

## ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: "THE WORLD WILL LITTLE NOTE NOR LONG  
REMEMBER": WOMEN AND GENDER IN THE BATTLE  
OF GETTYSBURG

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Degree and year: Master of Arts, 1996

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This thesis is a gender analysis of the experiences of women in and around Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, during the Civil War battle in 1863. It examines ten eyewitness accounts written by these women to assess the impact of both the battle and the war upon them. It concludes that neither the battle nor the war was a "watershed" for these women.

Gettysburg women appear to have more similarities with Southern women than other Northern women due to experiences including dealing with the realities of men's absence, military occupation, and battle. The most striking difference between the women of Gettysburg and other Northern women is the absence of a "second generation" of benevolent ideology. Instead of subscribing to the "new" efficient view of benevolence, Gettysburg women retained a sentimental, localized and much less structured form of charity.

This thesis explores image versus reality. Personas and images of the Battle of Gettysburg that persist in popular memory often are not, and indeed never were, an accurate picture of contemporary gender relations. Realities of individuals were often modified to reinforce existing gender roles. Traditional images of Gettysburg women as

passive witnesses to the battle are an example of this. Female eyewitness accounts of the battle actually revealed fluctuations in acceptable “manly” and “womanly” behavior. Though these women did not “seize” the opportunities of their non-traditional service during the battle, the significance of these experiences should not be overlooked.

“THE WORLD WILL LITTLE NOTE NOR LONG REMEMBER”:  
WOMEN AND GENDER IN THE BATTLE OF GETTYSBURG

by

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Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the  
University of Maryland at College Park in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts  
1996

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## DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my mother and father, Helen and Arvid Ericson.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to acknowledge the guidance and support of my advisor, Dr. Robyn L. Muncy. Dr. Whitman R. Ridgway was also an integral part of my experience at the University of Maryland. In addition, Dr. Leslie S. Rowland provided sage advice and a friendly smile. I am also indebted to my mentors and friends from Gettysburg College: Dr. Gabor S. Boritt, Dr. Julie Hardwick, Dr. Norman O. Forness, and Dr. Michael J. Birkner. They continue to nurture and inspire my love of history. Finally, I owe thanks to the staffs of the Adams County Historical Society, the Gettysburg National Military Park (especially Scott Hartwig), and Musselman Library at Gettysburg College.

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## Introduction: Image Versus Reality in the Lore of the Battle of Gettysburg

On the morning of July 3, 1863, twenty-year-old Mary Virginia Wade was shot dead while making bread in her sister's kitchen. This unfortunate occurrence gained Wade the distinction of being the only civilian killed during the Battle of Gettysburg. The reason "Jennie" Wade was at the home of Georgia Wade McClellan was to provide aid and comfort to her sister who had given birth to a son three days earlier. Despite the danger of stray bullets and shelling, Jennie had insisted on baking bread for hungry Union soldiers. After she had read her morning devotional from the Bible, Jennie began to mix the ingredients for biscuits in her dough trough.<sup>1</sup> Before her work could be completed, a sharpshooter's bullet pierced two doors and struck her in the back, killing her instantly, the sticky dough still clinging to her lifeless fingers.

After the Battle of Gettysburg, Jennie Wade was hailed as a heroine throughout the Union. "The Maid of Gettysburg" became the subject of countless poems, songs, and sentimental prose.<sup>2</sup> Rumor of her engagement to a Union soldier who, unbeknownst to Wade, had been killed shortly before the battle added to the pathos of the story. In addition to being immortalized in the pages of popular literature, her tragic story was preserved for the ages by an appropriation from the Pennsylvania State Legislature for "a monument to Jennie Wade." Erected in 1900 over her grave in the Evergreen Cemetery, adjacent to the Soldiers National Cemetery, the inscription on

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<sup>1</sup>A wooden box of sorts used to mix the flour and baking soda for biscuit dough and also used to store loaves of bread dough. Cindy L. Small, The Jennie Wade Story: A True and Complete Account of the Only Civilian Killed During the Battle of Gettysburg, PA: Thomas Publications, 1991), 30.

<sup>2</sup>Examples included the poems "The Maid of Gettysburg" by R. Stewart Gibbs and the anonymously penned, "Jennie Wade." Both in Ann Brophy, The Story of Jennie Wade: The Only Civilian Casualty At the Battle of Gettysburg (Fairfield, CT: By the author, 1988), 27-31.



Jennie Wade's monument includes the words: "With a courage born of loyalty, she hath done what she could."

Although Jennie Wade was the only civilian killed during the three-day battle, she was not the only civilian hero of Gettysburg. John Burns, the sixty-nine-year-old patriot who grabbed his gun and ran out "to fight the Rebs" was also lauded as a symbol of loyalty and courage. Burns, a veteran of the War of 1812, fought bravely alongside the Union forces to the west of town on July 1, 1863, and ceased his defense of home and country only when he fell, thrice wounded.

Burns's wounds were not mortal, and he lived to see his name immortalized in much the same way as Jennie Wade's. Newspaper accounts praised him as the embodiment of American valor and patriotism. Popular nineteenth-century author Bret Harte wrote a poem in honor of "John Burns of Gettysburg."<sup>3</sup> Even Abraham Lincoln was so impressed with Burns' exploits that he requested to meet with the old man when he travelled to Gettysburg for the dedication of the Soldiers National Cemetery.

Uncovering the "real stories" behind the legends surrounding Jennie Wade and John Burns will raise questions about the realities of the experiences of other civilians, both in and around Gettysburg, during the battle. It will be shown that the press distorted the stories of Jennie Wade and John Burns to fit them into neatly defined, gender-specific forms of patriotism. Was this also the case with other portrayals of the battle? Were realities that did not conform to accepted gender roles discarded from representations of the Battle of Gettysburg? Specifically, was the image of the women of Gettysburg as passive witnesses to history (as opposed to active participants in the three-day struggle) simply another example of images distorted to fit existing

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<sup>3</sup>"John Burns of Gettysburg," in Bret Harte: Representative Selections, With Introduction, Bibliography, and Notes, ed. Joseph B. Harrison (New York: American Book Company, 1941), 48-51.



expectations? How did these women experience the battle and what did the battle, indeed the entire war, mean to them? Were they empowered by their “trial by fire” in the streets, hospitals, and battlefields of Gettysburg or not?

Ultimately, this paper will seek to deduce the impact of the battle upon the lives and aspirations of the white women of Gettysburg, Pennsylvania.<sup>4</sup> This local study will then shed light upon larger questions about the meaning of the Civil War for women. In addition, it will illuminate questions about the hegemony of the separate spheres ideology and whether the Civil War was a “watershed” for mid-nineteenth-century women.

The question of whether the Civil War was a watershed for American women has been debated by historians for years.<sup>5</sup> Answers to this question range from the unequivocal affirmation of Anne Firor Scott (who believed the war “opened a Pandora’s box and speeded social change” for Southern white women) to George Rable’s assertion that the Civil War did little to challenge pre-war social realities in the South (he

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<sup>4</sup>This study is confined to the experiences of white women (and the corresponding experiences of white men) because the majority of the African American population of Gettysburg had fled in the days and weeks prior to the battle. Of those who remained in the vicinity, none left behind an eyewitness account of the battle. For more information on the effects of the battle upon these citizens, see Peter Vermilyea, “‘We Did Not Know Where Our Colored Friends Had Gone’: The Effect of the Confederate Invasion of Pennsylvania on Gettysburg’s African-American Community,” (Undergraduate paper, Gettysburg College, 25 April 1994).

<sup>5</sup>Anne Firor Scott, The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics, 1830-1930 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970); George Rable, Civil Wars: Women and the Crisis of Southern Nationalism (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989); Suzanne Lebsack, The Free Women of Petersburg: Status and Culture in a Southern Town, 1784-1860 (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1984); Lori Ginzberg, Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics, and Class in the Nineteenth Century United States (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990); and Anne Firor Scott, Natural Allies: Women’s Associations in American History (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1991).

dubbed it “change without change”).<sup>6</sup> The criteria for what exactly constituted a “watershed” has not been entirely clear, but in The Free Women of Petersburg Suzanne Lebsack offered a helpful guideline on the subject: “There is no question that in the war many women discovered in themselves new reserves of competence and daring. The question is: How far did this take them when the war was over?”<sup>7</sup>

The women of Gettysburg, much like the women of Petersburg, Virginia, did not experience the war as a watershed. The status of women did not markedly improve as a result of the battle or the entire war. In fact, not only did these women essentially “disappear” back into their homes, the men of the town experienced a surge of power within their now-famous community.<sup>8</sup>

The images of Jennie Wade and John Burns as the heroine and hero of Gettysburg were significant in many ways. First and foremost, they were a vital tool in boosting the morale of both Northern soldiers and civilians in the summer of 1863. Military defeat and the strength of Democratic anti-war propaganda, combined with the threat of European intervention on the side of the Confederacy, had made the Spring of 1863 a dark time for the Union war effort. Demoralization had reached “epidemic proportions” in the Union army after the defeat at Fredericksburg the previous December, and the Northern press carried debates over the proper expression of

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<sup>6</sup>Both of these are studies of Southern women. Scott, The Southern Lady, 79; Rable, 288. Studies of Northern women hardly pay any attention to the Civil War. For example, see Mary P. Ryan, Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790-1865 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

<sup>7</sup>Lebsack, 247.

<sup>8</sup>Among the new opportunities seized by men--many of whom had left and were returning to the carnage the battle had left behind--was the purchase of a number of acres of the battlefield by David McConaughy.



patriotic feelings by women. This combination of male desertion and female indecision may have caused the Union public to despair that no true symbols of “manly” or “womanly” loyalty remained.<sup>9</sup>

The Battle of Gettysburg and the fall of Vicksburg, which occurred within days of each other, were vitally important to the Union for a number of reasons. One major reason was the psychological boost it offered both soldier and civilian alike. The military victories renewed faith in the strength of the Union armies and the leadership of President Abraham Lincoln, but it was the human interest stories, such as those of Jennie Wade and John Burns, that captured the collective imagination of the North.

These two civilians from Gettysburg appeared to epitomize the ideals of female and male patriotism and sacrifice. Images of the pure, pious maid who met her fate tending to the needs of hungry soldiers and the noble old man who disregarded his own personal safety in order to protect and defend his home and the Union reassured the Northern public. Jennie Wade and John Burns were just what the country needed: concrete examples that loyalty did burn in the hearts of all kinds of citizens, even women and old men, who were not too afraid or war-weary to give their service to the Union. These stories seemed almost too good to be true. And, indeed, they were.

Although the basis of each of the legends was true--Jennie Wade *was* killed while making bread and John Burns *was* wounded when he took up arms against the Confederates--some details that did not quite fit with the sterling images of the heroine and hero of Gettysburg were discarded. For instance, Jennie Wade's father, James Wade, was a less than reputable character. He had been in and out of jail on a variety of

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<sup>9</sup>James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988): 584. For more on the debates surrounding the attributes of “loyal” womanhood and their appropriate display, see Christina Ericson, “Section, Class, and Gender: Debating ‘Womanhood’ in Northern Civil War Periodicals and Publications,” (Unpublished graduate paper, University of Maryland, 28 February 1996).

charges throughout his adult life, including a charge of forcible rape of which he was not convicted. Nonetheless, the encounter resulted in the birth of an illegitimate son, James A. Wade, who was raised as Jennie's older brother.<sup>10</sup> In 1852 Jennie's mother committed the elder James Wade to the Adams County Alms House. Jennie's father remained in the asylum until his death in 1872, which raises questions about the paternity of Jennie's youngest brother, born in 1855.<sup>11</sup>

As a result of these sexual and legal transgressions, Jennie's family was not highly regarded in Gettysburg. In addition, both Jennie and her mother worked for wages. Jennie helped to support her mother by taking in work as a seamstress.<sup>12</sup> Soon after the battle, stories that questioned her loyalty to the Union and even her virtue

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<sup>10</sup>William Frassanito, Early Photography at Gettysburg (Gettysburg, PA: Thomas Publications, 1995), 121.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 123.

<sup>12</sup>In her application for a mother's pension filed August 4, 1882, Mary Wade claimed that she had been dependent upon Jennie since her husband had died. This is interesting, considering that James Wade was still alive and well (in body if not in mind) in the Adams County Poor House when Jennie was killed in 1863. Was this merely a reluctance to acknowledge unsavory family secrets or did Mary Wade intentionally exploit the popular image of her daughter as the selfless heroine of Gettysburg for her own economic gain?

Evidence suggests the latter of these explanations might be true. In 1882, Mary Wade still had two healthy sons, Samuel and Harry, who could have been expected to support her, yet she nonetheless applied for the mother's pension. And although the Wade family had not been wealthy, they were not altogether destitute. According to the 1860 census, Mary Wade was listed as a tailoress with \$250 in real estate and \$50 in personal estate. When Jennie's sister, Georgia Anna (who had been listed as a milliner), left their household to marry John Louis McClellan in 1862, no doubt Jennie had become a vital contributor to her household's economy. However, a claim that Jennie had totally supported her mother at the time of her death must be treated as highly suspect. Both the act of the U.S. Congress granting Mary Wade a mother's pension and the 1860 Gettysburg Borough census are on file at the Adams County Historical Society, hereafter referred to as ACHS.



circulated through the town.<sup>13</sup> A number of Gettysburg's citizens resented Jennie's posthumous role as a heroine. And the voice that rang out above all others was none other than Gettysburg's "other" hero, John Burns.

The occasion for John Burns's best-known attack upon the reputation of Jennie Wade came in the form of a letter from Frank Moore, a man who was writing a book "to set before the world the noble acts of our loyal women in this war."<sup>14</sup> In his letter of January 17, 1866, Moore asked Burns if he knew anything of Jennie Wade, and if so, would he kindly supply "the name of some person who may be acquainted with the particulars of her life, character and the manner of her death." Apparently this inquiry of Jennie Wade--along with the painfully obvious lack of interest in his own heroics--struck a nerve in John Burns. Writing his reply on the same sheet of paper as the original letter, the frugal Scotsman made his indictment short and sweet, declaring, "The less said about her the better." And despite claiming that, "Charity to her reputation forbids any further remarks," Burns concluded his missive by labelling Jennie Wade a "she-rebel."<sup>15</sup>

Of course the reality of John Burns also fell far short of the ideal immortalized

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<sup>13</sup>Rumors of Jennie Wade being a "loose" woman persist in and around Gettysburg to this day. Occasionally rumors of this type were given a much wider audience. For example, an April 1864 article in the Pittsburgh Evening Chronicle stated, "as we must believe the people of Gettysburg . . . Jenny [sic] Wade was no heroine at all, and not even a good loyalist." Quoted from John S. Patterson, "John Burns and Jennie Wade: The Hero and Heroine of Gettysburg?" (Unpublished paper presented to the American Folklore Society Meeting, Philadelphia, 19 October 1989, in vertical file 8-28, Gettysburg National Military Park Library, hereafter referred to as GNMPL), 11. A considerably more judicious treatment of the intricacies of Jennie Wade's local "scandals" can be found in Frassanito, 119-28.

<sup>14</sup>Letter from Frank Moore to John Burns, 17 January 1866, on file at ACHS.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

by the Northern press. Accounts of local townsfolk who knew the “hero” of Gettysburg described “a Scotchman lacking in humor and the subject of practical jokes,” who enjoyed a reputation as a “local controversial character” even after he had held the position of town constable.<sup>16</sup> Although he freely acknowledged a wild and intemperate past, his application for a pension from the U.S. Army in 1864 made clear that he had changed his ways.<sup>17</sup> Burns was evidently exasperating to live with, even in his abstemious incarnation. His wife, Barbara, was less than thrilled with Burns’s battlefield heroics. Instead of expressing concern when a neighbor told her that John was wounded and he wanted her to fetch him in a wagon, Barbara flatly stated, “Him, I told him to stay at home.”<sup>18</sup> And she left him to find his own way home.

The examples of Jennie Wade and John Burns illustrate that the images of female and male patriotism during the Civil War relied less on facts than a shared assumption of the proper “service” to be expected of each sex. The dominant ideology of separate spheres placed women in the home, concerned with the family and domestic tasks. Women’s service to the war effort was understood to be a modest and passive. Men, on the other hand, were expected to forge into public arenas of business, electoral

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<sup>16</sup>Burns was elected constable in 1855, appointed in 1856, and elected in 1857. He ran again in 1860 but was defeated. Information in vertical file 8-28 at the Gettysburg National Military Park Library (hereafter referred to as GNMPL). It is relevant to note that even in his obituary, the local press insisted on placing the word “hero” in quotation marks. See the Gettysburg Star and Sentinel, 9 February 1872, as cited in Patterson, 8.

<sup>17</sup> “[A]lthough many years ago, somewhat free in his habits as to drinking, he has for some twenty years past been a strictly temperate man, not having tasted liquor during that time.” Report of the United States Senate on file at ACHS. Burns was awarded a pension of eight dollars a month for his service at Gettysburg--an amount equal to that awarded to Mary Wade for the “service” of her daughter, Jennie. This no doubt fueled Burns’ animosity.

<sup>18</sup>Henry Dustman account reprinted in the Gettysburg Times, 5 December 1946.



politics, and, when necessary, the battlefield. Whether the authors who molded Jennie Wade and John Burns into paragons of womanly and manly patriotism were simply ignorant of the realities of their lives or intentionally misrepresented them, the effect was the reinforcement of prevailing gender roles at the expense of historical accuracy.

In popular memory, the women of Gettysburg have, for the most part, seemed to be passive witnesses to the battle. However, the eyewitness accounts they left behind suggest otherwise. An examination of these sources will help us to determine whether or not the Civil War was a watershed for women.

The first step involved in answering the question, “Was the war a watershed for the women of Gettysburg?” is to uncover the reality of women’s lives during the battle. An excellent way to begin this excavation of experiences is to examine a number of eyewitness accounts written by women who lived through the Battle of Gettysburg. These telling sources described experiences vastly different from the popular, one-dimensional tales of Jennie Wade and John Burns. Although these accounts were published over a span of seventy-five years and were no doubt shaped by the time they were written, their representations of gender roles and identities in 1863 Gettysburg are very similar. Therefore, I will accept their veracity for the purpose of this preliminary study.

#### Background of the Women Who Wrote Eyewitness Accounts of the Battle

A wide variety of white women recorded their experiences of the Battle of Gettysburg. One was John Burns’ neighbor, Sarah Broadhead. Broadhead was a

thirty-year-old wife and mother, as well as a public school teacher in 1863.<sup>19</sup> She lived with her husband, Joseph, and their four-year-old daughter, Mary. Her personal diary of the events from June 15 to July 15, 1863, was printed in 1864 under the title, The Diary of a Lady of Gettysburg, Pennsylvania.<sup>20</sup> The Broadhead home was located on the western end of town in the "Warren Block," a row house that stood on the north side of Chambersburg Street.<sup>21</sup> John Burns lived across the street.

Just down the north side of Chambersburg Street from the Broadheads lived Mary McAllister. Forty-one and unmarried, McAllister was a "spinster" living in the home of Martha and John Scott, her sister and brother-in-law. The brick building housed both their residence and the general store that Mary ran.<sup>22</sup> Mary McAllister's account of the battle was published posthumously in a series of 1938 articles in the Philadelphia Inquirer.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>This was unusual. None of the women listed as a teacher in the 1860 census was a wife and mother. In fact, Sarah Broadhead was not listed as a teacher on the 1860 census. This probably was because her daughter, Mary, was only seven months old at the time. 1860 census, ACHS.

<sup>20</sup>Sarah M. Broadhead, The Diary of a Lady of Gettysburg, Pennsylvania: From June 15 to July 15, 1863 (Gettysburg, 1864; reprint, Hershey, PA: Gary T. Hawbaker, 1990).

<sup>21</sup>William Frassanito offers excellent discussions of the physical location of structures in 1863 Gettysburg in his two photographic histories of both the battle and the town: Gettysburg: A Journey in Time (New York: Charles Scribners Sons, 1975); and Early Photography at Gettysburg (1995).

<sup>22</sup>There is no indication that Mary McAllister had any help from either John or Martha Scott in the day-to-day operation of the store. In the 1860 census John had been listed as a railroad agent, while Martha was listed simply as a "wife." 1860 census, ACHS.

<sup>23</sup>Mary McAllister, The Philadelphia Inquirer 26-29 July 1938, transcribed by Robert L. Brake, July 1974, vertical files, GNMPL.

Both Sarah Broadhead and Mary McAllister had the dubious honor of residing on the street that was one of the main arteries for both the Confederate advance (and corresponding Union retreat through town) on July 1 and the retreat of Confederate forces on July 4 following the battle. As a result, the street was the scene of intense sniper fire throughout the battle. Sarah Broadhead noted this in her diary entry of July 5, complaining that everyone else in town could walk around unmolested, but her family remained virtual prisoners in their home.<sup>24</sup>

Elizabeth Salome ("Sallie") Myers lived on Baltimore Hill, four blocks south of Mary McAllister's home and general store. A Gettysburg schoolteacher like Sarah Broadhead, Sallie was twenty-one in the summer of 1863. She published her account of the Battle of Gettysburg in the San Francisco Sunday Call in the summer of 1903. Ten years later she recounted her story to writer Clifton Johnson, who included her experiences in his 1915 book, Battleground Adventures.<sup>25</sup> At the time of the battle Sallie lived with her sister in the household of their father, Peter Myers, a justice of the peace.<sup>26</sup> Sallie was among a group of young women "brimming over with patriotic enthusiasm" who greeted the Union Army's First Corps on July 1 with refreshments

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<sup>24</sup>Broadhead account, 16 (page references are to reprint edition).

<sup>25</sup>Elizabeth Salome "Sallie" Myers, "How a Gettysburg Schoolteacher Spent Her Vacation in 1863," San Francisco Sunday Call, 16 August 1903, transcribed by Robert L. Brake, vertical files, GNMPL; Clifton Johnson, "The School Teacher," chap. in Battleground Adventures (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1915): 176-82.

<sup>26</sup>Sallie's younger sister, Sue, also left an account of the battle. [Sue Myers], "Some Battle Experience As Remembered by a Young School Girl," Gettysburg Compiler, 24 April 1907, transcribed (n.d.), vertical file 8-2, GNMPL.



and songs.<sup>27</sup>

The excitement and romance of uniformed troops marching to battle was also not lost on young Matilda "Tillie" Pierce. A fifteen year-old schoolgirl, Tillie was a pupil of the female seminary run by Miss Carrie Sheads. Pierce and a crowd of her friends stood on the corner of Washington and High Streets and sang patriotic songs as the Union men of Buford's Cavalry marched into town shortly after noon on June 30. She also described singing again on July 1, and it is possible that Tillie Pierce was a member of the group that included Sallie Myers.<sup>28</sup>

Like Sallie Myers, Tillie Pierce belonged to one of the wealthier families of Gettysburg. Although a butcher by trade, her father, James Pierce, was listed simply as a "Gentleman" on the 1863 septennial census of taxable inhabitants. Despite the relative safety and comfort her home provided, Tillie did not remain at home with her family during the ordeal. Instead, she left town on the afternoon of July 1 with family friends, a woman and her two small children. Her journey eventually led to the Jacob Weikert Farm which lay one mile south of town. Ironically, Tillie spent the majority of the battle in a position much more exposed than that of her father's house! Her account of the battle, the book At Gettysburg: Or What a Girl Saw and Heard of the Battle, was published in 1889.

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<sup>27</sup>The Gettysburg Compiler of 1 July 1903 reported upon an encore performance given by these same "girls" some forty years later. According to the article, "The idea originated with Mrs. Sallie M[yers] Stewart and immediately took hold with the other women who encouraged the soldiers with their sweet melodies."

<sup>28</sup>Tillie was certainly a naive young girl caught up in the romance of the moment. She described preparing bouquets of flowers to give to the men as they marched by, but she forgot about them. She remembered them only after the men had passed by and the battle was underway. They were sitting on the kitchen table where she had left them. Mrs. Tillie (Pierce) Alleman, At Gettysburg: Or What a Girl Saw and Heard of the Battle (New York: W. Lake Borland, 1889; reprint, Baltimore, MD: Butternut and Blue, 1987), 33-5 (page references are to reprint edition).

Fannie Buehler was another wealthy woman who later wrote a book about her experiences during the Battle of Gettysburg.<sup>29</sup> The wife of attorney David A. Buehler, Fannie was thirty-seven and the mother of six in 1863. Luckily, all but the oldest and youngest of Fannie's children had been sent to visit her sister in New Jersey at the time of the battle. In addition to being a lawyer, politician, and the editor of a Republican newspaper (a real "leader among the leaders," according to his wife), David Buehler was also the postmaster of Gettysburg. On July 1 he fled town with the mails, leaving his wife in charge of the Baltimore Street building that housed both the post office and their home. After aiding her husband's rather comical escape (he was running out the east end of town as the Confederates were entering from the west), Fannie quickly took action. In order to thwart any Confederate access to the federal office, she closed the shutters, took down the "post office" sign, locked the door and buried the keys.<sup>30</sup>

Like the Pierces and the Buehlers, the family of Jennie McCreary was also rather wealthy. Jennie's father, the widower Smith S. McCreary, was a hat maker who owned a workshop just off "the diamond" on the south side of Chambersburg Street. The McCreary family also lived in this building, which was located adjacent to the social, if not the geographic, center of town. Jennie, who was seventeen at the time of the battle, was the youngest of three daughters. On the first day of the battle she and her sister, Kate, went up on to the roof to watch the opening salvos of the fighting. A short while later the sisters, undoubtedly realizing the roof was not the safest place to be, joined their father downstairs in the safety of their home's interior. Clearly restless, the girls then made their way to the home of a neighbor where they helped to roll bandages.

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<sup>29</sup>Fannie J. Buehler, Recollections of the Rebel Invasion and One Woman's Experience During the Battle of Gettysburg (n.p., 1896), vertical files of the GNMPL.

<sup>30</sup>Buehler account, 10.

(They got a chance to use the bandages, too, when a group of wounded Union soldiers happened by.) When the fighting became too intense to remain upstairs, the girls joined these neighbors, the Weaver family, in their cellar.

After a few hours Jennie and Kate McCreary were able to return home. Their voyage across the street, however, was filled with the sight of a wide variety of carnage. When they finally reached their home they found there not only their expectant father, but a group of wounded officers and hungry soldiers. Jennie spent the rest of the battle either tending to the needs of these men or cowering in the basement. Her account of the battle was recorded in a letter she wrote to another sister, Julia, a few weeks after the battle.<sup>31</sup>

The adventure of Sarah Barrett King was very different from Jennie McCreary's experience as a young woman in the relative safety of the household of her wealthy father. Like Jennie, King lived in the same household with her father and mother, but in 1863 she was twenty-seven and the mother of five. At the time of the battle, Sarah's husband, William T. King, was in the Union Army. A sergeant in Bell's Cavalry, William just happened to be convalescing on a couch in his own living room when the Confederates raided Gettysburg on June 26. In fact, it was Sarah who alerted him and other members of his company to the impending danger. Her timely advice apparently saved them, for "They barely escaped."<sup>32</sup>

Although she had enjoyed the excitement of standing on her front porch and

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<sup>31</sup>Parts of this letter were subsequently published as newspaper articles. [Jennie McCreary], "A Letter Written July 1863," Gettysburg Compiler, 1 July 1903; [Jennie McCreary], "Girl Saw Streets Filled With Dead and Wounded at Gettysburg," Philadelphia Evening Bulletin, 2 July 1938. Both newspaper clippings on file at ACHS.

<sup>32</sup>[Sarah Barrett King], "Battle Days In 1863," Gettysburg Compiler, 4 July 1906:  
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watching Confederate General Jubal Early's Division chase the remnants of Bell's Cavalry out of town, Sarah decided she did not want to be in town if a battle was going to take place. She prepared some pies and biscuits and assembled a dizzying array of other items which she stuffed into her bodice.<sup>33</sup> With these supplies she set out for a friend's cabin at Wolf Hill with her mother and five children in tow. Her father had decided to stay at their home, which stood on the corner of York and Liberty Streets. All of Sarah Barrett King's subsequent adventures took place at the homes of neighbors in the countryside northeast of town.<sup>34</sup> She published her account, "Battle Days in 1863," in the Gettysburg Compiler in 1906.

Another resident of the eastern end of town was Liberty Hollinger. Her home stood approximately one block to the east of Sarah Barrett King's, across York Street. Liberty, a sixteen-year-old schoolgirl, lived with her merchant father, mother, three younger sisters, and one younger brother. The Hollinger family was financially comfortable: Jacob Hollinger, who was in the grain and produce business, owned a warehouse adjacent to the railroad. Unlike the King family (with the exception of Sarah's father), the Hollingers did not flee their home. Consequently, Liberty's view of the battle was mostly from the cellar. Her account of this experience was not published

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<sup>33</sup>"It would be a surprising list if I could name the different articles the bosom of my dress contained." Ibid, 2.

<sup>34</sup>Sarah and her small caravan spent the day and night of July 1 at the John Bender farm. It was Mrs. Bender who greeted the weary refugees, though, because John Bender had fled with the most valuable of his stock. After the Bender farm had been completely overrun by Confederates, the band of women and children (which now included Mrs. Bender) moved on to the Rhinehart farm on July 2. Mrs. Rhinehart and her four daughters were "glad to have company," for their men had fled and took their stock away, too. Ibid, 2, 3.

until editor Elsie Singmaster submitted it to the Pennsylvania History journal in 1938.<sup>35</sup>

Three miles to the north of town was the farm belonging to Joseph and Harriet Hamilton Bayly. The experiences of Harriet, a forty-three year-old farm wife and mother of five boys, were far more immediate than Liberty Hollinger's. As a result of the configuration of the battle lines, the Bayly farm was behind enemy lines throughout the battle. This fact enabled Harriet to have more than one spirited exchange with Confederate soldiers and even got her briefly arrested. Harriet Hamilton Bayly's accounts of the battle were later published in the local Gettysburg press.<sup>36</sup>

Like Harriet Hamilton Bayly, Elizabeth Thorn also had extremely close contact with a large military contingent in her own back yard. However, the men who commandeered her home were with the Union army. The Thorns lived in the gatehouse of the Evergreen Cemetery, just to the east of what would soon be known the world over as Cemetery Ridge. Elizabeth's husband, Peter, had been the gatekeeper of the cemetery before he enlisted in the Union army in 1862.<sup>37</sup> Upon his departure, Elizabeth took over his duties.

Both Elizabeth and Peter Thorn were German immigrants. Elizabeth's mother and father, Catherine and John Masser (neither of whom spoke English), also lived with

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<sup>35</sup>Mrs. Jacob A. Clutz [Liberty Augusta Hollinger], "The Battle of Gettysburg," ed. Elsie Singmaster, Pennsylvania History 5, No. 3 (July 1938): 166-78.

<sup>36</sup>[Harriet Hamilton Bayly], Gettysburg Star and Sentinel, 25 September 1888: 1, newspaper clipping on file at ACHS; [Harriet Hamilton Bayly], "Mrs. Joseph Bayly's Story of the Battle: Mother of William Hamilton Bayly," Gettysburg Compiler Scrapbook (n.d.), transcribed by William Ridinger, 30 October 1939, vertical files, GNMPL.

<sup>37</sup>Peter Thorn was mustered in to Company B of the 138th Pennsylvania Volunteers on August 16, 1862. He spent the Gettysburg Campaign at Harper's Ferry and Washington, D.C. Vertical files, GNMPL; and Eileen Conklin, Women at Gettysburg 1863 (Gettysburg, PA: Thomas Publications, 1993), 166.



the Thorns. Elizabeth had three sons and was six months pregnant with her fourth child at the time of the battle.<sup>38</sup> Ordered from their home at the gatehouse, Elizabeth and her family were forced to seek shelter in the countryside south of town. When she was finally allowed to return to her home, she was faced with ruined bedding, pilfered belongings, and the grim task of burying 105 dead bodies. Elizabeth Thorn recorded her experiences in two accounts, both of which were published many years later in local Gettysburg newspapers.<sup>39</sup>

Obviously these women had a wide variety of experiences of the battle, ranging from the relative safety and quiet of the family cellar to forced removal from their homes. The accounts they left showed that the tactical positions of the armies were only one element determining how a woman experienced the battle. Equally important were her age, marital status, location of residence, economic status, occupation, and at least in one case, nationality.

#### “Who Is In Control?” The Ambiguity of Gender Roles

Despite all of these differences, a common theme ran through all of these accounts: a sense of ambiguity over who was in control. Women’s historians and feminist theorists argue that gender is about power and the question, “Who is in

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<sup>38</sup>Elizabeth gave birth to a girl in early October, 1863. She named the child Rosa Meade Thorn, in honor of the commander of the Army of the Potomac, General George Gordon Meade.

<sup>39</sup>Mrs. Peter [Elizabeth] Thorn, “Experience During Battle,” Gettysburg Compiler, 26 July 1905: 2, newspaper clippings on file at ACHS; and [Elizabeth Thorn], “Mrs. Thorn’s War Story,” Gettysburg Times, 2 July 1938, transcribed copy (n.d.), vertical files, GNMPL, 8 (page references are to transcribed copy).

charge?” was a common one throughout these narratives.<sup>40</sup> This uncertainty signalled the breakdown of existing gender identities. The battle occasioned an upheaval in the relationships between men and women as well as among men and among women. The crisis in gender can be seen in the way the female authors of these eyewitness accounts portrayed the men and women (including themselves) in their stories.

Ambiguity about gender was evident in the contradictory images of both sexes. Female-authored accounts portrayed the men of Gettysburg, both civilian and military, as both protectors and those in need of protection and care. The descriptions of women were also divided between the traditional (submissive women) and the decidedly non-traditional (empowered women). These accounts illustrated a number of discrepancies between the images of ideal manhood and womanhood (as personified in the legends of John Burns and Jennie Wade) and the reality of the confusing, smelly, bloody cacophony of battle. The men and women who emerged from these accounts were far less gilded than the “hero” and “heroine” of Gettysburg, but immensely more compelling.

In the prescriptive literature of the antebellum North, the image of the submissive woman was a familiar sight. In fact, historian Barbara Welter deemed submissiveness one of the four cardinal virtues of the “cult of true womanhood.”<sup>41</sup> Therefore it was not surprising to find that the women who penned these accounts generally represented themselves under the authority of men. However, the absence of

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<sup>40</sup>Joan Wallach Scott, “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis,” in Gender and the Politics of History (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988).

<sup>41</sup>The other three were piety, domesticity, and purity. Barbara Welter, “The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860,” American Quarterly 18, No. 2 (Summer 1966): 151. Although the first two of these virtues were praised in most of these accounts, allusions to or discussions of sexual purity were conspicuously absent.

many civilian men (those who were traditionally in power) and the presence of a great number of military men, both Union and Confederate, complicated the matter greatly. For now it was no longer--if, in fact, it ever was--"woman obeys man," but "woman obeys man with correct political views."

### Civilian Men Who Leave

The majority of women who represented themselves as "in charge" were those whose menfolk had left town. Perhaps the most salient point that can be made regarding the civilian men of Gettysburg is simply that many did not stay around. Although a number of men were enlisted in the army, many more voluntarily left their families in the days and weeks prior to the battle. Of the women who wrote these eyewitness accounts, nearly half had menfolk (heads and/or other male members of the household) that left them at some point before or during the battle: Fannie Buehler's husband left with the mails; Sarah Barrett King's husband left to fight in the Union army with Bell's cavalry; Harriet Hamilton Bayly's husband was gone on an errand to a neighbor's when the Confederates arrived at her farm; Sarah Broadhead's husband had left with a party that hoped to halt the Confederate advance by felling trees in their path but he was back in town before the battle (in fact it was Sarah who decided to leave home during the first day's fighting); and although Mary McAllister's brother-in-law did not leave town, he was of little use as a protector because he was recuperating from a sickness and ended up fainting just as the battle started to get underway on July 1. As shocking as these stories may first appear, the majority of the men who fled Gettysburg were actually moving their horses to safer areas in order to keep them away from



Confederate “reckless raiders.”<sup>42</sup>

The behavior of these men may have appeared inconsistent with the prevalent ideology that hailed men as the protectors of their wives and families, but it was nonetheless widely practiced in and around Gettysburg during the three “Rebel Scares” of the war.<sup>43</sup> None of the accounts written by women who lived in Gettysburg condemned this practice, and many made a point of mentioning the constant threat of losses faced by the owners of livestock.<sup>44</sup> Perhaps no one explained the justification for this practice better than Harriet Hamilton Bayly, who stated succinctly, “Why a farmer needs a horse as much as a house . . .”<sup>45</sup> Apparently, it was acceptable for a man to abandon his wife and children temporarily because the extenuating circumstances of war made protecting horses the paramount duty to ensure the economic safety of his family.

Although the Victorian ideal of separate spheres of male and female influence were widely accepted as “natural,” there was nonetheless a lot of room for interpretation. The fact that so many of the civilian men left their wives and children in Gettysburg and the surrounding countryside in the days prior to the battle was an excellent example of this. How was this action reconciled with the assumption that men were the protectors of women and children? One possible explanation was that the economic safety of a

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<sup>42</sup>Bayly Compiler account, 1 (page references are to transcribed copy).

<sup>43</sup>Three war scares occurred in Gettysburg during the Civil War: April, 1861; July and August, 1862; and June of 1863. Charles H. Glatfelter, “The Gettysburg Community in 1863,” (Unpublished paper), vertical file 9-G1b, GNMPL.

<sup>44</sup>Examples include Broadhead account, 7, 8; Hollinger account, 169; and Myers Battleground Adventures account, 176.

<sup>45</sup>Bayly Star and Sentinel account.



family was also considered the duty of men. When faced with the choice between economic ruin and temporary absence from their family, the men may have used this ideology (of men as protectors) to make their decision easier. After all, if men were the “natural” protectors of women and children, wives and children would not be in danger if they were left alone, because other men would protect them. In other words, women and children would not really be alone. Along this line of reasoning, the very same troops whom they believed might steal their goods would be chivalrous enough to refrain from harming their dependents. Surprisingly, this assumption turned out to be true: the troops (even the “enemy”) were generally very well-behaved towards civilians of both sexes, and the majority of the destruction occurred in the form of pilfered property.<sup>46</sup>

The practice of fleeing with horses and other valuables may have been widely practiced in and around Gettysburg, but it was not accepted without question in other areas of the North. New York Times correspondent Lorenzo L. Crouse branded the men of Gettysburg cowards and indicted them for utterly failing in their manly responsibilities both during and after the battle. In an article widely reprinted in the Northern press, Crouse contemptuously claimed:

In the first place the male citizens mostly ran away, and left the women and children to the mercy of their enemies. On their return, instead of lending a helping hand to our wounded, and opening their houses to our famished officers and soldiers, they have only manifested indecent haste to present their bills to the military authority for payment of losses inflicted by both armies.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup>Reid Mitchell found that many Confederates were proud of their restraint in the invasion of Pennsylvania. Civil War Soldiers: Their Expectations and Experiences (New York: Simon and Schuster, Inc., 1988), 152-4.

<sup>47</sup>Lorenzo L. Crouse, “Further Details of the Battle of Gettysburgh [sic]--Characteristics of the People of the Town--Interesting Incidents, & c.,” New York Times, 9 July 1863.

Crouse also railed against the “exorbitant” prices charged for food, lodging, and even bandages for the wounded.

One of the few townsmen who escaped Crouse’s wrath was our “hero,” John Burns. By fighting to protect his home Burns had managed to set himself apart from the majority of the men in and around Gettysburg whom Crouse considered cowards. This sentiment was echoed in the lines of Bret Harte’s ode to John Burns which pointed out:

He was the fellow who won renown--  
The only man who didn’t back down  
When the Rebels rode through his native town;  
But held his own in the fight next day  
When all his townsfolk ran away.<sup>48</sup>

It was within this context that the image of John Burns became problematic for the men of Gettysburg. For although Burns’ heroics brought honor and a degree of fame to their town, the men who had fled town became somewhat emasculated because they had “run away.” Even some Union soldiers felt that the men of Pennsylvania had not lived up to their manly duty to protect and defend Northern soil.<sup>49</sup>

Despite these stinging rebukes to the manhood of the men of Gettysburg, the guidelines of what constituted honorable “manly” behavior were far from rigid at this time. In fact, gender roles for both women and men were in a state of flux throughout the war. An overwhelming response to Crouse’s article was proof of that.

Among the indignant letters sent to the editor of the New York Times to protest Crouse’s slander of the men of Gettysburg was a document written by no less than twenty leading professional men of the North. In defense of the collective manhood of

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<sup>48</sup>Harte quoted from Harrison, 48.

<sup>49</sup>Mitchell, Civil War Soldiers, 152.

Gettysburg, the letter explained that leaving town during the battle was not due to “cowardice, meanness, or a lack of patriotism,” as Crouse had argued. Instead they pointed out, “There are times when ‘discretion is the better part of valor.’”<sup>50</sup> These men clearly understood that “manly” behavior was subject to the constraints of time and place.

While the manliness of the men of Gettysburg was being debated by the Northern press, the townswomen were never viewed as inadequate. There was never a question of their “womanliness.” A typical post-battle account related that, “the Gettysburg women were kind and faithful to the wounded and their friends, and the town was filled to overflowing with both.”<sup>51</sup> In this context, the male inadequacies cited by Crouse (e.g., not opening their homes to the wounded and/or hungry) were actually compensated for by the women of Gettysburg. By tending to the needs of men, these women appeared to occupy a traditional domestic, nurturing role. Whereas the flagrant “transgressions” of the men of Gettysburg disturbed many people’s notions of a fixed set of gender roles and responsibilities, the “traditional” acts of the townswomen provided a (false) sense of stability.

#### Gettysburg Women Who Assert Autonomy

Despite the appearance of a general proclivity to obey the orders of men, the gender identities of Gettysburg women were actually in a state of flux during the battle. Even though the ideal of the “true woman” stressed submissiveness, there were a number of

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<sup>50</sup>The letter is reprinted in the Adams Sentinel, 14 July 1863.

<sup>51</sup>Frank Moore, Women of the War: Their Heroism and Self-Sacrifice (Hartford: S.S. Scranton and Co., 1866), 137.



autonomous decisions made by the women who wrote these eyewitness accounts. In fact, some women acted without the consent of men, and others in direct opposition to the wishes of men. Fannie Buehler showed such initiative when she took the steps to secure the safety of the post office when the Confederate cavalry invaded the town on June 26. Her efficient erasure of all signs of a government office was clearly the autonomous act of a determined, capable woman, not a passive witness to the event.

Other examples of autonomous actions by these women were found in their decisions whether to leave or remain in a house perceived to be in danger. Sarah Broadhead opted not to stay in her own home with her husband on the first day of the fighting, deciding instead to take her daughter to the home of a neighbor “up town.”<sup>52</sup> Sarah Barrett King also acted against the wishes of men, but in her case she decided to stay in the house Confederate soldiers recommended she and her companions vacate.<sup>53</sup>

### Submissive Women?

Despite the fact that some women “rebelled” against the demands of men, most continued to view men as authority figures. Although a number of the townsmen had left the area for a variety of reasons, many others remained and maintained positions of power within the community and their homes. Each of the ten women who wrote accounts lived in a male-headed household, and many described the control these men retained over their homes, and the women within them, during and after the battle. For example, both Jennie McCreary and Liberty Hollinger recounted the ways in which their fathers reacted to the demands made by Confederate troops.

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<sup>52</sup>Broadhead account, 12.

<sup>53</sup>King account, 3.

The power dynamic of these exchanges was interesting because, while Jennie McCreary's father accommodated demands for food, Liberty Hollinger's father consistently refused all demands made upon him by Confederate forces.<sup>54</sup> In both cases the teenage girls perceived the actions of their fathers in a favorable light. Jennie saw her father as acting in a practical manner, wisely acquiescing to a military demand during a time of battle. Liberty, on the other hand, viewed her father's refusal to aid the soldiers as proof of his resolve and patriotism. It is significant to note that these two diametrically opposed actions by men could be, and were, considered a positive reflection of male gender roles. "Manly" behavior became subject to not only constraints of time and place, but also interpretation by individuals.

Harriet Hamilton Bayly also continued to view her husband as in charge, even though he was absent from their home on an errand to a neighbor's house as the battle commenced. She explained she had to receive the Confederates who approached her gate in her husband's stead, "as he had not come back."<sup>55</sup> Although unable to assume his role as the lord and master of his home at that point, Mr. Bayly did get to assert power over his wife after he returned: the following day he would "not allow" her to return to the nursing of wounded soldiers in the field.<sup>56</sup>

Elizabeth Thorn also wrote of civilian men in positions of power. Her husband may have been away in the Union army, but the men in her life nonetheless controlled her.

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<sup>54</sup>McCreary Evening Bulletin account. Jacob Hollinger refused to surrender the keys to his warehouse, denied several requests for food, and would not allow the Confederate soldiers in his home to socialize with his daughters. Hollinger account, 168-9, 172.

<sup>55</sup>Bayly Star and Sentinel account.

<sup>56</sup>Bayly Compiler account, 5.

Her father, though “old” and unable to speak English, continually directed her actions. An example of this propensity to obey her father’s wishes can be seen in an incident involving a wounded Union officer. From his reclining position on a crowded floor this man beckoned to Elizabeth. As she recounted, “[M]y father said go to him.” The officer showed her a picture of three small boys, his own children, and asked Elizabeth to allow her sons to “sleep in his arms.” She reluctantly agreed, because “Father said it would be to [sic] sad not to oblige him . . .”<sup>57</sup>

Elizabeth Thorn also mentioned the demands of her boss, David McConaughy, president of the Evergreen Cemetery. When he met Mrs. Thorn and her family trudging home after the battle he chastised her to “hurry on home, there is more work for you than you are able to do.”<sup>58</sup> Female chroniclers thus presented the civilian men of Gettysburg, at least those who remained in town during the battle, as maintaining pre-war levels of control over their dependents.

The women of Gettysburg also obeyed the demands of many of the military men who had literally overrun the town. In these eyewitness accounts, both Union and Confederate men were portrayed in positions of power. While the nature of the orders given to the women varied, the character of the demands was similarly invasive.

The most common demands made by Union men were supplying food to hungry soldiers, caring for the wounded, and accommodating the needs of senior officers. “Sallie” Myers recounted being in her home when she was ordered by Dr. James Fulton to go to the hospital and help care for the wounded.<sup>59</sup> And although Mary McAllister

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<sup>57</sup>Thorn Compiler account, 1, 2.

<sup>58</sup>Thorn Times account, 7.

<sup>59</sup>Myers Sunday Call account, 1 (page references are to transcribed copy).



entered the hospital at Christ Lutheran Church of her own volition, she was soon sent scurrying for items requisitioned by impatient doctors and pleading patients.<sup>60</sup>

Elizabeth Thorn was similarly ordered around, forced to cook dinner for Union General Oliver Otis Howard, and, later, on the authority of the same man, ordered from her home. This last hardship proved to be a blessing in disguise: her home was located on the eastern slope of Cemetery Hill and would soon be engulfed in the horrendous clamor of Pickett's Charge.<sup>61</sup>

Many of the accounts described similar demands made by the invading Confederate forces. For instance, Sarah Barrett King was witness to a Confederate soldier's demands for food and a place to sleep. There was, however, a decidedly more coercive quality to the power assumed by Confederate soldiers. The man who demanded food and a place to rest at the Rhinehart farm did not simply sleep, eat, and leave: he suspiciously searched the room in which he 'rested' and insulted the meal prepared for him.<sup>62</sup>

Similar searches and seizures peppered the women's accounts of the battle. Fannie Buehler recounted the way she was "accosted" at her door by a group of Confederates who informed her they knew she was hiding Union soldiers and they planned to search

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<sup>60</sup>She was sent out twice for whiskey, which was a very popular and rare commodity during the battle. McAllister account, 1, 3 (page references are to transcribed copy).

<sup>61</sup>Thorn Compiler account, 2. Thorn was obviously very proud of her service to General O. O. Howard and two of his fellow generals (Daniel Edgar Sickles and Henry Warner Slocum). However, General Howard did not recall the meal. In an 1883 letter to Evergreen Cemetery president David McConaughy Howard struggled even to recall Elizabeth Thorn: "I believe the woman gave me a cup of coffee, but the recollection is too indistinct to base any material statement upon." O. O. Howard to D. McConaughy, 7 February 1883, vertical files, GNMPL.

<sup>62</sup>King account, 3.

her house.<sup>63</sup> And Harriet Hamilton Bayly recounted the heart-rending scene of the Rebels taking all of her horses, including Nellie, the horse of her beloved dead daughter.<sup>64</sup>

Scenes such as these showed that the presence of the military men in town occasioned obedience to their authority. Both civilian sexes were subject to this control; recall Jennie McCreary's father's acquiescence to the Confederate demands for food. This fact illustrates the nature of power relationships among men (in this case civilian and military men), as well as between men and women.

Nevertheless, these narratives portrayed women standing up to men in the military much more often than to civilian men. And even when women did choose to assert themselves with civilian men, the exchanges were more often than not a question of personal safety (either for themselves or their children, as in the case of Sarah Broadhead who took her daughter to the "safer" home of a neighbor) rather than a deliberate attempt to thwart the men's authority. Did this have to do with long-established notions of power relations among townsfolk? Did the women of Gettysburg find it easier to overturn gender hierarchies when unfamiliar men were involved? What about the demonstrated authority of the military men? Were women more inclined to challenge the authority of Union or Confederate troops? What role did military rank play in these situations?

Two of the older, married women recalled situations in which they assumed a position of power in a confrontation with Union men. Elizabeth Thorn insisted that she was perfectly able to show the Union troops the roads of the town, despite the soldier

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<sup>63</sup>Buehler account, 21.

<sup>64</sup>Bayly Star and Sentinel account.

who insisted there must be a man who could show them around instead.<sup>65</sup> Sarah Broadhead was much more strident in her challenge to the authority of Union men. While she was engaged in the task of caring for wounded men at the Seminary hospital on July 5, she demanded to see the surgeon in charge and then demanded an explanation from him for the neglect of a particular man whose leg was “covered with worms.”<sup>66</sup>

Confederate men were also held accountable for unacceptable situations. Harriet Hamilton Bayly recounted how she “rose up in my wrath” to demand water for wounded Union troops who had been without water for twenty-four hours.<sup>67</sup> In the case of Mary McAllister, she reported “sassy” Confederates to their commanding officers twice.<sup>68</sup> This was interesting because it represented an autonomous act against the authority of one set of Confederate military men, but a bow to the power of another, and the distinction was rank.

Women also stood up to Confederate men by refusing to accept views or actions which violated their world view. Most of these experiences were recounted by older women, which may have explained their greater willingness to express disagreement with the Confederates. Sarah Barrett King matched wits with a belligerent old soldier sent to “guard” the farm at which she stayed. To his incessant inquiries about why the men of the town were absent and not protecting the townswomen, she finally retorted,

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<sup>65</sup>Thorn Compiler account, 2.

<sup>66</sup>Broadhead account, 18.

<sup>67</sup>Bayly Star and Sentinel account.

<sup>68</sup>McAllister account, 4.



"They know we can do that ourselves . . . ."<sup>69</sup>

Perhaps no other account revealed the spunk of its author so much as Harriet Hamilton Bayly's. She recounted how she blatantly told the Confederate men she was an abolitionist when they "talked their slavery and secession notions." She also refused Confederate money offered for bread she had distributed to them. This action became less altruistic and more politically charged when she told them, "I would take the genuine article--good greenbacks--if they had it; and they paid me well."<sup>70</sup> And remember Sarah Barrett King, who chose to defy the wishes of the Confederates and remain in a house which she and her companions had been advised to leave.

This willingness to stand up to military men apparently stemmed from a feeling of moral justification. These women felt justified in their demands for redress because they were acting as the moral guardians of those (who, incidentally, were men) in need. These accounts of standing up to military men were written by older women, which points to the importance of age as a major factor in how women experienced the battle.

The fact that many of the older women of Gettysburg were better able to assert themselves against military men rather than civilian men may also point to the significance of daily contact in creating and maintaining power relations between men and women. The military men that entered Gettysburg in the summer of 1863 had "power" in terms of weapons and sheer numbers, but the civilian men of the town (at least those who remained) retained their longstanding positions of power both within the family and within the larger community. The women who asserted themselves against the military men, such as Sarah Barrett King and Harriet Hamilton Bayly, were

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<sup>69</sup>King account, 3.

<sup>70</sup>Bayly Star and Sentinel account.

apparently more comfortable confronting unfamiliar men. But these confrontations were ultimately counterproductive: although the women asserted their autonomy, the men who witnessed these assertions left when the battle was over. Ultimately, the women of Gettysburg did overturn a few gender hierarchies, but the civilian men who were in power both before and after the battle neither witnessed nor recognized these spirited exchanges with military men.

### Men as Protectors?

Another component of the complex web of power relations of 1863 Gettysburg was the image of men as protectors. Even though some of these women found themselves engaged in behavior that bespoke autonomy, they nonetheless carried with them the prevalent separate spheres ideology that envisioned men as protectors. Their battle narratives portrayed the trouble they had reconciling the image of the dominant ideology and the reality of their lives, where many of their men were absent.

Women who wrote these accounts portrayed men as protectors in cases where the head of household remained. Younger women writing accounts were especially inclined to present their fathers in manly, protective roles. On the other hand, older women frequently mentioned the failed attempts of male protection. Mary McAllister wrote of the man who called to warn her about the danger of sharpshooters and got shot himself.<sup>71</sup> Sarah King took some amusement from telling how her father hid behind a bed in the house when he learned the Confederates were in town.<sup>72</sup> In fact, only Fannie Buehler, who was rich and whose account was written in 1896, and whose husband

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<sup>71</sup>McAllister account, 5.

<sup>72</sup>King account, 2.

was a politician, seemed overly concerned with exalting the protective qualities of her husband. According to Fannie, “There was no lack of provisions in our home, thanks to the prudent forethought of my very thoughtful husband.”<sup>73</sup> Thus, David Buehler provided for his family, protected them from hunger and want, despite the fact he had fled town with the mails.

Many Gettysburg women felt civilian men were physically unable to protect them from the fright and danger of battle. Certain men in the Union army were also considered less than paragons of protection. Sarah Broadhead’s observation, “We do not feel much safer, for they are only raw militia,” illustrated the difference between military men (veterans) and boys (new, “raw” recruits), and how they were perceived. “Men” might be able to aid them, but “boys” apparently offered little protection.<sup>74</sup> Sarah Barrett King similarly ridiculed the “fool-hardy” Union men who came to Gettysburg from Emmitsburg, Maryland on June 27 (“I presume on a lark.”) and missed running into the Confederate cavalry by only a few hours.<sup>75</sup> Both Sarah Broadhead and Sarah Barrett King were older, married women. Their descriptions of the ineffective Union forces were made before the battle commenced. However, after the battle began, images of military men as protectors abounded. This included both Union and Confederate men.

The protection given to the women of Gettysburg by Union troops was both psychological and physical. Many narratives recounted a feeling of safety, both when the Union forces arrived on June 27, and when they triumphantly returned to the town

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<sup>73</sup>Buehler account, 19.

<sup>74</sup>Broadhead account, 7.

<sup>75</sup>King account, 2.



on July 4. According to Sarah Broadhead, the presence of Union troops in the public square on that Independence Day was a comfort: “I knew we were now safe.”<sup>76</sup>

Union troops also provided physical protection to the women of Gettysburg. While she was showing the Union Army the roads of the area, Elizabeth Thorn was directed by the officer to walk “to the east or southeast of the horse” so he could protect her from any bullets that might fly her way.<sup>77</sup> Liberty Hollinger recounted how she appealed to two wounded Union soldiers for help and advice on the first day of the battle. They advised her to go the cellar, and then proceeded to carry her mother, who had fainted, down there before they rejoined the retreat of the Union forces.<sup>78</sup> Finally, Jennie McCreary told of how a wounded Union officer in her house called out to a group of menacing men lurking about her home that the place was a hospital, and the threatening Confederates “went away.”<sup>79</sup>

Despite the fact that they were members of an invading army, Confederate men were also presented as protectors of the women of Gettysburg. This is interesting, since many of the townsmen who were *not* invaders were not seen by women as potential protectors. The fact that these women viewed Confederates as able and willing protectors of women and children was yet another example of the strength of the separate spheres ideology.

The image of Confederate guards assigned to “protect” the townswomen was a

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<sup>76</sup>Broadhead account, 16. Mary McAllister also recalled how “we thought we were safe” when the Union troops arrived on July 1, the first day of the battle. McAllister account, 1.

<sup>77</sup>Thorn Compiler account, 2.

<sup>78</sup>Hollinger account, 168.

<sup>79</sup>McCreary, Evening Bulletin and Compiler accounts.

recurring theme.<sup>80</sup> Two accounts of older women used this image to great effect. Sarah Barrett King described how she and her companions felt “perfectly safe” when two Confederates said they would sit on the doorstep and guard the house.<sup>81</sup> And Mary McAllister, who had a problem with the first “sassy” men assigned to guard her home, was eventually rewarded with two satisfactory men, and was “not molested any more.”<sup>82</sup>

### Women Potentially Empowered By War Work

At the same time these women were hailing some military men as protectors they were potentially empowering themselves through war work. Every one of these ten women participated in aiding the soldiers, some in the battlefields and others in their homes. Going ‘out’ and ministering to the wounded on the battlefield embodied a certain level of autonomy, as can be seen in the case of Harriet Hamilton Bayly, whose husband forbade her to return to the work. Of course a certain degree of authority also accompanied caring for the wounded men within the confines of one’s own home. Although these women were catering to the needs of men--a decidedly uncontroversial aspect of the domestic ideal--the power dynamic had been subtly altered because these men were vulnerable and in some cases in need of protection, a decidedly unmanly trait.

These wounded men, who previously had been in a position of authority over

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<sup>80</sup>Of course, if the Confederates occupied a large portion of the town from the evening of July 1 to the early morning of the 4th, one might wonder whom the “guards” were protecting the townswomen from.

<sup>81</sup>King account, 3.

<sup>82</sup>McAllister account, 5.

women, reacted to their predicament in different ways. Many were thankful for the kind assistance given. However a few, including the officers nursed in the homes of Mary McAllister and Sallie Myers, were demanding and haughty.<sup>83</sup> And, according to the accounts of Sarah Broadhead and Sallie Myers, at least some of the men were aware of a line between being self-sufficient (manly) and being helpless (effeminate). Some men were reluctant to submit to the ministering of first aid by women. When Sarah Broadhead asked the Union men at the Seminary hospital if any would like their wounds dressed, one replied that there was a man on the floor "who cannot help himself, you would better see to him."<sup>84</sup> This man asserted his self-sufficiency and drew a distinction between himself and the helpless fellow soldier on the floor. A second example of this reluctance to grant women control occurred when Sallie Myers assisted a wounded Union officer in dressing his wounds. In her account of the situation she related his assurance that "he would take the responsibility and superintend the job if I would do the work."<sup>85</sup> So, even though Sallie actually performed the procedure, the officer assumed the "responsibility" (i.e., the power) of the situation.

Ultimately, women did have a large degree of control over the fates of many of these men. Take, for instance, Sarah Broadhead, who was instrumental in relocating wounded men from the wet basement of the Seminary hospital to considerably more sanitary quarters four flights up.<sup>86</sup> Nursing wounded soldiers was a source of empowerment for these women, and it is apparent that at least some of the men

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<sup>83</sup>*Ibid.*, 3; Myers Sunday Call account, 2.

<sup>84</sup>Broadhead account, 18.

<sup>85</sup>Myers Sunday Call account, 2.

<sup>86</sup>Broadhead account, 19-20.



recognized this, especially the wounded Union men who made such a point of being “able to help themselves.”

As these varied experiences of stepping up (and in some cases physically stepping out of the home) to the challenge of nursing suggest, the reality of the women of Gettysburg was far removed from the popular image of female passivity. In fact, their nursing of the wounded, not to mention feeding many of the 21,000 wounded men who littered the town and countryside, made the women of Gettysburg a vital military link. Their service was an indispensable part of the war effort.

But because this service was “domestic” to a certain extent, the non-traditional aspect of the experiences of Gettysburg’s women has been hidden for the most part behind Jennie Wade’s ample domestic (and inherently passive) shadow. Domesticity was thus conflated with passivity. Instead of being recognized for their active public labor, real *work* in service to their country, these women were patted on the head and thanked for their sentimental assistance, which was understood as simply a “natural” outpouring of their feminine charity and not really “work” at all. And, ultimately, none of these women demanded recognition for her service.<sup>87</sup>

This behavior might be explained by the early nineteenth-century separation of the home (private/female) from work (public/male), which eventually led to the classification of unpaid work as non-work. This applied to housework as well as war work. As Jennie Attie pointed out in her study of war work in the North, women’s inclination for voluntary labor was considered “natural” but no men were expected to

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<sup>87</sup>But Jennie Wade’s mother did. She applied for, and was awarded, a mother’s pension for Jennie’s “service” during the battle. This is significant because the most “traditional” service rendered by a woman during the battle resulted in one of the most non-traditional demands. Her request was so unusual that the mother’s pension form that Mary Wade filled out had to be modified: in every instance the word “son” appeared it was neatly crossed out and “daughter” put in its place. Application on file at ACHS.

support the Union for free.<sup>88</sup>

How different women dealt with their potentially empowering experiences during and after the battle varied. Although the conditions for empowerment were present, not all of the women recognized that they might have been empowered, and fewer still acted upon this possibility. In fact, the only woman who acted in an out-of-the-ordinary way following the battle was Elizabeth Thorn who was assigned the grim task of burying one hundred and five bodies.<sup>89</sup>

Most of the women found great personal satisfaction and pride in the work they did for those wounded at the Battle of Gettysburg. Sallie Myers captured the mood succinctly: “while I would not care to live over that summer again . . . I would not willingly erase that chapter from my life’s experience.”<sup>90</sup> Many of the women of Gettysburg expressed surprise at being able to handle the huge responsibilities placed upon them in the heat of battle. Jennie McCreary found she actually had “a little more nerve than I thought I had.”<sup>91</sup> And Sarah Broadhead discovered that, “We do not know

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<sup>88</sup>Jeanie Attie, “Warwork and the Crisis of Domesticity in the North,” in Divided Houses: Gender and the Civil War (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 252. See also Glenna Matthews, ‘Just a Housewife’: The Rise and Fall of Domesticity in America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

<sup>89</sup>Despite her greatly expanded role as the gatekeeper of the Evergreen Cemetery, Elizabeth Thorn was nevertheless subject to the continuities that remained firmly entrenched in the town of Gettysburg after the battle. In her Compiler account, she stated flatly, “For all the work of burying the soldiers we never received any extra pay from the cemetery nor from any other source, only the monthly salary of \$13.” (2) Her responsibilities may have multiplied, but her remuneration had not.

<sup>90</sup>Myers Sunday Call account, 3.

<sup>91</sup>McCreary Compiler account.

until tried what we are capable of.”<sup>92</sup>

In addition to this sense of personal growth, a few of these women actually recognized that their responsibilities during the battle had offered a greatly augmented role. Fannie Buehler realized that it was she who must run her household and take care of the group who had congregated in her home. With her husband gone, she had assumed the entire responsibility for her fate and the lives of others. With the importance of her role in mind, she recalled, “so much depended upon me, and what would happen if a stray shot or shell should strike me. No, no, whatever others did I must run no risks, and so I staid [sic] in the house and yard . . .”<sup>93</sup> According to Buehler’s account, domesticity was far from a mere synonym for passivity. In reality, domestic responsibilities actually empowered married women.

In an account written in 1903, Sallie Myers recognized the power her role as a nurse had bestowed. Her account stated plainly the great pride she took in the “passes which admitted me to any hospital at any time.” She recounted her desire to be an enlisted nurse. The reason she gave for not acting upon this ambition? “I could not see my way clear to leave home at that time.”<sup>94</sup> This was no doubt a common theme in the weeks and months following the battle. In fact, none of these women seemed to step out of their traditional, pre-battle roles after the battle had ended. It appeared that none was ready to venture out of the home.

Of course this was understandable in the wake of the immense influx of visitors to the town as soon as the railroad lines, which had been destroyed by Confederates, were

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<sup>92</sup>Broadhead account, 19.

<sup>93</sup>Buehler account, 22.

<sup>94</sup>Myers Sunday Call account, 3.



repaired on July 10th. Within days the population of the town had swollen to the point of overflowing with volunteers, family members searching for loved ones, and the simply curious. The women of Gettysburg, some of whom were relieved from their nursing duties by the arrival of the U.S. Sanitary and Christian commissions, and the establishment of the general U.S. Army Hospital, were now expected to provide food and other services to accommodate these guests. As if the additional demands of the battle's immediate aftermath were not enough to tax even the sturdiest constitution, the stench of rotting flesh (both human and equine) and the fear of pestilence necessitated keeping one's windows closed in the stifling heat of the summer. It was no wonder these women stayed indoors.

### The Hegemony of the Separate Spheres Ideology

Despite the presence of contradictory gender images in eyewitness accounts of the battle, the popular image of Gettysburg has not been one of controversy or change. The traditional images of Jennie Wade and John Burns have concealed the decidedly non-traditional situation during and immediately following the battle. Even the articles and poems of the Northern press that alluded to less-than-manly behavior on the part of many Pennsylvania men failed to budge the firmly entrenched popular belief in Gettysburg as the home of these paragons of female and male patriotism.

This raises the question of the hegemony of the separate spheres ideology. The ideology had a strong hold on the popular imagination, as can be seen in the creation and ready acceptance of the stories of Jennie Wade and John Burns. The separate spheres ideology was so pervasive that it was able to accommodate the many manifestations of manhood and womanhood that resulted from both the Battle of

Gettysburg and the Civil War in general.

Although men were idealized as the protectors of women and children within the separate spheres ideology, the exact form of that protection remained vague. In Gettysburg, the men regarded economic protection as their primary duty so they felt justified in leaving their wives and children to safeguard their livelihood. Many people in other parts of the North felt that it was the physical safety of wives and children that were of paramount importance, and attacked the men of Gettysburg for their inadequate manliness.

There were a number of justifications offered to explain why the townsmen fled Gettysburg, and all included elements of the “man as protector” theme. As we have seen, many of the accounts written by Gettysburg women appreciated the economic protection offered by farmers who moved their livestock out of the path of the two ravenous armies. Many of the urban Northerners who attacked the men who fled Gettysburg, among them L.L. Crouse, probably did not understand the economic importance of livestock. Even the letter written on behalf of the men of Gettysburg in response to Crouse’s unflattering New York Times article showed an ignorance of the significance of livestock to the exodus. According to the letter, “but very few” of the townsmen actually left, and those that did “were chiefly men of official positions . . . and others of that class.”<sup>95</sup> Although it ignored the role of farmers as economic protectors of their families, this response offered another justification for the men leaving: the protection of government property. A prime example of this was Fannie Buehler’s husband, who took the mails to Harrisburg. In addition, the letter to the editor of the New York Times pointed out the threat of military age men being pressed into service in the Confederate army. If these men were taken away from their families

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<sup>95</sup>Adams Sentinel, 14 July 1863.

and forced to go to war, they would no longer be able to protect their families in either a physical or economic way.

The separate spheres ideology was so prevalent that it was even shared by the Confederate men who fought at Gettysburg. Because men were viewed as the “natural” protectors of women and children, it was assumed (by the men who left town with valuables, the women who stayed behind, and the invading army) that the civilians left “defenseless” would be spared harm. So, in essence, the prevalence of the image of men as protectors gave the men of Gettysburg the ability to prioritize one certain type of protection over the others, in this case the economic protection of their families.

#### Gettysburg’s Experiences and Studies of Other Mid-Nineteenth-Century Women: Similarities to Southern Women

Despite the fact that they lived in a geographically Northern town, the women of Gettysburg had many experiences similar to those of Southern women. The most striking of these similarities was “having to do a man’s business” in the absence of husbands and fathers.<sup>96</sup> However, studies of the South by Drew Gilpin Faust, Anne Firor Scott and Joan Cashin have focused upon the situations where the men were away by military necessity, not by choice--although some argued that the men of Gettysburg had no choice in their flight to preserve economic stability.<sup>97</sup> Both groups of women were forced to assume the responsibilities of men, but the duration of that challenge was

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<sup>96</sup>Drew Gilpin Faust, “‘Trying To Do A Man’s Business’: Slavery, Violence, and Gender in the American Civil War,” Gender and History 4 No. 2 (Summer 1992): 197-214.

<sup>97</sup>Such as Fannie Buehler’s adamant defense of her husbands’ leaving with the mails--she described how she had to convince him to go. Also Harriet Hamilton Bayly’s observation that a farmer needs a horse as much as a house.



much shorter in Gettysburg. The battle lasted only a few days, as opposed to the years of service rendered by the Southern women.

Another similarity between the women of Gettysburg and the women of many parts of the Confederacy was the experience of military occupation. Not many realize that Gettysburg was under martial law by not one but two armies over the course of the battle. While the Confederates held most of the town (from the afternoon of July 1 to the early morning of July 4) citizens were living in territory held by hostile forces. Luckily for them the Confederates were much less “hostile” to the areas of the North that they “visited” during the Gettysburg Campaign of 1863 than the Union forces had been to the South.<sup>98</sup>

The women of Gettysburg were also very socially conservative, much like the majority of Southern women. This conservatism no doubt was a factor in their refusal to demand acknowledgement for their wartime service. In staying silent about their battlefield service, Gettysburg women, who did not share the nation’s idolization of Jennie Wade, nonetheless helped to perpetuate the image of women as silent, passive witnesses to history who could only make bread or get shot (in Wade’s case, both) to further the war effort. George Rable found a similar set of circumstances in his study of Confederate women: “Although women did not uniformly embrace the value system of the Old South, they did much more to uphold than undermine it.”<sup>99</sup>

A final similarity was the qualified acceptance of female nursing. The women of

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<sup>98</sup>In *Civil War Soldiers*, Reid Mitchell discussed possible reasons for this. One explanation was that the Confederates simply took the high moral ground. Another pointed to more practical considerations: Lee simply could not afford the loss of discipline with his troops that condoned looting would entail. Finally, it was a prudent political decision: Lee was trying to get the North (and Europe) to recognize the South as an equal nation, and widespread pillaging was not a very good idea.

<sup>99</sup>Rable, 2.

Gettysburg were allowed, indeed expected, to nurse the wounded, but only in a way that corresponded to an outpouring of “natural” feminine nurturing and charity. When Sallie Myers performed the surgical procedure on the officer in her home it was made clear, by both the officer’s words and Sallie’s subsequent re-telling of the story, that it was he who “supervised” the job. This is consistent with the findings of Drew Gilpin Faust that in the South nursing was accepted as another dimension of women’s service and sacrifice, just so long as it was not transformed into female empowerment.<sup>100</sup>

All of these similarities suggest the possibility that Gettysburg, which is located a mere six miles from the Mason-Dixon line, should not be lumped together with the rest of “the North” in discussions of Civil War experiences. The eyewitness accounts of the battle point to many shared experiences between women of Gettysburg and their Southern sisters. Suzanne Lebsack concluded, “It may be that for women, the distinctiveness of the South lay in the breadth of the gap between private power and public display: No one objected to a woman’s acquisition of power as long as she did not ask that it be made obvious, official or general.”<sup>101</sup> This was also the case in 1863 Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, as well.

### Differences

Of course the experiences of Gettysburg women were also different from those of Southern women. The most obvious difference was the lack of economic deprivation in

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<sup>100</sup>Drew Gilpin Faust, “Altars of Sacrifice: Confederate Women and the Narratives of War,” in Divided Houses, 185.

<sup>101</sup>Lebsack, 248-9.



Gettysburg, even immediately after the battle.<sup>102</sup> This material advantage over Confederate women was understood by Northern women even before the time of the battle.<sup>103</sup> Although the presence of two armies had severely taxed their food supply, the wagon- and trainloads of food, medical supplies, and volunteers were a great relief. And although the town of Gettysburg suffered a fair degree of damage as a result of the battle, it was far from destroyed.<sup>104</sup> In fact, some could argue that it was changed for the better, becoming famous as the site of the “high water mark” of the Confederacy.<sup>105</sup>

Another major difference between the wartime experiences of the women of Gettysburg and Southern women was the absence of slavery in Pennsylvania. The presence of slavery as the “cornerstone” of Southern society served to add a dimension

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<sup>102</sup>In fact, a number of studies have claimed that the economy of the area was surprisingly unaffected by the battle or the entire war. Matthew J. Gallman and Susan Baker, “Gettysburg’s Gettysburg: What the Battle Did to the Borough” (Unpublished paper presented at the Civil War Institute, Gettysburg, PA, 28 June, 1995); Marilyn Brownfield Rudawsky, “After July: The Effects of the Battle of Gettysburg on the People of Adams County” (M.A. thesis, Youngstown State University, 1979).

<sup>103</sup>One example of the literature which acknowledged the hardships of the Confederate women was, “A Few Words on Behalf of the Loyal Women of the United States By One of Themselves (Loyal Publication Society, No. 10, 1863),” in Frank Freidel, ed., *Union Pamphlets of the Civil War, 1861-1865*, vol. 2 (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of the Harvard University Press, 1967).

<sup>104</sup>The damage suffered by the families of women who wrote eyewitness accounts varied. According to claims submitted to the State of Pennsylvania, Peter Thorn (Elizabeth’s husband) lost property worth \$295; James Pierce (Tillie’s father) lost \$832 in property; and Joseph Bayly (Harriet’s husband) lost four cattle, a steer, a bull, two cows, three horses, and eleven sheep, livestock worth a total of \$613. On the other hand, Jennie McCreary was surprised that her home was relatively unscathed, with “only the tearing down of our fences, which can easily be repaired.” McCreary *Compiler* account. Damage claims on file at the GNMPL.

<sup>105</sup>Some, however, have bemoaned the town’s fame. In her master’s thesis on the effects of the battle upon the people of Adams County, Rudawsky sadly noted that although the county had returned to normal by the beginning of 1864, “a return to the old anonymity . . . would never again occur.” Rudawsky, 117.



of mastery and institutionalized violence to social relationships that was missing in Gettysburg. Because slavery was a factor in all personal relationships in the South, the mastery and violence of the system was present not only between the master and the slave, but also between all men and women, white and black.<sup>106</sup> Whether one was a privileged white “lady” or a black female slave one thing remained constant: slavery was a constitutive factor in the identities of all women.<sup>107</sup>

The absence of this institutionalized violence in Gettysburg helped to shape white women’s experience of the war. First of all, the mastery and violence required in interracial relationships in the South did not appear to be a factor in Gettysburg’s racial relations. In the rare instances men or women of color were even mentioned in eyewitness accounts the battle written by whites, they were portrayed in a very paternalistic manner. The absence of slavery also meant that the women of the town were not forced to oversee slaves when their husbands left, as was the case with many Southern women. The skills of assertiveness and domination that were required of slaveholders (and increasingly female slaveholders, as the men left to fight in the army) were not a part of the lives of Gettysburg women, even though such skills might have come in handy during and after the battle.

However, simply because slavery was absent in Pennsylvania does not mean that

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<sup>106</sup>For excellent studies of how this mastery was played out in individual Southern households, see Drew Gilpin Faust, James Henry Hammond and the Old South: A Design for Mastery (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982); Drew Gilpin Faust, “Trying to Do a Man’s Business;” Joan Cashin, “Since the War Broke Out”: The Marriage of Kate and William McLure,” in Divided Houses; and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988).

<sup>107</sup>Fox-Genovese, 334.

race was not a factor in Gettysburg.<sup>108</sup> In fact, in the days and weeks before the Battle of Gettysburg most of the town's free black population fled town to avoid being captured by Lee's invading army. Of those who did not leave, many were enslaved and carried off as contraband of war.<sup>109</sup> Despite their role in such extreme situations, no first-hand accounts of the battle were written by free black women.<sup>110</sup> Instead, we are provided only brief glimpses of the lives of black women through brief, dismissive passages in accounts left by white women.<sup>111</sup>

And finally, there was the difference between Gettysburg's tradition-loving women and the South's element of "unruly women."<sup>112</sup> These women, who did not meet the demands of proper ladylike behavior in the Old South, were the subject of continuing, intense efforts to institute social and sexual control. The political and economic realities of the Civil War after 1862 occasioned decidedly aggressive behavior on the part of

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<sup>108</sup>For more information on the history of African Americans in the Gettysburg area see Emma Lapsansky, "Black Presence in Pennsylvania 'Making It Home'," Pennsylvania History Studies, No. 21 (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania Historical Association, 1990), esp. 14-20.

<sup>109</sup>On the experiences of the African American population of Gettysburg during the battle, see Vermilyea, and Gallman and Baker.

<sup>110</sup>The closest thing to an eyewitness account by an African American woman was a chapter in Clifton Johnson's Battleground Adventures entitled, "A Colored Servant-Maid." The account was clearly second-hand, and cannot easily be traced to any specific individual.

<sup>111</sup>A typical example of the meager information on African American women to be gleaned from white women's accounts is Fannie Buehler's brief mention of how both of her black servants had run away, which left her "alone in the kitchen." Buehler account, 11.

<sup>112</sup>Victoria Bynum, Unruly Women: The Politics of Social and Sexual Control in the Old South (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992).

some Southern women.<sup>113</sup> These “unruly” women were agents of temporary change during the war in such non-traditional acts such as rioting and political subversion (which they committed by hiding Confederate deserters). However, they were ultimately unsuccessful in changing the reality of their everyday lives once the war was over. The status of Gettysburg’s women was similarly unchanged, but their actions far from “unruly.”

### Similarities to Other Northern Women

The women of Gettysburg also shared many similarities with other Northern women. The best-documented of the experiences of nineteenth-century Northern women were those involved with benevolent organizations. Gettysburg’s women shared the zeal of other Northern women for a distinctly feminine, sentimental charity-- what Lori Ginzberg delineated as the “first generation” of organized benevolence in her Women and the Work of Benevolence. Examples of this type of benevolence proliferated in Gettysburg throughout the war, among them the Soldiers’ Aid Society, which was formed in April of 1861, just days after the war commenced.

Gettysburg also shared a characteristic of larger Northern cities, a strong basis of community networks.<sup>114</sup> The informal “use of the streets” was apparent in the stories of the women who wrote eyewitness accounts. It appeared that both the family and the

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<sup>113</sup>Examples of this can be found in Bynum; and Faust, ““Trying To Do a Man’s Business,” in which slaveowner Lizzie Neblett took out her frustrations on her children.

<sup>114</sup>Christine Stansell explored the uses of the streets and such community networks in New York City in City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1790-1860 (New York: Knopf, 1986). In fact, where Mary Ryan found the family to be the “cradle of the middle class,” Stansell essentially argued that in New York the streets were the “cradle” of the working class. See Ryan, Cradle of the Middle Class.



streets were vital sources of information and understanding in Gettysburg both during and after the battle.

Community networks were present in both the town of Gettysburg and farms in the surrounding countryside. Information was much more accessible in town, however, where citizens could generally look out their window and get a good idea of what was going on. Sallie Myers described a common Gettysburg scene: "All of us townspeople betook ourselves to the streets and stood around in groups or sat on doorsteps."<sup>115</sup> The battle, much like the rest of the Civil War, was viewed through the prism of community life.<sup>116</sup>

Those who lived on farms had a much harder time attaining information. Sarah Barrett King (a town-dweller who spent the battle in the countryside) was especially attuned to this isolation: "We were away from any news and the suspense was awful."<sup>117</sup> Farm wife Harriet Hamilton Bayly, who was certainly used to the extra effort involved in staying up to speed on news of the town, hurried through her work on the morning of July 1 so she could trek up a local hill which provided "a first-rate place for a lookout." She got there bright and early, and found most of her neighbors already there. When no information about the troops could be ascertained from this position, Harriet and a male neighbor started towards town to get more information. They walked for a while, but soon a shot from a Confederate cannon made them aware

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<sup>115</sup>Myers Battleground Adventures account, 177.

<sup>116</sup>For more on the symbolic and ceremonial roles of women in Gettysburg during the war see Gallman and Baker, 20-1. See also Mary P. Ryan, Women In Public: Between Banners and Ballots, 1825-1880 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990).

<sup>117</sup>King account, 3.

they were between two armies and they wisely hurried home (“faster than we went”).<sup>118</sup>

### Differences

The major differences between the experiences of these Gettysburg women and other studies of women in the North appear in the presence and function of organized benevolence. Unlike the women of Utica, New York, that Mary Ryan studied, the women of Gettysburg had not “absorbed” the public welfare functions of the town by the time of the battle.<sup>119</sup> In fact, the Poor House, which was by far the largest dispenser of aid to the needy, was run by men before, during, and after the battle. Although women were active in the grunt work of benevolence, the power of the organizations (in the form of the offices of these societies) was firmly in the hands of the towns’ elite men.<sup>120</sup>

When the “ladies” of Gettysburg formed wartime soldiers’ aid societies they also

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<sup>118</sup>Bayly Star and Sentinel account.

<sup>119</sup>Ryan, Cradle of the Middle Class, 213.

<sup>120</sup>The Poor House listings show that from 1860 to 1880 all of the officers of the organization were men. All of the treasurers were lawyers. Adams County Poor House Accounts on file at ACHS.

This conclusion is also supported by Gallman and Baker, who found that the traditional power base of the town of Gettysburg remained intact through both the battle and the war. In a separate study of Philadelphia during the Civil War, J. Matthew Gallman similarly concluded that “although wartime benevolence drew attention to the North’s charitable women, it did little to change established gender roles.” Gallman, Mastering Wartime: A Social History of Philadelphia During the Civil War (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 134.

elected the “leading” (i.e., wealthy) women of the town to hold offices.<sup>121</sup> The aim of these societies was to supply local soldiers with clothing, food, and a variety of delicacies during their duration of service. These forms of localized, “spontaneous benevolence” were incredibly popular in Gettysburg. The presence of all of these societies does not appear to fit with the “second generation” of organized benevolence that Lori Ginzberg has asserted became entrenched elsewhere in the 1850s.<sup>122</sup> The embodiment of this second generation was the United States Sanitary Commission, with its emphasis on “nationalism, discipline, centralization, and, above all, efficiency.”<sup>123</sup> Despite the fact that Gettysburg’s benevolence was a generation “behind,” it had at least one thing in common with the USSC: both relied upon the work of women under the direction of a group of elite men.<sup>124</sup>

Competing visions of benevolence were not limited to Gettysburg’s older conception and the newer, more efficient system of the USSC. A rival national organization, the U.S. Christian Commission, was also a proponent of the older, more

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<sup>121</sup>The list of women who held offices in the Ladies’ Union Relief Association of Gettysburg published in the Adams Sentinel in 1861 was “like a who’s who of Gettysburg.” Elwood W. Christ, “A History and Architectural Analysis of the Witherow-Breckenridge-Pierce House, Gettysburg, Adams County, Pennsylvania” (Unpublished paper, 22 November 1995), 168.

<sup>122</sup>Gallman and Baker also found that the Gettysburg Ladies’ Union Relief Society continued to go about their business with a decidedly local mindset, even after widely publicized calls for goods from the U.S. Sanitary Commission in 1861. It appeared that although the Gettysburg women gave generously to this national organization, they nonetheless refused to give up their work of localized, “sentimental” benevolence. Gallman and Baker, 17-20.

<sup>123</sup>Ginzberg, 133.

<sup>124</sup>George Fredrickson has argued that the elite male leaders of the USSC were actually less interested in humanitarian aims than imposing their own conservative ideas of government by teaching order and discipline. Fredrickson, The Inner Civil War: Northern Intellectuals and the Crisis of the Union (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), 98-112.



personalized system of charity. In stark contrast to the rigid rules and iron discipline of the Sanitary Commission, the Christian Commission sought to “minister to the soul as well as the body” of individual wounded soldiers. A major point of contention between the two national organizations was the use of paid agents instead of volunteers: the Sanitary Commission paid its agents, while the Christian Commission considered the motives of its unpaid volunteers more “pure.”

The competition between the USSC and the USCC was evident in the newspapers of Gettysburg during the war, but especially after the battle.<sup>125</sup> The women of the town eventually became actively engaged in both organizations, seemingly without regard for their ideological differences.<sup>126</sup> Despite their work in these national organizations, it is important to point out that the foremost benevolent efforts of Gettysburg women were very localized and limited, and that this local focus remained intact before, during and after the battle.

Not only did the women of Gettysburg lag behind some areas of the North in their benevolent institutions and practices, they were also decidedly lacking in a feminist consciousness. They did not recognize themselves as vital components in the war effort and, as such, entitled to wield public influence. Unlike other women who had turned wartime service into a demand for recognition, the women of Gettysburg remained

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<sup>125</sup> It certainly comes as no surprise to learn the “sentimental” approach of the U.S. Christian Commission won hearty approval from many citizens of Gettysburg, among them the editors of the Adams Sentinel. According to the paper, the difference between the other relief associations (the U.S. Sanitary Commission among them) and the USCC, was that the latter “makes ministrations to the spiritual wants a principal feature in its work. We heartily wish it God speed.” Adams Sentinel, 14 July 1863.

<sup>126</sup> For a more detailed discussion of the women of Gettysburg and their involvement with the USSC and the USCC see Gallman and Baker, 37-9.

unwilling to call attention to themselves.<sup>127</sup>

An example of one woman who did take advantage of her wartime role was Clara Barton, an independent nurse who tended the union Army and later went on to found the American Red Cross. According to her biographer, Stephen Oates, “The Civil War was the defining event in Clara’s life, shaping who she was and what she became. It gave her the opportunity as a woman to reach out and seize control of her destiny.”<sup>128</sup>

## Conclusion

The Civil War, and most likely the Battle of Gettysburg, were surely the defining events in the lives of the women of Gettysburg, as well as Clara Barton. It undoubtedly helped to shape these women and had a profound influence upon what they--and their town--would become after the war. But these Gettysburg women did not “reach out and seize control” of their opportunities. Why? And how can the answer to that question add to our understanding of womanhood in nineteenth-century America?

The experiences recorded in the eyewitness accounts of some of the women who lived in and around Gettysburg during the battle point to the “uneven developments” of women in the nineteenth-century.<sup>129</sup> The women of Gettysburg probably did not see

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<sup>127</sup>These findings are consistent with the conclusions of J. Matthew Gallman in his study of the Northern home front during the Civil War. He found that although the war forged a political consciousness in some women, the great majority did not question their position as women in American society. J. Matthew Gallman, The North Fights the Civil War: The Home Front (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1994), 190.

<sup>128</sup>Stephen B. Oates, A Woman of Valor: Clara Barton and the Civil War (New York: The Free Press, 1994), ix.

<sup>129</sup>I have borrowed the phrase from Mary Poovey’s Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988), which is a book about English women, but I think it is useful in understanding the ways that some women can make gains without others, and sometimes



benevolent organizations as the road to empowerment or a training ground for the suffrage movement. Because they had very little power in the most influential of the public welfare institutions, the Poor House, the women of Gettysburg were no doubt largely unaffected by the new conception of the ideology of benevolence. Their response (or lack of it) to this new ideology remained surprisingly unchanged, even after the first and second generations of organized benevolence met head-on following the Battle of Gettysburg.<sup>130</sup>

The women who lived through the battle and helped to nurse the ubiquitous wounded soldiers were driven by a gendered, sentimental idea of charity as a distinctly female domain. When the first trains arrived in Gettysburg after the battle (there was a delay because the railroad bridge over Rock Creek had to be repaired) agents of the U.S. Sanitary Commission and members of the Christian Commission swarmed into town. Although each had a distinct organizational and ideological goal in the treatment of the thousands of wounded, their differences did not seem to matter to the women of Gettysburg in the weeks following the battle.

By "taking over" the care of these military men, these men and (mostly) women of the USSC and the USCC relieved a huge amount of the townswomen's burden, and they were grateful. Some of these women were upset to see "their" wounded moved out to Camp Letterman, the general hospital established a mile and a half outside of town, but most were too occupied with the immediate demands of accommodating the

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at the expense of other women. This concept is also explored in Fox-Genovese's Within the Plantation Household, where the status and power of one group of women (slaveholders) is dependent upon the oppression of another (slaves).

<sup>130</sup>Even after the battle the women continued to do most of the work in organizations run by men. This included situations where men, and not women in auxiliary organizations, were in charge of any cash donations. Gallman and Baker, 36-41.



multitude of guests in their households to put up much of a fight.<sup>131</sup> So, within days these women--many of whom had braved shot and shell and held their own against two armies--were once again consigned to the home.

While the women of Gettysburg were cooking, cleaning, washing, and generally supporting the hordes of visitors that descended upon the town after the battle, the men were also busy. Many were involved with clean-up efforts, both for individual property, and the good of the town (removal of the thousands of dead and decaying bodies was of primary concern, especially in the sweltering July heat). But others were interested in the profit to be made from the battle. These profits ranged from the immediate (such as charging wounded men to be driven from the battlefield into town in a wagon or demanding exorbitant prices for goods) to the long-range (such as the “gentlemen” who purchased many acres of farmland and suggested a Gettysburg Battlefield Memorial Association).<sup>132</sup> It seems that these men, many of whom had been absent during the battle itself, were prepared to “take charge” of reaping any rewards that might come of such an unfortunate event.

The stories of Jennie Wade and John Burns, showed that images of the Battle of

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<sup>131</sup>Camp Letterman was named for the Medical Director of the Army of the Potomac, Jonathan Letterman. For a detailed examination of the field hospitals in and around Gettysburg after the battle, see Gregory Coco, A Vast Sea of Misery: A History and Guide to the Union and Confederate Field Hospitals at Gettysburg July 1-November 20, 1863 (Gettysburg, PA: Thomas Publications, 1988).

<sup>132</sup>David McConaughy (Elizabeth Thorn’s boss) and David Wills were the two local men most instrumental in establishing the GBMA. The organization was very localized in character until 1880, when veterans of the Grand Army of the Republic were able to dominate the board of directors. This situation appeared to mirror the general mindset of the town’s organizations, which was to remain localized for as long as possible. For more information on the GBMA see John Mitchell Vanderslice, Gettysburg: A History of the Gettysburg Battle-field Memorial Association (Philadelphia: The Memorial Association, 1897); and Gerald R. Bennett, Days of “Uncertainty and Dread”: The Ordeal Endured by the Citizens at Gettysburg (Littlestown, PA: By the author, 1994), 87-90.

Gettysburg had been distorted to fill a need for stability and morale in a time of crisis. The visions of Jennie Wade as a pious, domestic woman prepared to sacrifice herself on the altar of the Union, and John Burns as a determined, courageous old man who risked life and limb to protect his hometown deflected attention away from a crisis in gender during the Battle of Gettysburg. Men that abandoned their families and women that challenged traditional roles were not congruent with the "nature" of proper manly and womanly behavior, so their presence was ignored in memory.

This study has revealed that the experiences of the women who lived in Gettysburg during the battle were really more like Southern women than other Northern women. The women of Gettysburg had not encountered or absorbed the new understanding of benevolence that was empowering some Northern women by 1863. While the national organizations embraced a "second generation" approach of efficiency and order, Gettysburg's conception of benevolence was decidedly "first generation:" a sentimental, distinctly feminine approach to charity.

Another major difference between Gettysburg and the rest of the North was the experience of military occupation and the destruction of battle. After the Battle of Gettysburg, townswomen were forced to turn their attention to the immediate material necessities of nursing and cooking for thousands of wounded men and accommodating the influx of visitors from around the North. While the majority of Northern women were spared the exigencies of war, the women of Gettysburg, much like Southern women, were forced to deal with the immediate effects of battle.

However, one popular image of the Battle of Gettysburg has proved to be true: women who lived through the battle made no claim to the power they had so briefly held. None (but Mary Wade) demanded formal recognition of their service. No woman left her home in Gettysburg to pursue a career in the army as a nurse. No monuments

were erected to the women who had faced two armies, in many cases alone. Their potentially empowering roles as providers of essential material aid to the armies was ultimately couched in terms of “natural” female proclivities toward nurturing. In this way, the townswomen of Gettysburg became symbols of domestic service and self-sacrifice in much the same fashion as Jennie Wade.

From the perspective of over a hundred and thirty years, it is easy to become frustrated and demand to know why this was allowed to happen. Why did the women of Gettysburg fail to seize the opportunity to enlarge their “sphere,” to demand rights, and to wield the influence that their service to man and state had earned them? Essentially, why were these women blind to the “big picture” that their success in augmented roles during the battle might offer the opportunity of increased participation in public, possibly even political, arenas?

Before we indict these women for their failure to pursue an activist career in women’s right, however, one should remember the constraints of place and time upon these women. Simply because the Seneca Falls Convention of 1848 raised a certain degree of awareness of women’s rights, it is unlikely that the women of Gettysburg shared any type of feminist consciousness in 1863. On the contrary, these women were probably wary of the women’s rights movement, considering it silly and/or dangerous. These women did not share the language that would enable them to conceive of their acts as politically charged.

A final thought on the subject hearkens back to the Gettysburg Campaign, commanded by General George Gordon Meade.<sup>133</sup> Following the victory at

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<sup>133</sup>Meade had been given command of the Army of the Potomac a few short days before the battle, replacing “Fighting” Joe Hooker. For more information on the commanders of the Army of the Potomac, see Gabor S. Boritt, “‘Unfinished Work’: Lincoln, Meade, and Gettysburg,” in *Lincoln’s Generals*, ed. Gabor S. Boritt (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 79-120.



Gettysburg, Lincoln was furious that Meade had not pursued Lee's Army of Northern Virginia as they retreated. Lincoln simply could not comprehend how Meade could have failed to take advantage of such an opportunity. By letting Lee "escape" across the Potomac River, Lincoln reasoned that Meade had sentenced the nation to two more years of bloody war. What Lincoln failed to recognize, however, was the exhaustion of Meade's troops. Perhaps the lesson we should take away from this is that sometimes the "big picture" does not take into account the limits of human endurance. Much like Meade's troops, the women of Gettysburg were physically, emotionally, and psychologically exhausted after the battle. They did not "follow-up" on their tactical advantage and launch a frontal assault on male social and political dominance, but perhaps the war will yet be won.

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