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Belles Among the Bluffs : The Experiences of Women During the Siege of Vicksburg

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Belles Among the Bluffs
The Experiences of Women During the Siege of Vicksburg

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Introduction

I think the hearts of women suffer more real sorrow than those that are called to still their beating upon the battlefield They are at rest and know no more pain; we are left [to] mourn their loss, and hide our anguish deep in our own hearts.
Angie, fiancée of a Confederate soldier, June 9, 1864[1]

Throughout the retelling of the great battles and campaigns of the Civil War, there remains a voice that often goes unheard. It is the voice of those citizens who could not become political officials or military heroes but who often served their section of the country just as passionately and bravely. It is the women of the Civil War era who too often get lost amid the descriptions of battle scenes and war time politics. During the war, these women endured great loss and deprivation, which warrant their being described as "war heroes."

One must look beyond military and political greatness in determining the criteria for labeling an individual a war hero. The devastating Civil War that tore the United States apart from 1861 to 1865 left behind a legacy of ordinary people who had achieved something out of the ordinary when viewed from a late twentieth century perspective. Whether expressing some grandiose sense of courage, or simply acting on an innate instinct to survive, most of the men and women who lived through the Civil War experienced a drastic change in their everyday lives. Many were forced to behave in a manner very different from that to which they were accustomed. The stories of the ordinary men who became great military leaders and soldiers or important political officials are among the most popular

accounts in American historical writing. These "war heroes" are well-known, and often revered, by school children and adults alike. However, it is the purpose of this study to chronicle and describe another type of war hero. The woman who watched as her husband, sons and brothers went off to fight in a war that she may not have completely supported; the woman who was forced to abandon her home and flee to the hillsides with her children; the woman who, for the first time in her life, had to wonder about the source of her next meal and that of her children - these are the stories of the other "war heroes" about which American historians are beginning to focus their writing.

Twentieth century contemporaries often describe a hero as an idol, a champion, or a superstar. Someone who would risk his or her life for another, make spontaneous and courageous decisions, and endure sacrifices beyond that which others may not be willing to endure would be described as a hero by most modern men and women. Women who experienced the Civil War, such as those described in this study, endured sacrifices and hardships, made difficult and often dangerous decisions concerning their own welfare as well as that of others under their supervision, and behaved in manners that were atypical of the normal behavior for their positions as dictated by their society. One may argue that anyone, when placed in similar circumstances, would demonstrate behaviors similar to those described in the pages that follow. While admitting the validity of this argument, this study attempts to recognize, describe and evaluate the actions of ordinary[2] people in rather extraordinary situations. From this analysis, we can learn that

anyone who is forced or willing to sacrifice that to which she is accustomed for her own or others' welfare can be described as a war hero.

This definition of a war hero certainly pertains to the Southern women who experienced the forty-seven day Union siege of Vicksburg, Mississippi, and its preceding campaigns. These women proved to be stronger in spirit and character than the romanticized ideal of the lady of leisure, the Southern belle. Ironically, women who sacrificed for the Confederate cause were often described as the most precious of the South's assets. They were the shining jewels of the South, the sweet Southern belles. After the war, the term "belle" came to mean more than a genteel lady of the South, but a heroine of the Confederacy. By hearing the voices of these belles, the Civil War can be seen as much more than a collection of military campaigns and battles. Greater insight can be gained into the human experience of the Civil War, demonstrating that these women, who were labeled Southern "belles" were, in fact, wartime heroines whose voices need to be heard. By hearing the voices of the belles among the high bluffs of Vicksburg, Mississippi, during a most devastating Union siege, the campaign for the Mississippi River can be seen as more than a strategic loss for the Confederacy. We become aware of the commonplace, or the ordinary people who starved, cried, suffered and died during the long days of the siege of Vicksburg as well as the four years of the catastrophic war.

A study of the experiences of women during the siege of Vicksburg illuminates the effects of the war upon Southern women as opposed to their male

counterparts about whom most Civil War materials are written. Recent historians have begun to highlight the experiences of women during wars and other significant historical events. Mary Beth Norton and others have chronicled the experiences of females during the American Revolution by using diaries and journals left by colonist women. Several historians have used similar primary sources in detailing the lives of women during the Civil War. Within the last decade, an increasing amount of Civil War research has been focused upon women. George Rable used dozens of primary sources in his book Civil Wars, which is an excellent account of the lives of women during the war. Mary Beth Massey's Women in the Civil War, is also an excellent depiction of the lives of women during the war. Studies chronicling the experiences of women in a particular region of the country during the Civil War also exist.

Despite the expanding amount of historical accounts devoted to the lives of females during the Civil War, detailed narratives describing the lives of women during specific battles or campaigns of the war are not common. Most works focus on an entire region, the north or the south, or a particular state, Pennsylvania or South Carolina. This study focuses on the experiences of women during one specific event of the Civil War, the siege of Vicksburg, Mississippi, and the preceding campaigns for the Mississippi Valley. By focusing our attention so closely on one event, our perspectives concerning the human aspects of the war can be enhanced. These were ordinary women who experienced one of the most devastating events of the entire conflict. Their accounts, written in their own words, are a historian's

most valuable tool, because they tell the real story of the Civil War. There is an abundant amount of works focused on the campaign for Vicksburg, but none that relate the accounts of the unsung heroes of the siege, the women whose stories have not yet been told.

In chronicling the women who experienced the siege of Vicksburg, the heroism of each should not be described in terms of her championing of the Confederacy. In fact, there were Unionist women in Vicksburg during the siege and undoubtedly, there were Confederate women whose support for the South waned during the war. Therefore, the qualities that make these women heroines must be described in terms of strength of spirit and character. These characteristics enabled women of Vicksburg to overcome the hardships and deprivations of the siege, which, for many, became severe. Their emergence from this ordeal should be held separate from their political loyalties or beliefs in the ideals of the war. Their survival is an example of the strength of the human spirit, which is the real story of the Civil War.

Chapter 1
The Campaign for the Mississippi Valley and Vicksburg

[Vicksburg is] the key. . . and the war can never be brought to a close until that key is in our pocket.

President Abraham Lincoln [3]

The women of Vicksburg probably did not foresee on the eve of the Civil War that their small city would become one of the most crucial battle sites of the entire conflict. Founded in 1814 by North Carolina minister Newet Vick, the river town of Vicksburg had grown rapidly. The city laid along a bend in the Mississippi River in a collection of high bluffs known as Walnut Hills. Steamboat trade along the great Mississippi provided the impetus for Vicksburg's expansion throughout the latter part of the first decade of the 1800s. With the completion of a railroad between Vicksburg and Jackson, Mississippi's state capital, and another linking it with Louisiana, Vicksburg's position as a commerce center was established. Vicksburg boasted a population of nearly five thousand on the eve of the Civil War, all unaware of the devastation that would befall their city during the conflict.[4]

The campaign for Vicksburg evolved from the desire of Union officials to gain control of the Mississippi River. The great Mississippi River was identified as a Confederate asset early in the war and, almost immediately after the firing on Fort Sumter, Union officials sought control of the strategic waterway. Brevet Lieutenant General Winfield Scott, General in Chief of the United States Army at the beginning of the Civil War, offered a plan to defeat the Confederate rebels,

which included controlling the Mississippi. This "Anaconda Plan," as it was termed, promised to cut the Confederacy in half by establishing blockades along the eastern coast and the Gulf of Mexico and by seizing control of the Mississippi River.[5]

Union control of the Mississippi would be a devastating loss to the Confederacy as it would effectively sever the western states of Arkansas, Louisiana and Texas from their Confederate neighbors east of the river. This would deprive the Confederacy of the much needed supplies and recruits provided by these western Confederate states. Union ships would also enjoy the lucrative trade routes into the Gulf of Mexico and the Confederacy would be greatly hampered in their attempts to gain formal recognition as a nation from European countries.[6] The importance of the Mississippi River could not be overestimated. Therefore, as Confederate officials sought to defend their position, their Union counterparts began to formulate the plans to seize the great river.

By early 1862, nearly a year after the war had begun, Union forces finally began a campaign for the Mississippi River. They attacked Confederate forces stationed on the river from the north and south. The Union army attacked from Kentucky in the north as the navy engaged rebel forces from the Gulf of Mexico in the south. Union successes at Forts Henry and Donelson, led by Major General Ulysses S. Grant, as well as the capture of Memphis, Tennessee, gave Union forces control of the upper Mississippi by the summer of 1862.

Meanwhile, Union gunboats under the command of Flag Officer David G. Farragut, coming from the Gulf of Mexico, gained control of Forts Jackson and St.

Philip, as well as the Confederacy's largest city, New Orleans, Louisiana. As these Union forces moved further north, they also captured Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and Natchez, Mississippi, by the summer of 1862.[7] These conquests left only one Confederate stronghold on the Mississippi River. Union officials believed the capture of this city would be as swift as the other successes they had enjoyed along the Mississippi. They were wrong. In the struggle for control of the Mississippi River that would follow, this city came to be seen as a source of hope for the dying Confederacy and would resist the Union forces for another year, costing the Union, as well as themselves, a heavy loss of lives and supplies. The city, located along a bend in the Mississippi River, was Vicksburg. This city, Mississippi's second largest, would be the proverbial "thorn in the side" of Union forces for over a year. President Abraham Lincoln identified Vicksburg as "the key," and stated that, "the war can never be brought to a close until that key is in our pocket." Lincoln added, "We may take all the northern points of the Confederacy and they can still defy us from Vicksburg."[8]

With orders to seize this "key," General S. Phillips Lee brought his Union fleet to Vicksburg on18 May 1862. Made confident by earlier Union successes along the Mississippi River, Lee promptly demanded the surrender of the city, with the following message addressed to "The Authorities at Vicksburg":

U.S.S. Oneida
Near Vicksburg, May 18, 1862

The undersigned, with order from Flag-Officer Farragut and Major-General Butler, respectively, demand the surrender of Vicksburg and its defenses to the lawful authority of the United States, under which private property and personal rights will be respected.

Respectfully Yours,
S. Phillips Lee,
Commanding Advance Naval Division[9]

Lee received three curt replies to his message, the latter two restating the opinion of the first that "Mississippians don't know how and refuse to learn how to surrender to an enemy."[10]

The Union fleet began firing on the city, attempting, to no avail, to prompt its surrender. Vicksburg's residents enjoyed a "natural defense" as the city rested on high bluffs rising to over two hundred feet in some areas. The city was surrounded on the north, south and east by these massive hills and on the west by the great Mississippi River, effectively providing a formidable natural defense.[11] Despite the assaults mounted upon Vicksburg from Farragut's fleet, the city's forces held. Farragut realized that a much larger assault was needed, from land and water. With no such force in sight and with the waters of the Mississippi falling fast, threatening the vessels in Farragut's fleet, the Union forces began to consider retreat. Disease played a considerable role in the making of this decision as a large number of Farragut's sailors suffered from dysentery and malaria in the hot Southern summer. In fact, diseases and ailments spread so rapidly through the

Union forces that only 800 of Farragut's 3,000 sailors were healthy.[12] Due to these dire conditions, the two Union fleets led by Farragut and Lee withdrew from Vicksburg in late July 1862.[13]

The first campaign against Vicksburg reaffirmed both Union and Confederate forces' desire to control the vital city of nearly five thousand residents.[14] As Union officials sought to develop another plan to capture the city, Confederate leaders quickly moved to strengthen Vicksburg's defenses and to establish additional holds at Grand Gulf and Port Gibson (See Appendix).[15] President Lincoln, still believing Vicksburg to be "the key" to establishing Union control of the Mississippi, appointed Major General Ulysses S. Grant to the position of Commander of the Army of Tennessee in the fall of 1862. The well-known general had became known as "Unconditional Surrender" earlier that year in his strategic victory at Fort Donelson, which gave Union forces control of the upper Mississippi. Following the devastating battle at Shiloh in April of 1862, which was a victory for the Union despite the high number of casualties, Grant assumed charge of the Department of the Tennessee in October.[16] Grant was charged with capturing Vicksburg and neutralizing any Confederate threat along the Mississippi River.[17]

During the same month, the man who would defend Vicksburg against Grant's forces, Captain John C. Pemberton, was appointed by Confederate President Jefferson Davis to command the Department of Mississippi, Tennessee and East Louisiana. Davis instructed Pemberton to defend the great Mississippi and maintain Confederate strongholds along the river. Pemberton, who came to be

known as the "Defender of Vicksburg," assumed command of the Department of Mississippi, Tennessee and East Louisiana after serving nearly a year in Charleston, South Carolina, defending the harbor. The Northern born Pemberton, who had not yet seen an active battle, was mistrusted by Mississippians who questioned his experience, as well as his loyalty to the South. Pemberton set about quelling those suspicions almost immediately upon his arrival. Having realized the vital strategic importance of Vicksburg from the skirmishes and threats against the city earlier that year, Pemberton rushed to solidify the land defenses in the city. Pemberton ordered the high hills to the rear of the city, called Snyder's Bluff, and another highpoint to the south of Vicksburg, Warrenton, to be fortified and prepared for a possible attack. The final measure in Pemberton's preparations was either overlooked or viewed with bewilderment by Vicksburg's residents and Confederate soldiers who had been charged with defending this city. Yet, this measure of Pemberton's forethought would prove to be of immense importance in the ensuing months. He ordered supplies and provisions to be stored in Vicksburg to accommodate an army of 17,500 for five months.[18] Pemberton was preparing for a siege.

While Pemberton was preparing Vicksburg for battle, Grant, with 40,000 troops, marched south from Tennessee toward Vicksburg along the Mississippi Central Railroad in November 1862. Grant hoped to engage Pemberton's forces in the northern part of the city, while troops under the command of Major General William T. Sherman attacked Vicksburg's defenses. Sherman offered an additional

32,000 soldiers to Grant's force as the Union threat became increasingly formidable. Confederate forces led by Major General Earl Van Dorn, upon learning of the planned attack against the South's last stronghold on the Mississippi River, sought to alleviate this threat. In late December, Van Dorn, along with over three thousand soldiers attacked and destroyed Holly Springs, a rail depot on the Mississippi Central, which housed Grant's supplies. Brigadier General Nathan B. Forrest's Confederate troops had a similar goal when they attacked Grant's Mobile & Ohio Railroad supply line in western Tennessee. These two Confederate successes left Grant and his troops with no supplies. The general knew that taking Vicksburg would be a difficult and long process, a feat that would be impossible with no supplies. Therefore, in the last days of 1862, Grant returned to his headquarters in Memphis, Tennessee.[19]

Sherman's plan to engage Vicksburg's defenses would not be abandoned as quickly as Grant's. On December 29, Sherman's forces attacked at Chickasaw Bayou, a swampy area between the Yazoo River and the high Vicksburg bluffs. This site was less than five miles from the city of Vicksburg and a Union victory here would be a deadly blow against the stronghold. However, the swampy terrain added to the formidable Confederate defenses spelled certain doom for Sherman's forces who were repulsed, suffering heavy losses. Following the defeat, Sherman reported, "I reached Vicksburg at the time appointed, landed, assaulted, and failed."[20]

In the wake of the failed attempt at Chickasaw Bayou, Major General John

A. McClernand assumed command of Sherman's troops, which pleased those soldiers who believed Sherman to be incompetent. McClernand planned an attack against Fort Hindman, also called Arkansas Port, which was a Confederate hold on the Arkansas River near the junction with the Mississippi. Begun on January 4, 1863, McClernand's raid on the fort held by nearly 5,000 Confederates proved to be successful. The fort was surrendered after a land and naval assault that lasted over three hours. Although the Union forces reveled in their victory, the capture of Fort Hindman did not weaken the immense defenses at Vicksburg.[21]

By early 1863, Grant had assumed command of all of the Union forces gathered in Tennessee and Louisiana with the goal of seizing Vicksburg. This force of 45,000 was divided into three corps and stationed at Young's Point, Milliken's Bend and Lake Providence. Generals Sherman, McClernand and McPherson commanded the three corps, which were further strengthened for the attack against Vicksburg by the naval squadron under Admiral Porter which had meandered down the Mississippi to join Grant's forces. The squadron, consisting of more than sixty vessels and over 300 guns, added 5,500 men to the already formidable Union force planning to attack Vicksburg.[22]

As Grant began to formulate a plan to attack Vicksburg, he pondered over the remarkable natural defenses that the city enjoyed. Any expedition to the north of the city would be hampered first by "The Delta," a sixty mile stretch of swampy bayous covered with thick forests and dense undergrowth, and then by the high bluffs which flanked the northern part of the city. In order to penetrate the

defenses to the south of the city, Grant would have to move his forces through the Louisiana lands on the west side of the Mississippi River, which were also swampy and prone to flooding. These wetlands were particularly formidable in the winter of 1862-63 due to the heavy amount of rainfall during that season. With its tributaries overflowing, the Mississippi River rose above its banks, as if assisting Confederate forces in the quest of keeping the Yankees out of Vicksburg.[23]

During the early months of 1863, Union forces attempted several expeditions intent on penetrating Vicksburg's defenses and capturing the city. Two canal projects were planned, one by Grant and the other by McPherson. Both projects hoped to divert the Mississippi River away from Vicksburg in order for the Union forces to be able to reach the bluffs to the west of the city, escaping Pemberton's batteries located along the river. However, both projects were abandoned. Further flooding of the river destroyed Grant's canal and Pemberton, upon learning of the other canal project, sent Major General William W. Loring to halt McPherson's advance.[24]

Grant, still searching for a way to penetrate Pemberton's defenses, sent a force led by Admiral Porter to navigate the Steele Bayou, a two hundred-mile stretch of rivers and bayous north of Vicksburg. At various points, the narrow waterways were barely wide enough for the squadron to pass through. Despite the natural obstructions, Porter determined to reach his destination and continued up the hazardous bayou. After fending off a Confederate force at Deer Creek, with the assistance of Sherman's infantry who were following the squadron, Porter realized

the expedition could no longer continue up the treacherous waterways, and the project was abandoned.[25]

With northern officials criticizing his failures, Grant formulated a new plan by March 1863. Since the waters of the Mississippi River had finally began to recede, Grant was able to lead his forces to a small town on the Louisiana side of the Mississippi River, Young's Point, which was twenty-five miles south of Vicksburg. Porter's Union naval squadron, located to the north of Vicksburg, was ordered to pass through the Confederate batteries located within the bluffs surrounding the west side of the city and meet Grant's forces at Young's Point. Porter's squadron, consisting of six transports, each towing two barges loaded with supplies, ran the batteries of Vicksburg on the night of April 22. Suffering the loss of one transport and six barges, Porter successfully met Grant's forces south of Vicksburg. After crossing the river on April 30, Grant wrote that he experienced

> a degree of relief scarcely ever equaled since. . . I was now in the enemy's country, with a vast river and the stronghold of Vicksburg between me and my base of supplies. But I was on dry ground on the same side of the river with the enemy. All the campaigns, labors, hardships, and exposures, from the month of December to this time, that had been made and endured, were for the accomplishment of this one object.[26]

Pemberton decided not to oppose Grant's landing, believing his primary goal was to defend the city of Vicksburg. General Joseph E. Johnston, his commanding officer, believed Pemberton should take the offensive, garnering all of the available Confederate troops to defeat Grant's forces before they crossed the river. However, Pemberton preferred the offensive tactic, believing that meeting Grant south of the

city would stretch Vicksburg's defenses too thin leaving the city vulerable to a Union attack from the North. Pembeton's failure to comply with Johnston's wishes would prove to strain relations and hamper communication between the two throughout the Vicksburg campaign.[27]

In early May 1863, McClernand's troops defeated a much smaller Confederate force at Port Gibson and then moved on to capture Grand Gulf, giving the Union forces a stronghold on the east bank of the Mississippi. Grant decided to march his forces northeast toward Edward Station, a railroad terminus midway between Jackson, Mississippi's capital city, and Vicksburg. Gaining control of the railroad would sever communication between the two important cities and Confederate forces would be unaware of which would be his prime objective, Vicksburg or Jackson, giving Grant an advantage. Pemberton, still utilizing a defensive tactic, allowed Grant to march his army inland, believing this would only serve to further weaken the Union forces' position. With Sherman's troops, who joined Grant at Milliken's Bend on 7 May, Grant's forces, now totaling over 45,000, began their march.[28]

Upon learning of Grant's impending arrival near Edward Station, Pemberton dispatched troops toward Jackson to meet the Confederate forces gathering there. Johnston, upon arriving in Jackson found Grant's troops between Pemberton's army and the mounting Confederate troops in Jackson, a fact which he believed spelled certain doom to the city of Vicksburg. Johnston sought to combine his troops with those of Pemberton's in order to engage the great battle that would hopefully

destroy Grant's forces. Johnston sent a dispatch to Pemberton on 14 May, after Union forces gained control of Jackson, ordering him to bring his forces toward the northeast, attacking Grant's rear. Again disagreeing with his superior officer, Pemberton believed that moving his forces toward Jackson would leave Vicksburg defenseless should Johnston's plan fail. Pemberton obeyed a second dispatch he received two days later which ordered him to march his forces northeast and unite with Johnston's troops. However, Pemberton's forces encountered those of Grant near Champion Hill.[29]

Grant's force of 32,000 succeeded in defeating the Confederate force of 23,000. The Union victory at Champion Hill resulted in heavy losses for both sides. As Pemberton withdrew toward the Big Black River and the city of Vicksburg, he ordered the bridges burned, halting Grant's furious march toward the vulnerable city. Working by torchlight, Grant's army rebuilt the bridges using materials they found nearby and crossed the river on 18 May, leaving them only a few miles from their objective of Vicksburg. Pemberton, who was frantically trying to amass his defenses, received a dispatch from Johnston on the same day. Believing the city to be doomed and preferring to sacrifice the location rather than further troops, Johnston ordered Pemberton to evacuate the city. Pemberton, again questioning the orders of his superior, sought the advice of his senior officers in this decision. Unanimously deciding that a withdrawal would crush Confederate morale, Pemberton and his advisors determined to hold the city at any cost.[30]

Grant's army arrived the next day. The Union forces surrounded the city,

both on land and on the river, and quickly mounted an assault on the heavily fortified bluffs of Vicksburg, cutting the city off from the rest of the Confederacy (See Appendix).[31] Thus began the siege of Vicksburg. This siege, begun on 19 May, lasted forty-seven days, until the weary Confederate forces, weak from insufficient food and clothing, were forced into submission on 4 July 1863. The loss of Vicksburg, added to the Union victory at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, on the following day, delivered a devastating blow to the Confederacy and began to foreshadow certain defeat of the South.[32]

Chapter 2
The Siege

The citizens of Vicksburg, Mississippi, and the surrounding areas experienced the siege in much the same ways as did the Confederate soldiers. The men, women and children who were trapped in the city became strangely accustomed to the seemingly endless shelling that fell upon the city. As the siege continued and the deprivations became more severe, these people suffered greatly. Yet, at times, their stories get lost in the accounts of the devastating strategic loss of Vicksburg for the Confederacy's military. The diaries and journals left by the women of Vicksburg, the belles among the bluffs, provide great insight into the siege as well as the experiences of females during the Civil War.

After the capture of New Orleans, in April of 1862 by Union forces, the citizens of Vicksburg anticipated the Yankees would soon travel the two hundred miles separating the cities and begin to threaten their beloved town as well.[1] The choices available to Vicksburg's women in response to the threat of Union forces was simply flee or stay. Those who remained in Vicksburg did so for diverse reasons, from protecting their homes and property to their belief that they would be safe amidst the high bluffs that characterized their fair city. Many of these women recorded their reasons for staying or leaving Vicksburg, as well as their experiences before, during and after the occupation of federal troops, in the journals or diaries that were common among young women in the nineteenth century.[2] These journals serve as a living testimony of the hundreds of women who experienced the siege of Vicksburg.

Although most of the journals that have survived from the campaign for Vicksburg were written by middle to upper class women, some generalizations can be drawn about the experiences of females during the siege. Women in general experienced some form of deprivation, such as food or clothing, as well as the psychological trauma of being a resident of a besieged city during a bloody war. The women of Vicksburg became somewhat desensitized to the seemingly continuous shelling of the city, while remaining deeply troubled by the worsening conditions they and the soldiers were forced to endure and the growing numbers of casualties that resulted from the siege. As did most Southern women during the antebellum and Civil War periods, Vicksburg's women turned to religion for comfort and strength during the ordeal. Daily devotions and prayers helped these women keep the faith that the Lord would help them survive the dire conditions of the siege. The citizens of Vicksburg felt close bonds with their neighbors during the trying days of the siege and often made touching gestures of kindness, offering food, blankets, or some other item that was in such high demand.

Regardless of their allegiance to the North or the South, these women generally felt pity for all of the soldiers around Vicksburg, but were much more likely to aid their own side's troops. In general, the convictions of the women of Vicksburg regarding the war survived the siege virtually unaltered. The Unionist women reveled at Vicksburg's surrender and hoped it would lead to a prompt end to the war they felt was unnecessary. The Confederate women of Vicksburg mourned the loss while remaining devoted to the Southern cause.

The Call to Arms

When the bugle sounded, and the drums called men to serve their country, the brightest and manliest of her sons responded with eagerness. Mothers, wives, and sweethearts little realized what war meant as they kissed loved ones good-bye, thinking that sixty days would bring them back.

Lucy McRae, Vicksburg resident[3]

After the firing on Fort Sumter and President Lincoln's call to arms, Vicksburg's residents did not celebrate with marching bands and parades as did other Southern cities. Due to commercial ties with the North and loyalty to the Union, many of Vicksburg's businessmen did not immediately embrace the ideals of the Confederacy. Despite the absence of war fever hysteria that could be found in other regions across the South, Vicksburg's leaders began military preparations, quickly organizing six volunteer companies.[4]

The city's residents were proud of their men's responses to the Southern cause. Mothers, sisters and girlfriends packed the soldiers' belongings carefully and went with them to the train depot for one final goodbye. The women of the city sewed silk flags for their companies to proudly carry into battle. The war seemed remote to these women during these early days after the call to arms. Like many Americans during the first months of the Civil War, the women of Vicksburg foresaw a short war, lasting only a matter of weeks. Many believed the war would remain in the middle part of the country, fought mostly in and around the border states of Virginia, Kentucky and Pennsylvania. They believed the war would be remote and would probably not touch them as far south as Vicksburg.[5]

The Yankees are Coming

It was like the slaying of the first born child of Egypt. Sorrow was in every house.

Annie Harris, Vicksburg resident[6]

With the fall of New Orleans in the spring of 1862, the belief that the war would remain remote was quickly discarded as many of Vicksburg's residents realized the war was upon them. Annie Harris, a Vicksburg resident, remembered that after hearing about the capture of New Orleans, "people walked along the streets aimlessly, as one does when troubled, with bowed heads and saddened mien."[7] Many Mississippians responded to the impending threat of Union troops by destroying the coveted "King Cotton" that was their livelihood in order to assure the Yankees would not profit from it. At her plantation, Brokenburn, located just across the river from Vicksburg, Kate Stone and her mother set fire to over twenty thousand dollars worth of cotton.[8] Katherine Polk, from her farm just outside of Vicksburg, resented the Confederacy's order to burn their cotton crops. "We saw our only means of livelihood perish before our eyes," she wrote.[9] Other residents also acknowledged that their fortunes were literally going up in smoke, yet thousands of pounds of cotton were destroyed as Vicksburg's residents awaited the arrival of the Yankees.[10]

Another response of Vicksburg's citizens to the impending threat of the Union Army was to hide their valuables. Many of the women believed the horror stories of the Yankees pillaging in the northern towns of the Confederacy. Fearful that the

Northern soldiers would steal their only material possessions, many of Vicksburg's residents began hiding their most valued articles. The women dug holes in their back yards to bury trunks containing such articles as silver, crystal, and fine linen.

Some of the activity in the city in 1862 and 1863 bordered on hysteria during those days spent anticipating the arrival of the enemy. Alice Shirley recalled the scene in her diary: "The people of the village were hurrying hither and yon, the women hysterical, many hiding their jewels and their money."[11] Dora Richards also found Vicksburg's residents crazed as she recorded, "[T]he women were almost hysterical. They seemed to look forward to being blown up with shot and shell, finished with cold steel or whisked off to some Northern prison."[12] Shirley and Richards were somewhat unique in Vicksburg. Both were staunch Unionists. Alice Shirley's father was "an old time Whig," and remained devoted to the Union even after Mississippi's secession.[13] Therefore, Alice Shirley and her family were not stricken with terror at the mention of the forthcoming Yankees. Instead, they, as well as Unionist Dora Richards, eagerly awaited the federal troops arrival in Vicksburg.

For the Confederate women of Vicksburg, the potential arrival of federal soldiers filled their hearts with dread. Kate Stone expressed in her diary that "it seems hopeless to make a stand at Vicksburg. We only hope they may burn the city. . . How much better to burn our cities than let them fall into the enemy's hands."[14] Hundreds of Mississippians fled their homes during these weeks in the spring of 1862. Mahala Roach, a recently widowed, well-respected Vicksburg

resident, determined to take her children to her mother's plantation on the Big Black River until her city was again safe.[15] Many other residents decided to leave the city, temporarily, just until the Union forces could be repulsed. Kate Stone and her mother abandoned their plantation and set out for Texas, where they would remain for the duration of the war.[16] Kate described the frantic scene at the railroad depot. "Everywhere were refugees – men, women and children – everybody and everything trying to get on the cars, all fleeing the Yankees. . ."[17]

The actions of these men and women were in keeping with the desire of General Pemberton who assumed command of the Confederate forces of Vicksburg later that year. Pemberton issued a proclamation on December 26, 1862, which read, "It is earnestly recommended that all the noncombatants, especially the women and children should forthwith leave the city. When the city becomes crowded with the soldiery, it will be impossible to afford the helpless those aids and facilities which humanity might seem to demand."[18] Despite Pemberton's request and the apparent hysteria seen in many of their neighbors, hundreds of Vicksburg's women determined to remain in the city. Alice Shirley and her family refused to surrender their home, which became surrounded by Union troops.[19] Ida Barlow's family refused to heed the order of enemy soldiers who insisted they vacate their house. Ida recalled that her "dear grandmother took her knitting and sat on the front gallery and said, 'come on gentlemen – I will die where I have lived.'"[20]

Ironically, there were hundreds of refugees fleeing into the city of Vicksburg as well. Residents of cities like New Orleans and Jackson, which had already been

taken by federal troops, sought refuge in Vicksburg, where there was only the threat of Yankee soldiers arriving. Mary Loughborough, a Vicksburg resident who had fled to Jackson after the fall of New Orleans, now sought to return home after the capital city had also been captured. Mary was one of many in the railroad depot seeking to go to Vicksburg. She related, "The depot was crowded with crushing and elbowing human beings. . . a living stream that slowed and surged along. . .seeking the Vicksburg cars. Vicksburg is our city of refuge, the last to yield thou wilt be and within thy homes we will not fear the footstep of the victorious army, but rest in the safety amid thy hills. . .we will laugh away our women's fears, and lighten our hearts from the dread and suffering we have experienced."[21] Mary anticipated the objections of men like her husband, Confederate Major James M. Loughborough, to women remaining in Vicksburg. She later wrote in her journal, "We must stay here, even if the gentlemen say go, which I fear they will; we must urge them to allow us to remain, for you know they can refuse us nothing. We declared that we would almost starve – that we would meet any evil cheerfully in Vicksburg, where our friends were, where we were carefully housed, quiet and contented."[22]

Those who, like Mary Loughborough, determined to remain in Vicksburg soon saw the arrival of thousands of soldiers, both Union and Confederate. Mahala Roach lived near the railroad depot where she witnessed several trainloads of soldiers arriving in Vicksburg. Mahala offered water to the Confederate soldiers and welcomed them to the city.[23] Lida Reed offered food to the passing soldiers.[24] She also related that the women of Vicksburg knitted socks and handkerchiefs for

the Southern soldiers.[25] Mahala Roach wrote about sewing a shirt for an army lieutenant. She fashioned the shirt, "out of [her] old shawl."[26] Despite her Unionist convictions, Dora Richards Miller joined a "company for making lint and getting stores of linen to supply the hospitals." She also made cartridge bags, pantaloons and jackets for the Confederate army, later stating that she, "felt ashamed to think that. . . [she] had not the moral courage to say, 'I don't approve of your war and won't help you, particularly in the murderous part of it.'"[27] Emma Balfour noted in her journal that, "last night. . .[she and] Mrs. Higgins. . .sat up til after eleven o'clock making cartridges." She further recalled, "We get no help from the outside world now – and have to help ourselves."[28]

All of these activities remained well within the boundaries allowed those who represented "true womanhood." The rigid social structure of the antebellum South maintained separate spheres for men and women. Women were expected to fulfill their roles as mistress of the home and caretaker of the children. Even in the poorest of homes, where women often had to work in the fields along with their husbands, the separate sphere of womanhood was maintained. A woman's place was in the home and she was expected to fulfill all of the domestic tasks associated with that position. Although women often helped their husbands in the fields, men were the dominant characters within the family. The Southern man was the head of the household and his children and servants, if he had any, as well as his wife were subordinate to him. This ideological separation between gender roles had long been entrenched within the social structure of the south by the early 1860s.[29]

With the beginning of the war, as Southern men set out to fight for the Confederacy, the women were forced to assume new roles and responsibilities. In the absence of their husbands and sons, Southern women often took control of the family business or farm. These women found themselves emerging from the domestic circle into the man's world. Yet, the new roles that these women adopted did not remove them from the clearly defined boundaries of the woman's sphere.

Historians suggest that the task of protecting the sanctity and integrity of the family fell to the women during this time of crisis.[30] Since women were believed to be the more spiritual and virtuous of the two sexes, and with most of the men away, women were charged with ensuring the survival of the family throughout the war. This task involved assuming some roles that were once reserved for men. One of the new roles adopted by Southern women was that of aiding the Confederacy. The domestic chores of sewing flags and clothing for Confederate soldiers were seen across the South as a woman's moral obligation. Women were applauded throughout the Southern states for their tireless devotion to aid their Confederate soldiers. Yet these endeavors were staged from the clearly defined boundaries of the woman's sphere. The types of domestic chores done in the name of the Confederacy, such as flag and uniform sewing, served to strengthen the ideals of true womanhood, since they were seen as an extension of protecting the sanctity of the family, while, at the same time, aiding the poorly equipped Confederacy.[31] Thus, the women of Vicksburg fulfilled the roles of true womanhood as they prepared to aid their soldiers in the battle for control of the Mississippi River.

The Siege Begins

People do nothing but eat what they can get, sleep when they can, and dodge shells.

Dora Richards Miller, Vicksburg resident[32]

As Grant's forces surrounded the city in May of 1863, the months of preparation were finally put to the test. The Union troops began a fierce bombardment of shells aimed at Vicksburg, which marked the beginning of the siege. It seemed that "the shelling never ceased," wrote Lida Reed during those first fearful days.[33] Emma Balfour related in her journal, "I never saw anything like it. People were running in every direction to find a place of safety. The shells fell literally like hail."[34] Many residents were awed by the scenes of battle and sought a safe place high among Vicksburg's bluffs from which to watch the shelling that was befalling their city. Dora Richards watched from her upper gallery[35], while many others ascended the towering Sky Parlor Hill for a better view. One day while standing atop Sky Parlor Hill watching an engagement, Emma Balfour came to the horrifying conclusion that, "at the moment there was firing all around. . .a complete circle from the fortifications above all around to those below and from the river."[36] Sky Parlor Hill was not the only place where people gathered. In fact, Mary Loughborough stated that, "groups of people stood on every available position where a view could be obtained of the distant hills."[37]

Once this horrific shelling began, Vicksburg's residents were soon overtaken by hundreds of wounded soldiers. Ida Barlow remembered, "Our home was filled

with the wounded and right busy was every member of the family obeying orders from the surgeon and administering to the needs of the suffering."[38] Annie Harris also commented on the willingness of Vicksburg's residents to give aid to the ailing troops. "Wounded soldiers came in large numbers, and each household received as many as could be accommodated, the ladies sleeping on mattresses in order that the sick might be comfortable. We had not the heart to drive them away, though we found it anything but agreeable to be in the midst of so many men."[39]

Annie Harris and many others became so fearful of the continuous shelling and the horrible destruction that followed, that they desired to leave the besieged city. Harris recalled the scene in her memoirs. "Everywhere women and children were fleeing before the enemy with what possessions they could carry, refugees from ruined homes, seeking safety in flight, far away from the horrors of war."[40] Harris and her family left Vicksburg for Alabama, leaving their home and most of their possessions behind, their "only thought being to get away from the doomed city."[41] Dora Richards's quest to leave the city did not end as well. After proclaiming to her husband, "You must get me out of this horrible place," her plans to leave Vicksburg were thwarted by Union troops.[42] Several of Vicksburg's citizens fled the city, most anticipating lodging with friends and family in other parts of the South that were believed to be safer. Many of the records left by such individuals indicate a belief that they would return to Vicksburg once the Confederate forces dispelled the Yankee threat. These individuals had confidence in the Confederate soldiers occupying the heavily fortified bluffs of Vicksburg and believed that the

Yankee forces would not be able to penetrate the city.

Despite the impending threat of the Union army and the fierce assault being waged against their city, there were those who determined to stay in Vicksburg. These individuals were frightened by the Union assault, but, like those that fled the city, believed that the Confederate forces would soon dispel the Yankees. As the Union forces continued their assault, the citizens who remained in Vicksburg grew strangely accustomed to the persistent shelling. Dora Richards recalled, "The slow shelling of Vicksburg goes on all the time, and we have grown indifferent. It does not at present interrupt or interfere with daily advocations. . ."[43]

Many of the women in Vicksburg continued to go about their daily chores, as the continuous roar of the Union shells filled the air. The domestic tasks of cooking, cleaning and washing laundry remained part of the lives of many women during these first days of the siege. The women quickly learned the time of day when the shelling reached its most fierce and the times during which it was safer to venture outside. Mary Loughborough recorded the daily routine, to which many Vicksburg residents had grown accustomed. "Generally at four o'clock in the morning the shrapnel were thrown more furiously than at any other time through the day. At about seven, the Minie balls began falling, accompanied by Parrot, canister, solid shot, and shrapnel shells; and through every minute in the day this constant play of artillery and musketry was kept up from the Federal lines. . .so constant fell projectiles of all descriptions, that I became almost indifferent to them."[44]

Cave Life

The caves of Vicksburg were not, as many suppose, natural caverns, but hastily dug passages, like the burrows of rabbits, running straight into the hillsides and many of them in the heart of the city.
Lida Reed, Vicksburg resident[45]

Becoming desensitized to the continuous roar of shells did not prevent the danger these women faced if they remained in their homes. Mass destruction could be seen throughout Vicksburg as houses were demolished by shells or set ablaze by Union soldiers. Yet, hundreds of Vicksburg residents either refused or found it impossible to leave the city. Therefore, they fled to the places in the city that they believed would be the most safe, the hills. Within the lofty bluffs of Vicksburg, hundreds dug caves where they could escape the shelling. Caves became a way of life during the siege of Vicksburg. Virtually no one remained above ground. Many of the caves were hastily dug structures that served the intended purpose of protection from the Union shells, but offered little in the form of comfort. However, Annie Harris remembered that "those who could afford it had them [caves] large and comfortable with a hall and often three or four rooms were furnished."[46]

So great was the demand for caves that digging them became a thriving business. The prices averaged from twenty dollars for a one room cave, to fifty dollars for a multi-chambered cave with timber braces.[47] Mary Loughborough's cave, ordered dug by her husband, measured approximately six feet from the entrance and was deep enough so that she could stand erect.[48] Many residents were

not fortunate enough to have their own caves. Hundreds flocked to large one-room caves that were open to anyone. Lida Reed counted at least sixty-five in one cave where she spent the night, likening the people to "sardines in a box."[49] Lucy McRae remembered being one of two hundred people in a large cave on a night when the shelling was particularly heavy.[50] Emma Balfour "preferred to risk danger in a house rather than in a cave with so many." She vowed to stay out of the suffocating caves for as long as possible.[51] Balfour was among the minority in the city. Most people headed for the hills as Vicksburg became honeycombed with caves.

For many Vicksburg residents, their experiences in the caves were made easier by what they perceived of as the devotion of their slaves. Annie Harris recorded in her journal, "Through all the manifestations of war, the friendly relationship of the negro never altered. They would echo the same sentiments as the whites against the invaders, and still showed in action and expression the old devotion that had existed in happy, prosperous times. All united in telling my mother. . . that they would never leave her if the Yankees came. . ."[52]

Lida Reed recalled the devotion of her slaves Minnie and Chloe, stating, "These faithful women served us cheerfully during the siege and stood by us stoutly afterward."[53] Mary Loughborough relied on the protections of her slaves during her weeks spent in the caves. She recorded, in rhetoric typical of the time, "The servants we had with us seemed to possess more courage than is usually attributed to negroes. The 'boy' [her slave, George] slept at the entrance of the cave with a pistol I had given him, telling me I need not be 'afeared –dat anyone come dar'

would have to go over his body first."[54] George risked his life for his mistress on one occasion when he picked up a live shell that flew into their cave and threw it far from Mary, barely escaping its blast. After this episode, Mary recalled, "[George} has been my faithful defender throughout all my vicissitudes in Vicksburg."[55]

Reading these accounts through a twentieth century perspective raises questions about the credibility of these women's perceptions concerning the loyalty of their slaves. Contemporary perspectives may lead to the assumption that these slave loyalties were merely perceived or, more likely, were the result of a survival instinct within slaves to remain in the presence and within the good graces of their white masters, who were much more likely to be able to obtain food, shelter, and/or other necessities of life. These items were difficult for white people to garner. A slave without a master would find it nearly impossible to survive.

In some parts of the South during the Civil War, slaves sought refuge behind Union lines, running away from their masters and hoping for a chance to escape their present lives. There is not much evidence that this occurred in Vicksburg. With the continuous shelling, approaching the Union lines surrounding the city was extremely difficult. There was also the added difficulty of escaping the watchful eyes of Vicksburg's citizens who were mostly gathered in small areas surrounding the caves. Therefore, this perceived loyalty of the slaves of Vicksburg's residents may have been nothing more than the only plausible course of action for a group of people with virtually no material resources or assistance.

The phenomenon of the cave life of Vicksburg is one of the most

fascinating aspects of the siege. These hastily dug or carefully crafted structures became the center of existence for most of the population of Vicksburg. Few residents remained in their homes throughout the siege. Mostly comprised of women and children the residents of the caves formed small communities in the bluffs surrounding the city. Rarely venturing back to their homes, perhaps to acquire a particular item that they want to keep with them or to occasionally check for property damage, Vicksburg's citizens moved their families to the bluffs that surrounded the city.

While the city's residents moved into the caves, the social structure of Vicksburg's society remained virtually in tact. As was the case with the residences of the city, the caves were grouped by social class. The wealthier citizens' caves were clustered together and the less elaborate caves of the lower classes were located in nearby, but still different parts of the hillsides. Those members of the upper classes often enjoyed the larger caves that were dug by hired males, those too young or too old to fight in the war, those who were not soldiers for some other reason, or slaves who were hired out by their masters or mistresses. Some of these caves were actually furnished with items brought from the homes of the wealthier classes. Having several rooms within their caves, the members of the middle and upper classes were able to continue their daily lives with a greater sense of normalcy than was allowed by those who could not afford the multi-room caves.

Lower class women were often forced to share large one-room caves with a few or several other families. A sense of camaraderie developed among those

sharing caves as people often aided their neighbors in small but significant ways. Perhaps offering one another a gift of a blanket or a small ration of sugar, the sense of community that developed among cave dwellers helped to ease the harsh existence for many of Vicksburg's residents. The caves also offered women a sense of security. Without the presence of their husbands, brother, fathers, etc., women felt vulnerable to the perceived threat of the encroaching Yankee army. The large number of familiar faces residing in the caves gave women a greater sense of being protected from both the Union shelling and the soldiers.

Whether residing in the large one-room structures of the lower classes or the more elaborate multi-chambered caves of the wealthier citizens, the women of Vicksburg continued to oversee the domestic chores delegated to them by the social structure of the South. They obtained food to the best of their abilities, assured that their children were cared for, kept a watchful eye on their servants, if they had them, and maintained the spiritual sanctity of the family by continuing daily prayer and devotions and attending church services whenever possible. Although continuing these tasks was more difficult for the women of the lower classes who were forced to share caves with other families, the women of Vicksburg remained in control of the domestic sphere. Even within the large one-room caves comprised of several families, those women who were married and managed households before the war, continued to operate within that realm during the siege. Those women who were not married were most often a member of a family or were in some other way linked with a family that was managed by a female throughout the siege.

What shall we eat?

Reb: When is Grant going to march into Vicksburg?
Yank: When you get your last mule and dog eat up.
Exchange at Vicksburg, July 1863
recorded by M. Ebeneezer Wescott[56]

Regardless of the devotion, perceived or real, of their slaves, many women of Vicksburg suffered throughout the siege as a result of the severe deprivations of food, water and other necessities. Grant's troops had literally cut Vicksburg off from the rest of the world in his attempt to force a surrender, and therefore, the city's residents had to survive on the supplies they had garnered before the siege. During the weeks before the siege, some of Vicksburg citizens attempted to stockpile as many goods as possible. However, as had been the case virtually since the war began, resources were in short supply. With the beginning of the siege, the supply lines were completely severed.

Lida Reed remembered the frightened faces of the hungry children with whom she shared a cave, while feeling the rumbling of an empty stomach herself.[57] With meat in such short supply, Vicksburg's hungry citizens, as well as Confederate troops surrounding the city, began eating mule meat. Dora Richards reasoned, "Rice and milk is [sic] my main food; I can't eat the mule meat. We boil the rice and eat it cold with milk for supper." She went on to add, "I never understood before the full force of those questions – what shall we eat? What shall we drink? And where withal shall we be clothed?"[58] Mary Loughborough remembered having only bacon

and bread to eat. She wrote that she "became so accustomed to the hunger, that [she] obeyed the calls to breakfast with reluctance, eating most practically to sustain life, without the slightest relish for food [she] was compelled to masticate and swallow."[59] A few weeks later, when their rations grew even smaller, Loughborough felt deep pity for her half-starved two-year-old daughter. She recalled a disturbing scene.

> My little one had swung in her hammock, reduced in strength, with a low fever flushing her face. . .A soldier brought one morning, a little jaybird, as a plaything for the child. After playing with it for a short time, she turned wearily away. 'Miss Mary,' said the servant, 'she's hungry; let me make her some soup from the bird.' At first, I refused: the poor little plaything should not die; then, as I thought of the child, I half consented. With the utmost haste, [the servant] disappeared; and the next time she appeared, it was with a cup of soup and a little plate, on which lay the white meat of the poor little bird.[60]

Due to the high demand for food products, Vicksburg's merchants, who had smuggled goods in from the North, charged exorbitant prices. For example, in Vicksburg a pound of butter was sold for one dollar and fifty cents, while a pound of butter in Clinton, which was approximately thirty miles away, was only forty-five cents.[61] Other foods were priced similarly in Vicksburg. A barrel of flour was priced at two hundred dollars, while a bushel of corn was one hundred. A barrel of sugar was thirty dollars and a pound of bacon was five dollars.[62] However, even these outrageously priced items were increasingly difficult to obtain as the siege continued and the shelves of the mercantiles became bare.

Clear drinking water was also in great demand in Vicksburg. Those residents who owned wells regarded themselves as quite fortunate when they

beheld others drinking muddy water from the river or streams. Lida Reed's family was forced to buy fresh water by the bucket and ration it carefully, resulting in frequent thirst.[63] Dora Richards and her husband were among the most fortunate, having two wells upon their property. However, the coveted fresh water brought many people asking for a drink. One of the wells, the Richards "had to give up to the soldiers, who swarm about like hungry animals seeking something to devour."[64]

With the shortage of cloth, Kate Stone observed that, "clothes have become a secondary consideration. Fashion is an obsolete word and just to be decently clad is all we expect."[65] Dora Richards was surprised by her own abilities when she was compelled to fashion a new pair of shoes out of the sleeves of an old coat. She wrote, "I am so proud of these home-made shoes, think I'll put them in a glass case when the war is over, as an heirloom."[66] Richards and many other Vicksburg women learned to make candles as well because none could be found in the city to purchase.[67] Paper was in such short supply that the Daily Citizen, Vicksburg's newspaper, was printed on wall paper.[68]

Not only did Vicksburg's residents experience shortages of supplies, but they were also likely to endure some form of destruction of their private property. With the bombardment of Yankee shells befalling the city, it seemed only a matter of time before tragedy would strike home. Lida Reed's house was among the many hit by shells. She described the scene in her memoirs. "[A] bomb burst in the very center of [our] pretty dining room, blowing out the roof and one side, crushing the well-spread tea-table like an egg-shell, and making a great yawning hole in the

floor, into which disappeared supper, china, furniture, and the safe containing our entire stock of butter and eggs."[69]

Ida Barlow's house, which laid just outside of Vicksburg's borders, behind the Union lines, was burned by federal troops after her father was accused of assisting the rebels. She recalled, "Leaving our home a mass of smoldering ashes, we went bare-headed with nothing except what we had on."[70] Several other citizens in the besieged city saw part, if not all of the homes destroyed by shells. If not hit directly, some homes were damaged by the fires that spread throughout the city.

Mary Loughborough and the hundreds of others living in the caves throughout Vicksburg's bluffs feared that while they were burrowed in the hillsides, their homes and property were being destroyed by the persistent shelling. However, during many of the dark nights filled only by the roar of the shells, many of those living in the hillsides also became terrified by the possibility of shells striking their burrows causing fatal cave-ins. During the long nights in the dark caves, panic-stricken voices told horrifying tales of cave-ins where several people were killed. With the spread of such horror stories, many began to doubt the safety of their refuge under the earth.[71] Some considered leaving the caves for a safer location. The sobering realization, however, that there was nowhere else to go left many filled with angst. Women clutched their children tight against them in their underground homes, fearing the morning would find them buried alive, but being even more fearful of sleeping outside without the protection of the bluffs.

Psychological Distress

The screams of the women of Vicksburg were the saddest I have ever heard. The wailings over the dead seemed full of a heartsick agony.
Mary Loughborough, Vicksburg resident[72]

This fear of cave-ins was only a part of the psychological trauma that plagued the residents of Vicksburg. As would be the case with any human being experiencing such hardships and being in almost constant threat of danger, the citizens of Vicksburg endured what at times could be described as extreme emotional anguish. Much of the distress felt by Vicksburg's women resulted from their worry and fear concerning loved ones from whom they were separated. These women suffered nearly paralyzing anxiety concerning relatives and friends serving in the military. Nearly every woman had a relative or friend fighting in the war and most lived in constant fear of receiving the horrible news of their loved one being wounded or killed.

These women also feared for their own lives amidst the constant falling of Union shells. Mary Loughborough described this extreme distress:

> I cannot attempt to describe the thrill of pity, mingled with fear, that pierced my soul, as suddenly vibrating through the air would come these sorrowful shrieks!-these pitiful moans!- sometimes almost simultaneously with the exploding of a shell. This anguish over the dead and wounded was particularly low and mournful, perhaps from the depression. Many women were utter sick through constant fear and apprehension.[73]

Dora Richards wrote of a woman who feared being alone after learning of the death of her son who had been a Confederate soldier.[74] Others, became distressed

over the seemingly endless days without any news of the progress the Confederate troops were making against the encroaching Yankees. Vicksburg's citizens were starved for news of the war. Mary Loughborough recalled "noone seemed to know whether the Federal army was advancing or not. And so the weary days went on – the long weary days – when we could not tell in what terrible form death might come to us before the sun went down."[75]

These long hours filled with uncertainty took their toll on many of Vicksburg's residents. As the hardships worsened during the forty-seven day siege, some women found their resolve beginning to crumble. Dora Richards prided herself throughout the early days of the siege as being "constitutionally brave." Yet after the weeks of terrifying shelling and mass destruction, she admitted, "I've lost my nerve."[76] Mary Loughborough's account of a night in her cave reveals the distress under which these women survived.

> I shall never forget my extreme fear during the night, and my utter hopelessness of ever seeing the morning light. Terror stricken, we remained crouched in the cave, while shell after shell followed each other in quick succession. As [a shell] neared, the noise became more deafening; the air was full of the rushing sound; pains darted through my temples; my ears were full of the confusing noise; and, as it exploded, the report flashed through my head like an electric shock, leaving me in a quiet state of terror the most painful that I can imagine – cowering in a corner, holding my child to my heart – the only feeling of my life being the choking throbs of my heart, that rendered me almost breathless.[77]

Survival Tools

Lord, keep us safe this night, Secure from all our fears: May angels guard us while we sleep, Til morning light appears.
Dora Richards, Vicksburg resident[78]

Despite the intensity of this psychological trauma, many Vicksburg residents remained dedicated to the Southern cause. Emma Balfour reasoned why the Union forces continued the shelling of Vicksburg.

> The general impression is that they fire at this city, in that way thinking that they will wear out the women and children and sick, and General Pemberton will be impatient to surrender the place on that account, but they little know the spirit of the Vicksburg women and children if they expect this. Rather than let them know that they are causing us any suffering, I would be content to suffer martyrdom."[79]

Kate Stone wrote a short poem expressing her desire for Vicksburg to fight for as long as her forces would allow. "Better the fire above the roll/ Better the shot, the blade, the bowl/ Than crucifixion of the Soul./ Better one desperate battle and the city in flames than tame submission."[80] A petition asking General Pemberton to surrender appeared among Vicksburg's residents a few weeks into the siege and was signed by only three people.[81]

This opposition to surrender can be explained with an examination of the things that sustained Vicksburg's women throughout the dreadful siege. Other than their convictions concerning the war, women also held to religion, the kindness of their neighbors and the optimistic belief that Jefferson Davis would soon send reinforcements and Vicksburg would be saved. Religion was a central part of most Southerners' lives as it was integral in their entire social structure. Most

Southerners during the antebellum period and continuing into this century believed that women had a greater spiritual capacity than did men. The moral superiority of a woman led to her role as the family's religious anchor. As a result of this mentality, women during the turbulent Civil War remained icons of religious sanctity as they clung to their spiritual beliefs.[82]

Many women relied on their religious faith to sustain them throughout the death and destruction during the siege. Vicksburg's women sought the sanctity of the church in their most distressing times. Lida Lord Reed's father served as an Episcopalian minister and she recalled him leaving their cave every day and going to the church to hold services for all who would attend.[83] Many citizens sought the comforting words of ministers as they often risked their lives to attend church. Dora Richards "took a skiff to church" when the heavy rains flooded her home.[84] Emma Balfour was thankful for each opportunity to attend church, "for the sake of worshipping once more."[85] When describing a Sunday morning Methodist church service, Mary Loughborough declared, "we heard words of cheer and comfort in this time of trouble."[86]

Women prayed for the Lord to keep them and their loved ones safe through the siege and the entire war. Dora Richards recalled speaking a prayer each night before going to bed, asking the Lord to keep her safe.[87] These women often marveled at the grace of the Lord even during their most trying times. Emma Balfour wrote, "In the midst of all this carnage and commotion, it is touching to see how every work of God, save man, gives praise to Him. The birds are singing. . . the flowers

are in perfection. . .Nature is all fair and lovely – 'all save the spirit of man seems divine.'"[88] Mary Loughborough offered a similar sentiment when she wrote, "Whatever the sins of the world may have brought us to – however dark and fearful the life to which man may subject us, our Heavenly Father ever blesseth us alike with the sun's warmth and the moon's beauty – ever blesseth us with the hope that, when our toil and travail here are ended, the peace and the beautiful life of heaven will be ours."[89]

The kindness of others also helped to sustain the women of Vicksburg during the trying weeks of the siege. Amidst the horrific shelling that brought devastation to their city, the citizens of Vicksburg developed a stronger bond of community. The endless nights of living in the damp caves with little to eat and drink created a bond among the citizens as they could be seen engaging in selfless acts of kindness aimed toward each other. Annie Harris and her family encountered kind neighbors when they fled their house during the early days of the siege. She wrote, "We stopped at friendly houses along the way for food and shelter, and were kindly welcomed and housed."[90] Vicksburg's residents also assisted each other in digging and supporting caves. Mary Loughborough recalled one man giving her a mattress for her cave and another providing a blanket to cover the opening of the burrow. She wrote, "I shall ever remember with gratitude the kindness with which they strove to ward off every deprivation."[91] Those who were fortunate enough to procure an unusual quantity or quality of food were often willing to share it among other cave dwellers. This offered a feeling of community and resulted in strong attachments being made

among members of the besieged city.

Many Vicksburg residents held to the belief that Jefferson Davis would send reinforcements to assist Pemberton's forces. Rumors circulated throughout the city that General Johnston's troops in Tennessee would make their way to Vicksburg to help the Confederate forces quell the tide of Yankees that threatened to overtake the city. Despite the assuredness of this occurrence in the early days of the siege, the weeks of constant shelling with no end in sight caused many of Vicksburg's residents to abandon this hope. Yet, many of the people trapped within the besieged city refused to relinquish all hope, believing that Pemberton's forces could hold out and Grant would evacuate his position on the Mississippi River.

As the days of captivity lengthened, Vicksburg's residents held to these survival tools in desperate attempts to persevere. Each act of kindness offered by a fellow cave dweller, each trip to church to hear the optimistic words of the minister, and each bit of information concerning the impending arrival of Johnston and other Confederate troops helped Vicksburg's residents to endure the tremendous hardships that the siege caused. As would be the case with most people in similar circumstances, some of the women of Vicksburg witnessed their faith in the Confederate cause waning during these endless days. Even the most dedicated Confederate began to question the strength of the South. Without the luxury of an abundance of information concerning the news of the war, the citizens of Vicksburg were left to wonder how much longer the Confederate troops guarding their city could maintain their positions.

Vicksburg Surrenders

I shall never forget the woeful sight of a beaten, demoralized army that came rushing back – humanity in the last throes of endurance.
Dora Richards, Vicksburg resident[92]

The desperate plight of Vicksburg's citizens ended after forty-seven days when the Confederate forces in the city finally succumbed to the Union forces. On July 4, 1863, the Confederate forces in Vicksburg surrendered to General Grant's Union army. Thus began a stream of defeated Confederate soldiers marching through the city. Dora Richards remembered the pitiful sight of the soldiers. She recalled, "Wan, hollow-eyed, ragged, footsore, bloody, the men limped along unarmed, but followed by siege guns, ambulances, gun carriages, and wagons in aimless confusion."[93] Many of the Confederate soldiers, upon meeting the ladies of Vicksburg, expressed regret that they were unable to defend them. Lida Reed recalled the following:

> We met group after group of soldiers, and stopped to shake hands with all of them. We were crying like babies, while tears rolled down their dusty cheeks, and eyes that had fearlessly looked into the cannon's mouth fell before our heartbroken glances. 'Ladies, we would have fought for you forever. Nothing but starvation whipped us,' muttered the poor fellows.[94]

Other women felt contempt for the Confederate soldiers who had surrendered. Although she disagreed with them, Mary Loughborough recounted the ways in which some women harassed the defeated Confederate soldiers marching through the city. "'Oh! Shame on you!' cried the ladies. 'It is all your own fault. Why don't you stand your ground? We are disappointed in you!' cried

some of the ladies. 'Who shall we look to now for protection?'"[95] These sharp remarks reflect the desperation brought about by the hardships faced during the siege. These women may have believed that, with the Confederate surrender, all of their trials and tribulations had been in vain. Despite their waning faith in the South's ability to save Vicksburg, most residents clung to a small hope that the Yankees would abandon their attempt to surmount the heavily fortified bluffs. With the Confederate surrender, Vicksburg's residents came down from their caves and began feeble attempts to put the shattered pieces of their city back together again.

Chapter 3
The Changing Roles of Women During War

During the Civil War, women were forced to assume roles that were unfamiliar to them. The women highlighted in this study mostly belonged to the middle class on the eve of the conflict. Yet, as has been argued by several Civil War and women's historians, belonging to the middle class did not assure that a woman was a lady of leisure. Many of these women often participated in the daily chores associated with farming. However, the most important role dictated by Southern society to be fulfilled by a woman was that of the ideal woman. The ideal woman was virtuous, religious and possessed a great deal of integrity. This woman was expected to manage the household matters, which included any and all domestic chores as well as rearing of the children. Those women whose families owned slaves were expected to oversee the house servants and make sure that the children were being cared for.

The ideal Southern woman was also responsible for the religious sanctity of her family. Most Southerners believed that women were, by nature, more virtuous than the opposite sex; therefore, the family's religious well being belonged in her hands. The typical Southern woman also participated in physical labor alongside the man of the family. Whether it be farming or some other form of labor, the typical woman did participate in the family work. Even women of the upper classes participated in domestic chores while managing the affairs of the household. Therefore, the ideal Southern woman was virtuous, selfless, hard working, and possessed a kind heart with which she managed the domestic sphere.[1]

The women discussed in this study could all be seen as having fulfilled the characteristics of true womanhood. These women, who belonged to the middle class, did not partake in grueling physical labor, but they did complete several domestic related chores. The tasks associated with cooking and cleaning were completed by Vicksburg's women throughout the siege. Those women who had children and servants continued to supervise their charges in the same manner during the siege as they had before Union troops surrounded their city. The women of Vicksburg maintained their positions as caretaker of the home throughout the siege. Some were forced to make the decision to flee their homes for the safety of the bluffs or nearby friends and/or relatives that could provide shelter. Although quite few in number, some women remained in their homes, ever fearful that the persistent shelling would soon destroy their property. Whether remaining in the family home or seeking some other type of protection, the women of Vicksburg continued to manage their households. Mary Loughborough remained the caretaker of her family throughout the dire conditions initiated by the siege as she continued the daily supervision of her servants and her child.

The women of Vicksburg can be seen as fulfilling the characteristics of true womanhood in other ways as well. Each of these women faithfully attended church. Even when the Union shells were befalling their city, the women of Vicksburg sought any way possible to attend church. When travelling to the church was not possible, religious services were held in their homes, or, even more commonly, in the caves scattered throughout the city. Religion seemed to be a source of strength

and comfort during the frightful days of the siege. Throughout the descriptions of death, destruction and hunger, many of the women of Vicksburg remained faithful that the Lord would deliver them from this trial. They also maintained faith that their loved ones would be brought home safely and that the war would soon come to an end. Women like Emma Balfour and Mary Loughborough fulfilled the ideal of the pious Southern woman when they wrote of the grace of God while Union shells were falling all around them.

These women, operating within the woman's sphere gave of their time and effort to aid the Southern cause in the early months of the war, as well as when the Confederacy was near defeat. Sewing flags and making uniforms for the Confederate army gave these women a chance to contribute to the war effort in a material way. Even Dora Richards, a Unionist, made cartridge bags and clothing for Confederate soldiers. Perhaps not only her fear of being a Unionist in a Southern city, but the expectations of true womanhood prompted Richards to perform these types of domestic tasks.

Many of the women of Vicksburg were forced to abandon some parts of this ideal of true womanhood when the deprivations and hardships became more severe. From taking wounded soldiers into their homes to wearing homespun dresses and living in caves, these women were forced to surmount the antebellum rules of decorum and modesty. In the absence of their husbands, brothers and sons, Vicksburg's women were forced to assume the roles most often delegated to men. For example, few women were as lucky as Mary Loughborough whose husband was

nearby and could hire someone to provide his wife and daughter with a cave. Most women were forced to garner the funds necessary and arrange for the digging of their caves on their own, without the assistance of a man.

These women were also forced to interact with the soldiers who flooded into Vicksburg before, during and after the siege. The antebellum rules of decorum and modesty did not permit proper young southern ladies to converse with the uproarious soldiers who entered the city before the siege, or the half naked, half starved wounded soldiers who filled their doorsteps during and after the siege. Yet the circumstances brought about by the siege forced women to come into contact with these soldiers, offering them primitive medical attention or meager supplies. Thus, as the war and the siege progressed and the hardships became more intense, the roles of women began to expand and alter somewhat.

Despite the fact that her womanly duties were being expanded, none of the women highlighted in this study can really be seen as having challenged the gender roles or societal structure of the South. Instead of plans to change their lot in life, these women concentrated on survival during this devastating siege upon their city. The women of Vicksburg did not attempt to capitalize upon their new positions within the family to argue for autonomy. As would any woman in similar circumstances, the women of Vicksburg simply lived each day as it came. They faced each challenge as it was presented before them. Thoughts of survival, rather than equality were foremost in their minds.

When contemplating the changing roles of the women of Vicksburg during

the Civil War, it is useful to draw comparisons with the experiences of females during the American Revolution. As has been mentioned earlier, historians are increasingly focusing on the lives of women during significant historical events. Those works devoted to the American Revolution enable a study such as this to compare the ways in which the affects of war upon women were similar or different during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Fought nearly one hundred years earlier, the American Revolution affected the lives of women in many of the same ways that the Civil War changed the lives of women in the 1860s, especially with regard to gender roles.

Historians focusing on the changing roles of women during the American Revolution and the Civil War disagree with regard to whether the altered roles of women during these wars encouraged them to foresee a world where men and women would be equal. Mary Beth Norton's book Liberty's Daughters chronicles the lives of women during the American Revolution and demonstrates that their traditional roles were challenged by the circumstances of the war. Norton cites spinning circles and sewing groups as women's first emergence into the public sphere during the Revolutionary period. With the colonial boycott on many English goods, a high premium was placed upon the tasks women could complete in their homes, such as spinning. The importance placed upon their work gave women more confidence in their abilities.

Norton argues that this confidence grew considerably during the Revolutionary war as women were forced to assume responsibilities once reserved

for men. By using dozens of primary sources, Norton demonstrates a change in the confidence within colonial women during the war. Letters from soldiers to their wives reveal that, during the early years of the war, men often suggested that their wives rely on the support of male relatives and friends not serving in the military in overseeing the family business. However, as the war progressed, women gained more knowledge about finances and other business matters while their husbands were more concerned with the progression of battles. Thus, according to Norton, not only did women gain confidence in their own abilities, but men also grew increasingly aware of the capabilities of females.

Norton argues that "the war dissolved some of the distinctions between masculine and feminine traits. Women who would previously have risked criticism if they abandoned their 'natural' feminine timidity now found themselves praised for doing just that. The line between male and female behavior, one apparently so impenetrable, became less well defined."[1] While admitting that the line separating the sexes did not disappear altogether after the war, Norton argues that the experiences of the Revolution led many women to believe that a world where men and women were equal could possibly become a reality.

Joan Hoff-Wilson reaches a contrasting conclusion from that of Norton in her essay, "The Negative Impact of the American Revolution." Hoff-Wilson contends that, although the war did alter the lives of women, the affects were not strong enough to alter the gender roles prescribed by eighteenth century society. In fact, it was this gender based social structure that prevented women's roles from being

seriously challenged in the years preceding, during and following the American Revolution. The opportunities permitted to women were so limited, according to Hoff-Wilson, that women were ill equipped to contemplate the ideology associated with the Revolutionary era. Their lack of contact with the changing world left women unable to take advantage of the opportunities brought about by the Revolution. Hoff-Wilson contends that "words like virtue, veracity, morality, tyranny, and corruption were ultimately given public political meanings by male revolutionary leaders that were incomprehensible or, more likely, misunderstood by most women."[2] Thus, women were not able "to express their dissatisfaction or frustration through effectively organized action."[3]

Hoff-Wilson further relates that women did not challenge their gender roles during and after the American Revolution because of the socialization process of the eighteenth century that led women to believe that nature dictated a clear distinction between male and female spheres. The activities women participating in during the war remained well within the woman's sphere and thus, did little to challenge this view. Hoff-Wilson relates that the highly publicized sewing circles of "Liberty's Daughters," were not attended by the vast majority of colonial women but were instead reserved for the upper classes. Therefore, even this task, although still within the realm of the woman's sphere, was reserved for only a small percentage of the female population, dispelling the argument that such activities led women to develop greater confidence in their own abilities.

Similar arguments exist among Civil War historians regarding the changing

roles of women. In her book Women in the Civil War, Mary Elizabeth Massey contends that the new responsibilities placed upon women during the Civil War gave them a sense of independence. Massey suggests that women acquired new skills during the war as they performed tasks previously restricted to the man's sphere. Many women had learned to function in the larger society outside of the home and became more eager to further extend their opportunities after the war. Massey relates that several job opportunities became open to women following the Civil War. Some of these jobs outside of the home were taken out of necessity, especially in the South where the war brought greater financial hardships. Massey also relates that "between 1865 and 1890 an educational revolution was taking place in the woman's world."[4] Women, even in the South, were seeking to further their education. This increased emphasis on education reveals women's desire to venture beyond their spheres into a world of greater opportunities.

When considering the changing roles of women during the siege of Vicksburg, the diaries and journals utilized in this study demonstrate that Massey's conclusions may not apply to this group of women. When the war was over, most of these women welcomed the opportunity to resume their previous roles as wife and mother, leaving behind the responsibilities of managing the family business, farm, and/or interests.

Once the horrors of the siege were behind them, the women of Vicksburg set about the task of returning their lives to a state of relative normalcy. Although much less traumatic after the siege ended, their lives would not return to normal until nearly

two years later when the devastating war came to a conclusion. And even then, the lives of these women who had witnessed so many atrocities would never really be the same. They had overcome hardships and survived extreme danger. They had ventured beyond the antebellum rules of decorum and had taken small steps into the man's sphere. As Norton described with regard to the women of the American Revolution, the women of Vicksburg were now more confident, more independent and slightly more autonomous, having fulfilled the roles traditionally granted to males and gained an understanding of their own capabilities throughout the war.

Yet, in the nineteenth century world in which they were living, few were willing to conceive of a world where men and women were equal. Although most of the sources utilized in this study concluded with the end of the siege, a few continued until the end of the war. Even those that ended with Vicksburg's surrender, reveal that these women did not harbor thoughts of challenging their gender roles or attempting to change their lot in life. These women, although confident in their own abilities, remained tied to their domestic sphere after the siege. The horrors of war had been faced and the women of Vicksburg had met the challenges presented to them. This involved their assuming new roles, those society dictated be performed by men. However, once the shelling stopped, these women came down from the bluffs and set about the immense task of returning their lives to their previous state, with little thought of attempts to gain equality or challenge their positions within society.

Conclusion

Who is left out?

To some degree, all of Vicksburg's residents suffered during the siege. The journals and memoirs concerning Vicksburg were mostly written by middle and upper class women, who seemed to have experienced deprivation on a fairly large scale. One can imagine how much greater the hardships would have been for a member of the lower class, who had not any money, much less enough to buy bacon at five dollars a pound, a price which is exorbitant today, over a hundred years later. Therefore, although one can reach generalizations concerning the dire situation of Vicksburg's women, the lower class women, who usually did not leave journals or memoirs, are not given a voice.

However, as census data indicates, Vicksburg's residents were more likely to be a member of the middle and upper classes than perhaps in most other locations in Mississippi. The state of Mississippi, with a population of well over 100,000, became well-known throughout the country as the site of fertile soil and a climate favorable to farming several crops in high demand in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, like rice and cotton. Thus, a great majority of Mississippi's population were farmers or were employed in the agriculture. In fact, farmers made up over 49% of the entire work force in Mississippi. Farm laborers constituted nearly 9% of the work force. Another 5% of the labor force consisted of overseers. Therefore, well over 60% of Mississippi's population were directly involved in farming.

The predominance of farming in Mississippi assured high slave populations throughout the state. Vicksburg is located in Warren County, which, like most

counties in Mississippi, had a larger population of slaves than white people. The total white population of Warren County, 6,895, was greatly outnumbered by the total slave population which numbered 13, 763. Vicksburg, the largest city in Warren County, numbered nearly five thousand residents. Unlike many other parts of Mississippi, there were over twice as many white residents as there were slaves – the free population was 3,189 and the slave population was 1,402.

This information enables the deduction of some generalizations concerning the population of Vicksburg. The low number of slaves compared with many other parts of the state indicates a smaller percentage of farms than would be found in the more rural sections of Mississippi. Vicksburg's status as the largest city in Warren County also indicates a more urban atmosphere, which would further suggest a smaller number of farms. With a smaller number of farms, there would be fewer farmers and farm laborers in the city of Vicksburg. The size of the city in relation to any other city in the area would indicate that a larger number of professionals would reside in Vicksburg. Bankers, merchants, physicians, teachers and other professionals would have been more likely to live in Vicksburg than in the more rural areas of the state. Therefore, one can deduce from this information that Vicksburg contained a higher percentage of citizens belonging to the middle and upper classes than did most other parts of Mississippi, as would be the case with many of the larger cities in the state.[1]

Middle and upper class women wrote the journals and memoirs utilized in this study. This fact would seem to exclude the largest part of the population in a

rural state such as Mississippi. However, as the census data demonstrates, this was probably not the case with Vicksburg. Although surely not the majority, the middle and upper classes constituted a larger percentage of Vicksburg's population than they did in most other parts of Mississippi. Therefore, this study provides a greater understanding of the experiences of women in Vicksburg, Mississippi during the Civil War than it would if it focused on a more rural location.

Despite these assumptions, there exists a distinct absence of information regarding those women of the lower classes, who for varied reasons, did not leave records. Perhaps, being less educated than the upper classes, these women did not know how to write. Even more likely, perhaps the dire conditions of the war left these women with little money with which to purchase paper, already in short supply and difficult to acquire. A great deal of these women of the lower classes were slaves who may not have been given the opportunity to record the events of their lives, even if they had learned to write. Whatever the reasons, the lack of records left by these women of the lower classes leaves them sorely underrepresented in historical accounts of the Civil War.

While recognizing these facts, this study offers valuable information about the experiences of women during the siege of Vicksburg. This work incorporates all of the known first-hand accounts of women who experienced the siege of Vicksburg. These accounts, although perhaps slightly skewed by the absence of the lower class perspective, offer a wealth of information concerning the siege and the lives of the people who experienced it.

The Role of Memory

When reviewing diaries and memoirs, one must also consider the factors of memory and time and how those things act to distort a recollection of a well-known event. Although no stark differences can be found between the journals that were written during the siege and those that were written some time later, subtle disparities can be detected. For example, Ida Barlow's inflamed rhetoric describing her recollections of the siege some years later is noticeably different from the subdued language of Emma Balfour, who wrote in her diary almost every day during the siege. Perhaps the passage of years caused Ida to romanticize the war and exaggerate her stories to some degree. Then again, perhaps the slight differences between these accounts can be attributed simply to the personalities of the two women writing them.

Most research indicates that unique or highly dramatic episodes create strong personal memories, which are recalled vividly.[2] The argument can clearly be made that the Civil War was a unique and highly dramatic episode. Therefore, one can make tentative conclusions about the accuracy of memoirs when compared to diaries and journals written during the topic event. Those women who, years later, looked back upon the siege of Vicksburg were remembering what was probably the most unique experience of their lives, which would lend credibility to their accounts.

However, other research indicates that the leading cause of memory distortion is the result of retelling a story several times.[3] Ida Barlow and other women who wrote memoirs of their lives during the siege of Vicksburg may have

retold these stories dozens of times to family and friends. The possibility exists that some distortion in the accuracy of the account could have occurred by the time these women actually put pen to paper and recorded their recollections. This could account for the slight differences detected in the accounts of Ida Barlow as compared with those of Balfour. Barlow's recollections were slightly more dramatic than those recorded by Emma Balfour.

The most likely conclusion is that the slight differences between the accounts written during the siege and those recollected years later can be attributed to variations in the personal situations of these women. Mary Loughborough's account, like Barlow's, was written several years after the siege. However, the romanticized rhetoric found in Barlow's account differs from Loughborough's recollections. An examination of the personal situations of these two women can attempt to explain the differences in their rhetoric.

Both women were members of Vicksburg's middle class, enjoying relative comfort and stability on the eve of the Civil War. However, an examination of the personal situations of Barlow and Loughborough reveals striking similarities in their experiences during the siege. Barlow was among the wealthiest of Vicksburg's citizens. She lived with her father, step-mother and siblings in a grand home just outside of the city, behind Union lines. Her father was too old to serve in the military and, thus, remained home throughout the conflict. However, Barlow's oldest brother, Captain James Arthur Barlow, an officer in General Robert E. Lee's army, was killed early in the war. During the siege, Union soldiers surrounded

Barlow's home, which, again, was outside of the city. Barlow recalled that she and her family suffered severe psychological distress during the siege. She stated, "We were utterly in their power and in a constant state of uneasiness for fear we would be killed."[4]

When a company of Confederate soldiers ambushed the Union troops near the Barlow house, her father falsely stated that he knew the Rebels were hiding nearby. This enraged the Union officers who set the magnificent Barlow house ablaze. Barlow remembered, "leaving our home a mass of smoldering ashes."[5] Once their house was burned, Barlow and her family sought refuge with some family members outside of the city. She remembered having little to eat. She wrote, "We drew our rations just like the soldiers did (and awful living it was too) fat pickled pork, hard tack so old it had bugs in it, a little flour and coffee."[6] Though they were still behind Union lines, Barlow and her family witnessed horrific sights as the countryside surrounding their city was destroyed by the constant bombings.

Inside the city, Mary Loughborough experienced tragic circumstances much like those described by Barlow. The Loughboroughs were not quite as wealthy as the Barlows but they were members of the middle class. Confederate Major James M. Loughborough was among those charged with defending Vicksburg, and he, like many of the soldiers, feared for his wife and child. Mary, who wanted to stay in Vicksburg in order to be near her husband, experienced physical and psychological distresses similar to those recounted by Barlow. After the siege had ended, Loughborough published a book about her experiences. My Cave Life in Vicksburg

described the dreadful conditions in which Loughborough existed. She did not have family members surrounding her as did Barlow, but she did recount the generosity and kindness expressed to her from several other Vicksburg citizens. Loughborough also had a young daughter who provided her with some joy during the tumultuous period. The child also brought the added pressure of finding rations to sustain them throughout the siege. As recounted earlier, Loughborough was led to allow her servant to kill her daughter's pet bird in order to make a soup for the child. Unlike Barlow, Loughborough was one of the cave dwellers who sought refuge from the seemingly endless shelling under the earth. Here she witnessed appalling scenes similar to those Barlow observed from behind the Union lines.

Although some distinctions exist between the personal situations of these two women, their circumstances were quite similar. Both women were Confederate sympathizers and had loved ones fighting in the war. Both were forced to leave their homes and seek refuge elsewhere, Barlow with her relatives, Loughborough in the caves. Each of the women experienced hunger and was forced to contend with the extreme deprivations that characterized Vicksburg during the siege. The women witnessed horrendous atrocities as the casualties mounted. Both of them experienced the psychological trauma of being in constant fear of losing their lives. Each of the women recounted these scenes with clarity and emotion. Yet, Barlow's rhetoric is more inflamed, more romanticized.

After considering the similarities that exists between the personal situations of these two women, the conclusion can be drawn that the differences in the rhetoric

of their accounts must be attributed to their individual circumstances. Perhaps Ida Barlow had achieved a greater amount of education than did Mary Loughborough, which allowed her to utilize a superior vocabulary. Perhaps her personal views concerning the politics of the war were more inflamed than those of Loughborough. She may not have been as committed to the Confederate cause, leading her to explain the deprivations with a more enflamed rhetoric than Loughborough.

Whatever the circumstances, the point remains that most of the differences found in the accounts of the women who experienced the siege of Vicksburg can probably be attributed to differences in their personalities. The slight variations that do occur among those accounts written during the siege and those recounted years later probably tell us more about each woman's personality than they do about the affect of memory on the relating of a traumatic event. Perhaps Barlow's account is slightly exaggerated due to her retelling of the events countless times. This does not negate or even lessen the magnitude of the information contained in her account. The historical significance of a first hand account, such as the one Barlow left behind, can not be overestimated. These documents are invaluable to a historian seeking to discover the human aspects of a major historical even, such as the Civil War. When combined with the accounts written during the siege, those written later provide a more complete picture of the event in that the perspectives, opinions, and biases of many different women are surmised.

How did they cope?

The forty-seven day siege of Vicksburg proved to be one of the most horrendous events of the entire Civil War. On the eve of the war, the people of Vicksburg did not imagine that the conflict would reach as far south as Mississippi. They foresaw a short war, fought mostly in the border states. However, during the second year of the war, Union and Confederate activity around Vicksburg began to increase as it became apparent that the city held significant strategic importance. The hopes of a greatly outnumbered Confederacy hinged on the city situated upon the high bluffs of Walnut Hills. The imminent arrival of the Yankees filled the hearts of most Vicksburg citizens with dread. Hundreds fled the city, escaping farther south or west into areas perceived to be safer. Those who determined to remain in their city soon faced great challenges. The dire situation created by the Union siege of the city forced hundreds of Vicksburg's citizens to suffer deprivations like they had never known.

When reviewing the conditions under which the citizens of Vicksburg survived during the siege, one is left to contemplate the factors that sustained these people. The long days and nights spent huddled in dark damp caves burrowed into the hillsides while feeling the dryness of thirst and the sharp pains of hunger added with the extreme fear of being the next target of the constant shelling by the Union forces to produce a tremendous amount of psychological stress. The women of Vicksburg relied primarily on their religious faith for comfort and peace of mind throughout the war in general and the siege in particular. Prayer and church

services enabled them to strengthen their convictions that they would soon be delivered from these hardships.

Vicksburg's women also relied on the kindness of their fellow cave dwellers in their time of trial. As would be the case with almost any group of people under such extreme circumstances, those citizens trapped in the besieged city of Vicksburg developed a camaraderie, or a bond that prompted selfless acts of kindness. Most of the women who left diaries of the siege related at least one instance of a gift given by a neighbor, friend or even a stranger. Perhaps a portion of food or a coveted blanket, these gifts helped to sustain these women throughout the siege.

Some women boasted about the loyalty of their slaves and how this helped them survive the siege. However, like the lower class, slaves rarely left written records, so one can not conclude if this loyalty was real or perceived. Perhaps the slaves were, in fact, devoted to their mistresses and did risk their own lives for the safety of those who kept them in bondage. Maybe this loyalty on the part of their slaves was something that these middle class women merely perceived because of their society's misconceptions concerning the "happy slave." A likely explanation may be that the dire conditions in and around Vicksburg necessitated the slaves at least appearing to be loyal to their mistress in order that they may remain with her, where there was a greater likelihood of having food and shelter.

Several historians in recent years have been concerned with examining the experiences of women during times of war and/or other emotionally stressful situations. Valuable secondary sources highlighting these topics can be utilized to

add further clarity to this study. Comparing the responses of the women of Vicksburg with those of other women during similar episodes of extreme emotional stress will serve to produce a greater understanding of the human aspects of the siege and place the reactions of these women within a broader context. The experiences of women during the American Revolution offer an excellent comparison with the women of Vicksburg. Both conflicts were fought on American soil, with devastating affects to many Americans.

Norton's book Liberty's Daughters can again be utilized in comparing the experiences of women during the siege of Vicksburg with those of women during the American Revolution. Norton's study reveals that American women during the turbulent years of the revolution behaved in ways quite similar with those that have been described of the women of Vicksburg. The women of the revolutionary era, like women during most periods of war, were also faced with shortages of food, clothing and shelter. Many were forced to flee their homes in search of safer environment farther away from the enemy. The women of the American Revolution were also faced with the mounting dangers brought about by the rampant spread of disease throughout many parts of the country.

Norton reveals that the women of the revolutionary era responded to these hardships in many of the same ways as the women of Vicksburg reacted to the difficulties that resulted from the siege. Women during the revolution were also forced to assume roles that were unfamiliar to them. Norton states, "With their menfolk away serving in the armies for varying lengths of time, white female

Americans had to venture into new fields of endeavor. In the midst of wartime trials, they alone had to make crucial decisions involving not only household and family but also the 'outdoor affairs' from which they had formerly been excluded."[7]

When recounting the survival tools with which the women of the American Revolution sustained the long years of war, Norton highlights their gaining support from a network of friends and relatives. Just as the citizens of Vicksburg banded together for support and comfort during the siege, so too did the women of the revolution join with a group of friends in order to offer solace from the extreme conditions under which they were existing.

Norton also suggests that religion served as a survival tool among women during the Revolution. Just as their nineteenth century sisters, colonial women were expected to be pious and virtuous. Women were to be uphold the sanctity of the home and rear their children in a godly manner. Religion in the eighteenth century "pressed upon women a conservative outlook, one that stressed accepting present conditions rather than encouraging attempts at change," according to Norton.[8] This religious conviction led the women of the Revolution to endure the hardships that were forced upon them. They, like Vicksburg's women, lived each day as it came, believing that the Lord would soon deliver them from their trials. Therefore, as Norton and other historians suggest, when the tribulations associated with war came upon the women of the revolutionary era, they, like the women of Vicksburg nearly a century later, relied on the kindness of a network of family and friends as well as their religious convictions to help them endure.

Regardless of the angle from which one chooses to study the journals and memoirs left by the women of Vicksburg, whether determining their validity in terms of the role of memory, analyzing the degree to which they are applicable to all women, or comparing them with those left by women during other wars, they do provide insight into the human experience of the siege. The accounts of the women of the city demonstrate that the Siege of Vicksburg was more than a military loss to the Confederacy. It was months of tribulation when clothing and food once taken for granted now became luxury. It was hours of listening to the screeching sounds of shells followed by the piercing screams of men, women and children. It was endless minutes spent witnessing the destruction of a city that was home to thousands. But, most of all, it was forty-seven days that turned belles among the bluffs into heroines.

Notes

Chapter One Notes

[1]Edward L. Ayers, "A House Divided. . .": A Century of Great Civil War Quotations, (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1997, 158.

[2]By using the term "ordinary," the author does not intend to portray the typical Southern woman. Those women who left journals and diaries utilized in this study may not be characteristic of the typical female residing in the southern United States during the Antebellum, Civil War and Reconstruction periods. The term "ordinary" is used here to describe someone about which no exaltation or notoriety exists.

[3]James B. Eads, "Recollections of Foote and the Gun-boats," Battles and Leaders of the Civil War I: 338-46.

[4]James R. Arnold, Grant Wins the War: Decision at Vicksburg, (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1997, 12-14.

[5]Samuel Carter III, The Final Fortress: The Campaign for Vicksburg 1862-1863, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1980), 1.

[6]Kenneth Trist Urquhart, ed., Vicksburg: Southern City Under Siege, (New Orleans: Historic New Orleans Collection, 1980), xiv.

[7]Ibid., xv.

[8]Eads, 338-46.

[9]Peter F. Walker, Vicksburg, A People at War, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1960), 90.

[10]Urquhart, xv. The replies Lee received were from Colonel J.L. Autry, Military Governor; Brigadier General M.L. Smith; and Mayor of Vicksburg, L. Lindsay in that order. Walker, 91.

[11]Carter, 12. A.A. Hoehling, Vicksburg: Forty-Seven Days of Siege, (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1969), 2.

[12]William C. Everhart, Vicksburg and the Opening of the Mississippi River 1862-63, National Military Park Handbook, (Washington D.C.: National Park Service, Division of Publications, 1986, 16.

[13]John D. Mulligan, Gunboats Down the Mississippi, (Annapolis, Maryland: U.S. Naval Institute, 1965), 91.

[14]Walker, 8.

[15]Mulligan, 91.

[16]Everhart, 16.

[17]Urquhart, xvi.

[18]Arnold, 24-27.

[19]Everhart, 16-17.

[20]Ibid., 17.

[21]Ibid., 20.

[22]Ibid.

[23]Ibid., 20-23.

[24]Ibid., 25.

[25]Ibid., 26.

[26]Ibid., 30.

[27]Ibid., 34.

[28]Ibid., 35-36.

[29]Ibid., 41.

[30]Ibid., 42-43.

[31]A.S. Abrams, A Full and Detailed History of the Siege of Vicksburg, (Atlanta, Georgia: Inteligencer Presses, 1863), 30.

[32]Urquhart, xxi.

Chapter Two Notes

[1]Carter, 9.

[2]Michael O. O'Brien, An Evening When Alone, (Charolettesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993), 3.

[3] L. McRae Bell, "A Girl's Experience in the Siege of Vicksburg." Harper's Weekly, 8 June 1912, 12-13.

[4]Carter, 22.

[5]Ibid.

[6]Annie Laurie Harris (Broidrick), "A Recollection of Thirty Years Ago." (University of North Carolina: Southern Historical Collection), 12.

[7]Ibid.

[8]John Q. Anderson, ed., Brokenburn. The Journal of Kate Stone 1861-1868, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1955), 101.

[9]Katherine Polk Gale, Diary. (Marshall University: Morrow Library).

[10]Walker, 73.

[11]Alice Shirley, Diary. (University of North Carolina: Southern Historical Collection), 11.

[12]Dora Richards (Miller), "War Diary of a Union Woman in the South." Century Magazine, October 1889, 934.

[13]Shirley, 10.

[14]Anderson, 101.

[15]Mahala P. H. Roach, Diary. (University of North Carolina: Southern Historical Collection), 101.

[16]Carter, 158.

[17]Ibid., 169.

[18]Ibid., 96.

[19]Shirley, 16.

[20]Ida Barlow, "Manuscript Recollections of the Siege of Vicksburg," (Jackson, Mississippi: Mississippi Department of Archives and History), 4.

[21]Mary A. Loughborough, My Cave Life in Vicksburg, (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1864), 28-29.

[22]Ibid., 33-34.

[23]Roach, 108.

[24]Lida Lord (Reed), "A Woman's Experiences During the Siege of Vicksburg," Century Magazine, April 1901, 922.

[25]Ibid., 925.

[26]Roach, 255.

[27]Richards, 933.

[28]Emma Balfour, Diary, (Jackson, Mississippi: Mississippi Department of Archives and History, 5.

[29]George C. Rable, Civil Wars, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989).

[30]Ibid.

[31]Ibid.

[32]Dora Richards (Miller), "A Woman's Diary of the Siege of Vicksburg," Century Magazine, September 1885, 771.

[33]Reed, 924.

[34]Balfour, 11.

[35]Richards, 768.

[36]Balfour, 6.

[37]Loughborough, 50.

[38]Barlow, 4.

[39]Harris, 12.

[40]Ibid., 17.

[41]Ibid., 18.

[42]Richards, 773.

[43]Ibid., 767.

[44]Loughborough, 125.

[45]Reed, 923,

[46]Harris, 17.

[47]Walker, 145.

[48]Loughborough, 61.

[49]Reed, 924.

[50]Carter, 217.

[51]Balfour, 4.

[52]Harris, 16.

[53]Reed, 923.

[54]Loughborough, 65.

[55]Ibid., 144.

[56]Edward L. Ayers, "A House Divided. . .": A Century of Great Civil War Quotations. (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc, 1997).

[57]Reed, 924.

[58]Richards, 771, 768.

[59]Loughborough, 60, 77, 100.

[60]Ibid., 137.

[61]Walker, 121.

[62]Carter, 243.

[63]Reed, 926.

[64]Richards, 772.

[65]Anderson, 109-110.

[66]Richards, 768.

[67]Richards, 938.

[68]Richards, 772.

[69]Reed, 923.

[70]Barlow, 2.

[71]Loughborough, 90.

[72]Ibid., 131-132.

[73]Ibid., 56.

[74]Richards, 935.

[75]Loughborough, 47, 76.

[76]Richards, 773.

[77]Loughborough, 56.

[78]Richards, 772.

[79]Balfour, 12.

[80]Anderson, 107.

[81]Balfour, 12.

[82]Jean E. Friedman, The Enclosed Garden. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985).

[83]Carter, 263.

[84]Richards, 938.

[85]Balfour, 13.

[86]Loughborough, 41.

[87]Richards, 772.

[88]Balfour, 7-8.

[89]Loughborough, 71.

[90]Harris, 18.

[91]Loughborough, 61.

[92]Carter, 206.

[93]Ibid.

[94]Reed, 927.

[95]Loughborough, 43-44.

Chapter Three Notes

[1]George Rable's Civil Wars provided the background for much of the discussion concerning the roles expected of Southern women during the antebellum and Civil War periods.

[2]Mary Beth Norton, " The Positive Impact of the American Revolution," in Norton, ed., Major Problems in American Women's History, (Lexington, Massachusetts: D. C. Heath and Company, 1989), 110.

[3]Joan Hoff-Wilson, "The Negative Impact of the American Revolution," in Norton, ed., 94.

[4]Ibid, 90.

[5]Mary Elizabeth Massey, Women in the Civil War, (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), 349.

Conclusion Notes

[1]All statistical information is from the Eighth Census of the Population of the United States in 1860. Joseph C. Kennedy, superintendent of census. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1864.

[2]David C. Rubin, ed., Autobiographical Memory, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 42.

[3]Ibid.

[4]Barlow, 2.

[5]Ibid.

[6]Ibid., 3.

[7]Mary Beth Norton, Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750-1800, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1980), 195.

[8]Ibid., 127.

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Appendix

Campaign for Vicksburg