon their devotion to the Union." The response of the United States after Fort Sumter forced most Appalachian citizens to reevaluate their allegiances.²⁰

The Lincoln administration's reaction to Fort Sumter rang the death knell for Unionist holdouts in Western North Carolina. With the calling up of 75,000 volunteers, President Lincoln

¹⁹ Kruman, *Parties and Politics in North Carolina*, 276-277; University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, "North Carolina Maps," University of North Carolina Libraries, http://www.lib.unc.edu/dc/ncmaps/browse_location.html#Region (Accessed September 1, 2010)

²⁰ Inscoe, *The Heart of Confederate Appalachia*, 56; Inscoe, 60; Brown, "North Carolina Ambivalence: Rethinking Loyalty and Disaffection in the Civil War Piedmont." 8.

ended the secession debate in Appalachia. Unionists in Western North Carolina could no longer support the United States in the face of a Union invasion of the South. This study begins at the period when secession ended, and patriotism for the Confederacy took over Western North Carolina. By the late spring of 1861, Appalachians would send thousands of their sons and fathers into the Confederate army. But, the tremendous level of support and patriotism expressed at the war's start would be put to the test as the war intensified. While many Western North Carolinians would remain ardently loyal to the Confederate nation, many others would suffer moments of doubt, questioning their will to achieve independence. The pain and torment associated with the conflict would force many to question the validity of their new nation.

Western North Carolina's experience during the secession crisis and the Civil War set the region apart from its neighbor, East Tennessee. After the attack on Fort Sumter, support for the Confederate nation still garnered only mild support among East Tennesseans. While President Lincoln's gathering of troops to invade the South sparked an outpouring of Confederate patriotism in Western North Carolina, no such surge occurred in East Tennessee. John Inscoc notes that while "Carolina highlanders quickly capitulated to their state's secessionist majority after Fort Sumter and Lincoln's call for troops, East Tennesseans maintained a far more determined and effective Unionist leadership." Throughout the late spring and early summer of 1861, Western North Carolinians rallied to the Confederacy, mobilizing men and material for war, yet East Tennesseans remained largely against the Confederate cause.²¹

In June of 1861, twenty days after North Carolina had seceded, Tennessee finally left the Union. But this decision was without the support of most East Tennesseans. Led by vocal leader

²¹ Inscoc, *The Heart of Confederate Appalachia*, 106.

William Brownlow and Andrew Johnson, almost seventy percent of East Tennesseans voted against the ordinance, whereas Central and West Tennessee passed the ordinance with well over fifty percent margins. Of the thirty-one East Tennessee counties, only six passed the secession ordinance. In his study on the region, Todd Groce concludes that Tennessee Appalachians “simply did not share the secessionists’ fears that Lincoln posed a threat sufficient enough to warrant the dissolution of the Union.” Although most East Tennesseans rejected the Confederacy, a significant minority did embrace the new nation. The region would remain under Confederate control until August 1863 when the region’s center, Knoxville, fell to Union General Ambrose Burnside on September 1, 1863. With the fall of Knoxville, the minority of Confederates in East Tennessee fled the region, finding refuge in North Georgia, and Western North Carolina. Looking for reprisal against Confederate loyalists, Unionists East Tennesseans would join with the Union army in tormenting the few remaining loyalists. By late 1863, East Tennessee would be a Unionist stronghold and remain that way for the rest of the war.²²

Unlike East Tennessee, Western North Carolina remained in Confederate control throughout the war. Although being plagued with violence, much of which came from Unionist East Tennessee, Confederate authorities maintained command in the region until the spring of 1865. Unionism did exist in North Carolina, but it was not near to the extent that existed in East Tennessee. Western North Carolina during the Civil War looked less like East Tennessee and more like the rest of North Carolina. The North Carolina Mountains had much more in common with the state’s Piedmont region, described by David Brown. Like the Piedmont, Appalachia

²² Groce, *Mountain Rebels*, 36; 38; also see, Robert Tracy McKenzie. *Lincolmites and Rebels: A Divided Town in the American Civil War*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); Mary Emily Robertson Campbell. *The Attitude of East Tennesseans Toward the Union: 1847-1861*. (New York: Vantage Press, 1961).

would remain largely loyal to the Confederacy, but it did have significant elements of dissent and disloyalty.²³

This study sets out to understand Confederate nationalism in Appalachia by detailing the fluidity of morale and loyalty throughout the war. Divided into four chapters, this work reveals that Western North Carolina was a complex region, neither completely loyal nor disloyal, but rather somewhere in the middle between these poles. Confederate nationalism in Appalachia was in reality much more blurred than historians have perceived. Throughout the war, a majority of Western North Carolina actively supported the Confederacy, while others dissented against the Confederacy. In between these two groups, another faction of Western North Carolinians included a cross section of men and women who may have at times expressed disaffection against with Confederacy, but simultaneously hoped for southern independence.

The first chapter establishes how Western North Carolinians understood their national identity. Central to their identity, Appalachian Confederates believed they were fighting to protect their homes. The United States call for volunteers after Fort Sumter created a fear that a northern invasion into the Appalachians was probable. Although protecting their homes and communities was the integral part of their identity, this chapter will reveal that the Western North Carolinian will to fight was also supported by multiple other motivating factors. Religion, revolutionary patriotism, and slavery were also important reasons behind why Appalachian Confederates fought, and continued to fight throughout the Civil War. Viewing the war as one that they had tried to avoid at all cost, Lincoln's raising of troops induced Western North

²³ Insoce, *The Heart of Confederate Appalachia*, 145; Brown, "North Carolinian Ambivalence: Rethinking Loyalty and Disaffection in the Civil War Piedmont," in *North Carolinians in the Era of the Civil War and Reconstruction*, 8.

Carolinians to believe they were fighting against an invader. Therefore, they concluded that they were the righteous side. Throughout the war, Appalachians invoked the power of God to aid them in their quest for independence. Additionally, as battlefield losses increased, most Western North Carolinians would respond by praying more fervently than before. Revolutionary patriotism would serve a similar purpose for Western North Carolinians. Mountaineers believed that they were fighting in a war similar to that of the Revolutionary War. Revolutionary patriotism, like religion, would remain strong throughout the war. Even as defeat loomed over the Confederacy, Western North Carolinians compared their dire situation to the Revolution, where American patriots faced similar struggles. Lastly, this chapter will demonstrate that although slavery was not near as vibrant in Appalachia as it was in the lower South, many Appalachian Confederates would still fight to defend it. Although most did not own slaves, Western North Carolinians still had many reasons to fight for the institution. Slavery provided a hierarchical society that few, if any, white highlanders were willing to give up in exchange for racial equality. Even Appalachian citizens who did not own slaves still benefited from slave labor. Often borrowing or renting slaves whenever they needed extra help, many nonslaveholders still prospered from slavery.²⁴

The second chapter will explore the desertion problem that began in Appalachia shortly after the war started, and slowly increased as the war dragged on. Understanding Confederate desertion is an important part of any understanding of Confederate nationalism because it is generally understood by historians as an indicator of disloyalty and dissent. This chapter will reveal that Appalachian desertion happened for two general reasons. First and foremost, some

²⁴ Sheehan-Dean, *Why Confederates Fought*, 14; 18; James McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 63.

highlanders deserted shortly after the war began. This was primarily because they lacked the will to fight. However, not all deserters can be placed into this category. The central reason that most Appalachian Confederates chose to fight for the Confederacy was for the protection of their homes. Ironically, this same reason also encouraged many to desert. Many Western North Carolinians would desert not because of a lack of will, but instead because their families were in jeopardy at home. The Confederacy's inability to protect, sustain, and secure the home front while men were off at war caused many Confederates to desert. This chapter will show that not all deserters were necessarily disloyal.²⁵

Chapter Three will examine the national Conscription Acts which were imposed on Western North Carolina and the rest of the Confederacy. Examining conscription in Western North Carolina is revealing of the sacrifices that many mountain citizens were willing to make for the Confederacy. Conscription was not initially met with fierce opposition; the new act actually garnered mild support from some in the region. But as counties were swept dry of needed manpower, whatever initial support the bill had, quickly eroded. This chapter demonstrates that opposition to conscription in the mountains was based on the fundamental belief that Western North Carolinians had no other men to supply. The Confederacy's inability to provide for families in the absence of their men, forced many to complain to the North Carolina government that conscription was harming the region. However, these expressions of dissent were not necessarily reflections of disloyalty. Much of the antagonism between the North

²⁵ Gallagher, *The Confederate War*, 31-32.

Carolina government and citizens on the home front emerged because Appalachian residents believed that they had no more men to provide to conscription officers.²⁶

As the war waged onward, disloyalty and re-birth in Unionism slowly began to occur among a minority of Western North Carolinians. Chapter four looks at loyalty and disloyalty in North Carolina and their effects on the two gubernatorial elections. The 1862 and 1864 governor's races provide a glimpse of how Appalachian citizens viewed the Confederacy and the war effort. Although, the 1862 election would be between two candidates who both vowed to prosecute the war and achieve independence, the 1864 election would not be so simplistic. Throughout 1863, an increase in weariness over the war allowed for open discussion for peace negotiations and paved the way for a peace candidate to run for governor. The gubernatorial election of 1864 would be between a candidate who favored peace and one who favored war. The 1864 election would serve as a referendum on the war; North Carolinians would have a choice to continue the war, or opt for peace. In 1864, the peace candidate for governor, William Holden would be thoroughly defeated by incumbent Governor Zebulon Vance. When North Carolinians voted to send Vance back for a second term, they also voted to continue the war. But the rise of the peace movement in North Carolina underlines how disloyalty slowly increased in the state. Furthermore, it demonstrates how within North Carolina, a significant minority of society rejected their Confederate identity.²⁷

Throughout these chapters, it will be shown that Confederate nationalism existed in Western North Carolina, but at times many struggled with war weariness and the effects of

²⁶ Insoe, *The Heart of Confederate Appalachia*, 111.

²⁷ Kruman, *Parties and Politics in North Carolina, 1836-1865*, 236; 236; 265.

burdensome Confederate policies. The result is that Confederate morale in the region fluctuated throughout the war. Among the loyal population, many dissenters existed, but although they complained about the war, their desire to see the Confederate nation succeed was still quite strong. However, as the war went on, the will of many Western North Carolinians would not be strong enough to withstand the conflict. Violence and starvation in Appalachia would persuade a significant minority that the Confederate cause was not panning out. This study reveals that Western North Carolina had elements of both loyalty and disloyalty. While many held firm to the Confederate ideology no matter how harsh their surroundings, others would not be willing to make the same sacrifice.

CHAPTER ONE: THE CONFEDERACY IN WESTERN NORTH CAROLINA

By the spring of 1865, the Confederacy was teetering on the brink of collapse. But despite the imminent peril, many Western North Carolina Confederates still held out hope. In a March 15, 1865, letter home, Captain Benjamin Justice wrote to his wife, “I do not despair. Out of greater gloom. The God of our fathers delivered them in the days of the first revolution His hand is not weak and his arm is not short that He cannot save us in our perils.” Most Western North Carolinians believed they were fighting a war against tyranny and their cause was supported by God. Justice’s statement reveals the complicated fusion of revolutionary patriotism and religious righteousness that many Western North Carolinians felt. Justice had been soldiering for four long years and was desperate to come home to North Carolina, but despite his longing for home, he remained in the army. In this letter, Justice revealed his reasons for staying in the army. He stayed because he believed God was on his side in a fight against an enemy who sought the destruction of his home. Looking back to his Revolutionary forefathers, Justice found strength by comparing the Confederacy’s perilous situation to that of the Americans during the Revolutionary War.²⁸

This chapter will examine how Western North Carolinians evolved into Confederate soldiers and citizens. Confederate identity in Appalachia was made up of three main concepts; revolutionary patriotism, slavery and religion. The first portion of this chapter will show how Western North Carolina soldiers understood their fight for independence as a cause similar to the

²⁸ Benjamin Justice to his wife, March 15, 1865, Benjamin Justice Papers, Emory University Rare Manuscripts and Archives, Atlanta, GA. (from hereafter EURMA)

American Revolution. Just as the Continental army fought to protect their homes from an invading army, Western North Carolinians believed they were doing the same. Identifying with the Revolutionary war, Appalachian Confederates considered their cause to be a second war for independence. Although Western North Carolinians rarely addressed the topic of African slavery, they ironically believed they were fighting against their own enslavement from the North. While most North Carolinians believed they needed to protect the peculiar institution, evidence from the period shows that it was rarely referred to as a motivating factor for fighting. The second part of this chapter will reveal that although slavery was rarely spoken of, it was still an integral motivation to fight. The third portion of this chapter addresses the significance of religion in Confederate identity and popular will. Religion helped many Appalachian men and women endure the hardships of war as well as justify the losses of men on the battlefields. This chapter will reveal how Confederate identity in Western North Carolina was a complex makeup of many different beliefs. However, even in the face of many different motivations to fight, Appalachian Confederates always held their right to defend their homes at the core of their identity.

Most North Carolinians only joined the Confederate cause after President Abraham Lincoln called up troops in response to the attack on Fort Sumter in April of 1861. Holding firm to their faith that the Constitution of the United States could protect their values, the majority of North Carolinians continued to be Unionists after Lincoln's election. It was only the calling up of volunteers to subdue the rebellion in the deep South that inspired most Western North Carolinians to join the Confederacy. In his study on the Appalachian Confederate, Walter Lenoir, historian William L. Barney explains that it was not the bombardment of Fort Sumter that

excited Western North Carolinians; it was the “proclamation” that followed. Barney states that southerners “viewed Lincoln’s proclamation as a declaration of war and a call for the invasion of their homes, the abolition of slavery, and the end of the liberties they held dear.” Lincoln’s call for troops ruined hopes for peace among Western North Carolinians. Aaron Sheehan-Dean found that similar to Western North Carolinians, Virginians also became “ardent Confederates in response to what they perceived as Lincoln’s duplicity. The anger of betrayal, the sting of honor insulted, and the fear of northern intentions transformed many reluctant secessionists into eager rebels.” Prior to Lincoln’s proclamation, many Western North Carolinians believed the Unionist stance to be the position to achieve peace, but the North’s reaction to Fort Sumter change nearly all Unionist perceptions in Appalachia.²⁹

Historian Marc Kruman contends that most “North Carolinians believed that Lincoln’s election was an insufficient cause for secession. They felt that the political system could benefit themselves too and not just northerners.”³⁰ For the majority of Western North Carolinians, the victory of the Republicans in the 1860 election did not constitute a reason to secede. And even the corresponding attack on Fort Sumter was expected by most Western North Carolinians. However, after the attack on Fort Sumter, Lincoln’s reaction validated the secessionist argument that an invasion of the South was imminent. In their work *The Heart of Confederate Appalachia*, John Inscoe and Gordon McKinney conclude that “Lincoln’s response three days later ended any complacency or reluctance on the part of the vast majority of conditional Unionists in the

²⁹ William L. Barney, *The Making of a Confederate: Walter Lenoir’s Civil War*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 52; Sheehan-Dean, *Why Confederates Fought*, 15.

³⁰ Kruman. *Politics and Parties in North Carolina, 1836-1865*, 201.

region.”³¹ Most Western North Carolinians felt that they were pushed into a fight by a northern aggressor who wanted to invade their state and home. For Western North Carolinians, the war was always held in the mindset of the southern defender against the northern invader; the righteous against the unrighteous.³²

In his study on Ashe County volunteers, Martin Crawford writes that the raising of United States troops was interpreted as an invasion of the South which “not only challenged the independence of the new Confederate nation; but it simultaneously threatened the security of the local community and the homes and families of its individual members.” Crawford explains that Lincoln’s request for troops was viewed not only as an attack on the Confederacy, but for Western North Carolinians, it was an assault on their homes and communities.³³ An early war article in the *North Carolina Standard* attempted to encourage more men to enlist and those already in service to reenlist when the author stated, “The honor, the liberty, the rights and the property of the South are too dear to be compromised [...] Let the people rally to the standard of the country—let them drive back the foe, and strike for their homes and their fire sides with tenfold vigor.”³⁴ The purpose of this article was to motivate those still at home to join and those already in the army to continue fighting, therefore the key words the article used to inspire volunteering are important. The article’s use of “home” and “fireside” is significant because it alludes to the necessity to protect the local community. However, the use of the word “fireside” even goes beyond the local community and into the actual home. The fireside is often imagined

³¹ Inscoc. *The Heart of Confederate Appalachia*, 56.

³² Martin Crawford. “Confederate Volunteering and Enlistment in Ashe County, North Carolina, 1861-1862.” *Civil War History* 37 (1991): 32

³³ Crawford. “Confederate Volunteering and Enlistment in Ashe County, North Carolina, 1861-1862.” 32.

³⁴ Anonymous, “Re-enlisting and Volunteering” *North Carolina Standard*, (Raleigh) March 5, 1862.

as the core of the family home; a place where all members gather to socialize. To protect one's fireside would mean to protect one's immediate family. One Western North Carolina man from Alleghany County described these sentiments in a letter to the newspaper, *Spirit of Age*. H. B. Williams wrote that "Our fighting men have volunteered almost to a man. Our sons are in the service; our neighbors have, many of them, left their wives and little children, some of them extremely limited circumstances, and gone forth to peril their lives and fortunes to protect their homes and fireside."³⁵ Williams describes a mountain community that had depleted nearly every able man for service. But perhaps what is most significant is Williams' conclusion that all those who joined the army did so to protect their "firesides." In his pivotal book *For Cause and Comrades*, James McPherson notes that the belief that southerners were fighting for their home was an incredibly powerful source of motivation; he states that "For Confederate soldiers a more concrete, visceral, and perhaps powerful motive also came into play: defense of home and hearth against an invading enemy."³⁶ In other words, each man was fighting for his country and his state, but above all, they believed they were fighting for their families and homes.

Because Western North Carolinians were fighting in what they believed to be a defensive war, they understood that in this aspect, their conflict was similar to the Revolutionary war. They believed that the North, by invading the South, was usurping the power of the central government, and in effect destroying democracy. Therefore the recalling of the American Revolution and the Founding Fathers by Confederates emerged from the belief that the Confederacy was fighting to protect democratic government. Western North Carolinians, like all

³⁵ H.B. Williams "For the Spirit of the Age" *Spirit of the Age*, (Raleigh) January 26, 1863.

³⁶ James McPherson. *For Cause and Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997): 21.

Confederates, idealized the Confederacy for what they believed to be its defense of democratic principles. James McPherson explains that the “invocation of the Founding Fathers was as common among Confederate volunteers as among their Union counterparts—for an opposite purpose. Just as the American Patriots of 1776 had seceded from the tyrannical British empire, so the Southern Patriots of 1861 seceded from the tyrannical Yankee empire.”³⁷ By proclaiming themselves to be following in the footsteps of their ancestors, Confederates attempted to proclaim themselves as patriotic Americans fighting for independence from a tyrannical North. Additionally, because England invaded the colonies, comparing themselves to the Revolutionaries proved to be another way show that they were fighting a defensive war.

Historian Benjamin Carp explains that both Confederates and Revolutionaries perceived themselves as being threatened by an outside invader. The threat to the local community in both the Revolutionary war and Civil War South created a common enemy that communities could rally against. Carp notes that the “Revolutionary and Confederate leaders articulated common interests that justified the formation of a new nation, encouraged nationalist sentiment among the nation’s citizens, and mobilized soldiers and civilian supporters to defend the nation.” Populations in Colonial America and the Antebellum South were similar in that both of them had a “common interest” in protecting their local communities from an invading army. A national identity was created because everyone throughout the state and the South had the same interest in protecting their homes. Because of these similarities, many Western North Carolina Confederates voiced a connection to their revolutionary forefathers.³⁸ Western North

³⁷ McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades*, 21.

³⁸ Benjamin Carp “Nations of American Rebels: Understanding Nationalism in Revolutionary North America and the Civil War South” *Civil War History* 48 (March 2002): 10.

Carolinians' belief in the similarities between their cause and the Revolution proved to be quite resilient throughout the war. Even as battlefield losses were published, many Confederates took comfort in the fact that George Washington's Continental army experienced similar failures. An article published in the *Greensboro Patriot* explained to its readers that "With the examples of the reverses which befell our ancestors in a contest with a superior foe, during a war of seven years, why should we be discouraged at the temporary advantages of our enemies."³⁹ By comparing themselves with the Revolutionaries, the article simultaneously claims the North to be an invading army, which was done by associating it with England.

From the beginning of the war, and until the spring of 1865, Appalachian citizens associated themselves and the Confederate cause to the Revolutionary war. Shortly after the Fourth of July in 1863, A.B. Cox, a chaplain in the 22nd North Carolina from Ashe County wrote a letter to the *Spirit of the Age*. Cox stated that "The 4th of July is not celebrated here to-day; all is quiet in Raleigh. We hope that under other circumstances the day will be remembered as on former occasions. We are engaged in the second struggle for independence." Although Chaplain Cox does not describe specifically why the holiday was not celebrated, it was likely because many associated it with the United States, therefore celebrating it could be construed as Unionism. However, Cox does conclude that he hopes to remember the Fourth of July for the Revolutionary war. His statement, similar to the one made by Captain Justice demonstrates that both men clearly believed that North Carolina was engaged in a new war for independence. However, what is more revealing is the connection made with the American Revolutionary War; both men made a distinct connection with their revolutionary forefathers. Many communities

³⁹Anonymous, "Reverses of the Revolution" *Greensboro Patriot*. April 10, 1862.

throughout Western North Carolina felt they were sending their finest men off to fight for their independence, just as the colonists did in the Revolution. At the flag presentation for Mecklenburg county volunteers, the presenter, J. J. Williams drew special significance upon the first Revolution in a speech to a Western North Carolina crowd:

Eighty six years ago, the citizens of Mecklenburg of which Union was then a part, smarting under insults and wrongs of British oppression, solemnly declared their connection with the British crown forever dissolved. [...] we have endured 'till endurance is no longer a virtue' and now only is left us the alternative of becoming the abject slaves of the North, or asserting our independence by an appeal to arms. Never was a cause more just; our rights, our liberty, our all hang trembling in the balance.⁴⁰

Similar to Chaplain Cox, J.J. Williams drew a direct connection between the American Revolution and the war for Confederate independence. By directly linking the Revolutionary war and the Civil War, Williams was able to draw a parallel between the North and England. The American Revolution was believed by both North and South to be a war for freedom and against tyranny. Therefore, when Williams drew a connection between the Revolution and the Civil War, this underlined how Western North Carolinians viewed themselves.

Many Western North Carolinians looked back on their Revolutionary ancestors for guidance in their new conflict and some were driven to fight because they believed the North attempted to enslave the South. In his speech cited in the previous paragraph, Williams argued that not taking up arms would result in Southerners becoming "abject slaves." His insistence that not fighting would result in white slavery shows how many southerners believed that if the North won, they would destroy southern society and revoke the freedom of whites.⁴¹ For Confederates,

⁴⁰ Dr. J.J. Williams. "Flag Presentation." *Western Democrat* (Charlotte), July 23, 1861.

⁴¹ Dr. J.J. Williams. "Flag Presentation." *Western Democrat* (Charlotte), July 23, 1861

to be enslaved meant they would lose to their state and individual sovereignty and thus be subservient to the will of the North. James McPherson contends that many Southerners were motivated to fight because they believed the North was trying to make slaves of white Southerners. McPherson went on to explain that “Southern recruits waxed more eloquent about their intention to fight *against* slavery than for it—that is, against their own enslavement by the North.”⁴² Much of the southern will to fight was grounded in a belief that they were fighting a war of self defense. For Southerners, a northern victory would mean utter subjugation and slavery under the arm of the United States. In an early 1861 letter to the *Western Democrat*, the writer stated that “the question now is, will we be free or must we be slaves? [...] All the South should be united. We will all be subjugated and made slaves, if we are not united.”⁴³ In late 1864, Benjamin Justice made an almost identical conclusion in a letter to his wife. As the conflict waged on, Justice had become exhausted by war: “My spirit and my heart are weary of the dire and turmoil of war. But do not suppose that I would have peace on other terms than the entire independence of the South [...] the latter was trampled underfoot by the unscrupulous tyrant who seeks to enslave us.”⁴⁴ Justice’s declaration underpins much of the sentiment prevalent among Western North Carolina soldiers and citizens.

Many Appalachian men and women felt that they were fighting for their independence from an army seeking to “enslave” them. In a letter to the *North Carolina Standard*, one anonymous woman of North Carolina attempted to motivate support for the troops by articulating exactly what North Carolina soldiers were fighting against, “Remember when you

⁴² McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades*, 21.

⁴³ Anonymous, “What is it all for,” *Western Democrat* (Charlotte) June 18, 1861

⁴⁴ Benjamin Justice letter to his wife, February 7, 1864, Benjamin Justice Papers, EURMA

are sleeping in your downy beds, they walk and stand hour after hour, in snow, rain and sleet, that you may not be enslaved—that no proud force may drag you forth to a life of shame and wretchedness.” The author’s use of the word “enslaved” is significant because it places the consequences of Confederate defeat into the harshest possible outcome. The use of the word “enslaved” is done to convey to her readers that if the Southerners lost the war, not only would they lose their independence but they would also lose their individual freedoms. The author then reminds her readers of the American Revolution, encouraging them to find strength in those who came before, “Look back to the days of the first Revolution—remember what sacrifices our grandmothers made—then tell me, if in their glorious spirit of self-abnegation and consecration to the cause of human liberty, we have not been greatly blessed.”⁴⁵ The author identifies the Confederacy’s national sacrifices with the sacrifices made by those of the Revolution; insinuating that Confederates and Revolutionaries were both fighting for the same thing, freedom. The parallel drawn by the author reveals how Confederates drew a special connection with the ideals of the Revolution, and they attempted to project those same ideals onto their own cause for independence. The fear of white enslavement expressed by so many Confederates often went hand in hand with their Revolutionary sentiments. McPherson notes that “soldiers were using the word *slavery* in the same way that Americans in 1776 had used it to describe their subordination to Britain.” Therefore, exercising their belief that Northerners were attempting to enslave them, simultaneously worked to enforce their belief that they were following in the steps of their Revolutionary past.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Anonymous, “Mothers, Wives, Daughters, Sisters of North Carolina,” *North Carolina Standard* (Raleigh) November 5, 1862.

⁴⁶ McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades*, 106.

Although Western North Carolina Confederates spoke much more of their fear of white enslavement than they did their fear of African emancipation, this does not mean that slavery was not a motivating factor to fight. Most Confederates rarely spoke directly on the issue of slavery because they associated it with their freedoms. In other words, Confederates felt they were fighting to protect their families and their freedom, but part of that freedom included the right to own human property. McPherson explains that “Slavery was less salient for most Confederate soldiers because it was not controversial. They took slavery for granted as one of the Southern ‘rights’ and institutions for which they fought, and did not feel compelled to discuss it.” Although slave populations in Western North Carolina were only minimal, slavery was still an instrumental reason for fighting. For nonslaveholding Appalachian Confederates, like nonslaveholding Virginians, the biggest reason to support “slavery rested on the advantages of racial supremacy. Being white immediately conferred on even the poorest family a measure of respect and acceptance that the most successful free blacks would have had trouble establishing.” Western North Carolinians were well aware of the benefits slavery offered to their status within antebellum society, and they were not willing to give up that status symbol.⁴⁷

Besides offering a hierarchical society, which poor whites embraced, many non-slaveholders often had access to slave labor. Although non-slaveholders may not have had their own slaves, they could often rent and occasionally borrow slave labor from the local slave owner. Throughout the region, non-slaveholding yeoman farmers depended on local slave labor periodically during the year. Nearly all large slaveholders in the region partook in slave hiring which as John Inscoe argues, “enabled a large segment of the region’s non-slaveholding or very

⁴⁷ McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades*, 110; Sheehan-Dean, *Why Confederates Fought*, 18.

small slaveholding populace to benefit directly from the available black labor source.” Western North Carolinians recognized that a northern victory would mean the emancipation of slaves. The region’s dependency on slavery ensured that Western North Carolinians would fight not only to protect their homes, but also to protect the institution of slavery.⁴⁸

While Revolutionary patriotism, fear of white enslavement and the protection of the African slavery proved to be powerful incentives to fight, Christianity also played a pivotal role in justifying the Confederate cause. Not only did Christianity motivate many to fight, but it was also one of the biggest supplements to Confederate morale during the war. With a total free population of 661,563, Western North Carolina held thirty percent of the free population in North Carolina. According to the 1860 census, the total number of established churches in North Carolina was 2,270, of which 722, approximately thirty-one percent, were within Western North Carolina. From these numbers it is evident that religious participation in the region was significant prior to the war (see tab. 2). Religious participation in Appalachia, was prominent and on par with other regions of North Carolina. This religious activism would be existent during the war, supplying Appalachian Confederates with the necessary will and courage to wage war.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Inscoc, *The Heart of Confederate Appalachia*, 18; Inscoc, *Mountain Masters*, 130.

⁴⁹ University of Virginia, “Historical Census Browser,” University of Virginia Libraries, <http://mapserver.lib.virginia.edu/php/state.php> (Accessed September 1, 2010).

Table 2: Number of Churches in Western North Carolina

Counties	Churches	Total Free Population
Alexander	23	5,411
Alleghany	12	3,384
Ashe	26	7,565
Buncombe	51	10,721
Burke	NA	6,866
Caldwell	34	6,409
Catawba	28	9,065
Cherokee	22	8,647
Cleveland	38	10,217
Gaston	25	7,108
Haywood	19	5,488
Henderson	33	9,066
Iredell	54	11,170
Jackson	16	5,247
Lincoln	35	6,080
Macon	22	5,485
Madison	11	5,695
McDowell	25	5,815
Mecklenburg	26	10,833
Polk	10	3,423
Rutherford	46	9,182
Surry	63	9,134
Watauga	20	4,853
Wilkes	21	13,541
Yadkin	25	9,278
Yancey	37	8,293
Total	722	197,976

As the conflict drove on, a belief that their cause was justified by the Divine Providence enabled many Western North Carolina men and women to persevere during the war. McPherson contends that the persistence of religion in the Confederate army was a major contributor in the South's ability to withstand four years of fighting. He explains that religion, especially late in the war, "helped to prevent the collapse of both armies during the terrible carnage of 1864, but it was

a particularly potent force in the Confederacy.”⁵⁰ The Appalachian soldier’s faith in Christianity allowed them to endure the physical torture of a soldier’s life and the mental toll of war for over four years. Their belief in a higher power and the promise of life after death helped subdue their constant fear of dying, while also reinforcing the belief that God was on their side. The harsh realities of soldiering in the Confederate army made loss of life a prevalent sight for all Confederates. But a fervent belief in God often helped to subdue much of the stress and anxiety associated with a soldiering in the army. In his study on religion and soldiers in the Civil War, Steven Woodworth explains that the “horrors of war turned men’s hearts toward God not only in gratitude for His protection in battle or in facing hardships, but also because soldiers were impressed with the peace and happiness of dying Christians among their fellow soldiers.”⁵¹ Trusting in God permitted many Confederates to rationalize the frequent occurrence of death on the battlefield and in camp. Religion allowed for soldiers to place in perspective the loss of close friends and comrades.

Not all historians have agreed that religion kept Confederate morale intact during the conflict. In *Why The South Lost the Civil War*, the authors argue that religion played a key component in the failure of the Confederacy. They conclude that if “will, or morale supplies one of the intangible resources necessary to sustain a prolonged armed conflict, religion often proves a vital resource in maintaining will and morale. Unfortunately for the South, religion not only sustained morale, it also had the effect---eventually---of undermining it.” These authors argue that religion turned against Southerners; instead of providing sustenance, the authors believe that

⁵⁰ McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades*, 75.

⁵¹ Steven E. Woodworth. *While God is Marching On: The Religious World of Civil War Soldiers*. (Kansas: University of Kansas Press, 2001), 194.

religion brought about defeat through guilt. Battlefield losses and military setbacks convinced Confederates that God was not on their side. However, evidence demonstrates that religion did not shorten the life of the Confederacy, but actually prolonged it. In the bleakest hours of the Confederacy, soldiers and civilians looked to Christianity for comfort and solace. Religion was a fuel for Confederate armies that military defeats could not extinguish. Even as late as February of 1865, many North Carolinians still believed God was on their side. The *Daily Confederate* newspaper asked the question “Is there any hope for us? We can answer yes—the very same hope that there was in the beginning of the war, not more, not less—hope in God.” The article concluded that “He will not forsake us, until we forsake him.”⁵² This article underlines how powerful the Christian influence was in maintaining Confederate morale. With each military defeat, many Confederates reacted by praying even more, and most never questioned the belief that God was on their side.

Western North Carolina Confederates frequently wrote letters home and to newspapers articulating their belief in the religious righteousness of their cause. In his study of Confederates in Lee’s army of Northern Virginia, Tracy Powers contends that “Many correspondents and diarists, whether or not they attended worship services and prayer meetings, frequently mentioned their faith in God and His master plan for them.”⁵³ Many Appalachian Confederates were among the “correspondents and diarists” Powers speaks of. In letters home, they encouraged their loved ones to pray for their country and themselves. One Western North Carolinian wrote into the *Spirit of the Age* newspaper under the pen name “Nyanius.” He stated

⁵²Beringer. *Why the South Lost the Civil War*, 83; “Is there any hope for us” *Daily Confederate* (Raleigh), February, 23, 1865.

⁵³ Tracy J. Powers. *Lee’s Miserables: Life in the Army of Northern Virginia from the Wilderness to Appomattox*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press), 126.

that “Our troops are in fine spirits, and I am not coloring facts when I say they are eager for the arrival that seems to be in prospect. May God pardon our sins, nerve us for the contest, if it comes, and if it be according to His will, give us victory.”⁵⁴ The author assumes that military victory would be based on God’s will. Private Phillip Shull from Watauga County conveys very similar convictions when he wrote to his cousin while on furlough in Western North Carolina; Private Shull explains that he “hop and trust in him who holds the destines of our land undar the holler of his hand will bring this turbel afar to close and let us all gow home rejoyisen.”⁵⁵ In a springtime 1864 letter home, Captain Benjamin Justice told his wife: “I pray God to stand by our noble army and sustain and strengthen and aid them in the terrible shock of battle.”⁵⁶ Another Appalachian Confederate, Lewis Warlick, made a similar appeal when he wrote home, “May God defend and protect us from harm, danger through these troublesome times.”⁵⁷ Interestingly, both Warlick and Justice wrote these statements merely four weeks apart, which underlines how many Appalachian Confederates were likely sharing these same sentiments regarding God and the war.

For many Western North Carolinians, God was placed at the center of victories. Victories were afforded through the skill of generals and strength of the troops, but in the end, many Confederates believed that victories were above all else God’s will. In an early 1863 letter, one Western North Carolinian disclosed these sentiments when he stated that he felt “thankful to God

⁵⁴ Nyanius to Alexander Gorman, January 29, 1862, in *Far From Home: Letters from North Carolina’s Civil War Soldiers*, ed. Berry Munson (Greenville: Munson Publishers, 2004), 4.

⁵⁵ Phillip P. Shull to J.H. Council, Watauga County, December 21, 1862, in *The Civil War in North Carolina: Soldiers and Civilians Letters and Diaries, 1861-1865*, ed. Christopher M. Watford (Jefferson: McFarland and Company Publishers, 2001), 83.

⁵⁶ Benjamin Justice letter to his wife, April 26, 1864. Benjamin Justice Papers, EUMRA.

⁵⁷ Lewis Warlick to Cornelia McGrimsey. March 22, 1864, in *My Dearest Friend: The Civil War Correspondence of Cornelia McGrimsey and Louis Warlick*, ed. Mike and Carolyn Lawing (Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 2000), 155-156.

for the many glorious victories that He has given us during the past year, I humbly invoke his blessings on our army in the year 1863, and may it bring forth more glorious results than that which is now reckoned in the calendar of the past.”⁵⁸ These Confederates believed they were fighting a war in the defense of their homes and families. Because, they imagined themselves not as invaders, but as protectors of women, children, and their homes, they perceived God as being on their side.

In *The Confederate War*, Gary Gallagher contends that throughout “1864 and into 1865, many Confederates viewed their travails as orchestrated by a deity who eventually would reward their efforts with success.”⁵⁹ Western North Carolinians were firm believers that God was a supporter of the Confederacy. Battlefield setbacks were not interpreted as being evidence of God’s wrath, but were instead seen as a message that sin among Southerners must be extinguished before final victory could be achieved. A July 29, 1863, article in the *North Carolina Standard* stated, “If we are sufficiently humbled under our chastisements, if we come to God as a people, truly penitent for our sins, and ask His favor, we may confidently hope to secure it.” The recent military setbacks were not interpreted by the writer as being cause to believe that God may have not been on the Confederacy’s side. Instead the writer comprehends recent military losses as being associated with a failure in religious piety. The article interprets Confederate success as being hinged on the piety of the Confederate population.⁶⁰ After the military losses of Gettysburg and Vicksburg, the *Spirit of the Age* wrote an article reflecting on the recent military setbacks, “God had crowned our arms with such signal and marked triumphs

⁵⁸ Nilton to Alexander Gorman, Raleigh, January 26, 1863, in *Far From Home: Letters from North Carolina’s Civil War Soldiers*, ed. Berry Munson (Greenville: Munson Publishers, 2004), 54.

⁵⁹ Gallagher, *The Confederate War*, 49.

⁶⁰ “The Prospect Before Us” *North Carolina Standard*, (Raleigh), July 29, 1863.

that we grew vain-glorious and boastful, and gave to man the glory that belonged to Him. And now he has rebuked and humbled our pride and arrogance, by suffering the enemy to visit chastisement upon us.” As the article demonstrates, battlefield losses were believed to be the will of God. However, one should not assume that Confederates saw military failures as the Lord disapproving in their cause. The author concludes the article by expressing faith that God would not abandon the Confederacy, and victories would soon return, “we believe in the justice of our cause, so confidently, under the blessing of God, do we expect success [...] let us put our trust in God, with an humble reliance upon Him, constantly beseech that His arm of power and protection may be stretched out over us and give us the victory, and all will work right.”⁶¹ This article shows that even in the face of military losses, Confederates looked to God, and his support in their cause was rarely doubted. Military defeats forced Confederates to create a reason why their Creator would allow for battlefield losses. As the letters above indicate, many Western North Carolinians found reasons to justify military defeat without doubting God’s support for their cause.⁶²

As the war waged on and the Confederacy continued to suffer defeats, some Western North Carolinians looked back to stories within the Bible which told of similar sacrifices. One Western North Carolina newspaper looked to the Israelites for guidance, “Our late reverses in arms have reminded us of that portion of Scripture found in chapter of Joshua.” The author describes the biblical story of Joshua’s victories over Jericho and subsequent defeat of the Israelites at Ai. The author states that “they were defeated and fled.—The news comes to Joshua and the elders of Israel [...] what an example for us now to follow—not only for our President

⁶¹ Anonymous, “The situation of Affairs” *Spirit of Age* (Raleigh), July 20, 1863

⁶² Beringer, *Why the South Lost the Civil War*, 278.

and rulers, but one and all, from the highest to the lowest.” The author admits that at the beginning of the war, Confederates obeyed God and resisted sin, but they had since lost their way, having “neglected both in a great degree—like Joshua in regard to Ai, we have not wholly sought the Lord or made full and vigorous efforts [...] we may find, as Joshua did that we need not only to have full reliance in God, but use our every effort, one and all, united and all together, ere we succeed.”⁶³ Another article in mid-1864 also contemplated the history of the Israelites, “The Israelites experienced great and sudden changes of national fortune and destiny, which with their causes and connections, have been traced for our instruction” Telling the story of the Israelites and Philistines, the author concludes that “The Philistines [were] the Yankees of the old world, whom God raised up as scourges of national sins”⁶⁴ *The Spirit of the Age* was likely referring to the Bible when it told its readers, “History is full of examples, for our encouragement, of more unequal and even more bloody wars, that finally resulted in the triumph of the people fighting for their rights, their homes, and their lives. It is the will of God that we suffer occasional disasters.”⁶⁵ As it became clear to Southerners by 1862 that their independence would not come without a heavy cost; many highlanders found the will to persevere in biblical scripture and religious literature. Perhaps more importantly, these sources reveal that battlefield losses and the increasing strains of war did not force Western North Carolinians to concede that God was not on their side. During even the worst defeats and darkest hours most, Appalachian soldiers believed they were among the army of the righteous defending their homes from an invading enemy.

⁶³ Anonymous, “Achan’s Trespass and Israel’s Defeat” *Greensboro Patriot*, April 17, 1862 quoting from the *North Carolina Presbyterian*.

⁶⁴ Anonymous, “A Bible View of Subjugation” *Greensboro Patriot*, August 11, 1864, quoting from the *Christian Advocate*.

⁶⁵ Anonymous, “Another Call for Conscripts” *Spirit of Age* (Raleigh) July 27, 1863.

Western North Carolinians reveled in the sanctity of their fight for independence, but their faith in God went beyond simply seeing the Lord's righteousness in their cause. Religion served as source of courage and inner strength for Western North Carolina men and women. God's hand controlled their fate, it was his decision whether they lived or died. After the battle of Seven Pines, one Ashe County Confederate wrote home to his mother affirming that "I am well hoping that thes few lines may find you all injoying the same Blesing. We ort to be thankful to god for thes many blessings. He has got us through."⁶⁶ As the letter reveals, this soldier placed his trust in God and believed that it was God who safely brought him through the recent battle. On April 17, 1864, Corporal James W. Wright wrote home to his wife in Wilkes County: "I expect to try and discharge my duty as a soldier though it is painful to me. Yet I must obey my commanders and above all I want to obey my Heavenly Commander I feel that he will do what is right with me and if it is his will to take me from this troublesome world I hope I will get to a better one." The way Wright speaks of his military "commanders" and his heavenly "commander" shows that Wright associates his military duty as part of his religious duty to God.⁶⁷ Although Wright wanted to be at home, he believed it was military duty as well as God's duty that he remain in the army until the war was won. Wright, similar to other Western North Carolinians, saw the Lord as a direct actor in his life. In another letter home Wright stated, "I feel like the prayers my people in my behalf have been answered and I hope they will yet be answered. Dear Fanny look to God for protection and he will not forsake you."⁶⁸ One Wilkes

⁶⁶ Marion Sexton letter to Pryor and Mariah Sexton, July 14, 1862, in *The Civil War in North Carolina: Soldiers and Civilians Letters and Diaries, 1861-1865*, ed. Christopher M. Watford (Jefferson: McFarland and Company Publishers, 2001), 52-53.

⁶⁷ James W. Wright letter to his wife, April 17, 1864, John Wright Family Papers, North Carolina Division of Archives, Raleigh NC (from hereafter NCDA)

⁶⁸ James W. Wright, letter to his wife, September 2, 1864, John Wright Family Papers, NCDA.

county soldier, Private Calvin Leach stated to his mother, “I hope that you will continue in prayer for me that I may continue my duties as a Christian soldier while I am permitted to live in this unfriendly world of sorrow.” Calvin continued, “if we meet no more on earth we may have a happy meeting in heaven of bliss where parting will be no more.”⁶⁹ It is significant how Leach labels himself as a “Christian soldier,” which is revealing of the fact that Leach, like Justice saw it as his Christian duty to remain in the army. One should not underestimate the importance of these soldiers’ references to their “Christian duty” because it underlines how significant a role religion played in these soldiers lives.

For many soldiers, private Bibles served as a source of meditation and inspiration during hours alone in camp or on picket. On the early morning of August 7, 1864, Captain Benjamin Wright wrote his wife before beginning his day: “returned to my tent to write you a while and then commence the duties of the day. My little Bible lies by my side, my friend, my counselor, my guide. I am sitting alone in my tent.”⁷⁰ For some local regiments, Bibles were supplied with their uniforms. The *Western Democrat* noted that each private of the Waxhaw Jackson Guards was given a personal Bible before departing: “on behalf of the ladies, a Bible to each one of the Volunteers, impressing upon them in pathetic tones the great necessity [...] to build our hopes of sureness in this unhappy conflict of arms.”⁷¹ However, not all troops were as fortunate as the Waxhaw Guards; many soldiers went to war without Bibles. Throughout the war, private

⁶⁹ Private Calvin Leach to his Mother, November 20, 1863, Calvin Leach Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, NC. (from hereafter SHC)

⁷⁰ Benjamin Justice letter to his wife. August 7, 1864, Benjamin Justice Papers, EURMA.

⁷¹ Anonymous, “Flag Presentation” *Western Democrat* (Charlotte) July 23, 1861.

organizations, and citizens consistently tried to send soldiers Bibles and religious literature.⁷² Despite the efforts of many organizations, the Confederacy was never able to furnish enough Bibles for their armies. Steven Woodworth explains that “the churches and Bible societies of the South were never able to meet the wartime demand for Bibles.”⁷³ On February 18, 1863, a chaplain serving at a North Carolina hospital wrote into the *North Carolina Standard* requesting religious literature for North Carolina troops. The newspaper states that Reverend Lacy was not alone in his plea for literature and that “statements are coming to us daily, in increased numbers, and especially since having more of our soldiers in N.C.” The article encouraged readers to donate money for the purchase of literature stating, “we do hope many will speedily give [...] Let us determine, under God’s blessing, to keep the bread of life before our noble, suffering dying soldiers.” The article goes on to state that one of the first citizens to heed the Reverend’s call was a Western North Carolina woman.⁷⁴ On both the home front and the battlefield, many Appalachian Confederates looked to God for guidance and protection. The article skillfully intertwines religion and patriotism together, demonstrating that God was often placed at the forefront to the Confederate cause. This connection demonstrates that most Western North Carolinians placed God and Country together, in other words, the fate of the Confederacy was the will of God.

In his study on Virginia Confederates, Aaron Sheehan-Dean notes that the “language of Christian sacrifice blended with that of national sacrifice. Volunteers mourned the loss of

⁷² The *Weekly Standard* noted in late 1864 during Hoods Tennessee campaign that his army received 16,000 bibles from a Memphis Depot; *North Carolina Standard*, (Raleigh) October 5, 1864.

⁷³ Woodworth, *While God is Marching On*, 166.

⁷⁴ W.J.W. Crowder, letter to the editor, *North Carolina Standard* (Raleigh), February 18, 1863.

comrades, and families took pride in the men who died to defend their communities.”⁷⁵ Like Virginia Confederates, many Western North Carolina Confederates saw battlefield deaths as sacrifices for a greater good. While the death of a soldier was mourned, a sense of Christian and national pride comforted the loss. After the death of twenty-year old Lieutenant L.F. Haynes of Yadkin County during the 1862 Peninsula campaign, an anonymous comrade from his company wrote to the *North Carolina Standard* to announce his death. The writer stated that Haynes’ “mortal part was surrendered as a sacrifice for the sins of a fallen world. When our country called, he nobly stepped into its ranks to defend it from the attacks of our unnatural enemy.” The soldier concluded that “Truly, our victories are robbed of their luster by the loss of such gallant and brave officers as was our young friend, and it is only left to his country to have such misfortunes filled by following in his heroic steps, and defending to the last, the righteous cause for which he has offered his young life.”⁷⁶ The author described Haynes’ life as being “surrendered” and “sacrificed” for the Confederate cause. In doing so, the letter implies that Haynes’ death was both a Christian and a national sacrifice. Most Western North Carolina Confederates placed their lives in God’s hands, meaning that all soldiers did their utmost to stay alive, but the time of their death rested on God’s will. This letter expresses those sentiments: it was God’s will that Haynes be “sacrificed” for his country.

When the *Western Democrat* received the news that Lieutenant Paul B. Grier died at Bristoe Station, the writer stated that Lieutenant Grier was among “the noble lives that were sacrificed on the altar of their noble country at Bristoe Station.” The article concludes that Grier

⁷⁵ Sheehan-Dean, *Why Confederates Fought: Family and Nation in Civil War Virginia*, 83.

⁷⁶ Anonymous, “Gallant Dead” *North Carolina Standard* (Raleigh), August 27, 1862.

“fell gallantly, a noble martyr to his country’s cause.”⁷⁷ The writer uses powerful language in conveying the significance of Grier’s death. Using the term “martyr” is quite significant because it implies that Grier’s death was a sacrifice for the cause of independence. After Captain D. Harvey White fell at the battle of Spotsylvania Courthouse, his obituary appeared in the *Western Democrat*. The obituary, which was likely composed by his comrades, stated that White’s “blood was poured out as a costly libation upon the altar of Liberty. And his name is now added to that illustrious roll of immortal heroes, which shall ever be enshrined in the affections and crowned with the benedictions of a grateful country.”⁷⁸ White’s comrades coped with their loss by portraying his death as a sacrifice for the larger cause of independence. In this regard, Confederate deaths were not seen as a result of war, but instead they were a sacrifice for independence: dead Confederates were martyrs. The *Greensboro Patriot* exuded these sentiments when it published the story of one Haywood County woman who lost her only brother in the war. The paper explained that she “had but one brother to enter the army, and he gloriously fell a sacrifice to his country’s cause in the hard fought battle of Chancellorsville.” These statements demonstrate that much of Dean’s analysis on Virginia Confederates can be applied to Western North Carolina Confederates.⁷⁹ Many Appalachian soldiers and their families viewed a soldier’s death as a sacrifice for a righteous cause, which provided a sense of comfort and justification for the loss of their loved ones.

Beginning in the summer of 1863, religious revivals swept through much of the Confederacy. In both the Army of Tennessee and the Army of Northern Virginia, soldiers came

⁷⁷ Anonymous, “A Noble Soldier—A Glorious Death and Example” *Western Democrat* (Charlotte), March 22, 1864.

⁷⁸ Anonymous, “Obituary” *Western Democrat* (Charlotte), June 21, 1864.

⁷⁹ Anonymous, “A Patriotic Letter” *Greensboro Patriot*, October 12, 1863.

together in religious services and prayer.⁸⁰ One North Carolina newspaper stated that “Extensive revivals of Religion are in progress in several portions of the army on the Rappahannock and in Tennessee [...] May God extend the blessed work until our entire host of noble, patriotic soldiery may become true and valiant soldiers of the Cross of Christ.”⁸¹ Religious services in camp were a big part of many soldiers’ lives. One, North Carolinian Confederate, Bartlett Malone, of the Army of Northern Virginia wrote in the spring of 1863 that “General Jackson’s preacher, preached in our camps and his text was Hebrews chapter 3 and part of 7 and 8 verses the words was this: To day if ye will hear his voice harden not your hearts.” The next Sunday, Malone attended two sermons, one of which was again performed by General Jackson’s preacher, “I went to meeting at General Jackson Headquarters And the Preacher taken part of the 16th chapter of Luke commenced at the 18 verse for the foundation of what remarks he made.” Later Malone added that “in the evening we had preached in our Regiment from a preacher in the 18th Virginia Regiment. And his text was in Proverbs 18th chapter and the later clause of the 24th verse which reads thus: There is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother.” Malone’s diary details the numerous sermons that he heard nearly every Sunday that he was in the army. But his ability to meticulously recall each chapter and verse of the sermon he listened to shows that Malone was very knowledgeable of the Bible.⁸²

⁸⁰ Larry J. Daniels. *Soldiering in the Army of Tennessee: A Portrait of Life in the Confederate Army*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 116-119; J. Tracy Powers, *Lee’s Miserable’s: Life in the Army of Northern Virginia from the Wilderness to Appomattox* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 4.

⁸¹ Anonymous, “Revivals in the Army” *Spirit of Age* (Raleigh), June 15, 1863..

⁸² Bartlett Yancey Malone to his Diary, April, 18, 1863, in *The Diary of Bartlett Yancey Malone*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1919); 31; Bartlett Yancey Malone to his Diary, April, 26, 1863; This work was obtained through, the *Southern Historical Collection*; University of North Carolina, “Documenting the American South: The Southern Home Front: 1861-1865.” University of North Carolina Chapel Hill Libraries. <http://docsouth.unc.edu/imls/> [accessed September 1, 2010]

In an October, 1863 letter to the *Spirit of the Age*, one soldier from the 26th North Carolina vocalized his regret and the feelings of many of his fellow soldiers over the fact that his regiment did not have its own chaplain. The soldier tells the editor that “our men seemingly manifest a great desire to hear preaching when an opportunity is afforded; and I think much and lasting good might be accomplished if we had a faithful Chaplain.”⁸³ North Carolinians in the Twenty-Sixth Regiment were actively seeking religious prayer and guidance from chaplains. The soldier continued to profess his faith in God when he stated, “Let us humble ourselves and return unto the Lord and He will return unto us.” In this short line, it is very likely that this North Carolinian was speaking of the military setbacks of the summer campaign. Asking for readers and soldiers to return themselves to religious prayer and observation, the writer insinuates that a return to God will bring back military success. The above letter demonstrates the urge to return to salvation which can be attributed to the rise in revivals. However, it also brings to light the pressing need for chaplains within the army. Throughout the armies, many regiments were often desperate for chaplains who could sustain the perils of campaigning and battle. In many circumstances the life of a regimental chaplain was no different from the life of the common soldier. Steven Woodworth notes that “Chaplains might not be expected to live on quite the same level as the private soldiers did, but they could still expect to sleep on the ground rolled in a blanket, with canvas overhead or the stars. They might not have to march, but they would have to spend whole days in the saddle. They would be exposed to all the camp diseases the soldiers

⁸³ A.B. H. to Alexander Gorman, September 21, 1863, in *Far From Home: Letters from North Carolina's Civil War Soldiers*, ed. Berry Munson (Greenville: Munson Publishers, 2004), 82.

faced and, sometimes, even to hostile fire.”⁸⁴ Because of the rigors of the job, many chaplains were hesitant to take on the position of regimental chaplains in the army.

Soldiers often did not listen or follow chaplains they did not respect. Woodworth explains that some “men simply did not have the right personality, temperament, or other qualifications necessary to gain the respect of the soldiers.”⁸⁵ Chaplains who lived like soldiers were often rewarded with the most devout followers. In a letter home to his cousin, Albert M. White stated that “We have regular Preaching in Camp by the Rev Moretz I think well of him he is none of your hifaluten fools he is just one of the Company he stays in a mess with QA Cline and Munroe hoke he don’t strut about and look down on others because they are not preachers I think he is very well thought of in the Reg.”⁸⁶ White’s letter demonstrates how soldiers viewed themselves in relation to their religious leaders. His letter reveals how many soldiers would have been resistant to any chaplain who had not proven to the soldiers that they had the same courage and grit of their followers. Benjamin Justice described one chaplain who had lost the respect of his regiment: “I regret to have to tell you that your old friend Mr. Smith lost his usefulness and the respect of the men in his regiment and his resignation has been the result.” Justice continued to describe the many other chaplains in the North Carolina regiments. He stated to his wife that the “chaplains of the 26th and 52nd Regt. have been at their post but a short time and have not yet fully shown how they will wear, but my impression of them both is decidedly unfavorably.” This statement by Justice demonstrates how soldiers closely watched their chaplains to see how they stood up the rigors of camp life. The statements of White and Justice reveal how soldiers wanted

⁸⁴ Woodworth, *While God is Marching On*, 148.

⁸⁵ Woodworth, *While God is Marching On*, 152.

⁸⁶ Albert M. White to his Cousin, June 18, 1864. Albert M. White Papers. SHC.

Chaplains to practice what they the preached: the best and most revered chaplains were those who understood the sufferings they preached about.⁸⁷

In a late 1864 letter home, one Western North Carolinian explained the frequency of religious preaching in the army when he told his sister “This Sunday there is preaching in town to day but I did not go there Is preaching evry night for the good of the soldiers.”⁸⁸In a letter home, Benjamin Justice conveyed similar sentiments when he stated, “At night the manly voices of hundreds of those who survived Malvern Hill and Gettysburg and Bristoe Station may be heard from the rude pole Chapel, singing the songs of Lion and praising God their preserver.” For many men, religious observation went well beyond the individual solitude associated with prayer. For these soldiers, religious observation took more active forms, such as singing and more vocal forms of prayer. Justice concludes in his letter home that a “considerable religious interest prevails among the several regiments of the Brigade.” Justice’s letter takes on a sense of brigade pride when he tells his wife that “The Chapel mentioned just now was built by the joint labor of the different regiments and is regarded as the common property of all.”⁸⁹ Justice was a captain in the 26th North Carolina Regiment and a part of MacRea’s Bridgade which consisted of many Western North Carolina men from Ashe, Wilkes, Iredell, and Caldwell Counties. However, MacRea’s Tar Heels were not the only North Carolina Brigade to build a formidable church of their own.⁹⁰

⁸⁷ Benjamin Justice to his wife, April 4, 1864. Benjamin Justice Papers. EURMA.

⁸⁸ Albert M. White to Margaret White, October 30, 1864. Albert M. White Papers. SHC.

⁸⁹ Benjamin Justice to his wife, April 4, 1864. Benjamin Justice Papers. EURMA.

⁹⁰ Rod Gragg. *Covered with Glory: The 26th North Carolina Infantry at the Battle of Gettysburg*. (New York: Perennial, 2000): 9; Also see, Earl Hess. *Lee’s Tar Heels: The Pettigrew-Kirkland-MacRea Brigade* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

In March of 1864, J. Henry Smith, pastor from Greensboro told of his visit to Cooke's North Carolina Brigade, where he had witnessed the building of their brigade chapel. Smith led the first religious services at the new chapel: "I dedicated it to the service of God, and administered the Lord's supper in it on the first Sabbath that followed. At least two hundred partook of the communion. It is the largest chapel in the Army of Northern Virginia [...] this chapel is filled day and night with attentive and serious Learners."⁹¹ The building of brigade chapels demonstrates how fervent religious energy existed throughout much of the North Carolina regiments and the Confederate Army. The depictions made by Benjamin Justice and Henry Smith reveal that during both day and night many soldiers found solace and inspiration inside the chapel walls. Religious meetings provided a much needed reprieve from the boredom in between battles, while also helping ease the heartache and anxiety created by being away from home.

Western North Carolinians' frequent references to God reveal how they viewed their war for independence, demonstrating that they saw their cause as one of righteousness. Like the thousands of soldiers who believed their cause was supported by God, many citizens followed suit. In an early war letter, Cornelia McGimsey wrote to a friend serving in the Confederate army, "we have right and justice on our side; and that the God of Battles will protect us." Later in the year, she asked, "May God incline his ear to our humble petitions and may He save our country from destructive war and prepare us all for a land of eternal felicity."⁹² Cornelia like, so many on the home front, frequently prayed for God's intervention in the Confederate cause.

⁹¹ J. Henry Smith, "The Army of Northern Virginia" *Greensboro Patriot*, April 5, 1864.

⁹² Cornelia McGimsey to Lewis Warlick, May, 19, 1861, in *My Dearest Friend*, 9; Cornelia McGimsey to Lewis Warlick, June, 5, 1861, 19.

After a Confederate victory at Second Manassas, another Appalachian citizen, Cornelia Henry wrote, “They had another fight near Manassas. The Confederates whipped them back. Oh God grant us peace once again is the pray of many a heart.” Similar to the many soldiers on the battlefield, Cornelia Henry also frequently read her bible. She noted in her journal, “I have read the book of Leviticus in the bible today and some of Numbers. I am reading my bible through for the third time in my life. I am reading Josephus’ complete work of the bible.” Her Bible likely offered the same solace and comfort to her as it did to the thousands of soldiers on the battlefield.⁹³

In their study on Western North Carolina, John Inscoc and Gordon McKinney argue that while religion prevailed in the armies, religious participation declined dramatically on the home front. They conclude that the closure of churches in the region and the loss of chaplains to the army resulted in a decline in religious participation. The authors explain that “Much of the degeneracy was due to the breakdown of local institutional sources of support.” Because of this, they believe that “Religious organizations played a diminished role in the mountain life during the war, despite a spiritual revival that swept through the Confederacy.”⁹⁴ The frequent appearance of religious articles published in newspapers throughout the state demonstrates how Christianity still remained strong during the war. Despite the decline in organized church services in Western North Carolina, many citizens still remained faithful to God. Letters from soldiers in the army often requested that those on the home front pray for each other’s safety as well as independence and final peace. It is likely that many citizens observed these requests from

⁹³ Cornelia Henry to her Journal, September, 5, 1862, in *Fear in North Carolina: The Civil War Journal and Letters of the Henry Family*, ed. Karen L. Clinard and Richard Russell (Asheville: Reminiscing Books, 2008), 100; Cornelia Henry to her Journal, November, 23, 1862, 116.

⁹⁴ Inscoc, *The Heart of Confederate Appalachia*, 198.

soldiers. Just as men on the battle front prayed for honorable peace, so did citizens on the home front. Cornelia Henry wrote in her personal journal, “Oh! How I pity the poor soldiers this cold day. They are suffering for clothes and shoes at this time [...] I do indeed pity them, may we soon have an honorable peace is my prayer and the pray of every true Southerner.”⁹⁵ In a letter to her husband, Emma Clayton asked “why oh why are we not humbled before God, for then and not till then can we expect the blessings of peace upon our country.”⁹⁶ Emma’s letter sounds similar, to that of many of the Western North Carolina Confederates who composed similar religious expressions in letters home. Like many Appalachian soldiers, Clayton believed that God had a direct hand in deciding the fate of their cause.

While the prominence of organized religion may have been hindered by the lack of preachers on the home front, evidence suggests that Inscoe and McKinney may have overestimated the lack of organized religion in Western North Carolina. Just as men told their loved ones at home of their religious experiences, women also told their husbands, siblings and friends of their own religious experiences. Cornelia McGimsey wrote to a local friend in the army describing a local sermon, “I have just returned from preaching, we heard a splendid sermon today.”⁹⁷ In an October, 1864, letter, Emma Clayton similarly told of a sermon she listened to: “I went to church to day and heard an excellent sermon indeed from an Englishman, Mr. Lomax, I have never listened to minister who had a better flow of language.”⁹⁸ Both these women appear to have actively participated in religious sermons in the mountains, which is reflective of the existence of religious enthusiasm on the home front.

⁹⁵ Cornelia Henry to her Journal, October, 26, 1862, in *Fear in North Carolina*, 108.

⁹⁶ Emma Clayton to Husband, October 23, 1864. Clayton Family Papers. SHC

⁹⁷ Cornelia McGimsey to Lewis Warlick, October 26, 1861, in *My Dearest Friend*, 76.

⁹⁸ Emma Clayton to Husband, October 2, 1864. Clayton Family Papers. SHC

In a study on Confederate nationalism in Harrison County Texas, historian Andrew F. Lang found that this county experienced strong spiritual resilience on the home front. Similar to Western North Carolina, Lang notes that in Harrison County, “Local Spiritual leaders emphasized that the South was chosen divinely from God which created a sense of salvation and appeal on the home front that was difficult to resist.”⁹⁹ Like the citizens in Harrison County, many Appalachian citizens took solace in the words of the local pastors. One Western North Carolina woman, Mary Patterson, documented her frequent visits to church in a diary. On April 9, 1863, Patterson noted her whole family’s participation in a day of fasting, “Today having been appointed by our President as a day of fasting and prayer we all went to church and heard a good sermon by Mr. Bahnson.”¹⁰⁰ An examination of Mary Patterson’s diary reveals that she and her family regularly attended church services. Like many soldiers, these women expressed interest over religious gatherings in their communities. Additionally, these women also described their experiences with their preachers. They alluded to their church visits as if they were a regular or common activity in their lives. Lastly, none of these women expresses any regret over a lack of religious services available to them in their communities. While one cannot deny that religious participation may have struggled to maintain its prewar levels during the Civil War, Emma Clayton, Cornelia McGimsey, and Mary Patterson reveal that organized religion did remain active in the Western North Carolina mountains throughout the war.

For most Western North Carolinians, their allegiance to the Confederacy began the day that Abraham Lincoln ordered 75,000 volunteers to subdue the Confederate States. Believing that they were being invaded, many Western North Carolinians found recognition for their cause

⁹⁹ Lang, “Upon the Altar of our Country,” 286.

¹⁰⁰ Mary Patterson, Diary Entry, April 9, 1863. Mary Patterson Diary. SHC

by looking back to their Revolutionary ancestors. Although Revolutionary patriotism proved to be a vital part of their identity, without Christianity, the Confederate will to win would not have lasted until 1865. However, as the next chapter will demonstrate, some Western North Carolina men were not completely loyal to the Confederacy. When Appalachian Confederates had their loyalties to their new nation tested by war, some were not willing to endure these hardships. As a result, desertions would increase as the war went on, creating new struggles in the region. Desertion into Confederate Appalachia resulted in violence that created a divide between loyal Confederates and their new nation.

CHAPTER TWO: COMPETING LOYALTIES, WESTERN NORTH CAROLINIAN DESERTION

Western North Carolinians were quick to answer North Carolina's call for troops. Throughout the war, they would flock from their homes and into the army. While most Western North Carolina troops served and remained present for duty until the end of the war, a significant minority of Appalachian men deserted from the army. The reason men chose to desert was not always the same. Throughout the war, many Western North Carolina Confederates would desert simply because they lacked the will to fight. While some Confederates deserted because they no longer wanted to fight for the Confederacy, others deserted for more complicated reasons involving their family and homes. Initially volunteering to protect their families; Appalachian men had to decide between serving the Confederacy and protecting their families at home. While most stayed with their armies, others were not willing to risk their families' well being for Confederate independence. This chapter will demonstrate that a significant portion of Western North Carolina desertion stemmed from the Confederacy's inability to sustain a safe and stable home front while its soldiers were off at war. Initially going to war because they believed fighting for the Confederacy was the best way to protect their families, many Western North Carolinians would desert once they saw that the Confederacy had failed to protect their families in their absence.

Throughout the war, desertion was a recurring thought for many soldiers as they struggled with the conflict of how to protect their families while they were away. However, civilians on the home front were also confronted with similar struggles. Although civilians did

not struggle with whether or not to desert themselves, they still had their own conflicts with desertion. Understanding that men were needed in the army, many Appalachian civilians labored to ensure a sustainable life at home without the help of the men in the army. Civilians on the home front battled to protect their homes from deserters and Unionist violence, while also trying to ensure that they had enough manpower to make a proper sustenance. This chapter will show that throughout the war, men and women on the home front, similar to soldiers, tried to find a balance between supporting their families while also supporting the Confederacy.

The first portion of this chapter details the history of how Western North Carolina became riddled with deserters and subsequent violence early in the war. Although not all violence in Appalachia would be caused by deserters, they often partook in attacks on the civilian populace. The second part of this chapter will examine the home front in relation to the soldiers' understanding of their duty to the Confederate nation and their families. As conditions in Appalachia collapsed and decayed into violence, soldiers had to justify either deserting or remaining with the army. The third portion of this chapter looks at civilians in Western North Carolina and examines how women and men tried to cope with the loss of able-bodied men. Unable to make up for lost manpower, citizens on the home front constantly faced famine and violence.

By bringing to light the complexities of desertion, this chapter will demonstrate that the lines between loyal and disloyal are not always clear, but are often blurred. Many Appalachian deserters, especially those who hid out in the mountains using violence on civilians to survive, can easily be labeled as disloyal or anti-Confederate. However, there is another portion of

deserters who had the will to fight, but deserted because they were needed at home. If the Confederacy had protected Western North Carolina communities, these soldiers would likely not have deserted. Additionally, in many of these instances, these soldiers would return to the army once their families' well being and safety were secured. Both groups were deserters, but they actually possessed different levels of loyalty.

Throughout the war, deserters who refused to fight for the Confederacy would hide out in the Western North Carolina Mountains. As the war quickly intensified and soldiers realized that the war would not be a short one, many Appalachian men began to desert back home. In November of 1862, Cornelia Henry wrote in her journal about a local resident who had deserted. She stated that "Pinck Allen is lying in the woods as he is a deserter. It would be much better for him to go to his regiment. He belongs to the 25th Reg. He was no use when he was at home and now he is no use to his country." In the coming months, deserters began to convene in Cornelia's community and resorted to stealing food for survival. In the summer of 1863, she noted in her journal that several deserters were "in the neighborhood. They ought to be sent to the army if possible and soon as they are stealing of the honest people." As Cornelia's entries reveal, deserters exacerbated the suffering on the home front, putting greater strain on the already struggling citizens.¹⁰¹

In his study of Western North Carolina during the Civil War, William Trotter states that "desertions in significant numbers really started when the mass of volunteers realized it was not

¹⁰¹ Cornelia Henry to her journal, November, 19, 1862, in *Fear in North Carolina*, 114; Cornelia Henry to her journal, July 26, 1863.

going to be a short, victorious war.”¹⁰² Trotter’s statement identifies why a significant portion of Western North Carolinians deserted. For many, it simply boiled down to the fact that they lacked the will or inspiration to fight in a prolonged conflict for the Confederacy. Shortly after the war began, deserters would begin gravitating to the confines of the Western North Carolina mountains. However, it is false to assume that all deserters in the region were Western North Carolinians. The Appalachian Mountains had a strong appeal to deserters throughout the Confederacy because of the numerous places to hide, elude, and if need be fight off Confederate authorities. Historian Richard Reid concludes that “a large number of deserters fortified themselves in the western mountains, but upon close inspection it appears that many of the men who took refuge there were from out of the state or from other parts of North Carolina.”¹⁰³ Geographical advantages that the region offered to deserters guaranteed that Appalachia would be plagued with a large population of deserters throughout the war.

In a letter from a Buncombe County soldier to his brother published in the *Spirit of the Age*, the soldier addressed the deserter problem in Buncombe. When he heard that his brother at home was getting ready to join the army, he sarcastically requested that his brother also “take all the deserters who are lying out shirking their duty” with him, “for they are numerous”¹⁰⁴ Western North Carolina would soon become overwhelmed with deserters who took advantage of the mountainous region for hiding out. Confederate efforts to catch deserters in the region rarely relieved the problem in the mountains. Often inefficient and untrained militia led the efforts to

¹⁰² William R. Trotter. *Bushwhackers: The Civil War in North Carolina, The Mountains*. (John F. Blair Publisher: Winston Salem, 1988), 137.; Also see; James Bearman, “Desertion as Localism: Army Unit Solidarity and Group Norms in the U. S. Civil War.” *Social Forces* 70 (December 1991): 322.

¹⁰³ Richard Reid, “A Test Case of the ‘Crying Evil’: Desertion among North Carolina Troops during the Civil War,” *The North Carolina Historical Review* 58 (July, 1981): 249.

¹⁰⁴“W.L. Westall to his Brother” *Spirit of the Age* (Charlotte), September 14, 1863.

catch deserters. Historian Mark A. Weitz explains that “North Carolina used its state troops to try to control the deserter problem, actions that led to violence in the mountains of western North Carolina.” These efforts to reel in deserters were rarely effective. Deserters reacted by forming guerilla bands to protect themselves from militia and home guard forces. Weitz notes that by “1863 deserter bands arose in the region and added their numbers to the mix. Deserters had only one concern, survival, and in an environment already rife with violence they had no problem plundering homes or fighting with either army, so they posed a serious danger to both soldiers and civilians.”¹⁰⁵ Although deserters in Appalachia did not account for all the violence, which can also be blamed on Unionists and the Union Army, deserter attacks in the region compounded an already volatile situation in the mountains. Confederate efforts to protect the civilian population in Western North Carolina were often reactionary and fractured, most military operations were ineffective in rooting out deserter bands. Troops often only arrived after attacks had occurred; therefore the bandits had already plundered the community and escaped. Throughout the war, the Confederate efforts to secure and protect Appalachians were usually not successful. Military forces struggled to successfully engage the enemy, which was largely due to the enemy’s ability to quickly escape into hiding after attacks.

The greatest incident of deserter-related violence occurred in January 1863 in Madison County. On January 8, 1863, a band of approximately fifty deserters, many of whom were believed to have been from the neighboring town of Laurel, invaded the small town of Marshal in search of salt and provisions. While ransacking the town, the gang shot one Confederate soldier on furlough and destroyed numerous buildings. After taking the supplies they needed, the

¹⁰⁵ Mark A. Weitz, *More Damning than Slaughter: Desertion in the Confederate Army*. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), 141, 188.

band of raiders attacked the home of Colonel Lawrence Allen, a prominent citizen and soldier. The deserters forced the colonel's three children outside, taking their blankets and exposing them to the cold weather. After the attack, Confederate authorities ordered Colonel Keith and the Sixty-Fourth North Carolina to respond to the attack on Marshal. While in route to Madison County, Keith received word that one of Allen's children had already died after the exposure to the cold, and another one of his children was near death. Enraged by the death of the child, Keith's regiment quickly rounded up fifteen suspected deserters who were believed to have been involved in the attack on Marshal. After two of the fifteen suspects escaped while the regiment was in route to Knoxville for trial, Keith, out of frustration over the escapes, chose to execute the remaining thirteen prisoners. The prisoners ranged from the ages of twelve to fifty-six, and seven of them were related; sharing the same last name, Shelton. In the weeks following the massacre A.S. Merrimon, a state solicitor for the western district of North Carolina wrote Zebulon Vance and notified him that he "learned that probably 8 of the 13 killed were not in the company that robbed Marshal and other places. I suppose they were shot on suspicion." When Confederate authorities received news that Keith disobeyed orders and executed the prisoners, he and four officers on his staff were all forced to resign from the army. Governor Vance was outraged by the murders, and tried to have criminal charges brought against Keith, but his efforts were to no avail.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁶Gordon B. McKinney, *Zeb Vance: North Carolina's Civil War Governor and Gilded Age Political Leader* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 145; Inscoc, *The Heart of Confederate Appalachia*, 119; A.S. Merrimon to Zebulon Vance, February 24, 1863, in *North Carolina Civil War Documentary*, ed. Buck Yearn and John G. Berrett (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 109; Also see Phillip Shaw Paludan. *Victims: A True Story of the Civil War*. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2004).

The events in Madison County, known as the “Shelton Laurel Massacre,” placed Confederate authorities in Appalachia in a negative light. The difficulty of finding the elusive raiders tormented military authorities in the regions, creating a frustration that led to the death of thirteen men. In the days following in the wake of the Shelton Laurel Massacre one newspaper stated, it “is therefore to be hoped that the military authorities here, or the Government at Richmond will take some effective steps to ferret out these tory bandits of the mountains, and give security to loyal citizens.” The paper concluded “Let them be caught and hanged summarily, and sufficient force kept in the mountains to preserve the lives and property of loyal citizens.”¹⁰⁷ The John Inscoe concludes that Shelton Laurel “represented the most extreme manifestation of escalating tensions between lower-ranking troops and civilians, as guerilla warfare blurred the lines between combatants and noncombatants and obscured the rules of war that defined both.”¹⁰⁸ But even more so, the event brought to light the inherent inefficiency of the Confederate efforts to protect the Appalachians. Shelton Laurel served as a prime example of how military forces failed to prevent violence and depredations in the mountains. In his study on Appalachia and the Shelton Laurel Massacre, Phillip Paludan explained that Unionists, and deserters “in the surrounding mountains were hardly affected by the Shelton Laurel killings.” The attempts to terrorize the deserters “did not paralyze guerillas; it gave them power. It sanctified their marauding by hoisting over it the banner of betrayed and brutalized innocence. It ennobled the guerilla’s cause.” Arriving well after the invasion of Marshal, the military excursion to catch the perpetrators did little to ease the sufferings of mountain populations because the

¹⁰⁷ Anonymous, “The Affair in Madison County.” *Daily Progress* (Raleigh), January, 19, 1863.

¹⁰⁸ Inscoe, *The Heart of Confederate Appalachia*, 120.

damage to the community had already been done. But even more so, the attempts of Colonel Keith to deliver justice only emboldened the bandits, doing nothing to in deter future attacks.¹⁰⁹

By the middle of 1863, local authorities were soon overwhelmed by deserters who resorted to violence as a means to survive. Weitz contends that by “June of 1863 sizable deserter armies existed in Yadkin, Wilkes, and Caldwell counties.” In particular, Weitz found that “Wilkes County became home to a band of five hundred deserters that created a paramilitary unit, fortified their camp, and openly challenged the Confederate army to come and take them. A band of one hundred deserters roamed Cherokee County, disarming Confederate soldiers en route to their units.” Deserter bands would often roam, crossing county lines and attacking neighboring towns. Cornelia Henry wrote in June of 1864, “the Tories and deserters killed Andy Johnson of Henderson Co. a few weeks ago. I hope they will never come here. I do hope and pray we may never fall in the hand of our enemies.” In the last years of the war, Appalachia would be filled with deserter gangs which preyed on unprotected civilians.¹¹⁰

In the spring of 1863 Captain G.W. Hays of Cherokee County wrote to Governor Vance requesting military assistance to help deal with the growing deserter problem in Western North Carolina. On June 6, Governor Vance responded to the captain’s request for troops. Vance explained to Hays that he could not send any more troops. He stated, in “answer to your representations of the great danger to the property and peace of the mountain country, arising from the disaffection on the border of Tennessee and the great number of deserters who are resorting thither [...] I hope the good citizens will accede to for their own defense.” Vance

¹⁰⁹ Paludan, *Victims: A True Story of the Civil War*, 101.

¹¹⁰ Weitz, *More Damning than Slaughter*, 190; Cornelia Henry to her journal, June 21, 1864, in *Fear in North Carolina*, 226.

continued that although he wished to supply troops, he told Hays “In no other way shall I be able to furnish protection to the good and loyal citizens of that country, as I have no other regular troops to spare for that purpose.”¹¹¹ Vance’s proposition that the Appalachian citizens arm themselves and protect their communities was not effective in curtailing the rising violence in the region. By the middle of the war, Weitz explains that “Desertion into North Carolina’s mountains had evolved to the point that makeshift groups of civilians were unable to suppress deserters.”¹¹² Vance’s response to Hays’ request for assistance reveals how the Confederacy was unable to properly defend and protect Appalachian civilians. Without assistance from Richmond, the aid Vance could supply to Hays was not nearly sufficient to quell the violence. As a result, soldiers in the army would look on as Western North Carolina stood largely defenseless against violence at the hands of deserters, Unionists and the Federal Army.

Many who deserted were being forced to choose between the worst of two evils. While the majority of Western North Carolinians wanted to serve the Confederacy, they did not wish to serve if it meant the starvation or suffering of their families. Therefore, when they were pressed with the decision to stay in the army, or leave to protect their starving families at home, some soldiers chose the option of leaving without permission. Soldiers who deserted for familial reasons were problematic in the sense that they cannot be labeled strictly as loyal or disloyal. Since these men did not desert because they lacked the will to fight, one cannot necessarily label them as totally disloyal. Lying somewhere between these two poles, these soldiers demonstrate that desertion is not black and white. Historian David Brown explains that there were those “whose loyalty fluctuated, who equivocated, and who did what was best for themselves and their

¹¹¹ “Vance to Colonel Hays” *North Carolina Standard* (Raleigh), June 10, 1863.

¹¹² Weitz, *More Damning than Slaughter*, 190.

families.”¹¹³ While all deserters may have acted disloyally, many soldiers, like the ones Brown describes, were more loyal than others. Gary Gallagher explains that not all Confederate desertion is indicative of “weak will or unhappiness with the Confederacy.” Similarly, in her study on North Carolina in the Civil War, Chandra Manning notes that as “the war’s fury enveloped the South, it exposed the tensions between the needs of families and the needs of the Confederacy that rested at the heart of Confederate patriotism. The sheer length of the conflict kept men away from the homes and communities that relied on their labor and in that way endangered rather than furthered white families’ best interest.” For most soldiers, their family lay at the heart of what they were fighting for. Therefore as their families’ sufferings escalated, a conflict emerged between the Confederacy’s needs and their families’ needs. Manning concludes that most “southerners responded to such conflicts with resentment that did not negate their commitment to the Confederacy but did strain their willingness to continue making the sacrifices Confederate independence would require.”¹¹⁴ As the Confederacy continued to fail to provide for families and protect those on the home front, Western North Carolinians would begin to question if the Confederacy had their best interests in mind.

At the beginning of the war, desertion of North Carolina troops was not as widespread as it would become in the last years of the war. Although the initial years of the war saw a gravitation of deserters into Appalachia, much of the desertion did not occur until late into the conflict. Richard Reid contends that many deserters were actually battle-hardened veterans. From a case study done on 4,395 North Carolina soldiers, Reid found that “almost 70 percent of

¹¹³ Brown, “North Carolinian Ambivalence,” 8.

¹¹⁴ Gallagher, *The Confederate War*, 31; Chandra Manning, “The Order of Nature would be Reversed: Soldiers, Slavery, and the North Carolina Gubernatorial Election of 1864.” In *North Carolinians in the Era of the Civil War and Reconstruction* eds. Paul D. Escott (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 103.

all deserters had fought in the war for over a year, and more than 56 percent had served for over 18 months.” Until the spring of 1863, relatively few desertions occurred in North Carolina regiments. Between June of 1863 and early 1865, nearly seventy percent of all desertions would occur. The extended period of time spent in the army by most deserters adds weight to the argument that not all deserters were equally disloyal. Deserters who soldiered for one or two years before deserting most likely had a stronger loyalty to the Confederacy than someone who deserted only after a few weeks or months in the army. Reid concludes that a “man who deserted in 1862 cut himself off from much of his society and weakened the South’s chance of victory. His decision was, if not a rejection of that society’s norms, at least a blow to its military efficiency. The same act in April, 1865, can hardly be seen as a sign of dissent.” The rise in desertion ran parallel with the increasing violence and military excursions in North Carolina. With decreasing food supply and the increase of violence on their families, many Western North Carolinians questioned their loyalty to the Confederacy. However, this was only done after years of service to their nation.¹¹⁵

Western North Carolinians understood their commitment to the Confederacy to be a type of mutual contract or agreement. They were willing to enlist and fight for the Confederacy, but in their absence, they expected the Confederacy to protect their families. As the war went on, it became clear to many that their families were not getting the protection or support that was promised to them. In a January, 1865, letter to Governor Zebulon Vance, a group of North Carolina soldiers expressed these concerns. In this letter, which was signed “North Carolinians of Lee’s Army,” the soldiers stated that “Very many of our wives were dependent on our labor

¹¹⁵ William Trotter, *Bushwhackers: The Civil War in North Carolina, The Mountains*, 137; Reid, “A Test Case for Crying Evil: Desertion Among North Carolina Troops During the Civil War.” 246.

for support before the war, and when articles of food and clothing could be obtained easier than now. At this time they are alone, without a protector, and cannot by hard and honest labor, obtain enough money to purchase the necessities of life.” This statement demonstrates how a soldier may be driven to desert because his family was in danger of starvation. Additionally, the use of the word “protector” reveals that these soldiers felt that their families were without proper defense. The date that this letter was written reveals that even as late as January, 1865, soldiers were still willing to continue the war as long as they could be rest assured that their families were protected at home. The soldiers explained to Vance that “It is not in the power of Yankee armies to cause us to wish ourselves at home. We can face them, and can hear their shot and shell without being moved, but sir we cannot hear the cries of our little ones and stand. We must say something, must make an effort to relieve them.” The courage of these soldiers still remained intact even after four years of fighting, but as the letter demonstrates, their loyalties to their families had been forcing them to question whether to desert. The soldiers conclude their letter by directly addressing the North Carolinian desertion issue: “Do something for them and there will be less desertion and men will go into battle with heartier good will. But it is impossible for us to bear up under our many troubles, the greatest of which is the suffering of our wives and little ones at home.” These Appalachian Confederates show that desertion among many North Carolinians was not always a reflection of war weariness. They contend that it was not within the power of the Union armies to make them desert; their desertion had little to do with loyalty. This letter shows that it was in the Confederacy’s grasp to curb much of the desertion problem if it would secure the home front.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁶ N.C. Soldiers in Lee’s Army to Zebulon Vance, January 24, 1865. Zebulon Baird Vance Papers. NCDA.

The North Carolina Confederates in the above letter were willing to stay in the army despite their families' sufferings; however, many other soldiers did not do so. Unlike the soldiers who appealed to Governor Vance for help; some Western North Carolinians would not choose to be so diplomatic. The need to get back home to aid their families was too urgent and could not be postponed. After receiving word that his youngest child had died and his wife was near death, one Western North Carolinian deserted the army in order to come to her. The soldier explained to Vance that "my family got sick an I hear of the Death of my last child an my wife was unexpected an I left the service an came home an with the help of almighty god I went home and found my wife a live and I wish you to pardon my transgression buy grantin of me a furlo of thirty days an a passport to return to my command."¹¹⁷ This soldier's story reveals the complexity behind many Western North Carolina men's choice to desert. Deserting not because he did not want to fight, he instead fled the army because he wanted to aid his dying wife. Although he could be portrayed as disloyal, the soldier was not disloyal in the sense that he no longer wanted to fight for the Confederacy. This soldier's willingness to return to the army, as exhibited by his request for a furlough rather than an exemption, reveals that he did still have a level of loyalty to the Confederacy. In his study on Virginia Confederates, Aaron Sheehan-Dean found that for some Virginia deserters the line between loyal and disloyal was similarly skewed. He explains that throughout the war "the line between loyal and disloyal continued to be fuzzy; not all men who were absent were necessarily permanent deserters."¹¹⁸ Just as Virginians often left the army and returned, many North Carolinians did the same. In her study on desertion during the Civil War, Ella Lonn estimated that of the 24,000 North Carolina soldiers who

¹¹⁷ Nathan Langley to Zebulon Vance, June 19, 1864. Zebulon Baird Vance Papers. NCDA

¹¹⁸ Sheehan-Dean, *Why Confederates Fought*, 94.

deserted, approximately 9,000 would rejoin to the army after deserting. The large minority of deserters who returned to the army demonstrates how not all deserters were completely disloyal.¹¹⁹

Western North Carolina soldier Malcolm Rae was one of the 9,000 North Carolina deserters who returned to the army. After receiving word that his family desperately needed him at home, Rae left the army and fled home. In a letter to Governor Vance, Rae explained that he “volunteered in defense of his country in June 61 to serve twelve months after that time elapsed I was pressed in for the war with the promise of a furlough.” The soldier explained that after his furlough was never granted he decided to head for home without permission. He stated that, “so promise being violated I took the privilege to go home to see my almost helpless family.” Similar to the soldier cited above, the urgency Malcolm felt to return to his “helpless family” surpassed his willingness to stay in the army. But after being home for fifteen days he decided to leave his family and attempted to return to the army, only to be caught and taken to prison for desertion. Malcolm concluded his letter by requesting to be released from jail and allowed back to his regiment, “being respectfully willing to return to my regiment I would therefore [...] have me released from prison and sent to my regiment, 25th NC.”¹²⁰ Unable to withstand being away from home, some soldiers deserted just long enough to aid their struggling families. In his study on North Carolina desertion, Richard Bardolph contends that “thousands of absentees went home fully intending to return to duty after looking to the spring plowing and planting.”¹²¹ Another

¹¹⁹ Ella Lonn. *Desertion During the Civil War*. (Gloucester: American Historical Association, 1928), 231-232.

¹²⁰ Malcom Rae to Zebulon Vance, January 29, 1865. Zebulon Baird Vance Papers. NCDA.

¹²¹ Richard Bardolph, “Confederate Dilemma: North Carolina Troops and the Deserter Problem,” *North Carolina Historical Review* 66 (January 1989), 86; also see; Richard Bardolph, “Confederate Dilemma: North Carolina Troops and the Deserter Problem , Part Two.” *North Carolina Historical Review* 67 (April 1989): 61-86; Richard

private, Thornton Sexton acted similarly to Malcolm. After campaigning through many of the major battles, including Second Manassas, Fredericksburg, and Chancellorsville, Sexton left without leave on May 19, 1863. Shortly before leaving Sexton told his parents, “Dear Mother I would like to be at hom if I cood. Well I never new what bad times was before in my life.” But despite deserting, Sexton returned on September 1, 1863. Although Sexton never stated his reasons for returning, it is apparent that he served loyally until he died of wounds incurred at the Battle of the Wilderness.¹²²

Another Western North Carolinian, Private R.H. Larseen, told Vance that he deserted after his family pleaded for him to return home. He stated, “My wife sent for me. My oldes child an my wife was sick [...] I ask my officers to let me come home an they would not let me and I came home anyway.” The soldier continued that he was ready to come back to the army, “I will go back an stay if you will send me a pass to go back.”¹²³ In his study on Virginia Confederates, historian William Blair explains that many North Carolinian deserters were simply the victims of a geographical disadvantage. He concludes that “Virginians blamed the most frequent desertions on North Carolinians,” however, he contends that “Virginians may have looked more patriotic only because they enjoyed the advantage of geography—with home nearby they could easily ‘straggle’ while those leaving for homes farther away earned the label of deserter.”¹²⁴ Blair brings to light the inherent problem with desertion. Virginians are often seen as the most loyal of

Bardolph “Inconstant Rebels: Desertion of North Carolina Troops in the Civil War.” *North Carolina Historical Review* 41 (April 1964): 163-189.

¹²² Thornton Sexton to Father. May 9, 1863, cited in *The Civil War in North Carolina, Soldiers and Civilians Letters and Diaries, 1861-1865*, eds. Christopher Watford, 106.

¹²³ R.H. Larseen to Zebulon Vance. June 19, 1863. Zebulon Baird Vance Papers. NCDA.

¹²⁴ William A. Blair, *Virginia's Private War: Feeding the Body and Soul of the Confederacy 1861-1865* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 89.

all Confederates, but like North Carolinians, many were prone to return home when needed. Fortunately for those who wished to only return home for a short time, their close proximity to home allowed them to avoid the “deserter” name. Blair’s study shows that for many Virginia Confederates who deserted home and returned to the army, their family played a key role in the will to fight. For Virginians, like many North Carolinians, their families were an integral motivator in decisions to desert.

Western North Carolinian deserters returned to the army for a variety of reasons. While many may have been persuaded to return purely out of loyalty, the fear of being caught and punished for desertion were also motivating factors.¹²⁵ Although these soldiers were not as loyal as those who never deserted, or even those who deserted with the intent to return, they did still maintain a level of loyalty. This was the situation for Private Robert Chapman. Shortly after Chapman deserted, he wrote to Zebulon Vance stating, “I left the 9th day of November without absence for which I have repented for a thousand time I am a true southern man and always has bin.” Chapman concluded that he “was truly sorry for and doo sincerely beg for pardon and [...] I want some way to get transportation back to my regiment without being punished.”¹²⁶ Chapman, like many other Western North Carolina deserters wished to return to the army after being at home for a period of time.

Desertion was a problem that plagued both soldiers and civilians throughout the war. Although soldiers may have struggled with whether to desert, civilians similarly struggled with

¹²⁵ Throughout the war, Governor Vance made numerous public proclamations requesting that deserters to return back to the army. Most notable was a January 26, 1863 proclamation offering no punishment for soldiers who returned to the army; Inscoc, *The Heart of Confederate Appalachia*. 115.

¹²⁶ R. Chapman to Zebulon Vance. February 25, 1865. Zebulon Baird Vance Papers. NCDA.

how to survive without sufficient manpower at home. For some women, the problems that they incurred in the absence of their fathers, husbands, and sons were too great to handle. Throughout the war, a faction of Appalachian civilians wrote to their loved ones, encouraging them to desert. Just weeks after the fall Vicksburg and the loss at Gettysburg, one Appalachian woman from Madison County wrote her husband in the army, “I want you to come home as soon as you can after you git this letter [...] I want you to come home worst that I ever did.” For this Western North Carolinian woman, her Confederate loyalty was not strong enough to weather the war. The recent military defeats proved to be reason enough for her to encourage her husband to desert.¹²⁷

However, not all women were willing to plead for their male relatives to desert. Throughout the war, many women petitioned the North Carolina Government to have a male relative detached. In most cases, Appalachian civilians attempted to get male members of the community detailed back home so that they could assist in bringing crops. They also recognized that if men were not sent back home to help the communities, some soldiers would take it upon themselves to come home without leave. When one Forsyth county women requested that Governor Vance have her son detailed, she stated, “please grant me this my petition that I may have my son John Hominger detailed belonging to the 4th battalion Co. B Junior Reserves. I wish to get him detailed this year on my farm my husband is in the army in the NC Calvary both my son and my husband was in the army all last summer I made but little grain.” The willingness of both her husband and son to enlist reveals how dedicated their family was to the Confederate cause. Additionally, one must imagine how difficult it was for this woman to survive in the absence of her two male providers. The request to have her younger son sent home was a

¹²⁷ Martha Revis to H.W. Revis, July, 20, 1863, in *North Carolina Civil War Documentary*, 97.

compromise between supporting herself and doing her part for the war effort. She did not request her husband to be released from the army, thus demonstrating that she still supported the Confederate cause.¹²⁸ Another North Carolina woman who had four sons in the Confederate army wrote to Vance requesting that her hospitalized son be allowed home. Elizabeth Clemmons affirmed “I have furnished four of my children to go in this war and they have been in service for two years” With one son dead, two serving and one in the hospital, Mrs. Clemmons asked Governor Vance to allow her ill son to come home. Despite her already courageous sacrifice of four sons, she promised that her son would reenlist if possible: “And if he Ever Gits able to go in service Again he is wiling to go and I am wiling to do all I can for my Country and the people around me knows that.” This letter underlines how many families tried to compromise between supporting the military and also ensuring their families’ survival. By requesting that only her sick son come home, Ms. Clemmons attempted to support both the Confederacy and her family. Mrs. Clemmons concludes her letter by promising Vance that her son will reenlist if he recovers from his wounds; this reveals her dedication to the Confederate cause.¹²⁹

In some cases, mountain women collectively came together to ask for assistance from Governor Vance. In a September 8, 1864, letter, citizens in Catawba County requested that the Senior Reserves from that county be allowed home in order to help bring crops in preparation for the upcoming winter: “it is time that the wheat crop should be sowed and immediately succeeding this will be the making of our molasses and the gathering of our corn.” As their letter reveals, these citizens were desperate for help to farm their fields. But despite the urgency of the needs, these Western North Carolina citizens recognized that the Senior Reserves were off

¹²⁸ Shele Hominger to Zebulon Vance. January 23, 1865. Zebulon Baird Vance Papers. NCDA.

¹²⁹ Elizabeth Clemmons to Zebulon Vance. May 1, 1863. Zebulon Baird Vance Papers. NCDA.

fighting for their independence and the protection of North Carolina. Therefore, in an effort to reach a compromise with the Confederate government, they asked that “if the public necessity is such that these men cannot be disbanded we pray you to use your influence to have them detailed for 60 days.”¹³⁰ This statement reinforces how many mountain citizens made efforts to reach a balance between the war effort and their own well being. They recognized that their men were needed on the front lines and could not return home permanently. Additionally, this letter gives a unique glimpse into how many mountain communities ran dry of able bodied men. Since most their younger men had enlisted, these citizens likely assumed that getting any military age man released was not likely. Therefore, they were bargaining for the temporary release of older men who had been conscripted into the senior reserves. Citizens of Haywood and Chatham Counties described a similar situation of desolation, when they asked Vance for help bringing in their crops. They explained that “We the undersigned Citizens petition to know if there is any chance to git our hands early next week to harvest. Our early wheat and oats are getting ripe and we will have to aid the Soldiers wives in saving there grain,” Similar to the petition made by the residents of Catawba County, this letter exhibits how able bodied men had been completely depleted from mountain communities. Throughout Western North Carolina the lack of manpower had become so severe that many counties faced famine and starvation.¹³¹

Another concerned Appalachian civilian wrote to Vance requesting a detail of one hundred experienced soldiers to defend the region, “one hundred men could do what is necessary to be done immediately in this county. That a force is necessary between here and the Tenn-line I

¹³⁰ Catawba County Residents to Zebulon Baird Vance, September 8, 1864. Zebulon Baird Vance Papers. NCDA.

¹³¹ Citizens of Haywood and Chatham Counties to Zebulon Vance, June 3, 1863. Zebulon Baird Vance Papers. NCDA.

do not doubt but it should be men who have seen service.” This civilian points out an important fact that most of the soldiers in charge of protecting Western North Carolina were untrained and ill prepared to combat deserters and Unionist. Although he was not speaking directly on the issue of desertion, the letter still addresses one of its main causes. His letter brought to the light the fact that the Confederate government was not protecting its civilians. He continued to state that without military protection, their crops would be threatened, “This valley is much exposed to raids from that quarter. As subsistence is scare in East Tenn. It is not improbable that the federals will try to occupy this valley through the winter.”¹³² Without the protection from deserters and Unionists, crops throughout the region were destroyed. This letter confirms that violence on the home front and starvation went hand in hand. The writer illustrates how much of Western North Carolina was left unprotected. Throughout the war, loyal citizens would plead for help and manpower from Confederate authorities, but their pleas frequently went unanswered.

On many occasions, citizens would write to Vance and warn him that if government assistance were not provided, then Western North Carolina soldiers would likely desert the army. Civilians recognized that much of the desertion was due to the Confederacy’s lack of support on the home front. One Western North Carolina woman told Vance, “There are but very few at home the men are dreaned out of our country very clean. There is not a detailed man in this community to work for us nor defend us no ways at all.” Mrs. Comly explained to Vance that her husband had died in the service and with the conscription of her Grandfather in the Senior Reserves she no longer had anybody at home to provide protection for her. She continued that her vulnerable status was common among the region and that if “our noble soldiers hear how

¹³² E. M. Welborn to Zebulon Vance. September 12, 1864. Zebulon Baird Vance Papers. NCDA.

their families are exposed it will almost cause them to desert the camp and come home.”¹³³ This concerned citizen’s dire warning to Vance should not be viewed as a sign of dissent. In her study on the Civil War home front, Jacqueline Glass Campbell notes that, “From the other side of the line came letters from Confederate civilians who warned authorities about the dangers of desertion.” Campbell continues to state that one “cannot assume that the civilians and soldiers who alerted Confederate authorities about the potential of increased desertions were disloyal. The truly disaffected would surely not have drawn attention to themselves. This was especially true of Confederate women, for whom desertion posed a multitude of problems.” Campbell points out an important fact that most citizens who wrote to Vance warning of the desertion issue or pleaded for assistance were loyal citizens. These citizens recognized that without help, soldiers would likely leave the armies.¹³⁴

Western North Carolina was not only vulnerable to deserters and Unionists, but also to speculators. In some communities, food and clothing speculators made it even harder for some mountain families to survive. Shortly after the war began, speculators in Western North Carolina raised the price of food above the wages that soldiers and relief funds could supply to their families. In his study on Appalachian women, Gordon McKinney found that speculation “in food had driven the prices so high that county officials did not have the resources to provide for every needy family. The result was that many women discovered that the community that had supported them economically and had provided security for them could no longer do either.”¹³⁵

¹³³ Sue Comly to Zebulon Baird Vance. January 5, 1865. Zebulon Baird Vance Papers. NCDA.

¹³⁴ Jacqueline Glass Campbell, *When Sherman Marched to the Sea: Resistance on the Confederate Home Front*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 80-81

¹³⁵ Gordon McKinney, “Women’s Role in Civil War Western North Carolina,” *North Carolina Historical Review* 69 (January 1992), 52.

Phillip Paludan similarly found that by the middle of the war the “cotton, clothing, wool, corn, and hogs—all vital to the lives of mountaineers—were almost impossible to get.” Paludan concluded that “Speculators hung onto their supplies,” refusing to sell to families without enough money.¹³⁶

One Western North Carolina woman wrote to Vance stating, “I cant get what the county allows me tell the 13th of July and when I get that it wont be only \$22.50 and it would take it all to by one Barrel of corn if I had the money now and if you don’t provide me with some means to get support I am bound to suffer my husband is in the army and has bin for a long time.”¹³⁷

Another North Carolinian who was in charge of providing for soldiers’ families in his community expressed the same frustrations and despair felt by many Western North Carolina families. In his letter to Vance, Mr. Armstrong described the devastation being caused by speculators in his neighborhood, “these women are getting in a very destitute condition for clothing [...] speculators are about to ruin our county.” He continued that if prices could be lowered to a reasonable price, the women may be able to purchase cotton; “few have but little farms they have not team horses are scarce and they cannot get plowing done, if cotton yarn could be had most of them could I expect at a fair price pay for enough to cloth themselves and their children.”¹³⁸ Just as Confederate authorities were unable to protect Appalachian civilians from deserter bands, Mr. Armstrong’s letter reveals that the Confederacy was equally ineffective in protecting Western North Carolina from speculators.

¹³⁶ Paludan, *Victims: A True Story of the Civil War*, 80.

¹³⁷ Martha A. Allen to Zebulon Baird Vance. May 6, 1863. Zebulon Baird Vance Papers. NCDA.

¹³⁸ Although Mr. Armstrong writes Vance from Duplin County in Eastern North Carolina, the depredation he describes is similar to that of the situation in Western North Carolina; Mr. Armstrong to Zebulon Vance. May 16, 1863. Zebulon Baird Vance Private Papers. NCDA.

The Confederacy and the North Carolina government recognized that without assistance, desertion would no doubt continue to increase. Additionally, disloyalty and disaffection among the populace on the home front would spread. To combat this, state and local officials labored to provide assistance to impoverished families throughout the conflict. At the beginning of the war, some counties in Western North Carolina had developed relief funds which were created to purchase food for families who could not support themselves. However, according to historian John Inscoe, the “demand for aid quickly grew beyond the capacity of counties alone.” Beginning in December of 1862, the North Carolina government had begun distributing money to local county governments for disbursement among disadvantaged families. Each county had devised lists of indigent families who needed aid to survive, and relief would be handed out based on who needed it most. In the last two years of the war, North Carolina, “appropriated \$1 million in February 1863, \$1 million in December 1863, \$1 million in May 1864, and \$3 million in the last months of the war in 1865.” The efforts of officials in Raleigh and county officials played a significant role in assisting families, but it was never enough to alleviate the suffering of those on the home front.¹³⁹

On some occasions relief was available, but was denied to needy families. One Western North Carolinian who had her only son die in service wrote Governor Vance for assistance after she was denied war relief by local officials. Mary Johnson explained to Vance, “I am a poor woman, having only one son and one daughter [...] I applied twice to the committee for the relief of indigent families of soldiers and they refused to assist me on the grounds that my son did not support me before he went to serve, which is not strictly true, for he assisted me much.” As Mary

¹³⁹ Inscoe, *The Heart of Confederate Appalachia*, 169-170; Joe A. Mobley. *Zebulon Vance: North Carolina's War Governor in the Confederacy*. (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2005): 149.

Johnson's letter demonstrates, many families who needed food and assistance could often be denied aid for controversial reasons. Throughout the war, North Carolina women on the home front went hungry as available provisions were denied to them. Many women, like Mary Johnson "complained to Vance that county justices were hoarding or not distributing money, food, and supplies fairly." This lack of government foresight exacerbated the deteriorating conditions in the mountains.¹⁴⁰

Other Appalachian families encountered similar problems. While James Wright was off fighting; he became disgruntled when he received word that his family was not receiving aid. In an April 10, 1864 letter, Wright wrote to his wife, "I want you to write to me whether you have drawn anything or not from the commissioners [...] if you have not got anything I want to know the reason. I think you are as much entitled to it as any of them. Write as soon as you get this and let me hear from you and how you are getting along."¹⁴¹ Wright's letter appears to suggest that he was aware that his family was not receiving the food that they desperately needed. One should also note the sense of anxiety that can be seen in his letter home because he had no way of knowing if his family was starving. Although Wright never deserted the army, the anxiety that he expresses in his letter home is the same anxiety that pushed many Western North Carolina soldiers to desert. Unfortunately for the thousands of families living in Western North Carolina, the risk of famine only increased as the war went on. In June, 1864, one newspaper wrote that "If half we hear of suffering and distress in the Western counties to be true, the condition of

¹⁴⁰ Mary Johnson to Zebulon Vance. May 5, 1863. Zebulon Baird Vance Papers. NCDA; Mobley, *War Governor of the South: North Carolina's Zeb Vance in the Confederacy*. 149.

¹⁴¹ James W. Wright to Father, Mother and Fanny. April 10, 1864. John Wright Family Papers. NCDA.

many of the people is pitiable indeed. There is much suffering for want to food.”¹⁴² With the letters and reports detailing the famine and devastation occurring in their home region, it is easy to imagine how some soldiers would answer their families’ call for assistance by deserting. Throughout the war, many newspapers across the state would write of the depredations faced by those in the mountains.

Approximately 107,000 (ninety-four percent) of North Carolinians between the ages of 20-49 fought for the Confederacy and never deserted the army.¹⁴³ Most Western North Carolinians recognized their value to the army and despite their urge to leave, they never did. One Appalachian Confederate, Eli Fogleman, expressed the sentiments of most Western North Carolinian soldiers when he stated to his father, “I want to come as bad as you want me to come but it is impossible to get a furlough on a detail if I could come home I would do so. I cannot come home with out I runaway and I will not do that.”¹⁴⁴ Fogleman’s letter is symbolic of the plight that over 100,000 North Carolinians went through during their service away from home. His letter demonstrates that soldiers often struggled with a need to support their family and a need to support the Confederacy. Although Foglemen neglects to describe why he would not leave without a furlough, one can imagine that one reason he was driven to stay was because he believed fighting for the Confederacy was the best way to protect his family.

¹⁴² “Western North Carolina”. *North Carolina Standard* (Mecklenburg), June 8, 1864.

¹⁴³ I come to this number because approximately 130,000 out 150,000 North Carolina Confederates fought in combat roles. Subtracting 23,000 deserters from the total number of combat soldiers comes to the number of 107,000; Hugh Talmage Lefler, and Albert Ray Newsome, *The History of a Southern State: North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1973),456; the 1860 census shows that in 1860 there were 112,886 men between the ages of 20 and 49. A large portion of North Carolinians between the ages of 17-19 fought for the Confederacy, however the search parameters of the census database do not provide a way to calculate the number of males in this age group; University of Virginia. “Historical Census Browser,” University of Virginia Library, <http://mapserver.lib.virginia.edu/php/county.php>

¹⁴⁴ Eli Fogleman to Father. January 15, 1862. Eli Fogleman Letters. SHC.

Many Western North Carolina soldiers who refused to desert were outraged when their comrades left the army without leave. In a letter to his wife, Benjamin Justice complained, “I am extremely mortified at the conduct of these cowards and base wretches who would sell their country or throw away their liberty and their manhood.”¹⁴⁵ Although Justice likely wanted to return home and see his family, his loyalty to the Confederacy outweighed his willingness to desert. Therefore, when other soldiers deserted back home, Justice viewed their actions as disloyal and cowardly. Another Western North Carolinian, Private Julius Gash, was more bitter in his sentiments when he proclaimed “I wish I could express the contempt I naturally cherish for the deserter, and men who will at this particular time desert. I do candidly think they ought to be shot. I think it is nothing more than what they justly merits. Why! Confound a man who is void enough of principle to desert his country in so perilous a time as now.”¹⁴⁶ As these letters reveal, desertion was perceived by many soldiers as an act which threatened the independence of the Confederacy. Soldiers recognized that every man who deserted made their army weaker and threatened the survival of the Confederate nation.

Similar to the soldiers above, many civilians on the home front also despised deserters. When Margret Westbrooks found out that two of her four brothers serving in the Confederate army deserted, she was horrified by the shame they brought upon themselves and the disservice they did to their country. Margret wrote to Vance requesting a pardon for her two brothers, “I have two Brothers who have bin influenced to disgrace themselves by deserting their comrades and post of duty [...] they say they are willing to go back and perform their duty if you will

¹⁴⁵ Benjamin Justice to his Wife. August 31, 1863. Benjamin Justice Papers. EURMA.

¹⁴⁶ To find this collection I used Christopher M. Watford’s series of edited letters as a finding aid; Christopher M. Watford. *The Civil War in North Carolina: The Mountains*. (Jefferson: McFarland Press, 2003), 122-123; Julius Gash to Colonel. September 5, 1863. Mary Gash and Family Papers. NCDA.

pardon them and send them the nesary papers to prevent their being punished on their return to their command.” Ms. Westbrook explained that she was willing to endure the adversities of the home front alone, but only if the Governor would allow her brothers to return the army without penalty. She explained, “I have two other brothers in Confederate service and am all alone in my humble home to work for my daily support. Yet I am only willing to labor in this way if you will only pardon my brothers and allow them to return to there comrades and post whose they are willing to serve their country.” Ms. Westbrook was not willing to allow her brothers to desert even though she likely could have benefited from their help. Margaret Westbrook’s story reveals how families were often divided in their willingness to support the Confederacy. Although she was an ardent supporter of the Confederacy, two of her brothers appear to have been unwilling to make the same sacrifices that she was. Her letter shows how many Western North Carolinians had varying levels of loyalty. Many families were divided between members who were willing to support the Confederacy versus those who were less inclined to do so.¹⁴⁷

Given the circumstances faced by so many Western North Carolina citizens on the home front, it is understandable why husbands and sons may have deserted. However, as this chapter has demonstrated, desertion was not always a choice made because of war weariness. While many Western North Carolinians deserted because they no longer wanted to fight, many others left because their families needed them. According to Mark Weitz, only 2,457, ten percent of the 24,000 North Carolinians who deserted, went to the Union Army.¹⁴⁸ This number is significant because it shows that very few North Carolina soldiers chose desert from the Confederacy and embrace the Union. Desertion was almost always a “back to home” choice. While many

¹⁴⁷ Margaret Westbrook to Zebulon Vance. September 3, 1864. Zebulon Baird Vance Papers. NCDA.

¹⁴⁸ Weitz, *More Damning than Slaughter*, 131

deserters may have been anti-Confederates, most deserters were not necessarily pro-Union. In many circumstances, deserters hiding out in the Appalachian Mountains were equally anti-Confederate and anti-Union. Although many Western North Carolinians may have left the army without leave, few did so because they were Unionists. Whether they left for familial reasons, or simply because they were disenchanted with the Confederacy, only a slim minority would make the decision to become Unionists.

Throughout this chapter, it was been shown that the Confederacy's inability to assist those families on the home front forced many Appalachian Confederates to desert. With the increase in desertion and disloyalty, many areas within Western North Carolina began to experience significant levels of dissent. In the last years of the war, Appalachian solidarity began to decay as disaffection with the Confederacy increased. While unionism and disloyalty in most counties remained repressed and less vocal, border counties experienced a much higher level of dissent. The events surrounding the Shelton Laurel massacre in Madison County reveal how in many cases mountain areas experienced heightened levels of violence. Border counties, such as Madison were placed in volatile situation. With a higher population of deserters and a closer proximity to East Tennessee, many loyal Confederates faced harsh retributions during the course of the war. Yet despite the prevalence of Unionists in border counties, John Inscoe notes that the "proximity to the far more prevalent Unionism across the state line did not necessarily make loyalists out of Carolina residents." Although dissent and disloyalty may have been heightened in border counties, most citizens in these counties still remained loyal to the Confederacy, but their loyalties did have a price. In return for their support for the Confederate cause, highlanders in these counties expected protection and assistance from the Confederacy. As the food supplies

decreased, and depredations increased, many soldiers realized that the Confederacy was not fulfilling its promise to them and they therefore deserted.¹⁴⁹

Appalachian Confederates looked at the prosecution of the war as a shared responsibility, while they were off fighting, the government would aid and protect their families at home. Many, however, felt that the Confederacy failed to carry its share of the burden. A close examination of why soldiers deserted is often revealing of an inherent conflict which existed within the Appalachian Confederate identity. In 1861, the Confederacy won the allegiance of Western North Carolinians because they were convinced that fighting for the Confederacy was the best way to protect their homes and families. For these men, their home and family was an essential part of their identity. As the war intensified and soldiers saw that their families faced violence and starvation, many soldiers lost their reason to fight. This brings to light the fact that it was not always the power of the Union army that made Appalachian soldiers desert. Much of the desertion problem existed within the Confederacy because of its inability to protect families on the home front. The Confederacy was unsuccessful in filling the void left by the absence of enlisted men in Appalachia. When Western North Carolina Confederates saw that their homes and families were not being cared for by the Confederacy, they deserted.

¹⁴⁹ Insoe, *The Heart of Confederate Appalachia*, 95.

CHAPTER THREE: WESTERN NORTH CAROLINA OPPOSITION TO CONSCRIPTION

Two months before Jefferson Davis's first call for conscripts, the *Greensboro Patriot* asked the question "Will there be a draft?" This Western North Carolina newspaper asked that North Carolinians avoid being conscripted by volunteering, "we hope her brave sons will not suffer themselves to be *drafted*, to maintain and defend every thing dear to them; but that they will rally to the standard of their country's defense, with a determination to conquer the vandal enemy whose foot now pollutes the soil of our State."¹⁵⁰ By early 1862, southerners had abandoned hope of a short war and began to come to terms with the fact that their fight for independence would be paid at a much higher cost in lives than perceived. After receiving word that men would be conscripted, the *Patriot* did not denounce the new law, but instead requested that all able bodied men not "suffer" the embarrassment of being conscripted. Like the editor of the *Patriot*, many Western North Carolinians understood the necessity of keeping the armies supplied with troops. For many, conscription was viewed as a policy to ensure that the able bodied men, who had avoided volunteering, would be required to serve.

Throughout the war, the Confederate Government, in an attempt to keep men in the army, continuously increased their age quota for conscripts. The first conscription act was instituted on April 16, 1862, requiring for all men between eighteen and thirty-five to serve. However, the increasing demand for manpower forced Richmond to raise the age quota to forty-five in September of 1862. When the conscription act changed its maximum age of enlistment, the *Spirit*

¹⁵⁰ Inscoc, *The Heart of Confederate Appalachia*, 111; "Will there be a Draft?" *Greensboro Patriot*. February 13, 1862.

of the Age responded in favor of the act, stating “It will be seen by reference to another column, that President Davis has called for *all between the ages of 18 and 45*—under the conscription act. Let not only this call be promptly responded to, but let every man over 45 who is capable of bearing arms, rise up to the necessities of the occasion. If we do this, we can successfully contend against them, as we have done before.”¹⁵¹ Seven days after breaking the news of Davis’s new conscription act, the *Spirit* told its readers, “This call is rendered proper and indeed indispensable, by Lincoln’s call for 300,000 conscripts to swell his forces to be employed for our subjugation. His armies, whatever force they amount to must be met, if it should require every man and boy in the Confederacy.”¹⁵² The *Spirit of the Age* was quick to come out in support of the revised Confederate Conscription Acts. Recognizing the Confederacy’s desperate need for men, the paper proudly stated its willingness to put forth “every man and boy.” Like the *Spirit of the Age* and the *Patriot*, many North Carolinians were willing to supply as many men as the state could furnish. In Western North Carolina, many citizens saw the conscription acts as a way to get the shirkers into the army. In a study on one Appalachian woman, Mary Bell, John Inscoe notes that after the first conscription act was authorized in April of 1862, Mrs., Bell, “took some satisfaction in the face that a Confederate conscription act had passed.” Mrs. Bell’s only apprehension with the new law was that it only took men up to thirty-five, “there are many men here at 45 just as able and who have just as much right to go as men at 35.” Many in Western

¹⁵¹ Anonymous, “The Situation of Affairs” *Spirit of Age* (Raleigh), July 20, 1863.

¹⁵² Anonymous, “Another Call for Conscripts.” *Spirit of Age* (Raleigh), July 27, 1863.

North Carolina would share the same sentiments as Mary Bell; conscription was a way to get unwanted men at home into the army.¹⁵³

Initially, the majority of North Carolina newspapers were not opposed to national conscription, however, one newspaper, the *North Carolina Standard*, was a staunch opponent from its very beginning. In an April 23, 1862 column, William Holden, the paper's editor, proclaimed, "This act breaks the faith of both the State and Confederate governments [...] we regard it as inexpedient, unnecessary, oppressive, and unconstitutional. It places the rights of the States and the liberties of the people at the feet of the president." William Holden and his supporters opposed the government's forced enlistment of civilians, arguing that all enlistments should be "upon a volunteer principle entirely."¹⁵⁴ Holden was a one-time Vance supporter during his first term and fellow Conservative party member, but had become a strong opponent of Vance and the Richmond government by the middle of the war. Throughout the war, the *Standard* advocated for raising a volunteer army and opposed conscription policies on the basis of constitutional rights. In his work on North Carolina politics, Marc Kruman explains that Holden and some Conservative Party members saw conscription policies as a movement toward a centralized government. Conscription "represented the first step toward military despotism. If the central government and the military alone decided when and how many troops were needed and then took sole responsibility for recruiting them, it would be but a small step for the military to attain complete ascendancy in the South."¹⁵⁵ Kruman notes that Holden's opposition to Vance

¹⁵³ John Inscoc, "Coping in Confederate Appalachia: Portrait of a Mountain Woman and Her Community," *North Carolina Historical Review* 69 (October 1992), 396.

¹⁵⁴ William Holden, "Editorial." *North Carolina Standard* (Raleigh) April, 23, 1862; "Troops for our Defense." *North Carolina Standard* (Raleigh), December, 10, 1862.

¹⁵⁵ Kruman, *Parties and Politics in North Carolina, 1836-1865*, 245.

emerged from the central government's incursion into the state policies. In early 1864, Holden stated that his paper would "insist on strict construction of the Confederate Constitution, and on a searching but no ungenerous scrutiny of the acts of our rulers. It will inflexibly oppose any and every attempt to render civil authority subordinate to the military power."¹⁵⁶ Throughout the war, Holden's newspaper denounced conscription for its neglect of civil authority. Over time Holden's anti-conscription sentiment would gather the support of many, if not most, North Carolinians.

Like many citizens, North Carolina state officials did not immediately push back against Confederate conscription. But as complaints over conscription began to pile on his desk, Vance began to take a more critical view of the acts. Although North Carolina officials enforced the Conscription Acts during the war, the state government often battled with the Confederacy over conscription. During the war, Governor Vance never publically denounced the Confederacy's forced enlistment of North Carolinians. However, behind closed doors he frequently expressed his dissatisfaction with Richmond's right to enlist the state's citizens. Historian Joe A. Mobley explains that Vance "did complain frequently to the Davis government about what he considered the injustice and illegality of the War Department's actions in enforcing the conscription laws." Much of Vance's anger with conscription emerged after the Confederate government attempted to conscript public officials. In a March, 1863, letter to Jefferson Davis, Vance argued that with the "magistrates, the Militia, and the municipal officers of our incorporated towns, constables and such like officers of the state swept into a camp of instruction, I am at a loss to know what would be left of the power or sovereignty of this State [...] So obvious is the great damage and

¹⁵⁶ William Holden, "Editorial." *North Carolina Standard* (Raleigh), August 12, 1864.

disparagement which this latitudinous construction of the law could work against the States, that I cannot believe its framers so intended it.” Vance ended his letter requesting that Davis’s sense “of justice will not fail to perceive the weighty reasons of comity, policy, and respect for States rights—the great democratic doctrine of our revolution.” Governor Vance understood that the Confederacy’s over-implementation of conscription had begun to threaten North Carolina’s ability to function.¹⁵⁷

Beginning in the middle of 1863, the North Carolina Supreme Court became involved in the state’s battle over conscription. When hearing court cases over conscription, North Carolina Supreme Court Chief Justice Richmond Pearson consistently ruled against Confederate authorities, siding with the defendant. In her study on conscription in North Carolina, Memory F. Mitchell explained that the “application of the conscription and exemption laws to individual situations resulted in constant disagreement between military authorities and civil courts [...] Chief Justice Richmond M. Pearson, of the Supreme Court, stood as a symbol of freedom to many soldiers who appealed to him for discharge.” Supporting the rulings of the courts, Governor Vance made every effort to ensure that military authorities did not overstep civil authority in North Carolina.¹⁵⁸

One of the most notable conflicts between the North Carolina courts and the Confederate government arose over the substitution clause of the Conscription Acts. When John Irvin, a North Carolina citizen, was called up for conscription, he avoided service by providing a

¹⁵⁷ Joe A. Mobley, *War Governor of the South: North Carolina’s Zeb Vance in the Confederacy* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2005), 53; Mobley, 55.

¹⁵⁸ Memory F. Mitchell, *Legal Aspects of Conscription And Exemption in North Carolina, 1861-1865* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1965), 5.

substitute who was thirty-six years of age. However, when the Confederate government increased the conscription age to forty-five, they claimed that Irvin's substitute was of the age to be conscripted himself and Irvin therefore needed to enlist or provide a second substitute. After Irvin did not provide another substitute, he was arrested by Confederate authorities. Throughout the state, citizens who had provided substitutes who were now of conscription age were being required to provide a second substitute. When the case of John Irvin reached the State Supreme Court, Pearson ruled that the conscription of citizens who had already provided substitutes was unlawful. Gordon B. McKinney notes that "Pearson concluded that Irvin still had a valid substitute in service, and he consequently discharged Irvin from Confederate authority. A number of other men who found themselves in the same position as Irvin applied for a writ from Pearson, and they were also freed from Confederate custody."¹⁵⁹ When the Confederate government demanded that Vance overrule Pearson's rulings, Vance upheld the decision of the chief justice. Richmond authorities removed the substitute clause from the conscription act shortly thereafter. However this did not end the conflict, but actually made it worse. In February of 1864, Judge Pearson reacted back against the Confederate government when he ruled that the Confederacy's suspension of Habeas Corpus did not apply to conscription cases. When Confederate authorities attempted to ignore his decision, Governor Vance demanded that the ruling of Pearson be upheld or the state militia would be deployed to make sure the decision was being enforced. Pearson's ruling would be voted down by the remaining court justices later that

¹⁵⁹ McKinney, *Zeb Vance: North Carolina's War Governor*, 141.

spring, but Vance's persistence that state rulings would not be ignored by Confederate authorities is revealing of the inevitable conflict between state and Confederate authorities.¹⁶⁰

Like Vance and the courts, most Appalachian citizens by 1863 believed that the conscription acts had started to do more harm than good. In his study on North Carolina conscription, Walter C. Hilderman argues that North Carolinians, like thousands of "Southerners were bound to regard national conscription as a serious encroachment on state's rights." Hilderman continues that a "large portion of the Southern population, consistent with the principles of state's rights, was opposed to any national government, much less mandatory military service in defense of one." His work pins down why some North Carolinians, including Holden, may have opposed conscription, but he does not uncover why many others may have disapproved of the acts. Hilderman's explanation for the North Carolinian opposition to conscription neglects to account for the evidence showing that many North Carolinians were initially supportive or impartial to the act. This chapter will make it apparent that Western North Carolinian resistance to conscription was not always framed in a debate over states' rights. Instead, many Appalachian civilians opposed conscription only after it attempted to take men from the community who could not be replaced. Initially many citizens looked favorably upon conscription because it forced men into the army who were avoiding service. Eventually Western North Carolinian communities would be bled dry of manpower. When the conscription act's age quota was extended to forty-five, Cornelia Henry remarked that "the conscript bill has passed one house of congress. If it should pass both houses it will nearly ruin this country as there are so many poor men with large families of that age." As conscription officers returned to take the last

¹⁶⁰ Kruman, *Parties and Politics in North Carolina: 1836-1865*, 256-257.

of the male farmers and skilled laborers, Appalachian civilians would fight to keep these men at home.¹⁶¹

When the conscription acts began to remove the last remaining men at home, citizens were forced to argue and fight for their exemption. Much of the Western North Carolinian disaffection with conscription emerged when the Confederacy was failing to protect and feed families in the absence of their men. When Second Conscription Act was passed, Cornelia Henry feared that her thirty-nine year old husband would soon be conscripted, “The conscript bill has passed. I hope Mr. Henry will not have to go. If he does, what is to become of me and my children?”¹⁶² As more and more men were volunteering and being conscripted, the Confederate government was not, in return accounting for the protection of the families. In his study on conscription in Louisiana, John Sacher explains that disaffection with conscription in that state often emerged for this same reason, “many Louisianans felt that the Confederate government had abdicated its responsibility for their protection, and consequently they resisted conscription into the Confederate army.”¹⁶³ In the beginning, Western North Carolinians were willing to allow for conscription, but as their available labor dwindled, the Confederacy failed to step in and provide aid for communities. It was only after the Confederacy neglected to hold up its end of the bargain that most civilians turned against conscription. In his study of Virginia Confederates, William Blair notes that Virginians “generally accepted conscription and other intrusions of government in their lives. Continued tolerance depended on how political leaders administered the new

¹⁶¹ Walter Hilderman, *They Went into the Fight Cheering: Confederate Conscription in North Carolina* (Boone: Parkway Book Publishers, 2005), 21; Cornelia Henry to her journal, September, 23, 1862, in *Fear in North Carolina*, 103.

¹⁶² Cornelia Henry to her journal, October, 9, 1862, in *Fear in North Carolina*, 105.

¹⁶³ John Sacher, “A Very Disagreeable Business: Confederate Conscription in Louisiana,” *Civil War History* 53 (June 2007): 145.

systems and met the challenges that lay ahead. As the year progressed, shortages of food and other goods eroded faith in the government.”¹⁶⁴ Just like many Confederate Virginians, Western North Carolinians were willing to accept Confederate conscription until the policy began to seriously threaten the survival of those at home. Opposition to conscription only grew in the Appalachians after the white males who provided the food and products necessary for sustenance of their communities were conscripted. Western North Carolinians were willing to send all excess men into the army, but as valuable men in the communities were taken, resistance grew among the populace.

The resistance to conscription by those on the home front can be largely attributed to the Confederacy’s failure to supply the mountains while the men were gone. As the Confederacy’s inability to feed and secure the home front worsened throughout the war, Appalachian citizens faced increasing starvation and violence. Presented with an already limited number of males, the Conscription acts attempted to remove the few remaining able-bodied men in mountain communities. Gordon McKinney explains that “the absence of the adult males meant that there was no one left in the family to break the sod during the spring planting and to haul heavy rocks and timbers in newly cleared [...] As the war progressed and difficulties multiplied, agricultural production fell sharply.” Despite the best efforts of women on the home front, the void created by the absence of the male labor source was too great to be supplemented solely by female labor.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁴Blair, *Virginia’s Private War*, 55.

¹⁶⁵Gordon McKinney, “Women’s Role in Civil War Western North Carolina,” *North Carolina Historical Review* 69 (January, 1992), 45.

Focusing on the need to supply men to the army, the Confederacy was often slow to heed civilian calls for the government to exempt or release conscripted men. Even when Governor Vance spoke out against the conscription of farmers, the Confederacy neglected to listen to his pleas. John Inscoe explains, “Vance’s attempt at the most obvious solution—to put an end to conscription so that enough men could be retained in the area to feed the population—fell on deaf ears in the Richmond government”¹⁶⁶ But as the pressure to keep farmers at home increased from Western North Carolinians, the Conscription Bureau did begin to release some farmers from service. In April 1864, the *Asheville News* responded to the exemption of some farmers by stating:

We are glad to learn that the government is awaking to a sense of danger likely to follow the conscribing of farmers at this time.—We learn that sixty-one farmers have recently been released from Camp Holmes and sent home to cultivate their farms [...] Anyone at all acquainted with the real condition of the State at this time and the great suffering that many now experience, knows that not another man should be taken from the corn field. Take non producers but let the farmers stay at home.¹⁶⁷

This article reveals that the *Asheville News* was not completely opposed to the Conscription Acts, but it was against the government’s conscription of badly needed farmers. The newspaper encouraged the government to “take non producers” but asked to leave the few remaining farmers at home. The newspaper recognized that those who could be spared should be conscripted, but it was opposed to conscripting farmers and men of skilled crafts because of their necessity on the home front.

Local communities fought against the conscription of farmers and other skilled craftsman because it only deepened the food shortage crisis, making life unsustainable. One

¹⁶⁶ Inscoe, *The Heart of Confederate Appalachia*, 169.

¹⁶⁷ “Exempting Farmers” *Asheville News*. April 21, 1864.

Confederate colonel operating in the region sympathized with those living in the mountains. Colonel Jon L. Black of the First South Carolina Calvary, wrote that the “want of the necessary labor to cultivate the soil is so great in this mountain region that I am decidedly of opinion that all the men liable to conscription for State defense who are engaged in cultivating the soil should be left at home.” Black continued that “I recommend this because I am fully convinced that the distressed state of this country for the means of subsistence has been and will be the cause of many desertions from the army.” Despite the recommendations for suspension of conscription by Colonel Black, Richmond would continue to conscript men from Appalachia. Throughout the region, citizens would appeal to Vance for exemptions.¹⁶⁸

In late 1864, a forty-nine year old Burke County farmer who was one of the last farmers remaining in his community wrote Vance requesting an exemption from duty. Convinced he would soon be conscripted, the farmer stated, “at the age of a bout 49 I think as right as I can tel and as sure as I have to go this neighborhood of soldiers family’s will be bound to suffer as I am all the man in this section that can assist them any and if I leave there will be no wheat sowed and neither will the corn be gathered.” This letter to Vance exposes how sparse much of the manpower in many communities had become. Serving as one of the last able men in his community, the loss of this farmer would have surely done much more harm than good to the community. In other words, this farmer was more valuable to the Confederate cause by hoisting a plow than a rifle. Many of the men removed by conscription were vital to the community; the benefit that came from their placement in the army was often outweighed by the detriment of

¹⁶⁸ Jon. L. Black to Captain Feilden, May, 10, 1864, in *The War of Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, ser. 1, vol. 47, eds. U.S. War Department, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1880-1901), 333.

their loss at home. Although this farmer was petitioning Vance for his exemption on the ground that he was needed at home, he concluded his letter by stating “I don’t know if you can do anything in my behalf or not [...] But if there is no other chance I will go willingly.” It is significant how this farmer was still willing at the age of 49 to join the ranks and do the duty required of him in the army. As this letter demonstrates, many Western North Carolina men who resisted conscription were still patriotic. Many of those who resisted conscription did so because they knew that they could better serve the Confederacy with a plow rather than with a rifle. This letter shows that this farmer was petitioning for his exemption, but what is more revealing is that he was doing it for reasons other than those publicized by Holden and his supporters. He was fighting for an exemption because he knew that many at home depended on him for their own survival; his opposition to conscription had little to do with the act’s infringement on his rights as a free citizen.¹⁶⁹

In June 1863, a group of citizens pleaded for the exemption of Wiatt Woody because “his wife is not a healthy woman and has four little children and his father and mother.” They continued that his parents were in “their old age and his father being almost helpless.” By all circumstances, Mr. Woody was unable to leave his home for the army. These petitioners assured Vance that “We do not send this by no means to avoid the Conscript law [...] we your petitioners do certify that the said Wiatt Woody is and has been a loyal citizen of our county.”¹⁷⁰ This farmer’s circumstance was an unfortunate one, but as this letter shows that his resistance to conscription was not based on disloyalty or an unwillingness to fight. Many of those who signed

¹⁶⁹ Joseph Cline to Zebulon Vance. September 8, 1864. Zebulon Baird Vance Papers. NCDA; “Editorial.” *North Carolina Standard* (Raleigh) April, 23, 1862

¹⁷⁰ Undersigned Petitioners’ of Mitchell County to Zebulon Vance. June 19, 1863. Zebulon Baird Vance Papers. NCDA.

Woody's petition likely already had fathers and sons in the army. Therefore, if Woody's situation was not truly destitute, and he was not sincerely needed at home, one could imagine that many of those who signed his petition would not have done so. In another letter from fourteen citizens in Buncombe County, these residents requested the exemption of Alsey Cordell on the grounds that he had "a large family of his own" and "two other families in part dependent on him for support." These residents also insisted that Alsey was a loyal citizen, but his help was needed at home and not in the army. Petitions for exemptions from the army were from loyal citizens who already had loved ones serving. Families who already had relatives serving would not have willingly signed petitions to keep men at home who were not truly needed. Although citizens in mountain communities would have wanted to see every available man to enlist, they considered certain men as unavailable for conscription because their labor was too vital to the community.¹⁷¹

In another letter to Governor Vance, more than fifty women pleaded with Vance to not conscript any more men from North Carolina. The women explained to Vance that they had already sacrificed their strongest men, "Many of our natural protectors have been called away to the field of strife—many have fallen. Their deeds of prowess not forgotten in History." However, these women explained that with the enlistment of so many men, "Few remain at home—We humbly petition that they may not be taken from us." Similar to the letter above, the women describe a destitute situation where women could not find food within their counties. If these citizens were to lose more men, the condition of their country would have become even more perilous: "Our fields must be idle if men are not left to sow the crops, and gather those now

¹⁷¹ Fellow Citizens of Buncombe County to Zebulon Vance. September 6, 1864. Zebulon Baird Vance Papers. NCDA.

standing. It is impossible that women can attend to there household duties provide clothing and perform the labors of the field [...] Many widows and orphans made such by this war, already feel the pangs of poverty and before the approaching winter has passed must endure the bitterest destitution.”¹⁷² These women desperately needed men to perform farming duties so that they could have food to survive. Because the Confederacy could not supply communities with enough sustenance to survive, women had to rely on the few remaining men at home to feed the whole community. In his study on Harrison County, Andrew F. Lang found a similar disaffection among women and conscription. Like Appalachian women, Texas women in Lang’s study “were typically distressed in part by the effects of conscription and the subsequent responsibility to manage the slave population, as well as the larger duty to cope with loneliness and assume many of the burdens normally undertaken by men.”¹⁷³ Most Appalachian women were not stressed with the burden of guarding large slave populations due the regions relatively small number of slaves, but they were still faced with the challenge of taking on absent men’s roles. However, workloads often proved too arduous, and without a male component, farm labor could not be completed. John Inscoe contends, “While women and adolescents could and did plow the fields that had been used in previous years, the absence of fathers, husbands, and older sons meant that many other fields lay fallow.” When the Confederacy threatened to take the last of the farmers, these women were forced to speak out against any further conscription in their community.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷² Although this letter does not reveal which county the women lived in, it still remains to be a good example of the situation citizens faced throughout Western North Carolina as well as the rest of the State. Women of North Carolina to Zebulon Vance. Undated. Zebulon Baird Vance Papers. NCDA;

¹⁷³ Lang, “Upon the Altar of our Country,” 292.

¹⁷⁴ Inscoe, *The Heart of Confederate Appalachia*, 168.

Farmers were not the only ones who were desperately needed at home; each community also needed tradesmen, such as blacksmiths, millers, and cobblers. Despite the ability of some households to produce enough food to survive, “the specialized skills of the tanner, wheelwright, miller, and blacksmith were essential to every family, regardless of how self-sufficient or isolated they might be.” Therefore, when these men of specialized skills were pulled from their towns, their loss had a disastrous effect on the whole community. Prior to the war, many communities relied on a select few tradesmen to fulfill the needs of their community or town. After the waves of volunteering, many communities lost their only skilled manufacturers. By the middle of the war, Western North Carolinians found themselves without their local blacksmiths, millers, or cobblers. Men of skilled trades were pressed with a workload that spanned many miles and sometimes many communities. Oftentimes resistance to the conscription of tradesmen would take part on a community-wide scale. When conscription officers attempted to take the last of these men, many in the community would join together in producing petitions and asking for exemptions on the grounds that these men were of too much value to the community to be conscripted.¹⁷⁵

When a blacksmith from Chatham County was called up by conscription officers, numerous citizens from the county wrote to Governor Vance pleading for his exemption from the army. The citizens of Chatham explained to Vance, “we the undersigned Petitioners would respectfully suggest to your Excellency that we believe that the said R.W. Dixon would be of more service to the Confederacy to remain at home as a black smith then he could in any other way.” Without a blacksmith these concerned citizens recognized that they would no longer be

¹⁷⁵ Inscoe, *The Heart of Confederate Appalachia*, 171.

able to procure and repair farming tools; they explained, “For if he is taken away to remain a way. The farming interest we arsure you is bound to suffer.” The citizens of Chatham assured Vance that the forty-one year old Mr. Dixon, “is in every respect a good loyal citizen and all his relations that should be in the Army is there.”¹⁷⁶ By late 1864 Dixon was one of the last able-bodied men in his community. These Chatham residents stated that all of Dixon’s relatives who could be spared were already in the army. This letter provides a picture of the desperate situation faced by so many mountain communities in the last two years of the war.

In his study on Virginia Confederates, William Blair explains that the “need for labor was the leading reason for writing to the Confederate Government [...] Typically, the petitioners asked for the exemption from military service of a skilled artisan, professing that the neighborhood could not function without the individual.” Blair concludes that mountain regions such as the Shenandoah were of even greater need of male labor because they had few slaves, “the Shenandoah Valley expressed these needs more than the tobacco belt, where slaves helped fill artisan positions.” In the plantation belt, slave labor could be instituted in the place of lost white manpower; however in the Shenandoah, their limited slave population was not enough to fulfill these roles. Blair’s statement can also be applied to Western North Carolina, where slave populations were significantly less than the coastal plains of North Carolina.¹⁷⁷ With fewer slaves to perform both skilled and unskilled task, it becomes very understandable why many mountain communities resisted the conscription of the last remaining men at home. Writing from his command post in Western North Carolina, Colonel William Holland Thomas recognized this inherent problem:

¹⁷⁶ Citizens of Chatham County to Zebulon Vance. Undated. Zebulon Vance Papers. NCDA.

¹⁷⁷ Blair, *Virginia’s Private War*, 43.

Two causes have deprived this portion of North Carolina of the means of subsistence: First having but a few slaves among the whites and none among the Indians deprived the country of the necessary amount of labor, after nearly all the men between eighteen and forty-five had volunteered; second, it was a bad crop year, and the early frosts destroyed a large portion of the corn crops or materially injured them. It is this condition of the country that has produced starvation, and if not arrested will produce much disloyalty to the South at a time when we have no men to spare.¹⁷⁸

As Colonel Thomas's letter demonstrates, Western North Carolinians were in a perilous situation by the middle of the war. With the continuous loss of men, the region constantly suffered from food shortages. Thomas understood that if the Confederacy continued to conscript men from Appalachia, the citizens in the region would become increasingly more agitated towards the Confederacy, which would breed disloyalty.

While North Carolinians fought for the exemption of valuable men in their communities, some were outraged by the government's exclusion of slave owners who had twenty or more slaves. In an effort to keep quell the fear and anxiety over the possibility of slave uprisings; Confederate authorities permitted the exemption of one white male for every twenty slaves on each plantation. Some Western North Carolinians resented the law; John Inscoe explains that they "felt that the wealthy were being offered a way of out of the military that was unavailable to the poor."¹⁷⁹ Of all 4,065 slaveholders in North Carolina owning twenty or more slaves, ten percent, 385 owners resided in Western North Carolina.¹⁸⁰ Despite the relatively low number in Appalachia, many citizens were still forced to look on as planters in the mountains and throughout the state were granted exemptions by Confederate authorities while their

¹⁷⁸ William Holland Thomas to the Governor of South Carolina, February, 28, 1864, *Official Records*, ser. 1 vol. 53, 314.

¹⁷⁹ Inscoe, *The Heart of Confederate Appalachia*, 145.

¹⁸⁰ University of Virginia, "Historical Census Browser," University of Virginia Libraries. <http://mapserver.lib.virginia.edu/php/state.php> (accessed November 3, 2010)

communities were drained of their few remaining men. One North Carolinian, from a piedmont county summed up the frustrations of many of his Western North Carolina neighbors when he asked for North Carolina government officials to “try to reason with the authorities no to call out any more men over forty years old, for we cannot spare them without bringing famine on our land, and the other is to demand the Congress in the name of the people, the repeal of that odious and disagreeable law—the 20 negro exemption act.”¹⁸¹ This letter brings to light, the plight felt by many Appalachian citizens. As the conscription acts slowly bled more and more men from the mountains, local citizens watched as planters stayed at home. Although the Confederacy’s drafting of the “20 negro exemption” act had the purpose of preventing slave revolts, many yeomen viewed the act as a way to cater to the rich. This act created a false belief among many in the region that Appalachian Confederates were fighting “rich man’s war, and a poor man’s fight.” In areas of the South, where slave populations were much larger, it is likely that the “20 negro act” garnered a much stronger reprisal from citizens who perceived the act as unfair. However, in both the upper and lower South, many southerners resented the law.¹⁸²

While those on the home front resisted further removal of valuable men from their communities, many soldiers and officers in the army were less opposed to the Conscription Acts. In his study on the Twenty-Sixth North Carolina Regiment, Earl J. Hess argues that any “dissatisfaction among the regimental members was muted as everyone acquiesced to the inevitable.” Hess cites one anonymous soldier from the Twenty-Sixth who stated, “The Conscription Law produces very little effect here. All cheerfully submit to it as a military necessity, and are more determined than ever, by the help of God, to make short work with old

¹⁸¹ Anonymous, “Extract from letter: Simon Grove,” *The North Carolina Standard* (Raleigh) May 8, 1863.

¹⁸² Insoe, *The Heart of Confederate Appalachia*, 45.

Abe.” While some soldiers viewed the conscription acts as a usurpation of power, many soldiers understood the policies as a necessary war measure. Throughout the army North Carolina units took advantage of conscription by bringing conscripts into their depleted ranks.¹⁸³ Although many on the home front produced petitions in an effort to keep valuable tradesmen and farmers at home, most Western North Carolina soldiers were opposed to unnecessary exemptions. Similar to many North Carolinians, Louisianans, according to John Sacher, also welcomed new conscripts, “Not all Louisianans displayed misgivings regarding conscription. Men in the army expressed their desire that shirkers be compelled to join them in the ranks.”¹⁸⁴ For many soldiers, conscription was seen as a policy that forced cowards into the army. But soldiers in the army also understood that the conscription of some men would be detrimental to the home front.

In a letter home, Benjamin Justice, advised his wife to not sign an exemption petition for the release of a man at home. He stated, “I do not think it advisable to hire Bob Locust if John or Bill either can do as well. I would not advise you to have anything to do with the petition for his exemption from conscription or impressment. You could not conscientiously do so if you do not desire to employ him.”¹⁸⁵ This excerpt reveals how Justice and many other soldiers rationalized exemptions. Justice believed that men who were needed at home should be exempted, yet he was strongly opposed to exemptions for men who were not needed at home. Justice is symbolic of many Western North Carolina Confederates, these Confederates wanted those who were needed at home to stay, but they welcomed the conscription of men who were not pertinent to the survival their families on the home front.

¹⁸³ Earl J. Hess. *Lee's Tar Heels: The Pettigrew-Kirkland-MacRea Brigade.* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 17.

¹⁸⁴ Sacher, “A Very Disagreeable Business: Confederate Conscription in Louisiana,” 163.

¹⁸⁵ Benjamin Justice to his Wife. April 26, 1864, Benjamin Justice Papers, EURMA.

Another Confederate took a slightly more sympathetic approach to conscription and the problems it created for those at home. When W. J. O. Daniel heard that the local Gaston County doctor was subject to conscription, he stated that “I hope that Doc will be left at home. He will be of more use to the Neighborhood at home than he will be in the army.” This soldier concluded that “we need recruits very bad,” but in Gaston County, “I don’t think there is any there to spare.” This soldier understood the peculiar problem that plagued Confederates during the war. Writing only weeks after he participated in the battle at Gettysburg, he recognized that the army desperately needed more men, but he also sympathized with those at home. Taking those last remaining men on the home front, would only hurt his family and community, placing a greater risk on their ability to survive.¹⁸⁶

In March of 1865, the *Daily Confederate* pleaded for Congress to “call forth all the strength of the country. Let it take every available man, regardless of age, and put him in the army. [...] make every white man a soldier, subject to military law and discipline. Have conscription rigidly enforced; change enrolling officers often, sending old ones to the field and taking others.” By this late date in the war, the pleas made by the *Daily Confederate* largely fell upon deaf ears. Western North Carolina like much of the South had no more men to spare for service. Conscription was met with opposition in Western North Carolina, but those who fought for the exemptions of men at home, did so largely out of a need to survive. But, disaffection over the Confederacy’s conscription policies does not necessarily allude to a weakening of Confederate nationalism in Appalachia. Signs of “disaffection on the home front and within the army can mask the significant portion of the citizenry who still hoped for independence despite

¹⁸⁶ W. J. O. Daniel to Mrs. Torrence, “The Road to Gettysburg: The Diary and Letters of Leonidas Torrence of the Gaston Guards,” ed. Haskell Monroe, *The North Carolina Historical Review* 69 (October 1959), 516.

losing hope and confidence in their government.”¹⁸⁷ Western North Carolinians’ resistance to conscription was not done through an effort to undermine the Confederacy. As the letters and petitions in this chapter have demonstrated, those on the home front resisted conscription on the grounds that they had no men to spare. Similar to those at home, soldiers in the army also recognized that men were needed at home and in the army. While they wanted to see every available man conscripted, they recognized that some exemptions were necessary.

¹⁸⁷ “Shall we Arm the Negroes.” *Daily Confederate* (Raleigh), January 20, 1865; In the last months of the war, a minority of southerners considered the arming of slaves, however little evidence exist to suggest that Appalachian Confederates accepted the proposal; See, Mark L. Bradley, “A Monstrous Proposition: North Carolina and the Confederate Debate on Arming the Slaves,” *North Carolina Historical Review* 80 (April 2003); Bruce Levine. *Confederate Emancipation: Southern Plans to Free and Arm Slaves During the Civil War*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Blair, *Virginia’s Private War*, 130.

CHAPTER FOUR: DISLOYALTY AND UNIONISM IN WESTERN NORTH CAROLINA

The political system in North Carolina demonstrated a remarkable resilience throughout the war. North Carolina managed to successfully hold two gubernatorial elections during this period; these elections played a significant role in deciding how the state would prosecute the war. The successes of Zebulon Vance in the 1862 and 1864 gubernatorial races were a testament to North Carolina's willingness to achieve honorable peace only through Confederate independence. In both elections, the majority of Western North Carolina voters cast their votes for Vance, thus demonstrating their willingness to see the war through. Despite the successes of Vance, he did not run unopposed. William Holden's 1864 campaign and the subsequent rise of the peace movement underlined a strong minority opposition within North Carolina. By promising a quick end to the war, Holden would, by late 1863, become a strong opponent of Vance and the state's pro-war agenda. Although Holden would lose the 1864 gubernatorial election, his initial success and popularity among a minority of North Carolinians demonstrates how a small, but significant portion of North Carolina citizens were willing to consider peace negotiations with the United States as a means to end the war.

In an effort to promote a united front in their fight for independence, the Confederacy abandoned the political parties associated with antebellum politics and adopted a non-party system. In North Carolina, the state followed suit by dropping the Democrat and Whig party affiliations that most Confederate politicians had been associated with before the state's exit from the Union. Marc Kruman explains, "The partisanship that had divided North Carolinians

for so many years would cease, and words that stood as symbols of that division—Democrat, Whig, Secessionist, Unionist would disappear from the political vocabulary. North Carolina would be a unit, unanimous in its determination to repel the northern invader.”¹⁸⁸ Former pro-secession Democrats and Whigs adopted the new label, calling themselves the “Confederates.” However, the broad appeal of the Confederate Party did not succeed in quelling old party alignments. While former secessionists joined the Confederate party, most former Unionists were hesitant to align themselves with those whom they bitterly fought against during the secession crisis. Instead, former Whigs and Unionist Democrats gravitated to the new “conservative party.” Although old party lines remained largely intact after North Carolina’s secession, the political climate in North Carolina shifted away from discussions over railroads, state funding, and taxes. Old party platforms were thrown out for new political battles over which party could better fight for independence. Marc Kruman finds that “No longer did participants discuss the virtues of railroads and plank roads, or the democratization of suffrage requirements or equalization of taxation. Instead politicians sought to prove that their party and candidate were the more loyal to the Confederacy, would bring the more efficient administration to the state government, and were the more opposed to political parties.”¹⁸⁹ By late 1861, all other political issues had taken a backseat to one overriding issue; political contests would now be based over who could better prosecute the war and end the war soonest. As the war waged on and depredations and famine in North Carolina increased, each political side would portray themselves as the most efficient group who could alleviate the needs of North Carolina and defend her from the northern army.

¹⁸⁸ Kruman, *Parties and Politics in North Carolina: 1836-1865*, 223.

¹⁸⁹ Kruman, *Parties and Politics in North Carolina, 1836-1865*, 233.

The Confederate party North Carolina came under heavy scrutiny for the early defeats occurring in North Carolina, which were primarily on the coast. By mid 1862, the rise of a new political movement spearheaded by former Whigs, Unionists, and other disgruntled factions within the state, would attract the support of most Western North Carolina soldiers and citizens. The Conservative movement portrayed the Confederate leadership as inept and blamed them for the recent military setbacks which occurred throughout 1861. Conservatives made the argument that “Democrats had been unprepared to meet the exigencies created by the war. The state administration, they charged, established a weak and porous coastal defense, armed the state’s troops inadequately, and squandered public funds.”¹⁹⁰ Portraying the Confederate Party as a group unable to protect the state and its citizens, the Conservatives argued that they were better suited to carry the state through the war. The Conservative party would solidify their dominance in state politics after the triumph over the Democrats in the 1862 governor’s race.

The Conservative party’s nomination of Zebulon Baird Vance from Buncombe County secured much of the Western North Carolina vote. Vance was born in Buncombe County, North Carolina in 1830, and resided in the region for much of his life. Before the war, Vance was a young and aspiring politician. He first got his start in politics in 1854, running as a Whig, he won a seat in the North Carolina House of Commons. After two terms in the House of Commons, Vance returned to Buncombe County in 1856. In 1858, Vance won a recently vacated congressional seat. He would again return to Congress for a second term in 1859. Like many Western North Carolinians, Vance was a staunch Unionist. However, like many Unionists, Vance abandoned hope for the Union when President Lincoln called for 75,000 volunteers in

¹⁹⁰ Kruman, *Parties and Politics in North Carolina, 1836-1865*, 237.

reaction to Fort Sumter. At the time when the news of Fort Sumter reached North Carolina, Congressman Vance was preaching at a Unionist rally in Raleigh. When he received word that South Carolina had fired on Fort Sumter, and Lincoln responded by calling for troops, he gave up hope for reconciliation between the North and South. According to Vance, “I immediately, with altered voice and manner, called upon the assembled multitude to volunteer, not to fight against, but for South Carolina [...] if war must come I preferred to be with my own people. If we had to shed blood I preferred to shed Northern rather than Southern blood.” On May 3, 1861, seventeen days before North Carolina seceded from the Union, Vance decided to enlist in the Confederate army. Although he had no military experience, Vance “joined a Buncombe County company known as the Rough and Ready Guards and was soon elected captain.” Shortly thereafter, Vance would be promoted to colonel of the Twenty-Sixth North Carolina Regiment. Despite being nominated for governor, Vance declined to leave his regiment in order to campaign, relying on his supporters to run his election efforts. Vance would command his regiment through various battles including New Bern on the North Carolina coast. After being repelled by Union General Ambrose Burnside’s assault, Vance and his regiments were sent north to Virginia, arriving in time to participate at Malvern Hill.¹⁹¹

In response to the nomination of Colonel Vance for governor, the Confederate Party nominated William Johnston, a railroad executive and former state commissary general. The Confederate Party members tried to denounce Vance as a Unionist, claiming that he was not supportive of the Confederate cause. However, attempts to call into question Vance’s loyalty were not effective. Gordon McKinney explains that since “Vance was actually putting his life on

¹⁹¹ Mobley, *War Governor of the South*, 26-27.

the line for the cause so fervently dear to the hearts of Confederates, their attacks on him were, of necessity muted.”¹⁹² Throughout the campaign, the Conservative party’s offensive was led by the popular newspaper owner and editor William Holden of the *North Carolina Standard*. With the help of Holden and his newspaper, the Conservative movement was successful in portraying Johnston as “an original secessionist, claiming that such secessionists in the Confederate and state governments were responsible for poor progress in winning or ending the war, growing inflation, lack of support for soldiers and their families, and conscription.”¹⁹³ In the end, Vance’s popularity, with the help of Holden, was no match for William Johnston and the Confederate party. Throughout the state, citizens had become too disenchanted by Confederate policies and recent military blunders. The election resulted in a landslide victory for Vance. Of all the soldiers in the army who voted, Vance received sixty-six percent of their vote. Among North Carolinians as a whole, Vance received seventy-three percent of the votes cast.¹⁹⁴ Mirroring the rest of the state, Western North Carolinians demonstrated heavy support for Vance. In Appalachia, Johnson only carried twenty-three percent of the popular vote (see tab. 3).¹⁹⁵ Vance would carry every Western North Carolina County except Mecklenburg County, which was home to his opponent.¹⁹⁶ After the success of Vance, the Confederate party would no longer play a significant role in North Carolina politics. Following the 1862 gubernatorial race and the collapse of the Confederate party, the Conservative movement would become the only vibrant party in North Carolina.

¹⁹² McKinney, *North Carolina’s Civil War Governor and Gilded Age Leader*, 104.

¹⁹³ Mobley, *War Governor of the South*, 30.

¹⁹⁴ Kruman, *Parties and Politics in North Carolina, 1836-1865*, 237.

¹⁹⁵ “Official Vote for Governor” *Asheville News*. September 11, 1862.

¹⁹⁶ “Official Vote for Governor” *Asheville News*. September 11, 1862.

Table 3: 1862 Gubernatorial Election.

County	Zebulon Vance	William Johnson
Alexander	749	115
Allegany	227	12
Ashe	648	15
Buncombe	1,323	274
Burke	886	239
Catawba	605	555
Caldwell	838	40
Cherokee	NA	NA
Cleveland	523	575
Gaston	379	427
Haywood	NA	NA
Henderson	1,208	82
Iredell	1,544	161
Jackson	604	117
Lincoln	605	367
Macon	NA	NA
Madison	619	165
Mecklenburg	425	1,325
McDowell	728	104
Polk	NA	NA
Rutherford	1,147	257
Surry	658	204
Watauga	423	62
Wilkes	1,615	76
Yadkin	714	185
Yancey	1,172	58
	17,640	5,415

Historian Marc Kruman contends that the 1862 elections established the dominance of the Conservative party in North Carolina. The “gubernatorial election of 1862, North Carolina voters repudiated the party that had dominated the state’s politics for more than a decade. The defeat suffered by the Democrats was worse than any party had suffered over the previous two

decades.”¹⁹⁷ Following the defeat of the Confederate party, most former Democrats and Confederate party supporters began to support Vance and the Conservative movement. After backing William Johnston in the 1862 election, the *Asheville News* acknowledged their approval of Governor Vance. In a review of a Vance speech in Buncombe County, the newspaper wrote that his speech was “all that the most ardent Southern man could desire.” The paper stated that “We, in common with the large crowd present, were pleased with Gov. Vance’s speech. It was patriotic, encouraging and well timed, and is; we believe an index to a vigorous and patriotic administration of our State affairs.”¹⁹⁸ Similar to the *Asheville News*, the few Western North Carolinians who voted for William Johnston found it easy to cast their support for Governor Vance. Vance’s appeal to both North Carolina and the Confederacy made him an acceptable governor for both the Conservatives and Confederates in North Carolina. One staunch secessionist who had been opposed to Vance’s election changed his opinion of the governor after hearing his inaugural address. In a letter to Governor Vance, Toliver Davis stated, “Although we have not agreed heretofore in Politics, your speech at Raleigh was all I could have desired, and I feel it my duty to give you whatever influence and support to your administration my influence can permit.” Davis also spoke of his hope that Vance’s Governorship could secure the loyalties of those citizens not overly enthusiastic about Confederate independence. Davis stated that he hoped that Vance could “arouse” those who “have been lukewarm in the Cause and make them active. I hope your Action will have the effect to unite us all as one.”¹⁹⁹ Toliver’s statement

¹⁹⁷ Kruman, *Parties and Politics in North Carolina, 1836-1865*, 249.

¹⁹⁸ “Editorial” *Asheville News*, August 28, 1863.

¹⁹⁹ Toliver Davis to Zebulon Vance, September 11, 1862. Zebulon Baird Vance Papers. NCDA.

reveals how loyalties in Western North Carolina were varied, and some citizens may have been only partial to the idea of a Confederate independence.

With the collapse of their opposition, the Conservative movement would soon become prone to internal fissures. Marc Kruman contends that “It is in the context of the demise of the Democratic party that the growing divisions in the Conservative party must be viewed.” He explained that the division among Conservatives did not threaten the success of the party itself. He continues that if “the Democrats had remained a viable opposition, the only way the Conservatives would have attained success would have been through unity. With the Democrats dead at the state level and in most parts of the state, Conservatives could afford interparty squabbling and division.” With only themselves to compete against, the Conservative party would slowly begin to burst at the seams. The division in the party would fall along two lines, William Holden and Governor Vance. Both Holden and Vance would argue in 1864 that they were the true Conservative party candidate. Despite their shared claims, they had quite different plans for North Carolina.²⁰⁰

William Holden and Zebulon Vance were men of completely different upbringings. Whereas Vance was born into a prestigious family, Holden was born out of wedlock in 1818 in Orange County, North Carolina. Growing up in poverty, Holden had no formal education; however he did begin an apprenticeship at the age of ten working for the local newspaper, the *Hillsborough Recorder*. After his apprenticeship, Holden bounced around the state working with various different papers. In 1841, Holden received his license to practice law, and slowly became affluent among local Democratic and Whig party leaders in Raleigh. By 1843, Holden would

²⁰⁰ Kruman, *Parties and Politics in North Carolina, 1836-1865*, 249; 252.

accept the position as editor of the *North Carolina Standard*, the Democratic Party organ. Holden would go on to become a powerful party organizer for the Democrats until the secession crisis began.²⁰¹ Throughout the secession crisis, Holden held firm to his Unionist ties, which alienated him from the Democratic Party. In the early summer of 1860, he boasted that “no reason exist why North Carolina should contemplate at this time dissolution of the Union.” However prominent this opinion may have been among his Whig counterparts, the Democrats did not think highly of his Unionist sentiments. In the fall of 1860, “Holden’s pro-Union stand brought immediate retribution upon him, for when the state legislature convened in November, it replaced him as state printer.” With the divorce of Holden and his Democrat allies, he would begin to align himself with the Whigs, where his Unionist feelings were welcomed. On November 30, 1860, he would take part in a Unionist rally with then Congressman Zebulon Vance. However, after the events surrounding Fort Sumter, Holden like the rest of the Unionist holdouts accepted secession. As a state delegate to North Carolina’s secession convention, Holden signed the state’s ordinance of secession on May 20, 1861.²⁰²

After Vance’s victory over William Johnston, Vance rewarded Holden for his loyalty by reinstating as the state editor. Initially “the relationship between the new governor and Holden was a close one. The *North Carolina Standard* supported administrative policy, and Holden served as an advisor whose counsel Vance sought.” But this relationship would be short lived.²⁰³ As the harshness of the war intensified and suffering of North Carolina citizens increased, Holden began to radicalize his views on the war. As “discontent with the war grew, Holden

²⁰¹ Horace W. Raper, *William Holden: North Carolina’s Political Enigma*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985): 3-4; 9-10.

²⁰² Raper, *William Holden: North Carolina’s Political Enigma*, 36-37.

²⁰³ Raper, *William Holden: North Carolina’s Political Enigma*, 48.

reflected and encouraged it with a shift in his position toward the attainment of peace.”²⁰⁴ Giving counsel to Vance, Holden argued that North Carolina should begin unilateral peace discussions with the North. Vance on the other hand disagreed, contending that any discussions of peace could only be made on the terms of peace with independence. Additionally, Vance countered that North Carolina could not act unilaterally; only Richmond could decide whether an honorable peace should be pursued. Horace W. Raper explains that after having “failed to gain Vance’s acceptance of his ideas,” Holden “turned his thoughts to ways of ending Vance’s career and replacing him with someone who could be more amenable to his own plans.”²⁰⁵ Turning to his newspaper, Holden attempted to gain the support of North Carolinians. Knowing that many North Carolinians were disaffected with recent military setbacks in addition to the Conscription Act, Holden tried to rally the people around him. In an editorial, Holden argued that the “power to make war and the power to make peace is lodged with the Confederate government. We advocate the exercise of the peace making as well as the war-making power, and we do so in strict accordance with the Constitution itself.” His willingness to negotiate with the United States for peace created a divide within the Conservative party. Through his paper, Holden began to advocate for communities in North Carolina to conduct peace meetings, which many communities began doing. As Holden began to construct a peace movement, the battles lines of the 1864 gubernatorial race would be drawn.²⁰⁶

By early 1864 a minority of Conservatives led by Holden had been advocating for peace meetings in the state for many months. However, as the war entered a third year, he raised the

²⁰⁴ Kruman, *Parties and Politics in North Carolina, 1836-1865*, 250.

²⁰⁵ Raper, *William Holden: North Carolina’s Political Enigma*, 46.

²⁰⁶ Anonymous, “Who are the Traitors?” *The North Carolina Standard* (Raleigh), August 5, 1863.

stakes when he asked for the coordination of a state convention to discuss the possibility of peace with the United States. Governor Vance and the majority of the Conservative party were opposed to any mention of peace that did not come with honorable independence. Marc Kruman explains that the promotion of a peace convention by Holden was the final blow that divided the Conservative party: “The split in the Conservative party over the convention question broadened into open political warfare in March, 1864, when William Holden announced himself as a gubernatorial candidate opposed to the reelection of Governor Vance.”²⁰⁷ Holden spoke out against the opponents within his party and their opposition to peace meetings and the convention when he stated that it “may be true that these meetings are injurious to the common cause, though it must be confessed I cannot perceive what harm there is in attempting to negotiate peace, while fighting for it”²⁰⁸ The 1864 gubernatorial election in North Carolina in many ways can be interpreted as a referendum on the war. Citizens and soldiers of North Carolina were allowed to make a choice on whether they would like to fight for their independence or to open discussions for peace, and possibly reconstruction.

Holden’s decision to advocate peace negotiations and run for governor emerged after North Carolinians began to express discontent over the way the war was being fought. A large portion of Holden’s support derived from citizens who had suffered from violence or were without food and had received little or no relief from Confederate authorities in the region. With the fall of East Tennessee and the simultaneous rise in the demand for Confederate troops, Western North Carolina became increasingly vulnerable to attacks from deserters, Yankee raids,

²⁰⁷ Kruman, *Parties and Politics in North Carolina, 1836-1865*, 261.

²⁰⁸ Anonymous, “The Peace Convention and Governor Vance” *The North Carolina Standard* (Raleigh), September 9, 1863.

and Unionist bands. John Inscoe notes that by late 1863, the “ineffectiveness of the Confederate military was brought home to residents of Western North Carolina.” He concludes that the “inability of the Confederate army to defend mountain residents or maintain order in the highlands further undermined civilian morale in the region.”²⁰⁹ One Asheville correspondent reported to the *Western Democrat* that “citizens of this section have suffered enormously within the last twelve months.” The author continued that “Scarcely a week has passed that has not witnessed the robbery of some poor soldiers family, or the murder of a good soldier or citizen. Several families have been so thoroughly robbed that actual suffering and almost starvation has been the consequence.” As the increase in famine and violence spread throughout Western North Carolina, the loyalties of many citizens would be tested. Although many Appalachian men and women would endure the hardships of the conflict and stay loyal to the Confederacy, others would begin to lose faith in the cause. Loyalties in the region would be severely tested and some would decide that the suffering and hardships of the war were not worth the price of Confederate independence.

At a public meeting in Buncombe County, an undesignated amount of citizens stated that “we are tired of this desolating, ruinous war, and will vote for no man to represent us in any form who will not publicly pledge himself to make use of the first, and all the means in his power to bring about a reconciliation between the contending parties.”²¹⁰ Throughout Western North Carolina, some communities began to openly discuss their willingness to see a peaceful end to the war. These Western North Carolina citizens throughout 1863 and 1864 would be vocal and outspoken over their intentions to bring about an end to the conflict. In September 1863, one

²⁰⁹ Inscoe, *The Heart of Confederate Appalachia*, 157.

²¹⁰ “Public Meeting in Buncombe County” *North Carolina Standard* (Raleigh), August 26, 1863.

group of Western North Carolinians stated that “we are in favor of an immediate cessation of hostilities, and of holding a Convention jointly by the two governments for the purpose of negotiating a peace alike to both sections.”²¹¹ These citizens represented a significant portion of Holden’s base of support, who had given up faith in the Confederate Government. These civilians’ willingness to seek reunion with the North reveals how some Western North Carolinians’ by the middle of the war had abandoned hopes for Confederate independence. The military defeats and the rising death toll persuaded them that the Confederacy was not feasible.

By early 1863 Holden’s newspaper would become North Carolina’s organ for those who wished for immediate peace and an end to the conflict. One individual from Transylvania County wrote to Holden during the campaign, “We up this way, like yourself, desire peace, but are fearful that fighting will never bring it. We are among those who have always believed that every blow stricken in this fight made it worse.”²¹² Similar sentiments were expressed in a Watauga County meeting where an unidentified number of citizens stated that “we deem it our duty as freemen of North Carolina to meet in public council and express our views in regard to the policy of further prosecuting this bloody and inhuman war.” The group concluded that “peace cannot be restored merely by fighting. This we think is now apparent to all.”²¹³ Holden’s promise that he would open peace negotiations attracted many Western North Carolinians who were no longer willing to fight for the Confederacy.

In addition to promising an end to the war, Holden was hailed by many to be North Carolina’s defender against a tyrannical central government. Holden’s frequent critiques of the

²¹¹ “Public Meeting at Blue Ridge” *North Carolina Standard* (Raleigh), September 2, 1863.

²¹² “Public Sentiment” *North Carolina Standard* (Raleigh), March 25, 1863.

²¹³ “Public Meeting in Watauga County” *North Carolina Standard* (Raleigh), September 2, 1863.

Confederate government in Richmond attracted many Western North Carolinians who saw the Davis administration as a growing military despotism. By early 1863, many citizens had become unhappy with the increasing power of the Confederate government. A significant portion of Appalachian citizens expressed outrage over President Davis's decision to suspend *Habeas Corpus* and the lack of North Carolina leadership within the Confederacy. Although North Carolina was sending more troops into battle than any other Confederate state excluding Virginia, few North Carolinians were rising up within the ranks of the Confederacy. Additionally many Western North Carolinians looked upon Davis's suspension of *Habeas Corpus* as a direct attack on Holden and the *North Carolina Standard* in an effort to quell his criticism over the war.²¹⁴ In addition to this, the appointment of officers from other states to be in charge of North Carolina troops added to the appearance that Richmond and Davis were encroaching upon North Carolina's sovereignty.

At a peace meeting in Wilkes County, the attendees stated, "That we regard the policy of the Confederate government in its disregard of the habeas corpus act, and in appointing physicians and other officers over North Carolinians as an indignity offered to the citizens of North Carolina to which they should never submit; and we therefore demand their removal, and North Carolinians alone hold officers in and over North Carolinians."²¹⁵ When a North Carolina officer injured in combat was replaced by an officer from another state, an anonymous soldier wrote a letter to the *Standard* stating, "When the commandant of our Camp of Instruction was disabled, by wounds received in gallant service, from discharging his duties, his place was

²¹⁴ Inscoe, *The Heart of Confederate Appalachia*, 160.

²¹⁵ Anonymous, "Public Meeting in Wilkes County" *North Carolina Standard* (Raleigh), September 9, 1863.

supplied not by a North Carolinian [...] but by a native of another state—a foreigner.”²¹⁶ At a meeting of Yadkin County citizens, the participants resolved that “we do not intend to submit any longer to the gross insults to North Carolina, from the Confederate government at Richmond in the appointment of officers from other states to offices in North Carolina”²¹⁷ These Western North Carolinians wanted their soldiers to be led and cared for by fellow North Carolinians. Furthermore, their resistance to non-native officers within their state underlines the fact that North Carolinians were concerned over what they perceived to be the constricting of their sovereignty by the Confederate Government.

One particular controversy over appointments sparked outrage among many North Carolinians. The Confederate government placed a Virginian in charge of collecting taxes for North Carolina. For Western North Carolinians this act by Davis only added to their suspicion that Richmond was growing too strong. John Inscoe notes that although it may have been in reality a minor issue, the protesting of a Virginia native as the tax collector for North Carolina “served as a symbolic means of protesting Davis’s administration of the war effort.” Although this appointment did not greatly change or affect the lives of North Carolinians, “the unpopularity of the Richmond government was clearly one of the most important motivating forces behind the meetings.”²¹⁸ At a gathering of citizens in Buncombe County, the group resolved that “we do protest against the appointment of a man from Virginia or any other State to collect the tithes in North Carolina.” These citizens concluded that “we know North Carolina has men possessed of every qualification to fill that office and that we will pay our tithes to no man,

²¹⁶ Anonymous, “The Peace Convention and Governor Vance” *North Carolina Standard* (Raleigh), September 9, 1863.

²¹⁷ Anonymous, “Public Meeting in Yadkin County” *North Carolina Standard* (Raleigh), August 26, 1863.

²¹⁸ Inscoe, *The Heart of Confederate Appalachia*, 153.

save a North Carolinian”²¹⁹ For these Appalachian citizens, Holden was viewed as the only hope in curbing the growing power of the Davis administration. For those Western North Carolinians whose loyalty to the Confederacy had been severely strained, Holden’s promises of peace negotiations and the restoration of civil authority was met with enthusiasm and support.

For many Western North Carolinians, Holden’s promise of peace negotiations meant an end to the war, but it also represented an end to the conscription law. From its first inception, Holden had been vehemently opposed to the conscription laws. In early 1863 Holden stated, “North Carolina has never acquiesced in the principle of conscription, and never will. She regards it as unconstitutional, despotic and dangerous to liberty.” On occasions, Holden would often cater to his Appalachian supporters by bringing to light the devastating effects conscription was having on the region: “we honestly believe that it would be unwise, unjust, and deeply injurious to North Carolina to enforce those laws, especially in our Western Counties, where there are comparatively no slaves, and where their overflowing patriotism has nearly emptied them of fighting or working men.”²²⁰ As chapter three revealed, Western North Carolina communities had become drained of able bodied men to work and protect the home front. Many citizens in the mountains recognized that if Holden won the 1864 race one of his first orders of business would be to suspend conscription of North Carolina citizens. Many in the mountains became frustrated with watching as their communities increasingly sent away older men and those at home became worse off. The attendees of an August 26, 1863, peace meeting in Buncombe County expressed the plight of many Western North Carolinians when they complained that “the President having called upon this State for the conscripts of forty to forty

²¹⁹ Anonymous, “Public Meeting in Buncombe County” *North Carolina Standard* (Raleigh), August 26, 1863.

²²⁰ Anonymous, “The Conscription” *North Carolina Standard* (Raleigh), January 7, 1863.

five, we deem it unjust to the best interest of the State that any more troops be furnished until their just quota of men.”²²¹ These citizens felt that North Carolina had done its part for the Confederacy, but as the need for men increased many in the mountains became vocal about their disdain for conscription and Richmond’s heavy handed policies.

Throughout his campaign, Holden kept his plans for peace broad and unclear; however he was adamant that reconstruction of the Union was not his objective. Holden understood that while some of his supporters were ardent Unionists, many others wanted peace but still viewed the North as an enemy. Therefore, Holden was forced to keep the details for his plans for peace imprecise in an effort not to push away any of his supporters. The varied views held by Holden’s supporters reveal how disloyalty was not the same among everyone. While some citizens wanted to rejoin the Union, others simply wanted a cease-fire between the North and South. A significant portion of his base still viewed the North as an enemy and did not desire to rejoin the United States. Holden’s more moderate base of supporters were vocal that they wanted to hold a peace convention, but did not appear to want a reunion with the North. One group of North Carolinians stated that “it is perfectly clear to the minds of all sensible people that this war can never be settled by the sword.” These citizens stated that they wanted a convention to discuss the possibility of peace with the North, but “it is the least of our intention to give aid and comfort to the enemy; and we would here urge our soldiers the duty they have sworn to perform. Stand by your colors, while your friends at home tender the olive branch of peace.”²²² These citizens, unlike Holden’s more extreme Unionist supporters, were not willing to totally end all fighting

²²¹ Anonymous, “Public Meeting in Buncombe County,” *North Carolina Standard* (Raleigh), August 26, 1863.

²²² This public meeting occurred in Chatham County, which is in the North Carolina Piedmont, but it is representative of how many Holden supporters in Western North Carolina may have felt. “Public Meeting in Chatham County” *North Carolina Standard* (Raleigh), February 17, 1864.

with the North. However, they did want to open peace negotiations with the United States while simultaneously fighting.

Shortly before election day Holden insisted, “We want no submission, we want no subjugation, we want no more war if it be possible to stop it, but we want peace.”²²³ Because of Holden’s encouragement of peace meetings and his promotion of a peace convention, he was branded as a Unionist by his opponents. Despite his insistence that he did not want reconstruction of the Union, few North Carolinians believed that Holden did not want a reunion with the North. John Inscoe explains that “Confederate party members and moderate Conservatives led by Governor Vance were appalled by calls for a convention to negotiate peace.”²²⁴ As Holden’s peace campaign slowly grew momentum, many Conservatives throughout the state would strike back against his calls for peace. Competing newspapers would lash out at Holden and the *Standard* for his positions. In Western North Carolina, some communities would begin to isolate and speak out against citizens who advocated peace. Well before Holden announced his candidacy for governor, many citizens and soldiers in Western North Carolina rejected Holden’s calls for peace negotiations. His constant critiques of the Confederacy and the Davis Administration sparked skepticism over Holden’s loyalties among Conservative North Carolinians. Holden’s newspaper was soon labeled as a traitor’s paper. Holden’s opponents would claim that they were advocates of peace as well; however they only desired a peace that would accompany Confederate independence.²²⁵

²²³ Anonymous, “How is Peace to be Obtained” *North Carolina Standard* (Raleigh), July 27, 1864.

²²⁴ Inscoe, *The Heart of Confederate Appalachia*, 153.

²²⁵ Kruman, *Parties and Politics in North Carolina, 1836-1865*, 262.

Although most Western North Carolinians desperately wanted peace, many were quick to deny any prospect of peace which did not accompany independence. One anonymous letter from Buncombe County was published in an August 31, 1863, copy of the *Spirit of the Age*. The author claimed to speak for many in the county when he or she stated “No peace with our enemies except on the basis of complete independence of the Southern Confederacy.” The author continued that the morale of the people in Buncombe County was good, except for a few who had been influenced by a certain “Tory Paper,” most likely referring to the *North Carolina Standard*.²²⁶ In a September 1863 article, the editor of the *Western Democrat* spoke directly to Holden and his supporters when he stated that “those in the South who are holding peace meetings are entirely mistaken if they suppose they can get peace by compromise or reunion with the yankee nation.” The editor stated that everyone in the in North Carolina was desperate for peace, but only a “complete separation from the North will secure this, therefore we urge union and harmony among our people and liberal support of the Government in order that the war may be prosecuted with vigor and determination, and that the enemy may be convinced that the Southern people will never submit.”²²⁷ In another article, the *Spirit of the Age* attacked Holden and his supporters when it stated “the only hope of having peace at all, is in conquering it. No paper resolutions, no proposals, no conference, will be of any avail to save lives, liberty, and property, unless forced at the point of bayonet.”²²⁸ Throughout North Carolina, the majority of newspapers, citizens and soldiers would vehemently oppose any discussion of peace or compromise with the North. In Western North Carolina, many citizens would respond to peace

²²⁶ Anonymous, “Letter from Buncombe” *Spirit of Age* (Raleigh), August 31, 1863.

²²⁷ Anonymous, “Mistaken” *Western Democrat* (Mecklenburg), September 22, 1863.

²²⁸ Anonymous, “Movements for Peace” *Spirit of Age* (Raleigh), August 17, 1863.

meetings by coming together in their own meetings, and passing resolutions, declaring loyalty to the Confederate cause and their opposition to peace without independence.

At one public meeting in Union County, a “large portion of the citizens” published their opposition to peace proposals and the possibility of reconstruction. The citizens at the meeting resolved that they “utterly loath the idea of submission to or fraternizing with a people who have murdered our sons and brothers, devastated the fairest portion of our country.” This underlines how the harshness of war did not weaken their resolve, but strengthened it. The deaths of their brothers and sons at the hands of the enemy solidified and strengthened their Confederate identity, polarizing any mention of reconciliation with the United States. In another resolution they addressed the topic of peace, “we sincerely desire peace we say with a full appreciation of the responsibilities we assume, and of the character of the contest in all its bearings, that we desire it only on terms of a complete and final separation from our enemies politically, socially and otherwise.”²²⁹ As peace advocates had become more outspoken against the war, Appalachia witnessed “a strong reaction by the Southern nationalists in the mountains.”²³⁰ These Union County citizens wanted to see an end to the war, but like a majority Western North Carolina communities, they were unwilling to accept a peace that did not accompany full independence of the Confederacy.

Aside from calling their own meetings, loyal citizens also attended peace meetings and disrupted them. Throughout Western North Carolina, loyal citizens lashed out against their neighbors who called for meetings to discuss peace negotiations. One citizen from Gaston

²²⁹ “Confederate Meeting in Union County” *Western Democrat* (Charlotte), September 22, 1863.

²³⁰ Inscoe, *The Heart of Confederate Appalachia*, 154.

County wrote the editor of the *Western Democrat* and informed him that a peace meeting in their county failed after large crowds converged. He explained that “The proposed ‘public meeting’ in Gaston county, to agitate for a Convention, was a dead failure [...] a crowd gathered at Dallas, more than two-thirds of which was utterly opposed to holding the meeting.” The author of the letter concluded that “Gaston county has done her share nobly in this war, and her true citizens have determined that she shall not be disgraced by a few disloyal, factious spirits.”²³¹ This letter reveals that despite being the minority, proponents of peace movement still challenged the loyal status quo in Gaston County when they tried to conduct a peace meeting. At another peace meeting in Greensboro, North Carolina, citizens grew so hostile that the speaker could not put up any resolution to a vote. The writer boasted that “the crowd cheered, hissed, screamed and applauded in such a manner that every effort to be heard or to organize was utterly in vain. The resolutions could not be read. The crowd used all kinds of abusive and ridiculous epithets rendering the appearance of the supreme speaker ludicrous.” The author continued that the majority of the community abhorred any mention of peace that did not come with independence. He concluded that “The whole town seems to feel indignant at their course, and would like to see them suffer for their attempt to get up a traitor meeting.”²³² Attempts to establish peace meetings in both Gaston County and Greensboro reveal how only a small, but motivated, portion of Western North Carolina were willing to discuss plans for a peace that did not include independence. While the majority of Western North Carolina citizens were unwilling to accept peace without independence, Holden and his Appalachian followers underline a divide that existed in Western North Carolina.

²³¹ Anonymous, “Gaston County” *Western Democrat* (Charlotte) February 9, 1864.

²³² Anonymous, “The Greensboro Peace Meeting” *Western Democrat* (Charlotte) February 9, 1864.

Table 4: 1864 Gubernatorial Election.

County	Zebulon Vance	William Holden
Alexander	311	183
Allegany	NA	NA
Ash	492	25
Buncombe	833	216
Burke	665	156
Catawba	876	41
Caldwell	541	84
Cherokee	167	6
Cleveland	1,049	152
Gaston	448	203
Haywood	378	103
Henderson	535	314
Iredell	1,065	93
Jackson	275	71
Lincoln	557	104
Macon	312	78
Madison	279	45
Mecklenburg	1,708	113
McDowell	NA	NA
Polk	146	91
Rutherford	778	378
Surry	448	331
Watauga	266	79
Wilkes	442	548
Yadkin	NA	NA
Yancey	336	39
	12,907	3,453

Unfortunately for Holden and his supporters, the 1864 governor’s race resulted in a landslide victory for Governor Vance. Holden would lose every Appalachian county, except for Wilkes County, in which he only defeated Vance by approximately 100 hundred votes. In Western North Carolina, Holden only won a meager twenty-one percent of the popular vote. (see tab. 4). The voting pattern in the mountains nearly mirrored the statewide results, where Holden only garnered nineteen percent of the vote. Of the 72,561 North Carolinians who voted, Vance defeated Holden by a margin of 43,579 votes.²³³ As the results demonstrate, only a minority of Western North Carolinians and North Carolinians in general would cast their ballots for the

²³³ “Official Vote for Governor” *North Carolina Standard* (Raleigh), August 24, 1862

Conservative Peace candidate. However the success of Holden in Wilkes County reveals that Appalachia was not completely uniform in its sentiments towards the war. Some counties such as Wilkes were likely experiencing a more significant level of disaffection with the war. But overall, most of Western North Carolina was solidified in its choice to reelect Vance. Although Holden commanded a devout and vocal following in the mountains, they proved to be far too small. In the face of heavy campaigning on the part of Governor Vance, Holden was unable to successfully build upon his base. John Inscoe contends that Holden “won only Wilkes County in the mountains, and even here his margin of victory was very slight. The peace movement in western North Carolina had been out campaigned and crushed in the climatic election of the war.”²³⁴ Although most North Carolinians had become dissatisfied with the war, “they rejected the alternative of returning to the old Union, where the Lincoln administration had, as they saw it, snuffed out all liberty.”²³⁵ The 1864 governor’s race can be viewed as a referendum on the conflict. Highlanders went to the polls and overwhelmingly voted to reelect Governor Zebulon Vance. In doing so, they voted to continue the war until the North accepted Confederate independence.

Despite the devastating loss for Holden and the peace movement; the 1864 election did not quell the dissent and disaffection existent among some in Western North Carolina. Unfortunately for Vance, his victory coincided with military setbacks in the region; bringing more starvation and violence to the citizens living in the mountains. In a letter to Governor Vance anonymously signed by “a poor woman of North Carolina” the author pleaded for the governor to end the war and send all the soldiers back home. In her early January 1865 letter,

²³⁴ Inscoe, *The Heart of Confederate Appalachia*, 163.

²³⁵ Kruman, *Parties and Politics in North Carolina, 1836-1865*, 265.

she requested that “for the sake of suffering women and children [...] stop this cruel war.” The author continued, “my husband has been killed, and if they all stay till they are killed what in the name of God will become of us poor women and children.”²³⁶ Throughout Western North Carolina, some civilians similar to this anonymous woman had by late in the war become desperate for peace on any terms. This woman was likely a loyal Confederate at the beginning of the war, but the loss of her husband and the starvation of her family over time wore away her loyalties. For some, the price of Confederate independence was by early 1865 too high.

In the last two years of the war, violence and starvation in the region would increase, placing an even greater strain on morale in Appalachia. After the failed attempt to retake Knoxville in late 1863 and early 1864, Confederate forces permanently retired from East Tennessee for the remainder of the war. From that point on, Western North Carolina would be unprotected from Union military campaigns. In April 1864, J.K. Sass notified H.N. Bohman, the Chief Magistrate of South Carolina that the withdrawal of Longstreet’s army from East Tennessee had opened “all of Western North Carolina, Northeastern Georgia, and Northwestern South Carolina to incursions of the enemy, and I know of no troops or even local organization to oppose them.” With no protection from the enemy, Confederate morale in the region would continue to falter, by 1864, many of those on the home front would become disillusioned with the war. But disaffection with the war was not equally distributed in Appalachia. Although all counties experienced violence, border counties often bore the brunt of much of the attacks in Appalachia. John Inscoe explains that in “many instances, proximity to the Tennessee border

²³⁶ Anonymous, letter to Zebulon Baird Vance, January 10, 1865. Zebulon Baird Vance Papers. NCDA.

shaped a community's proclivities toward Federal loyalty." Inscoe continued that a "stronger Unionist sentiment" often existed in the remote sections of many border counties.²³⁷

One soldier serving near the Tennessee border in Western North Carolina wrote to Vance proclaiming that "I am fully satisfied that some of them have been encouraging desertion and have gone under with the disloyal sentiment with at least one half of the people of the county." The Captain told Governor Vance that if he could not supply him with more troops, the county's food supply for the winter would be in danger of destruction by the Yankees, "I think for the protection of this county some regular troops ought to be sent to Watuga and Ashe Counties immediately, and I urge that it be done." He warned Vance that "if the Raiders or Yankees come down in this Valley they will ruin and desolate all the homes of all good citizens that have stood against the Tories."²³⁸ In the last year of the war, violence and military operations in Western North Carolina overwhelmed the regular and home guard troops. John Inscoe notes, "The last nine months of the Civil War in western North Carolina thoroughly disrupted the traditional society that had been constructed there. Towns, neighborhoods, and even families had been torn asunder by economic deprivation and the violence brought on by both formal military organizations and ad hoc bands of terrorists."²³⁹ For Western North Carolinians, late 1864 and 1865 would bring about a new wave of military incursions that would devastate the region. A January, 1865 raid led an Indiana Calvary Regiment would cut through much of the mountain counties before finally turning back into East Tennessee unscathed. Unfortunately this attack

²³⁷ J.K. Sass to M. L. Bonham, April 20, 1864, *Official Records*, ser. 1, vol. 53, 328; Inscoe, *The Heart of Confederate Appalachia*, 94.

²³⁸ S.A. Sharpe to Zebulon Baird Vance, September 11, 1864. Zebulon Baird Vance Papers. NCDA. Although this letter was written shortly before the 1864 Gubernatorial election, it remains to be a good description of the violence and famine that would continue to exist on the home front after the election.

²³⁹ Inscoe, *The Heart of Confederate Appalachia*, 264.

precipitated a much larger cavalry offensive led by George H. Stoneman that would destroy factories, depots, farms and homes. After Stoneman's raid, Appalachia would be thoroughly ransacked, with little sustenance left for the survival of a war wearied populace.²⁴⁰

The military raids into Western North Carolina were largely successful in destroying food and war-making material throughout the region. Despite the Confederate defeats and failures to defend the mountain communities, many loyal citizens showed uncommon valor in the face of an overwhelming enemy. When Stoneman's cavalry invaded Watauga County in 1865, the Home Guard attempted to defend the town of Boone. Although most home guard troops only fired one or two volleys before retreating, one fifteen year old held his ground. Steel Frazier managed to shoot and kill two of Stoneman's men before retreating into the woods nearby.²⁴¹ In her study on Yadkin County during the Civil War, Frances H. Casstevens detailed another incident of rebel defiance and bravery in the face of the enemy. According to Casstevens, a detail of Union soldiers under Stoneman's command approached the home of Catherine Reece with the intent to pillage the property. When the soldiers attempted to take the family mule, Reece stood in front of the animal proclaiming, "Kill me, if you want, that's the only way you'll get my mule." Taking her claim seriously, Casstevens notes that the soldier in charge "ordered his men to leave her and her mule alone."²⁴²

Although few Western North Carolinians on the home front would have demonstrated the bravery that Frazier or Mrs. Reece did, hardly anyone embraced the arrival of the Yankees.

Western North Carolinians on the home front may not have fought until the last man, but most

²⁴⁰ John G. Barrett. *The Civil War in North Carolina*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1963), 365.

²⁴¹ Barrett, *The Civil War in North Carolina*, 351.

²⁴² Casstevens, *The Civil War in Yadkin County, North Carolina*, 98.

citizens still felt disdain for the conquering Union armies. In her recent work on Sherman's march through the Carolinas, Jacqueline Glass Campbell notes that "what Sherman and his men anticipated as Unionism was not an accurate definition of the spirit of most North Carolinians [...] discontent with their government did not *equate* to lack of faith in the Confederate nation. Dissension and resistance were frequently attempts to negotiate an equitable distribution of the burdens of war rather than expression of disloyalty."²⁴³ While many Western North Carolinians were vocal about their dissatisfaction with the war, few of them were willing to embrace their Union invaders.

Throughout the war, only a very small minority of Western North Carolina men chose to join the Union army. Statewide only 3,156 (three percent) of North Carolinians between the ages of twenty and forty-nine fought for the Union army. According to Terrell Garren, the total number of Appalachians who joined the Union army was 1,636 men, five percent of the male population.²⁴⁴ The low number of Union enlistments in Appalachia and throughout the state shows that although many were disloyal, only a small portion of that number were willing to join the Union and fight against their neighbors. Gordon McKinney's study of 261 letters requesting pardon written by Western North Carolinians to President Andrew Johnson provides insight into Confederate loyalty within the region. Although Johnson intended to punish the Southern elite after the war, McKinney reveals that most of "Johnson's correspondents from Western North Carolina were much less elite than the president had anticipated [...]. The vast majority of the applicants, however, were residents of western North Carolina who held minor civil offices in

²⁴³ Jacqueline Glass Campbell, *When Sherman Marched North From the Sea: Resistance on the Home Front*, 76.

²⁴⁴ Current, *Lincoln Loyalist*, 73; Garren, *Mountain Myth: Unionism in Western North Carolina*, 6. University of Virginia. "Historical Census Browser," University of Virginia Library, <http://mapserver.lib.virginia.edu/php/county.php>.

the Confederate government, primarily with the postal service and as local tax collectors.” One would imagine that a citizen being forced to write a letter requesting pardon; he or she would want to downplay their involvement within the Confederacy, or even state that they were Unionists throughout the war. Only fifty-four letter writers state that they were Unionists before and during the war, and forty-two writers claimed to be neutral throughout the conflict. In contrast, ninety-nine letters proclaim that they were loyal Confederates during the course of the war. Of these ninety-nine letters, forty-one writers admit that they were pro-secessionist before North Carolina left the Union. There were an additional sixty-six letters where the authors provide no information on whether they were loyal Confederates, Unionists, or impartial. However, these sixty-six writers were likely loyal Confederates who did not want to admit to being so, due to fear that they may be punished. McKinney notes that they “simply admitted to assisting the Confederacy and requested a pardon. It is tempting to conclude that these were people who welcomed the Confederacy and had no unionist loyalties to report.” McKinney’s study reveals that only a minority of Western North Carolinians were Unionists during the war, while the majority was loyal Confederates. However, his finding that forty-two letters state they were neutral demonstrates how some Western North Carolinians were impartial to the Confederacy and the Union. This study underlines how loyalties in Western North Carolina varied greatly, while most supported the cause, many others were Unionist or neutral.²⁴⁵

In Western North Carolina, the peace movement and increased disaffection with the Confederacy rarely evolved into Appalachian men deciding to fight against the Confederacy by taking up arms with the Union. Throughout the war, even when the peace movement was at its

²⁴⁵ Gordon B. McKinney. “Layers of Loyalty: Confederate Nationalism and Amnesty Letters from Western North Carolina,” *Civil War History* 51 (Spring 2005): 11-13.

strongest, Confederate civil and military authority still operated without any serious hindrance from Unionists. John Inscoe argues that “No combination of deserters, draft evaders, and Unionists was strong enough to assume military control of any significant segment of the North Carolina mountain counties. Even after Ambrose Burnside’s army occupied Knoxville in July 1863, opposition to the war in Western North Carolina remained poorly organized and subject to repression by state and national authorities.”²⁴⁶ Confederate authority remained so well entrenched in the region largely because the majority of Western North Carolinians were loyal citizens. Few of those who supported William Holden and the peace movement were willing to go as far as joining the Union army. In reality, most Holden supporters simply wanted an end to the hostilities.

Disloyalty existed in Western North Carolina, but it must be held in context of the war itself. In a recent essay Gary Gallagher contends that “discovering such stresses in Confederate society is roughly equivalent to finding sand on a beach. Every society in every place at every time manifests class friction. The interesting question is not whether it exists, but whether it shapes events decisively.”²⁴⁷ Of the 261 letters in Gordon McKinney’s study, even those men who argued that they were Unionists still continued to support the Confederacy by doing their jobs, “These people continued to do their jobs until the end of the war and supported the Confederacy in that way. This is indeed a crucial point. The actual commitment of the individual is much less important than the actions that individual took.”²⁴⁸ From a Confederate nationalism

²⁴⁶ Inscoe, *The Heart of Confederate Appalachia*, 145.

²⁴⁷ Gary Gallagher, “Disaffection, Persistence, and Nation: Some Directions in Recent Scholarship on the Confederacy,” *Civil War History* 55 (Fall 2009): 340.

²⁴⁸ Gordon B. McKinney. “Layers of Loyalty: Confederate Nationalism and Amnesty Letters from Western North Carolina,” 20.

perspective, these individuals still supported the Confederacy by performing their appointed roles throughout the war. Although they may be held disdain for the Confederacy, their actions only benefited the Confederacy. Disloyalty in Western North Carolina is revealing of the varying levels of loyalty among Appalachian residents. However, the evidence does not show that the region was never at risk of becoming a Unionist enclave, such as was the case in East Tennessee.²⁴⁹ Unlike most East Tennesseans, Western North Carolinians believed that supporting the Confederacy served their best interest. Most disloyalty in Western North Carolina came from citizens who were only willing to dissent within the laws of the Confederate government. The 1864 election demonstrated that most protests against the Confederate government were done within the laws of the civil government. The popularity of peace meetings revealed how Western North Carolinians attempted to bring about peace through the ballot box and not through violence.

Western North Carolina citizens had varying levels of loyalty to the Confederate cause. While many, if not most, remained loyal Confederates throughout the war, others were only lukewarm or impartial to the idea of a Confederate nation. The 1864 gubernatorial race and the general increase in disloyalty throughout the region illustrates that loyalties in Western North Carolina were not polarized but changed over time. By 1863 some Western North Carolinians who had once been supportive of the war began to change their opinion and decided that they wanted to seek peaceful and quick end to the war, thus casting their votes for Holden. However, just as the degree of loyalty of citizens had varied; disloyalty and dissent in Western North Carolina was not all the same either. A significant minority of Western North Carolina citizens

²⁴⁹ Todd Groce, *Mountain Rebels*, 127.

supported Holden in the 1864 election. But as this chapter has demonstrated, Holden's supporters varied in their level of disaffection with the Confederacy. While some Western North Carolinians went so far as to join the Union army, others held more mild Union sentiments. In other words, many Holden supporters may have claimed to be Unionists, but they were not willing to join the Union army and fight against their neighbors.

CONCLUSION

By 1865, most of the South had become occupied by the Union army and it was apparent that the Confederacy had failed to achieve its independence. As the war came to a close, one unrepentant Appalachian Confederate wrote from Point Lookout,

When I commenced this diary of my life as a Confederate soldier I was full of hope for the speedy termination of the war, and our independence. I was not quite nineteen years old. I am now twenty-three. The four years that I have given to my country I do not regret, nor am I sorry for one day that I have given - my only regret is that we have lost that for which we fought. Nor do I for one moment think that we lost it by any other way than by being outnumbered at least five if not ten to one. The world was open to the enemy, but shut out to us. I shall now close this diary in sorrow, but to the last I will say that, although but a private, I still say our Cause was just, nor do I regret one thing that I have done to cripple the North.²⁵⁰

Many Western North Carolinians likely shared these sentiments. Demonstrating a strong commitment to the Confederate cause, many highlanders made tremendous sacrifices for their state and the Confederacy.

With the surrendering of Confederate General Robert E. Lee and Joseph E. Johnston, Appalachian soldiers, like Louis Leon would return to a much different looking home. In the spring of 1865, the Civil War had decimated the South. The southern efforts to conduct the war had exasperated the resources of the South, draining both state economies and the wealth of private citizens. Historian Claudia Goldin estimated that the war's direct cost to both citizens and

²⁵⁰ Louis Leon, *The Diary of a Tarheel Confederate Soldier*. (Charlotte: Stone Publishing Company, 1913), 71; This book was accessed through the University of North Carolina, *Southern Historical Collection*; University of North Carolina, "Documenting the American South: The Southern Home Front: 1861-1865." University of North Carolina Libraries, <http://docsouth.unc.edu/imls/> [accessed September 1, 2010]

state governments in the South was \$3,285,900.00.²⁵¹ In total, 260,000, thirty percent of southerners who fought for the Confederacy would not return home, leaving 85,000 women widowed and 200,000 children fatherless.²⁵² Like the South as a whole, North Carolina experienced similar devastation. In total, 40,000 men, thirty percent of the 130,000 North Carolinians who fought were killed.²⁵³ Appalachia would equally pay a high for their participation in the Civil War. The prospering region of mercantile production, tourism, and farming that existed in the spring of 1861 would be nearly destroyed by four years of warfare. Gordon McKinney notes that in Appalachia all “agricultural surplus had been consumed, and livestock herds had been decimated. The transportation infrastructure had been weakened. All investments in enslaved persons were lost with emancipation.”²⁵⁴ The desolation and destruction left by the Civil War would take decades to repair. Historian Paul Paskoff concluded that “the war inflicted severe material damage on the South that had a significant role in setting back the region’s economic growth and development.”²⁵⁵

The farming industry would especially be devastated by the war. In North Carolina, the value of farms and farming in the state would decrease by forty-five percent. Totaling a net wealth of \$143,301,065.00 in 1860, North Carolina’s farming industry dropped to a value of \$78,211,083 in 1870. In Appalachia, agricultural suffered a similar level of loss. The value of

²⁵¹ Claudia Goldin, “The Economic Cost of the American Civil War: Estimates and Implications,” *Journal of Economic History* 35 (June 1975), 308.

²⁵² Gallagher, *The Confederate War*, 28; McPherson, *Ordeal by Fire*, 576.

²⁵³ The exact number of Western North Carolinians killed during the Civil War is yet to be calculated; Lefler, *The History of a Southern State: North Carolina*, 456

²⁵⁴ Gordon McKinney, introduction to *Reconstructing Appalachia: 1865-1910*, ed. Andrew L. Slap (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2010), 1; Also see, Gordon McKinney, *Southern Mountain Republicans: 1865-1900*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1978), 1.

²⁵⁵ Paul F. Paskoff, “Measures of War: A Quantitative Examination of the Civil War’s Destructiveness in the Confederacy,” *Civil War History* 54 (March 2008), 37.

farms in Western North Carolina dropped thirty-one percent, from \$29,226,507.00 in 1860 to \$20,226,507.00 in 1870.²⁵⁶ Although manufacturing industries in Appalachia saw a twenty-three percent gain in capital investment, much of the population remained largely unaffected by its successes.²⁵⁷ With a total population of 235,347 people in 1870, manufacturing positions only accounted for 2,511 persons, approximately two percent of the population. Between 1860 and 1870, the population in Western North Carolina would increase by nearly thirty-eight percent.²⁵⁸ As a result, nearly all viable farm land would become occupied. John Inscoe explains that with the drop in agricultural prices, “mountain farmers found themselves unable to maintain their independent ownership of their land.” Throughout Appalachia many former independent farmers would be forced into tenant farmer agreements, thus losing the rights to their land. The unfortunate result throughout Appalachia was that there emerged “a large group of identifiably poor farmers and laborers throughout the region who appeared to have little hope to escape their impoverished situation.”²⁵⁹ The region which appeared to be on the verge achieving economic balance and prosperity in 1860 looked starkly different in 1870.

The choices made by Appalachians in 1861 would have lasting effects on their region for years to come. Although the battles ceased in 1865, the lingering effects of the Civil War lasted well into the twentieth century. The devastation left by the war stood as evidence to a region that

²⁵⁶ University of Virginia, “Historical Census Browser,” University of Virginia Libraries, <http://mapserver.lib.virginia.edu/php/county.php> (accessed November, 4, 2010).

²⁵⁷ University of Virginia, “Historical Census Browser,” University of Virginia Libraries, <http://mapserver.lib.virginia.edu/php/county.php> (accessed November 4, 2010).

²⁵⁸ The two percent approximation of Western North Carolinians employed in manufacturing is only estimation. Currently the database does not allow for population searches to be limited to only adult males and females. Therefore the number given accounts for the total population in Western North Carolina, including children and elderly; University of Virginia, “Historical Census Browser,” <http://mapserver.lib.virginia.edu/php/county.php> (accessed November 8, 2010).

²⁵⁹ Inscoe, *The Heart of Confederate Appalachia*, 276.

sacrificed a great deal for the Confederate cause. To those loyal Appalachian Confederates who looked back on the war, they would remember the unique bond that existed between themselves and the Confederate nation.

Throughout the Civil War, a majority of Western North Carolinians remained loyal to the Confederacy. Any understanding of how Appalachian citizens viewed their relationship to the Confederacy must be grounded in the secession crisis before the war. The secession crisis played an integral role in the shaping of Confederate nationalism in Western North Carolina. Initially, most Appalachian citizens tried to avoid secession and war, believing that time and patience would lead to a peaceful reconciliation between the regions. In both the presidential election in the fall of 1861, and the state convention vote in February of 1861, most Western North Carolinians expressed their desire to stay in the Union. The presidential election results in North Carolina showed that the Constitutional Unionist candidate John Bell was only narrowly defeated by Democrat and pro-secessionist candidate John Breckinridge. In the mountains, citizens were equally as divided over the two candidates, where Unionists showed a strong output to for Bell. Three months later, Western North Carolinians directly addressed the secession crisis when they were permitted to vote on whether to have a secession convention. The majority of Western North Carolinians voted against hosting a secession convention. By March of 1861 it was apparent that highlanders were not going to accept secession until that time most Appalachian citizens had resisted the persuasion of secessionist within North Carolina. However, their long defense of Unionism would soon fall to the wayside in favor to the Confederacy. The Lincoln administration's reaction to Fort Sumter ended virtually all Unionist sentiment in Appalachia, and replaced it with a surge of Confederate patriotism. Western North

Carolinians were outraged over the United States' call for troops to invade the Southern Confederacy. The late date of secession in North Carolina left no doubt among Western North Carolinians that they exhausted all efforts to avoid secession. In other words, they left the Union believing that the war was thrown upon them from the North.²⁶⁰

For most, the complex and layered national identity that was created shortly after Fort Sumter was powerful enough to weather the conflict. Their will to endure was largely fueled by the distinct characteristics that made up their identity. The understanding that they were fighting to protect their homes and communities was a strong incentive to fight. Appalachians believed that fighting for the Confederacy was the best means to protect their families. But this perception was reinforced by underlying concepts of revolutionary patriotism, religion, and slavery. Looking back to their ancestors, many Appalachian Confederates believed their cause was the second Revolutionary War. Believing that the North was invading the South and trampling on their freedoms, highlanders thought they were fighting for American democracy. The American Revolution gave their cause a sense of righteousness, while also portraying the Union as un-American. Religion was another potent element of their identity. Religion, like the Revolutionary patriotism, served a similar purpose for Western North Carolinians. Not only justifying their cause, religion also gave Confederates strength and kept morale intact. Studying scripture and the Bible, Appalachian Confederates often compared their situation to that of other peoples, such as the Israelites. When the staggering battlefield losses were reported, many Western North Carolinians believed that God was only testing their will, often times lost battles were met with calls for more religious piety. Slavery also played a pivotal role as a reason to fight. As it has

²⁶⁰ Kruman, *Parties and Politics in North Carolina, 1836-1865*, 200; 205; 220.

been shown, white non-slaveholders still benefited from a slave society. Antebellum slave society gave whites a racial supremacy that few Appalachian were willing to give up. It would be together that these beliefs worked to solidify a Confederate identity which was predominant among most Appalachian Confederates.²⁶¹

However, despite having a strong national identity, many loyalists experienced disaffection. Dissent was frequent among both soldiers and civilians who became disgruntled over Confederate policies or varying issues associated with the war. Chapter two demonstrated that civilians and soldiers often expressed their anger over the Confederacy's inability to protect the home front. Throughout the war, speculators, Unionists, the Union army, and deserters all exacerbated suffering on the home front. With the fall of Knoxville in early 1863, Western North Carolina would become unprotected from violence. As the Confederacy fumbled at the opportunity to protect mountain communities, many soldiers deserted. Because, soldiers who deserted home to protect their families often returned to the army at a later point in the war; this type of desertion further blurred the lines between loyal and disloyal. Not all deserters were equally disloyal, in reality; many loyal Confederates were driven to desert because of the overwhelming need to protect their families.²⁶² Appalachians frequently wrote to Governor Vance expressing their anger and suffering over the depredations occurring in the mountains. In chapter three, it was shown that conflicts between Appalachian Confederates and Richmond over the conscription policies enticed many civilians and soldiers to write Zebulon Vance in protest of conscription. Anger over conscription would "reveal the stresses" placed upon communities as well as the difficult task of winning the war. However, resistance to conscription was based upon

²⁶¹ Sheehan-Dean, *Why Confederates Fought*, 15; 18; McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades*, 104; 75.

²⁶² Sheehan-Dean, *Why Confederates Fought*, 94.

the premises that Appalachian communities did not have any more men to supply the army.²⁶³

Despite the prevalence of loyalist in Western North Carolina, the region also held a significant minority of anti-Confederates. Disloyalty among many highlanders complicated Confederate war efforts in the region. Confederate dissent in Appalachia was expressed through a few different examples. Chapter two revealed that many deserters fled the Confederate armies because they did not wish to fight, which was especially true in the early years of the war. A great deal of these deserters gravitated back to the mountains where they resorted to violence as a means to survive. When deserter violence combined with raids led by both Unionist sympathizers and the Union Army, the will of all Appalachian Confederates would be tested. As Chapter Four had shown, not all forms of disloyalty were expressed through violence. Perhaps the greatest threat to Confederate loyalists in North Carolina was the rise the peace movement led by William Holden. Holden's prominence demonstrated how by the middle of the war, many North Carolinians had given up on the Confederate nation. Holden's rise was symbolic of a major rift between many North Carolinians and the Confederacy. However, just as the 1864 gubernatorial election was symbolic of the increase in disloyalty; it is also a testament to the will Confederate North Carolinians. With an opportunity to change the course of the war, most North Carolinians went to the polls and voted to keep fighting in the war. The success of Vance in 1864 underlines how the majority of North Carolinians were unwilling to accept a peace that did not accommodate Confederate independence.²⁶⁴

When studying Confederate nationalism, one must accept that internal fissures did exist throughout the South, as they did in Western North Carolina. However, the question remains to

²⁶³ Blair, *Virginia's Private War*, 43.

²⁶⁴ Inscoc, *The Heart of Confederate Appalachia*, 163-164.

be asked, did “internal dissent” cripple the Confederacy and affect its ability to make war? The answer is largely no. Internal antagonisms between the southern populace and the Confederate nation were not pronounced enough to crumble the Confederacy from within. In his study on Virginia Confederates, Historian William Blair asked the thought provoking question, “Although southern morale had its ups and downs, I wondered what Ulysses S. Grant would have said if someone had approached him in 1864 and asked if he noticed a lack of national spirit in the enemy that inflicted 65,000 casualties in the Army of the Potomac.” By asking this rhetorical question, Blair is alluding to the fact that for over four years the Confederacy managed to wage a war against a superior nation. This could have only been done by a dedicated people, who had a strong attachment to their nation. However, despite their tremendous sacrifices, it cannot be denied that the Confederacy suffered from internal antagonism, but internal strife was not strong enough to destroy the Confederacy.²⁶⁵

Western North Carolina did not fit neatly into one category of either, loyal or disloyal. Therefore, this study sought “the middle ground between the two competing historiographical positions.” Examining identity and nationalism in Western North Carolina has shown that throughout the war, the region, although mostly loyal, still contained a strong disloyal faction of citizens. Revealing that both elements of loyalty and disloyalty existed within the South has advanced our understanding of identity and nationalism within the Confederacy; allowing historians to move forward from the disloyalty versus loyalty argument. In a recent essay Gary Gallagher recognized this point when stated that the time has come “to move beyond a binary approach to questions of disaffection, commitment to the nascent nation, and the like.” Moving

²⁶⁵ Blair, *Virginia's Private War*, 5.

beyond age old argument will allow historians to engage more intricate understanding of the southern people and their relationship to the Confederacy. By recognizing the existence of loyalty, disloyalty, and those in between these two poles, this study attempts to move the historiography into a direction of more complex understanding of the nationalism and identity in the Confederacy.²⁶⁶

²⁶⁶ David Brown, "North Carolina Ambivalence: Rethinking Loyalty and Disaffection in the Civil War Piedmont." 8; Gallagher, "Disaffection, Persistence, and Nation: Some Directions in Recent Scholarship on the Confederacy." 352.

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