'North Carolinian Ambivalence: Rethinking Loyalty and Disaffection in the Civil War Piedmont'

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political benefit. After his death, they again seized upon his memory and his long career as an entertaining politician to create a symbol that could help their party weather the storms of the 1890s. History is written, at least initially, by and for the victors, and North Carolina Democrats used commemorations of Zeb Vance to reconstruct the historical memory of their state and the Civil War in ways that supported Democratic hegemony. By emphasizing Vance's labors for the common white man and his defense of local interests against Confederate demands, the Democrats burnished their party's image and appealed for white unity at a critical time when that solidarity was crumbling. While honoring a deceased leader, Democrats fashioned popular conceptions of history designed to buttress a repressive racial and class hierarchy.

Events in North Carolina during the era of the Civil War and Reconstruction had a powerful impact on the future of the state. They also illustrated the effect of forces at work throughout the South. The rights of black people, the roles of women, the influence of gender, and the nature of the class system were all in flux and moving toward definition through the political system. The racial norms that would replace the world of slavery were in formation. Historians face a large challenge in understanding the dynamics of this crucial period, both for North Carolina and for the South. These new essays, through their original research and perceptive interpretations, significantly advance that important agenda.

DAVID BROWN

North Carolinian Ambivalence

Rethinking Loyalty and Disaffection in the Civil War Piedmont

The issue of southern loyalty (or loyalties) during the American Civil War has been a perennial staple for nineteenth-century historians since Robert E. Lee's surrender at Appomattox. But in the past decade, it has evoked particular interest and controversy. The extent to which southerners rallied to the Confederate cause and sustained their commitment to the war—especially southerners who did not own slaves—has been the focus of considerable debate and much excellent work. Even so, there are few signs of general agreement: scholars remain bitterly divided on the question of southern lower-class loyalty during the war. On one side, historians like Paul D. Escott, Wayne K. Durrill, and most recently David Williams argue that class divisions seriously undermined the Confederate cause. On the other, Gary W. Gallagher, William Blair, and Brian Steel Wills argue for the strength of Confederate unity and the particular resilience of the plain folk. In their view, war weariness should not be mistaken for a lack, or even a loss, of will. Commitment to the Confederate nation was enduring, they suggest, despite the immense sacrifices demanded by a war wreaking terrible devastation in both emotional and material terms in many parts of the South.¹

This robust historiographical debate, linking home front to the battlefield, has been invigorated by reference to an increasingly sophisticated literature devoted to the study of nationalism. Stimulated by a lively debate among historians of early modern and modern Europe about the origins and consequences of national identity and civic affiliation, Civil War scholars have probed the strength and vitality of southern nationalism. Did the political hierarchy in Richmond convince southerners that the Confederacy was a nation with core beliefs and a distinctive identity? Was this enough to sustain morale and maintain the war effort until the South was eventually overwhelmed by superior northern forces?²

This essay considers these issues within the confines of a single location:

the North Carolina piedmont. It seeks a middle ground between the two competing historiographical positions that, in broad terms, emphasize the significance of a debilitating class antagonism on the one hand and on the other stress the unflinching loyalty of lower-class whites (or, at least, that disaffection and internal conflict, which most historians would agree increased after 1863, was a result of the strains of war and did not necessarily indicate diminishing support for the Confederacy). This historiographical impasse has become too polarized and is in danger of distorting and oversimplifying a complex situation. It is a false dichotomy to posit class antagonism or strains of war as rival explanations of increasing internal problems, much less as an explanation for Confederate defeat: both were important and each tended to reinforce the other. To be sure, there were many North Carolinians in the piedmont committed to the Confederacy, and they remained so for the duration of the war. Equally, many others stuck with the Union in large part because they were not enthusiastic about a war that they regarded as engineered by slaveholders defending an institution peripheral to the piedmont's economy.

Other North Carolinians in the piedmont, however, just like countless others across the South, did not neatly fit into either one of these positions. Wartime situations can elicit an extraordinary level of sacrifice and unshakeable commitment, but for every southerner who was staunchly Unionist or Confederate, there were others, perhaps a majority, whose loyalty fluctuated, who equivocated, and who did what was best for themselves and for their families. This group is difficult to discern and even more difficult to quantify—historical evidence is heavily slanted toward bold statements of support for the “cause,” however that is defined—and has tended to be overlooked in the current historiographical debate. Southerners taking what might be called an ambivalent position might be elusive, but they should not be written out of the Civil War story.³

A more nuanced approach must also take greater consideration of pre-war conditions than is often the case. The impression can sometimes be given that political loyalties and prevailing attitudes were formed only after the attack on Fort Sumter in April 1861. This essay pays particular attention to the continuities and discontinuities of class relations in the late antebellum period and the wartime responses of civilians on the home front. While not denying the importance of forging an overarching sense of Confederate identity, moreover, the essay argues that the recent focus on nationalism tends to obscure what is really significant to understanding the actions of North Carolinians in the piedmont during the war: local conditions and, above all, the overriding significance of the family. Ideo-

logical attachments to the Confederacy, or to the Union, were significant in broadly generating loyalty and sustaining a sense of purpose. In the end, however, familial ties, community bonds, and the ways in which the war played out at the local level were more important factors influencing the responses and actions of yeomen families trying their best to cope with the unprecedented burdens placed on them between 1861 and 1865.

The Peculiar Nature of the Antebellum Piedmont

The North Carolina piedmont occupies a distinctive place within the Old North State. As historical geographer D. W. Meinig succinctly put it, the settlement of North Carolina's interior was made “by peoples whose origins, social character, economic interests, and political concerns differed sharply from those of the older coastal societies.” Caught between the eastern plantation economy and the more isolated mountainous west, the region was in the midst of a transformation from a self-sufficient farming economy to a more commercial, market-focused orientation by the mid-nineteenth century, stimulated to a great extent by the building of the North Carolina Railroad. Turpentine and gold mining were also valuable businesses in the piedmont, and there were a number of textile factories.⁴

Even so, the majority of whites were small farmers cultivating a variety of crops. Slavery did not underpin the piedmont economy, as it did in many other parts of the South. There were exceptions to this rule, and cotton and tobacco were grown in the 1850s. However, piedmont slavery was heavily concentrated in counties on the northern and southern extremes: tobacco on the Virginia border and cotton on the South Carolina border. It was on the edges of the piedmont, then, that slavery was most entrenched. Slaves were present in the counties of the central piedmont, but they were proportionally not more than one-third of the total population and in many counties considerably less than a third. In 1860, just 15–20 percent of whites in the central piedmont owned slaves. Even allowing for those not owning slaves but who were involved with slavery (overseers, for example), it is fair to say that for about three-quarters of the central piedmont's white residents, slavery was not central to their immediate economic concerns.⁵

The *mentalité* of the piedmont is more difficult to characterize than its economy. There is no question that the central piedmont counties remained especially receptive to antislavery ideas long after the southern wing of the movement had supposedly withered in the proslavery onslaught after the Virginia emancipation debates of 1832. This partly reflected a distinctive, if

not peculiar, religious composition (by comparison with other parts of the South) that included Quakers, Moravians, Lutherans, Dunkers, and other sects. The American Missionary Society openly preached an abolitionist message in the piedmont during the 1850s, focusing on the central counties, which some have called the Quaker Belt. The piedmont also exhibited an intellectual strain of antislavery thought exemplified by the abolitionist proponents Hinton Rowan Helper and Benjamin S. Hedrick. Helper was born close to Mocksville, in what became Davie County in 1836, while Hedrick hailed from Salisbury in Rowan County. Both regarded slavery as an impediment to economic diversification and future progress.

To what extent others shared this view is impossible to gauge with any precision. In 1860, Hedrick estimated that between five hundred and a thousand men in Guilford County had read Helper's antislavery tract *The Impending Crisis of the South*, suggesting that yeomen in the piedmont were at least willing to contemplate slavery's utility and, perhaps, its future. Jesse Wheeler, a friend of Helper's and Hedrick's from Greensboro who covertly distributed *The Impending Crisis*, wrote that the book was "eagerly sought after by many men" but, in response to the optimism of his friends that a more hard-line stance against slavery might be developing in the piedmont, sounded a note of caution. Wheeler declined to become involved with a Republican Party initiative because he believed there was "not the least idea that they can carry this state."⁶

Wheeler's caution is important. Slavery was so central to southern life, so ingrained in the texture of daily routine, that while substantial numbers of whites in the piedmont were not directly connected to the institution, they nonetheless mostly accepted its presence without thinking. Abolitionists were overwhelmingly the exception. There is reason to speculate, however, that the status quo was in flux by the late 1850s and that the economic position of the lower classes gradually became worse in the decade before the Civil War.

Landless poor whites, mainly tenant farmers and laborers, made up between 30 and 40 percent of all free white households in the central piedmont in 1860. Their chances of accumulating sufficient money to buy or rent land diminished in the 1850s, as the presence of slaves both lessened the need for, and drove down the price of, casual wage labor. While the proportion of slaves in the central piedmont was low compared with elsewhere in North Carolina and across the South as a whole, the unsuitability of cotton and tobacco ensured that slave owners, lacking a staple plantation crop, put their bondpeople to a variety of diverse tasks and hired many out. Casual work, routinely required by the agricultural economy (during

harvesting in particular) and in building the railroad, was one way that poor whites might eventually accumulate enough savings to become upwardly mobile. Other potential avenues of employment, such as working in the mining or turpentine industries, were also subject to competition from slave labor. As railroads made the piedmont more accessible to distant markets, moreover, the shift to widespread commercial farming raised the average purchase price of land. Historian Charles C. Bolton concludes that there was a permanent and growing class of landless whites in the central piedmont whose only option was migration, and many left in the decade before the Civil War.⁷

The position of yeomen farmers who owned their own land was much better than that of poor whites. Rising land prices increased the value of their property, and the railroad made it easier to sell surplus products on wider markets. Despite the prospect of increased affluence, however, slavery remained an institution of little utility to farmers whose main cash crops were wheat and corn—the soil and environment of the central piedmont simply did not encourage plantation agriculture. Moreover, the prospects of yeoman sons and daughters looking to establish their own households in the local area were uncertain at best and were seemingly diminishing as the cost of buying land, which was in short supply anyway, went up. Without land or suitable opportunities of alternative employment, yeomen as much as poor whites had to consider leaving the place of their birth. Martin Crawford's study of Ashe County (in the mountains) argues that "for all households land ownership remained the guiding star of domestic ambition, for only then could social dependency be avoided." This was equally true of the piedmont, where the short supply of good farming land was a serious problem.⁸

Thus, while only a committed few demonstrated overt dissent, declining economic opportunity as well as slavery's limited significance and uncertain future in the central piedmont economy arguably sustained a feeling of ambivalence toward slavery. Like other parts of the Upper South, slavery was not economically vital and was naturally withering in many respects. Ira Berlin has emphasized the crucial distinction between a "slave society," in which the present and future depended on slave labor, and a "society with slaves," in which the enslaved were present but were of peripheral and, in the case of the mid-nineteenth-century Upper South in particular, declining importance. William W. Freehling develops this interpretation more fully for large sections of the Border South by the late antebellum period, using the apt term "semi-slavery" to characterize the trajectory of economic development. Quite simply, the northern extremes of the

South were becoming more like the Middle Atlantic states and less like the plantation societies of the Lower South. The central North Carolina piedmont most closely resembled these Border South regions on the eve of the American Civil War.⁹

Perceptions of economic well-being were critical to individual responses to the onset of war, but there was also an important political edge to piedmont society that was equally significant. Throughout the antebellum period, the region battled with the planter elite of North Carolina's eastern counties who controlled state government on issues of political representation, taxation, and internal communication, seeking to counter the privileges that slaveholders enjoyed within the state's governmental system. In contrast to other southern states (with the exception of South Carolina and Virginia), North Carolina resisted making democratic changes to its political system, retaining property qualifications for voting and for officeholding. For example, approximately half the white male population was barred from voting in state senate elections until the abolition of the fifty-acre rule in 1857.¹⁰ The dispute over an *ad valorem* tax had been a cause of antagonism, since the revised constitution of 1835 not only failed to tax slaves according to their value but also exempted slaves younger than twelve and older than fifty from taxation altogether. What Paul D. Escott and Jeffrey J. Crow term an "intensifying series of class conflicts" during the 1850s placed the divergent interests of the non-slaveholding majority and the planter minority in unusually sharp relief. To an extent, the second party system contained overt sectional and class conflict within North Carolina, as the Whigs and the Democrats maintained coalitions of different interests, including slaveholders and non-slaveholders, from different sections of the state, albeit with much difficulty at times. Undeniably, though, planters wielded disproportionate power within North Carolina.¹¹

Planter control came to the fore during the secession crisis. The majority of North Carolinians were against immediate secession, and a substantial number were unconditional Unionists reluctant to leave the Union even if negotiations to resolve the sectional dispute failed in the spring of 1861. Things came to a head in February 1861 over the question of whether to hold a secession convention. "More than any previous election since the formation of the second party system," argues Robin E. Baker, "the secession delegate election served to polarize the North Carolina electorate along class lines." Slaveholders overwhelmingly voted for secession delegates and non-slaveholders for Unionist (even those previously supporting

John C. Breckinridge in the 1860 election). Results in the central piedmont left no room for ambiguity. Approximately 19,000 votes were cast against holding a convention, while only 3,000 were in favor. By a margin of six to one, the central piedmont voted against immediate secession. By contrast, the slaveholding counties on the edges of the piedmont unanimously voted in favor of the convention, overwhelmingly so in some cases: Anson (520-460); Caswell (692-137); Granville (1,056-743); Mecklenburg (1,448-252); Richmond (383-251); and Warren (774-33).¹²

As the first shots were fired at Fort Sumter on April 12, 1861, the commitment of those in the central piedmont to a war protecting slavery was uncertain to say the least. Unlike their peers in the Deep South, who overwhelmingly saw their economic success resting on the promise of slave ownership, yeomen in the piedmont had little reason to consider slavery central to their future prospects. Moreover, the piedmont as a whole had spent many years battling with the eastern planter establishment on a variety of issues. These were serious impediments to Carolinian unity, especially in galvanizing support for a war that few in the piedmont regarded as anything else but a war to defend slavery. Even though there were concerns over the intentions of Abraham Lincoln and the Republicans, secession was regarded as a drastic step, and for many a step too far. The Union was too cherished an institution to break apart.

Taking Sides, 1861-1862

Jonathan Worth, senator from Randolph County, was the piedmont's, if not the state's, leading Unionist. He staunchly opposed secession in a series of speeches in 1860-61. He also believed that the majority of his constituents—yeomen from the piedmont—shared his view. As long as Lincoln made plain that he would "respect property and discountenance rebellion or insurrection among our servile population," then "many of our people will not willingly take arms," Worth wrote. Worth's optimism was dashed, however, in wake of Lincoln's request for volunteers to suppress what he called a rebellion after the attack on Fort Sumter, and Worth was forced to acquiesce to the wishes of the eastern planters. After that, a wave of secessionist fervor swept over the Upper South. It had always been likely that any coercive measure to prevent southern states from leaving would be decisively rejected by Upper South states, but few could have predicted how strong the reaction would be. Unionists were dismayed and could not prevent a popular surge toward the Confederacy. Worth's fellow

1861.¹⁷ Less than one in five is an undeniably low figure, especially in comparison with other Confederate states where recruitment rates were much higher. Explaining with any precision why this was the case is exceedingly difficult. Uncovering and characterizing the complex personal, emotional, economic, political, and familial factors involved in each individual case is hard enough, let alone making sweeping judgments for the whole of the central piedmont. Nonetheless, two important observations stand out in considering who volunteered in the first year of the war.

First, poor whites in the piedmont probably came forward more readily than yeomen, or at least more readily than yeomen with family commitments, although the evidence is far from conclusive. Poor whites did not have an economic stake in society that needed tending and protecting as yeomen did. A wage of eleven dollars a month was attractive to them. B. M. Edney of Henderson, a mountain county bordering the western edge of the piedmont, was commander of a Confederate camp. He requested a bounty for his recruits, or "*destitute* soldiers," as he put it, because "they are poor many of them and . . . greatly in need of that money I have promised them." Some petty criminals, overwhelmingly from the lower rungs of society, were simply coerced into the army in lieu of other punishment.¹⁸

Second, yeomen were reluctant to volunteer because they regarded their primary duty to be protection of the family. Decisions taken by yeomen in the piedmont were heavily determined by the needs and circumstances of their families. The vast majority of yeomen were tied to the farm: they had far more responsibilities than poor whites and risked their coming harvest if leaving. It was not only economic interest that influenced their decision, however. The uncertainty of the war, especially the unpredictable response of the enslaved, heightened the emotional attachment between men and women and emphasized the patriarchal responsibility of men to take care of their dependents. Not all yeomen, of course, were married or even property owners—as mentioned earlier, a growing number were looking to establish their own households, having come of age. In the cases of the three volunteers mentioned above, for example, Gibson was a widower, Shoe was unmarried, and Clement a law student, which undoubtedly made their choice easier. Moreover, some yeomen were fortunate enough to have friends or extended family too young or too old to join and were in a position to leave the farm in the hands of others if they wished. They might also be part of families large enough to cope with the absence of some members. Others perhaps wanted to join but were compelled not to do so because of their circumstances.¹⁹

Undeniably, though, the overwhelming majority in the piedmont stayed

at home. This surely cannot be explained by circumstance alone and indicates that large numbers of yeomen and poor whites were not prepared to support the Confederate cause or held sufficient reservations not to volunteer. Unionism was undoubtedly a major factor in the North Carolina piedmont. Throughout the central piedmont in the aftermath of secession, there were signs of discontent over joining the Confederacy. Many were not persuaded by secessionist arguments, essentially remaining committed to the Union, and were anxious, if not angry, at the news coming from Raleigh. Although it had long been thought that the mountain region of North Carolina was more staunchly loyal to the United States, recent scholarship suggests that Unionism was actually much stronger in the piedmont.²⁰

Thus, while incidents of Unionist outrage can be identified across the state in the wake of secession, they emerged with most vehemence and with more sustained force within the piedmont, especially within the central counties. Surprisingly, in terms of the conventional story of the early months of the war, but unsurprisingly, given the piedmont's economic circumstances and political experience, it was not just non-slaveholders who remained steadfastly Unionist but also some slaveholders as well. In April 1861, Colonel Caleb Bohanan, slaveholder from Yadkin County, informed his local militia "that no man ought to support" the Confederacy. He hoped that volunteers would indeed heed Lincoln's call, because "every secessionist ought to be hung." That feeling was enduring and continued to be openly expressed in places. On the occasion of an election for constable in Alamance County in 1862, for example, "one of the candidates announced himself as still devoted to the union and his supporters voted for him with ballots having on them the Eagle, as emblematic of their attachment to the Union." Unionist sentiment was sustained in no small part by the undemocratic way in which the state joined the Confederacy. As one claimant from Rowan County stated to the Southern Claims Commission after the war: "My feelings and language was for the Union all the time. The secession ordinance was not submitted to the people. I did not go with the state after it was declared out of the union by the rebels." Some of these piedmont Unionists were among the minimum number of five thousand North Carolinians who fought in the Federal army.²¹

It was a group in Davidson County, a few miles from High Point, who illustrated the extremes of piedmont Unionism. In July 1861, James H. Moore informed Governor Henry T. Clark that there was "a combination of persons opposed to the Southern Confederacy and who openly advocate the Union and express sentiments favorable to the policy of the old govern-

ment and in favor of the coercion policy of Lincoln." He estimated about 150 in total, "some of whom are men of considerable property (not slave owners)" who had forged links with other Unionists within the piedmont. Moore's estimate of numbers is conservative; other accounts suggest up to around 500 men were involved. What is not in question is the devotion of these men to the Union. "They have been in the habit of mustering under the old U.S. flag, and have expressed determination to do it two days ago at their militia drill, but was prevented by the rain. We sent men from this place to their muster ground to take note of the proceedings and they report that the officers of the company openly declared they would muster under the U.S. flag and would kill any man or set of men that should attempt to prevent it." This group was a persistent thorn in the side of the Confederate authorities. More than likely, these men were founding members of the Heroes of America, an organization actively opposing the Confederacy and seeking to aid the Union effort throughout the war. They forged links with similarly minded groups within the piedmont and across and even beyond the state as pockets of Union supporters organized themselves for mutual protection and armed resistance.²²

How should the dichotomy between willing volunteers and died-in-the-wool Unionists in the piedmont be interpreted? In the absence of precise figures, historians are forced to rely on vague terms such as "many" or "most," which is at the root of the historiographical disagreement over lower-class loyalty: both sides can marshal substantial evidence supporting their position, and each lacks a reliable method of quantification. In the case of the piedmont, the statistic of one in five volunteers could be taken as evidence that four-fifths of men were hostile to the Confederacy. Without much evidence to go on, this figure certainly should not be ignored. James M. McPherson contends that those entering service after the passage of conscription laws in April 1862 were much less patriotic than genuine volunteers; in effect, they were ambivalent about participating in the war. McPherson calculates that 57 percent of yeomen volunteers in the Confederate army in 1861-62 expressed "patriotic convictions" compared to just 14 percent of conscripted men after 1862.²³ But, then, the elusive nature of individual motivation makes it dubious at best to think that those men remained at home solely because they were anti-Confederate—there were surely many factors at work in their decision. It is probably safer to assume that about a fifth of eligible males in the piedmont were unhesitatingly committed to the Confederacy at the outset of the war. If historians want to cite examples of willing commitment, they will find many letters that

provide this. Equally, if they want to find evidence of uncertainty and outright hostility and noncompliance, that exists in abundance as well.

To escape this dichotomy, a different approach might consider enthusiastic volunteers and defiant Unionists as *both* constituting "extreme" positions rather than being typical or representative. Most men and women in the piedmont stood somewhere between the two. Focusing on the gushing letters of new recruits or the dramatic actions of armed resisters ignores the outlook of the majority, who cannot comfortably be placed in either camp. If we look very carefully, we can discern the existence of an ambivalent majority.

Take the earlier example of Mattie Martin, the tearful sweetheart of William Gibson, who joined the cavalry. She did not have a strong ideological connection to the Confederacy or to the Union but was very concerned about the life of one particular man caught up in the war. More tellingly, James H. Moore's description of the Davidson Unionists provides an indirect comment on the position of the majority. "In almost any other community," he wrote, "no difficulty would exist in arresting the parties and bringing them to trial, but it is a fact that a great number of citizens outside of those who are connected with this affair, and who profess to be southern in feeling, assume a neutral position, and would refuse to lend assistance to suppress the disaffection."²⁴ It is these "neutrals" who are generally overlooked in the historiographical debate over Confederate loyalty. Rather than being absolutely for or against the Confederacy, positions on which the terms of the current historiographical debate are predicated, a more sophisticated understanding of loyalty and dissent should recognize the wide spectrum of opinion that was ambivalent, ambiguous, and subject to rapid and frequent change. If we accept that many families in the piedmont were not decisively committed either way—and that they swayed between the twin poles of Unionism and the Confederacy—it provides a somewhat different perspective in considering the allegiances of lower-class whites during the war.

Conscription and the Inner Civil War in the Piedmont, 1862-1863

The story of the piedmont's inner civil war is not one that is very widely known among Civil War scholars, although it is well known to historians of North Carolina. This is surprising, given that events taking place between 1861 and 1865 have been outlined in detail by William T. Auman in several

articles and an excellent Ph.D. dissertation, foundational work to which all interpretations of the piedmont in the Civil War are indebted.²⁵ It is probably because the region (and indeed the state as a whole) cannot easily be placed within the terms of the dominant paradigm of Confederate loyalty or class dissent that it has been largely overlooked. North Carolina provided more Confederate troops than any other state except Virginia, and these men died in greater numbers than the soldiers of any other Confederate state. At the same time, North Carolina also had the highest number of deserters: approximately one-quarter of the total in the Confederacy as a whole. On the one hand, the Old North State was heavily committed to the cause; on the other, that commitment was exceedingly fragile, making sweeping interpretations of loyalty or disaffection highly problematic.²⁶

While Jefferson Davis attempted to marshal southern forces against the North, and North Carolina governors Henry Clark and Zebulon Vance coordinated both the defense of the state and its contribution to the Confederate war effort, a series of skirmishes took place within the piedmont between 1861 and 1865. The region was generally spared the large-scale battles that caused havoc elsewhere, but a different kind of confrontation took place. County authorities, militia officers, and the Home Guard had to deal with anti-Confederate forces of many different kinds, engaged in hostile activity ranging from withholding supplies and hiding out in the woods to more serious armed resistance. Matters became so dire that regular troops were sent into the region on several occasions in an increasingly desperate attempt to quell trouble and establish order.

For those in the piedmont who had not volunteered for service or joined rebel Unionist organizations, this was a cause of uncertainty, if not anxiety. In these circumstances, it was daily, local concerns that were uppermost. Protection of home and property was paramount in the minds of ambivalent yeomen. All southerners were called on to contribute not only manpower but supplies as well, demands that became increasingly onerous. But anti-Confederates also posed a threat, as they foraged for supplies and did not hesitate to take food and clothing when necessary. J. H. Foust complained of a "a band of desperate men" located "on the river of lower Randolph county" who, as soon as the volunteers had left for service, intended "to rob our people of property [and] commit outrages of a gross character on our defenceless citizens." In Franklinville, also in Randolph County, J. P. Aldridge reported that a Home Guard had been formed not only "for the defence and protection of the Southern Confederate states" but "also to protect the homes, lives and prosperity of this county for we have abolitionist and Lincoln among us who defy the home guards to molest them.

"They say they have as many armed men as we can raise." Their efforts were hampered by confusion over the legal status of the anti-Confederates and the legality of pursuing their apprehension. Aldridge complained to Governor Ellis that "we have no power to molest them[,] if we do we lay our selves liable to the punishment of the laws. So now we want some powers to clean out all such fiends as them." Local authorities tried to deal with this problem and establish order but met with limited success.²⁷

The passage of the conscription act in April 1862 marked a key moment in the history of the inner-civil war. Ambivalent North Carolinians were now placed in an extremely difficult position. Hitherto, they had been able to get on with their lives as best they could and ignore the war if they preferred, but with the passage of this and later conscription laws, which allowed for the drafting of men aged between eighteen and thirty-five (later raised to forty-five and then fifty), that was no longer a safe option. Margaret M. Storey points out how all southern Unionists faced a dilemma at this point: they either revealed their true colors and risked arrest and punishment if refusing to be drafted or had to swallow their principles and serve in the Confederate cause if called.²⁸

Not only Unionists faced this dilemma. Depending on age, the ambivalent came under intense pressure to take sides, or at least had to work much harder to avoid escalating their participation. "There has been a strong feeling against the conscript law among the uninformed part of the citizens here, ever since its passage," reported R. F. Armfield of Yadkin County. "Many of that class swore they would dye at home before they would be forced off and when the time came for them to go, perhaps nearly one hundred in this county took to the woods, lying out day and night to avoid arrest, and although the militia officers have exerted themselves with great zeal yet these skulkers have always had many more active friends than they had and could always get timely information of every movement to arrest them and so avoid it." The support of family was critical to those individuals who did not want to join the armed gangs. Outliers would hide in the woods and return home when they could, often under cover of darkness, for food and shelter. Armfield ruefully observed how this hampered the Confederate cause and in so doing confirmed the crucial role of intermediaries helping the fugitives: "The section of the county in which they lurk is so disloyal . . . and the people so readily conceal the murderers & convey intelligence to them, that it will be exceedingly difficult to find them, even if they do not draw together a larger force than they have yet had." In Iredell County, it was reported that "four or five hundred armed men" intended "to resist the guard by bushwhacking."²⁹

John A. Craven's letter of October 1862 similarly suggested that many men in Randolph County were avoiding the draft. He requested that Vance "have arrested at once all deserters & conscripts who are at home." Craven described how the arrest of a skulker brought an immediate response from his companions, who burnt down the barn of the militia officer involved. It was clear that a large proportion of draftees were not prepared to accept their orders: of 500 conscripts in his local area, Craven estimated that just 150 had gone into service. Some had gone to work in the salt mines, but the "great bulk of all these are *Abolitionists* and *Lincolmites*, a population that is entirely unsafe amongst us," he suggested. They were responsible for all kinds of trouble and threatened the safety of every loyal person in the county.³⁰

Whether Craven's description was entirely apt is debatable. Some men probably joined the Union bushwhackers, who caused such mayhem, for reasons of antipathy toward the Confederacy but also because they believed it was the best way to avoid conscription. For others, however, Unionism and abolitionism had little to do with their decision: they simply wanted to stay out of active service. It is impossible to calculate the numbers of men who hid in the woods or to generalize about their motivation. A common phrase used by witnesses in the Southern Claims Commission reports indicates that many men did not make an active or dramatic protest against the war: "I don't know that he ever contributed anything to aid the Union army or cause. I don't know that he ever contributed anything to aid the rebellion in anyway." Much depended on circumstances in specific neighborhoods. Anti-Confederates in Rowan County were afraid to make their feelings known "for fear of being imprisoned" in the prison camp located in Salisbury. Even where local feeling for the Union was strong, support was constricted at certain times, such as when the draft was called. "There were a good many union people in the neighbourhood," a witness from Guilford County stated, "but they were afraid to speak their sentiment openly, being fearful that they would be taken up." The personality of the individual was also crucial. Did they have the resolve to openly defy local officials? John Cole of Orange County was described as a "reserved man" who "was intimidated to some degree" although in favor of the Union. This evidence suggests that more men chose to hide from the draft than join organizations like the Heroes of America in the piedmont, thereby maintaining an ambivalent position as best they could.³¹

Historians tend to view all outliers, and those who aided them, as disloyal, for obvious reasons—they ultimately worked against the Confederate cause. Such a view is understandable, but whether the men involved

regarded their actions in precisely this way is open to question. Once conscription was introduced, fugitives avoided the militia and draft officers as best they could. Some did not have the resolve to avoid being pressed into service; Hamilton W. Rice testified that he "was a Confederate soldier for three years but was opposed to the war all the time." It was a common complaint that men taking positions exempt from the draft, such as in the salt mines or in the Home Guard, did so to avoid fighting. Should they be considered loyal to the Confederate cause? Others no doubt decided to join armed Union gangs as the best means of avoiding being called up, but this could have been a decision based on personal preservation and immediate need more than it was a reflection of core political beliefs. Yet more men in the piedmont simply did not want to commit themselves at all.³²

The majority of piedmont claimants to the Southern Claims Commission professed broad sympathy with the Union but were not prepared to escalate that affiliation by doing anything more than hiding out or providing food and shelter to deserters if not called up for service, choosing to see out the war as best they could. Draft dodgers in the piedmont justified and rationalized their decisions in many different ways; it is possible that some may even have been more broadly sympathetic to the Confederate than the Union cause. It was not loyalty to either side that was really important, though. The bottom line was that they were not prepared to risk their lives or leave their families behind. Outliers usually tried to remain as close to home as possible. It is no coincidence that this allowed them to continue to work on the farm at times when the militia and Home Guard were not present. Rebecca Norman of Yadkin County stated that her husband refused to be drafted and hid from the militia, but in "early 1863 he came home and worked a while in the farm."³³

Family, Loyalty, and Increasing Ambivalence, 1863-1865

Neighbor confronted neighbor in an ugly and divisive atmosphere that threatened to split communities apart in the piedmont. It was very difficult for the ambivalent to avoid taking sides in this situation, especially if they were on the receiving end of rough treatment. Jason S. Dunn provided a frightening description of the activity of a Unionist band led by William Owens in "sections of our old N. state where Crooks[,] McBride[,] and Daniel Worth's field of operations have been" (Davidson, Guilford, Randolph, Montgomery, and Moore counties). Encouraged by "the Quaker influence[,] they have strengthened and grown," stealing guns, food, and

horses, burning barns, and threatening further retribution. Dunn had been forced out of bed in the middle of the night by this gang. When he refused to hand over his gun, pistols were raised against his wife and daughter; "if I behaved myself," he said, they promised "to restore me to the Bosom of Abe. Lincoln . . . but if they herd from me anymore they would send me to the Devil where secession came from and my age only saved my life." All were afraid to report the names of these men for fear of retribution. "Things have grown so alarming and I dare not leave home as well as many others for our families would be without what little protection we might afford[.] [T]he wretched and deplorable condition of Treason[.] Rebellion[.] Robbery[.] and incendiaryism with plundering and ravaging the country all around going on here is incredible."³⁴ Dunn was almost certainly perceived to be a Confederate sympathizer, because attacks such as this were not usually carried out on households with Unionist inclinations. Even so, it must have been difficult to distinguish friend from foe as violence, intimidation, and lawlessness became pervasive in the piedmont.

Such circumstances might have furthered support for the Confederacy as the best hope of restoring law and order, but the militia and Home Guard could cause as much trouble as renegade Unionists. The inner war was vicious in the piedmont—those aiding the outliers risked torture, imprisonment, and even death—particularly when regular soldiers, who had little hesitation in using coercive measures to obtain information, were sent in.³⁵ Aggression on both sides most likely encouraged the uncommitted to continue to try to ride out the war as best they could without taking sides. Confederate hopes of generating support for the cause among ambivalent yeomen were also hampered by the ways in which preexisting rivalries shaped the dynamics of politics at the local level during the war. Joshua Bonner was accused of harboring a deserter but claimed that it was the false accusation of ex-Democrats in his home town of Salem who were abusing their authority. Bonner asserted that they not only picked on their former Whig rivals but used their position to stay out of active service while forcing others to serve. How many other local officials abused their power in this way is uncertain, but the complaint that those hunting deserters were conveniently avoiding the draft themselves was regularly made.³⁶

There is no question that the authorities seeking to enforce Confederate control received diminishing degrees of assistance in the central piedmont. In August 1863, J. H. Foust distinguished three different reactions among his fellow citizens, characterizing the position of ambivalent yeo-

men rather well. First, "the most dangerous sympathise with them [anti-Confederates] & will & do indirectly aid them." Second, some "fear to do any thing for fear of destruction both of life & property & if forced out will effect nothing." Finally, "the third class would aid in arresting them but are too weak to hope for success." Foust concluded that the Home Guard was not capable of arresting deserters and that their attempts only served to "increase the destruction of private property," unless they worked in conjunction with regular troops.³⁷ If the complaints of militia officers and Confederate authorities are anything to go by, more and more in the piedmont refused to help in arresting deserters and outliers. By 1864, Governor Vance was informed that not only were sections of Wilkes County (on the western edge of the piedmont) "disloyal" but that the local Home Guard and militia were "encouraging desertion and have gone under with the disloyal sentiment with at least one half of the people of the county. I am convinced that a good many magistrates have [also] succumbed."³⁸ The failure to establish order in piedmont counties did nothing to endear the Confederacy to ordinary whites who were uncertain that secession was a wise move in the first place.

Underlying the negative responses of yeomen and poor whites were family considerations. B. H. Kearns of Randolph County wrote to Vance inquiring if men aged between thirty-five and forty would be drafted soon as he; and many of his neighbors, wanted to know if it was worth planting a corn crop. He had been conscripted but not called up yet. "We know not what to do. Conscription is held over us. It is a folly to sow a crop and then be called away from it having no one to complete." Moreover, those who might be enlisted wanted to make "some arrangements for the protection of our families during our absence." Hugh M. May from Anson County wrote to Vance, "with reluctance," asking for exemption from further service after completing a twelve-month term. "I have got my mother and family under my charge and my sister and four little children whose father and husband volunteered for the War and died in the service and then my own wife and two little children all who look to me for support and last year I lost my crop by being in the service and I beg of you not for my sake but for the sake of those under my charge to give me a discharge until next fall if you have the power to do so for unless I stay at home they are bound to suffer." Both of these men were willing to continue with the war but were personally conflicted because of family responsibilities. Those displaying less conviction were surely more ready to place family above loyalty to the Confederacy.³⁹

As the war progressed and the hardships got worse, it does indeed

seem that family duty increasingly overrode other concerns. As Bill Cecil-Fronsman observes, the governors' papers are "replete with pleas to release sons or husbands whose labors were desperately needed for family support." Eliza A. Thomas described this as "the cries of the poor." She was one of countless others with children to feed who begged Governor Vance to return her husband from the front. The family "has a small crop in the field probably enough to support [the] family if it could be taken care of but the prospect is for it to remain there" because there was no one to harvest it. "If the country has come to the [point] that such a man cannot be spared to his family I suppose we must take what follows." Men and women in the piedmont became progressively more forthright in their discontent with the Confederacy's demands. It is too simplistic, though, to say that they withdrew their support because of war weariness or that they never had much support to give in the first place due to their class status. Both assumptions are partially correct. The debilitating effects of the war asked too much of yeomen families, and the consequent discontent inflamed preexisting social, political, and economic tensions. The exigencies of war, then, exacerbated class tensions in a region where the fault lines ran deep.⁴⁰

It was increasingly common for yeomen to use the rhetoric of class in expressing their frustration. However, growing class-consciousness, if that is the best way to characterize this phenomenon, did not necessarily encourage allegiance to the Union or necessitate abandoning the Confederate cause. A much-cited letter, written by a disgruntled private from Fayetteville, illustrates the way in which war weariness and class tensions combined but is perhaps most revealing by the way in which it shows that family was the major concern. "Now Govr. do tell me how we poor soldiers who are fighting for the 'rich mans negro' can support our families at \$11 per month? How can the poor live? I dread to see the summer as I am fearful there will be much suffering and probably many deaths from starvation. They are suffering now." This soldier predicted "a revolution unless something is done as the majority of our soldiers are poor men with families who say they are tired of the rich mans war & poor mans fight. They wish to get to their families & fully believe some settlement could be made were it not that our authorities have made up their minds to prosecute the war regardless of all suffering." The decisive factor, however, was not class or disaffection but the adverse manner in which his family was affected. "There is great dissatisfaction in the army and as a mans first duty is to provide for his own household the soldiers wont be imposed upon much longer." It was family considerations that would guide his future

conduct. "If a single man is killed no one suffers but if a married man or man of family is killed many may be made to suffer."⁴¹

An anonymous letter was just as blunt: "The time has come that we the common people has to hav bread or blood & we are bound both men & women to have it or die in the attempt. Some of us have bin traveling for the last month with the money in our pockets to buy corn & tried men That had a plenty & has bin unable to buy a bushel holding on for a better price[.] [W]e are willing to give & obligate two dollars a bushel but no more for the idea is that the slave oner has the plantations & the hands to rais the bred stuffs & the common people is drove off in the ware to fight for the big mans negro." If prices could not be regulated, the consequences were dire. "Them that has worked hard & was in living circumstances with perhaps a good little homestead & other thing convenient for there well being will be credited until the debt will about take there land & every thing they hav & then they will stop all & if not they will hav to rent there lands of them lords[.] [S]ir we hoos sons brothers & husbands is now fighting for the big mans negros are determined to hav bread out of there barns & that at a price that we can pay or we will slaughter as we go if this is the way we common people is to be treated in the confederacy." Despite the biting class hostility displayed in this letter, its writer was prepared to see the war continue as long as prices could be regulated, for it was "not our desire to organise and commence operations." The author was ready for North Carolina to consider leaving the Confederacy—"let us try to manage & defend our own state"—but was seemingly prepared to remain within it, if grain could be sold at acceptable prices. Indeed, the priority was not really staying in or out of the Confederacy but protecting the family homestead. The greatest fear revealed in this letter was of debt and the calamitous prospect of losing the farm. It also reflected the frustrations women felt in being left to carry out the daily burden of running the household and tending crops in the absence of large numbers of men. Drew Gilpin Faust famously drew on evidence like this to argue that it was because of the alienation of elite women that the Confederacy lost the war. Undoubtedly, the hardships that women faced did not help the Confederate cause, but this particular letter was not a decisive rejection of the Confederacy, much less a move toward the Union, but was a passionate defense of home and hearth.⁴²

The famous actions of a group of women in the piedmont in March 1863 during the so-called bread riots tell a similar story. The *Carolina Watchman* (Salisbury) reported that approximately "50 soldiers' wives, followed by a numerous train of curious female observers," attacked "several of our

businessmen . . . whom they regarded as speculators in the necessities of life" to "demand an abatement in prices." They threatened to take what they wanted unless storekeepers complied with their wishes. One man initially refused to sell flour at what the women considered a fair price, and they "went to work with hatchets on the store room door" until he changed his mind. These women were not outliers or criminals; indeed, they did not consider themselves to be doing any wrong. "They unhesitatingly declared their purpose and gave specific arguments to justify their acts," as Escott observes. Most likely, they did not even need to justify actions that put food in the mouths of their children. The *Carolina Watchman* sympathized with, rather than condemned, the women; "there are many families in this town and vicinity who have not tasted meat for weeks, and some times, months together." Similar demonstrations took place in the central piedmont, in High Point and in Yadkin County. Without further evidence, we cannot be sure that these women had decisively turned against the cause that their husbands fought for, but we can state with certainty that they acted to protect their families.⁴³

Rather than making a decisive stand against the Confederacy, many men and women in the piedmont did what was best for their families and homes, and in the latter stages of the war, almost certainly a majority took this position. The threats (and in the case of bread rioters, actions) of the countless numbers who complained to the governor were primarily motivated by family considerations, although they are often interpreted as being political acts. To what extent they were politically motivated cannot be ascertained without further evidence. It is impossible to tell with precision exactly how many supported the Confederacy, how many supported the Union, and how many stood somewhere in between, much less quantify changing opinions and fluctuating allegiances. However, we can be fairly certain that the need to protect and to provide for their families, in the most arduous of circumstances, became the most important concern for piedmont yeomen and poor whites by 1864 and 1865; it had been that way for many of them from the beginning.

Conclusion: The Piedmont in Wider Perspective

Understanding why piedmont non-slaveholders were so reluctant to become involved in the war when compared with their peers across the South has to begin by stressing local circumstances. It is not only slavery's peripheral economic importance in the central counties but a political and cultural environment in which slavery and planters were not central to

piedmont society. Planters, and their desire to protect slavery, were the driving force behind secession and defeating the North at all costs. As Victoria E. Bynum argues, large slaveholders in the piedmont "did not fit the general stereotype of the southern planter," as they were less wealthy and influential and more economically diversified than their counterparts elsewhere.⁴⁴ They were mostly located in the northern and southern extremes, where plantation agriculture existed. It is unsurprising, then, that piedmont yeomen, especially those in the central counties, did not unthinkingly follow the planters' lead, either within the state or within the South, and that the Confederacy attracted varying levels of support.

The power of the eastern planter establishment and the undemocratic nature of secession also did little to endear the Confederacy to ordinary whites in the piedmont (and to some slaveholders as well). Randolph County postmaster Emsley Beckerdite posed a difficult question to newspaper editor Marmaduke Robins in January 1865: "Was ours a republican government? You answer in the affirmative. Then I ask again if the people, the bone and sinew of this once great country[,] were ever legitimately consulted upon the question of cession. You would not like to risk your well earned title to intelligence by answering affirmatively." A minority in the piedmont felt so strongly about the undemocratic nature of North Carolina's exit from the Union that it underpinned their efforts to violently resist Confederate authority. Approximately one in five did not hesitate to volunteer, for a variety of reasons—not least the feeling that it was their duty to do so. It is not these southerners who have been the focus of this essay but the ambivalent who preferred not to take sides and avoided active participation as best they could. By 1863, there were more and more in this position. Beckerdite revealed that "I have not known a man in the last two years who would not willingly have given all he had and would have pledged all that his friends had to keep out of the army. . . . I tell you plainly that the people of the Confederate states would welcome with ovations any power upon earth that was able to deliver them from Conscription[,] impressments[,] taxation[,] and the other ills imposed upon them by those who have deceived them." The demands of the war, and local circumstances within the piedmont, worked in tandem in pushing the ambivalent to take a more critical view of the Confederacy.⁴⁵

In this light, the debate over the success, or otherwise, of Jefferson Davis, Robert E. Lee, and other southern politicians and generals in crafting a southern identity and stimulating a nationalist fervor seems somewhat peripheral. To be sure, wider issues of Confederate leadership should not be written out of the story. Piedmont residents followed the course of

the war closely. Had Davis's welfare measures been successful, substantial discontent might have been avoided. The effects of the conscription laws were immense. On balance, though, the rhythm of daily life was influenced more by family concerns and local events, not by what was happening in Richmond or on the battlefields.

This should come as no surprise when considering the nature of yeomen society before the war began. Scholars as diverse in their interpretation of yeomen life and culture as Stephanie McCurry, Lacy K. Ford, and Steven Hahn agree on the centrality of the household and the significance of family and community. The present historiographical debate over lower-class loyalty during the war tends to lose sight of this, shifting the focus from family and local community to the wider and more abstract notions of Confederate identity and allegiance. Whether this change in orientation provides a deeper understanding of the home front experience in the piedmont is debatable. Several decades ago, Orville Vernon Burton argued that residents of Edgefield, South Carolina, "interpreted the meaning of the conflict and reacted to its demands from the perspective of their own families, relatives, friends, and the local community." This was overwhelmingly the case for yeomen and poor whites in the piedmont as well, many of whom did not feel particularly strongly about either side in the war but looked to their own family concerns first and foremost. It is not class, disloyalty, or disaffection that best characterizes their position, but ambivalence.⁴⁶

It is difficult to draw too many broad conclusions from the example of the piedmont during the Civil War because local circumstances were critical, although there were surely many other ambivalent southerners. It can be speculated, however, that had the region felt the presence of the Federal army and its destructive power, this might have stiffened the resolve of the ambivalent and bred hatred of the invaders, as in Virginia, for example. "The more I see the Yankees," wrote a resident of occupied southeastern Virginia in 1862, "the worse I hate them." The inner civil war did not serve this purpose, however. It encouraged families to take a middle line and avoid committing to either side. Fighting rarely had a direct impact on the piedmont, and this helped to maintain a strong sense of localism rather than identification with the Confederate nation.⁴⁷

At the same time, there was undoubtedly a stronger underlying ambivalence toward slavery and toward the Confederacy in the piedmont than there was in most other parts of the South. Unionism was particularly strong. Few historians of North Carolina would dispute Cecil-Francis's contention that there was a "growing sense of class consciousness" among

non-slaveholders between 1861 and 1865.⁴⁸ Even so, this development manifested itself in many different ways, and recognition of common interests as yeomen or poor whites in a slaveholder's war did not always conflict with support for the Confederacy. The piedmont contributed men and materials, even when the demands placed on the region became virtually intolerable. Some yeomen chose to support the Confederate cause to the end, despite the hardships and the food shortages. We need to move beyond the either/or mode of thinking that categorizes southerners only as loyal or disloyal during the war and rediscover the large number who occupied the middle ground.

Notes

I gratefully acknowledge the support of an Archie K. Davis Fellowship from the North Caroliniana Society that allowed me to carry out research for this essay.

1. Key works emphasizing class and a lack of will include Richard E. Beringer, Herman Hattaway, Archer Jones, and William N. Still Jr., *Why the South Lost the Civil War* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1986); Wayne K. Durrill, *War of Another Kind: A Southern Community in the Great Rebellion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); Paul D. Escott, *After Secession: Jefferson Davis and the Failure of Confederate Nationalism* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978); David Williams, *Rich Man's War: Class, Caste, and Confederate Defeat in the Lower Chattahoochee Valley* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998); and David Williams, Teresa Crisp Williams, and David Carlson, *Plain Folk in a Rich Man's War: Class and Dissent in Confederate Georgia* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002). The opposite view is given in Gary W. Gallagher, *The Confederate War* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997); William Blair, *Virginia's Private War: Feeding Body and Soul in the Confederacy, 1861-1865* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); and Brian Steel Wills, *The War Hits Home: The Civil War in Southeastern Virginia* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2001). See also William W. Freehling, *The South vs. the South: How Anti-Confederate Southerners Shaped the Course of the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), which makes an astute analysis while leaning toward the class interpretation.

2. The most recent book on southern nationalism is Anne Sarah Rubin, *A Shattered Nation: The Rise and Fall of the Confederacy, 1861-1868* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005). Many of the essays in Lesley C. Gordon and John C. Inscoe, eds., *Inside the Confederate Nation: Essays in Honor of Emory M. Thomas* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005), discuss the themes of nationalism and allegiance; see, in particular, Brian Steel Wills, "Shades of Nation: Confederate Loyalties in Southeastern Virginia," 59-77.

3. In *Southern Outcast: Hinton Rowan Helper and the Impending Crisis of the South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006), I argue that yeomen

and poor whites in the piedmont were ambivalent in their view of slavery. This argument is extended to the Civil War years in this essay. Victoria E. Bynum also makes use of this term but in different contexts. She argues that "the ambivalence of the state's citizens and political leaders toward disunion—manifested by North Carolina's late entry into the Confederacy—has long been recognized by historians" and that "southern women had expressed an ambivalence about the war from its inception." Bynum, *Unruly Women: The Politics of Social and Sexual Control in the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 130, 133.

4. D. W. Meinig, *The Shaping of America: A Geographical Perspective on 500 Years of History. Volume One: Atlantic America, 1492–1800* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 292–93; Paul D. Escott, "Yeoman Independence and the Market: Social Status and Economic Development in Antebellum North Carolina," *North Carolina Historical Review* 66 (July 1989): 275–300; Allen Tullos, *Habits of Industry: White Culture and the Transformation of the Carolina Piedmont* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 77–82; Bess Beatty, *Alamance: The Holt Family and Industrialization in a North Carolina County, 1837–1900* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1999), 15–29, 53–71.

5. Rosser Howard Taylor, *Slaveholding in North Carolina: An Economic View* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1926), 35–36, 48–49; Charles C. Bolton, *Poor Whites of the Antebellum South: Tenants and Laborers in Central North Carolina and Northeast Mississippi* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994), 11–12, 20. Counties in the central piedmont include Alamance, Chatham, Davidson, Davie, Forsyth, Guilford, Iredell, Montgomery, Moore, Orange, Randolph, Rowan, Stanly, and Yadkin. Caswell, Granville, and Warren counties to the north predominantly grew tobacco, while Anson, Mecklenburg, and Richmond counties to the south grew cotton. The figure of 15–20 percent owning slaves in the central piedmont contrasts with the norm of 25 percent across the South as a whole in 1860; in the Lower South, more than a third of whites owned slaves. Peter Kolchin estimates that perhaps as many as 50 percent of all white southerners actually held "an economic stake in slavery" through family ties or connections to the plantation economy, even if they did not own slaves. Since North Carolina lacked a fully fledged plantation economy, this applied to few yeomen and even fewer poor whites in the central piedmont. Kolchin, *American Slavery, 1619–1877* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993), 181.

6. Benjamin Sherwood Hedrick to John A. Gilmer, January 19, [1860], Benjamin Sherwood Hedrick Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (hereafter SHC); Jesse Wheeler to Hinton Rowan Helper, September 10, 1859, William Henry Anthon Collection, New York Public Library.

7. Bolton, *Poor Whites*, 12–41.

8. Martin Crawford, *Ashe County's Civil War: Community and Society in the Appalachian South* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2001), 3. For an extended discussion of these issues, see Brown, *Southern Outcast*, 80–87, 118–23.

9. Ira Berlin, *Generations of Captivity: A History of African-American Slaves* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), 209–30; William W. Freehling, *The Road to Disunion: Volume Two, Secessionists Triumphant 1854–1861* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 14 and passim.

10. Ralph A. Wooster, *Politicians, Planters, and Plain Folk: Courthouse and Statehouse in the Upper South, 1850–1860* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1975), 40; Fletcher M. Green, *Constitutional Development in the South Atlantic States, 1776–1860: A Study in the Evolution of Democracy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1930), 232–33; Thomas E. Jeffrey, "Beyond 'Free Suffrage': North Carolina Politics and the Convention Movement of the 1850s," *North Carolina Historical Review* 62 (October 1985): 387–419, and "Free Suffrage Revisited: Party Politics and Constitutional Reform in Antebellum North Carolina," *North Carolina Historical Review* 59 (January 1982): 24–48.

11. Paul D. Escott and Jeffrey J. Crow, "The Social Order and Violent Disorder: An Analysis of North Carolina in the Revolution and the Civil War," *Journal of Southern History* 52 (August 1986): 379; Donald C. Butts, "The 'Irrepressible Conflict': Slave Taxation and North Carolina's Gubernatorial Election of 1860," *North Carolina Historical Review* 58 (January 1981): 44–66, and "A Challenge to Planter Rule: The Controversy over the Ad Valorem Taxation of Slaves in North Carolina 1858–1862" (Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 1978).

12. Robin E. Baker, "Class Conflict and Political Upheaval: The Transformation of North Carolina Politics during the Civil War," *North Carolina Historical Review* 69 (April 1992): 159; Bolton, *Poor Whites*, 143; R. W. D. Connor, ed., *A Manual of North Carolina* (Raleigh: E. M. Uzzell and Company, 1913), 1013–15.

13. Jonathan Worth to Dr. C. W. Woollen, May 17, 1861, in *The Correspondence of Jonathan Worth*, ed. J. G. de Rouillac Hamilton (Raleigh: Edwards and Broughton Printing Company, 1909), 1:147–48; John Gilmer, cited in Bolton, *Poor Whites*, 144–45; Marc W. Kruman, *Parties and Politics in North Carolina, 1836–1865* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1983), 213–21, provides a lucid analysis of the abrupt switch of support within North Carolina in April 1861.

14. Jesse Wheeler to Benjamin Sherwood Hedrick, May 6, 1861, Benjamin Sherwood Hedrick Papers, Duke University.

15. James Sinclair to John W. Ellis, May 4, 1861, Governor's Papers, box 151, North Carolina Division of Archives and History (hereafter GP and box number); Bruce Collins, *White Society in the Antebellum South* (London: Longman, 1985), 154; T. Watson Street, *The Story of Southern Presbyterians* (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1960), 52. Approximately one-half of Southern Presbyterian families owned slaves; estimates Andrew E. Murray, *The Presbyterians and the Negro—A History* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Historical Society, 1966), 65.

16. Private James William Gibson to parents, August 11, 1861, in *The Civil War in North Carolina: Soldiers' and Civilians' Letters and Diaries, 1861–1865*, ed. Christopher M. Watford, vol. 1, *The Piedmont* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2003), 19; Edmund Shoe to Esther Barrier, October 23, 1861, in *ibid.*, 24; William Clement to Mattie Martin, October 25, 1861, in *ibid.*, 26.

17. Bolton, *Poor Whites*, 157.

18. B. M. Edney to John W. Ellis, July 11, 1861, GP 152. Bolton, *Poor Whites*, 158, notes the cases of two poor whites coerced into service. See also the letter of a poor white, charged with murder in Goldsboro, asking for a pardon in order that he might join the militia in South Carolina. He apologized for his actions and hoped that he

would "have the chance of killing one yankey if you pleas before I dy" months before the war had actually begun. William Sauls to John W. Ellis, December 12, 1860, GP 149.

19. Without a detailed socioeconomic breakdown of initial volunteers from the piedmont, their status is open to conjecture. A study of the First North Carolina Regiment, composed of men from the eastern counties, suggests that it was yeomen who volunteered more readily than poor whites: Alan Craig Downs, "Enlistment into Confederate Military Service: The First Regiment North Carolina State Troops as a Test Case" (M.A. thesis, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 1982). Based on this, Bolton speculates that poor whites were less likely than yeomen to volunteer, but he also presents many compelling reasons why poor whites were more likely to come forward in the central piedmont, outlined in the previous paragraph of this chapter, which seem more convincing. Bolton, *Poor Whites*, 157-58. There is limited archival evidence on this question, but it suggests that it was those without a household to support and maintain who chose to join the Confederate army. Martin Crawford's analysis of Ashe County volunteers concurs that family responsibilities were significant, as more single men volunteered than married men. Crawford speculates that volunteering "provided an opportune escape route for young men who had failed to establish themselves economically," although he also notes "that Confederate recruits derived from progressively poorer families as the war continued into and beyond its second year." Crawford, *Ashe County's Civil War*, 90-91. It is worth remembering that the dividing line between poor white and yeoman is anything but clearly defined and that the key point is how few men came forward in the piedmont in comparison to elsewhere.

20. John C. Inscoe and Gordon B. McKinney, *The Heart of Confederate Appalachia: Western North Carolina in the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 84; Kruman, *Parties and Politics*, 211-12.

21. H. C. Wilson to Governor Ellis, April 22, 1861, in Noble J. Tolbert, *Papers of John Willis Ellis* (Raleigh: State Department of Archives and History, 1964), 2:662-63; William K. Ruffin to Thomas Ruffin, February 14, 1862, in *The Papers of Thomas Ruffin*, ed. J. G. de Roulhac Hamilton, 4 vols. (Raleigh: Edwards and Broughton Printing Company, 1918-20), 3:215-16; Claim 2114, John Julian, Rowan County, March 19, 1876, Settled Case Files for Claims Approved by the Southern Claims Commission, 1871-80, Record Group 217, National Archives, Washington D.C. (hereafter SCC; for more scholarship about this institution, see note 31 below). Richard Nelson Current, *Lincoln's Loyalists: Union Soldiers from the Confederacy* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1992), 216-17, speculates that 5,000 was the minimum number of North Carolinian Federal soldiers but that the total was probably much higher, especially because many were counted as recruits from Tennessee.

22. James H. Moore to Henry T. Clark, July 18, 1861, GP 152; William T. Auman and David D. Scarborough, "The Heroes of America in Civil War North Carolina," *North Carolina Historical Review* 58 (October 1981): 327-63.

23. James M. McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 102.

24. James H. Moore to Henry T. Clark, July 18, 1861, GP 152.

25. William T. Auman, "Neighbor against Neighbor: The Inner Civil War in the Central Counties of Confederate North Carolina" (Ph.D. diss., University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 1988). See also Auman, "Neighbor against Neighbor: The Inner Civil War in the Randolph County Area of Confederate North Carolina," *North Carolina Historical Review* 61 (January 1984): 59-92.

26. Hugh T. Lefler, *History of North Carolina* (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Company, 1956), 2:494; Ella Lonn, *Desertion during the Civil War* (New York: Century Company, 1928), 231.

27. J. H. Foust to John W. Ellis, June 10, 1861, GP 151; J. P. Aldridge to John W. Ellis, June 22, 1861, GP 151.

28. Margaret M. Storey, *Loyalty and Loss: Alabama's Unionists in the Civil War and Reconstruction* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004), 57, 66.

29. R. E. Armfield to Zebulon Vance, February 19, 1863, GP 162; J. C. McRae to Silas Alexander Sharp, September 17, 1863, John McKee Sharp Papers, SHC.

30. John A. Craven to Henry T. Clark, October 21, 1862, GP 160. It should also be noted that after joining the Confederate army, large numbers of men in the piedmont chose to desert. Auman, "Neighbor against Neighbor," 69 (*NCHR*), estimates that just less than a quarter of men from Randolph County deserted.

31. Claim 8797, Joseph Ivery, Orange County, March 27, 1875; Claim 743, Michael Shuding, Rowan County, March 29, 1877 (a similar view is given in Claim 3483, John Carson); Claim 3044, Jeruia A. and Julia D. McGrady, Guilford County, December 1878; Claim 12789, John Cole, Orange County, March 14, 1872, all SCC. Frank W. Klingberg has written the basic study of the Southern Claims Commission; see *The Southern Claims Commission* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1955). Michael K. Honey, "The War within the Confederacy: White Unionists of North Carolina," *Prologue* 18 (Summer 1986): 75-93, remains the fullest study of the cases made by North Carolinians to the Southern Claims Commission during Reconstruction seeking recompense for property and materials taken by Federal soldiers during the war.

32. Claim 10730, James M. Lindsey, Davidson County (testimony of Hamilton W. Rice), SCC.

33. Claim 3508, Rebecca Norman, Yadkin County, March 19, 1875, SCC.

34. Jason S. Dunn to E. J. Hale and sons, January 8, 1863, GP 161.

35. See, for example, Mary Browne to Vance, September 15, 1864, GP 180, for an account of how women, children, and old men were spared no mercy by militia officers in Davidson County. She hoped Vance would do all that he could "to protect the civil laws and writs of our country." The relations of suspected rebel leaders were especially vulnerable; William Owens's wife was strung up by her thumbs. Bynum, *Unruly Women*, 143-44.

36. Joshua Bonner to Henry T. Clark, January 16, 1862, GP 157.

37. J. H. Foust to Vance, August 29, 1863, GP 168.

38. S. A. Sharpe to Vance, September 5, 14, 1864, GP 179.

39. B. H. Kearns to Vance, February 26, 1863, GP 162; Hugh M. May to Zebulon Vance, January 5, 1863, GP 161.

40. Bill Cecil-Fronsmen, *Common Whites: Class and Culture in Antebellum North*

Carolina (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1992), 212; Eliza A. Thomas to Vance, October 25, 1864, GP 181.

41. O. Goddin (Fifty-first North Carolina Regiment) to Vance, February 27, 1863, GP 162. This letter has been reprinted in W. Buck Years and John G. Barrett, eds., *North Carolina Civil War Documentary* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 97-99, but it has not been transcribed entirely accurately or fully. The last quotation cited here is from Goddin's postscript to this letter that is not reprinted in Years and Barrett.

42. Anonymous to Vance, February 17, 1863, GP 162. This letter may or may not have been written by a female, and it is possible it even had multiple authors (it is signed "Regulators"). The content is most reflective of a female voice, however. The letter also originated from Bladen County, just outside the southeastern corner of the piedmont. It nonetheless aptly captures the concerns of yeoman families from the piedmont and, indeed, across the state, whose worst fear was losing their home and farm. Drew Gilpin Faust, "Altars of Sacrifice: Confederate Women and the Narratives of War," *Journal of American History* 76 (March 1992): 1228.

43. *Carolina Watchman* (Salisbury), March 23, 1863; Paul D. Escott, *Many Excellent People: Power and Privilege in North Carolina, 1850-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 65-66.

44. Bynum, *Unruly Women*, 20.

45. Emsley Beckerdite to Marmaduke Robins, January 21, 1865, cited in Escott, *Many Excellent People*, 82.

46. Orville Vernon Burton, *In My Father's House Are Many Mansions: Family and Community in Edgefield, South Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 225-26; Steven Hahn, *The Roots of Southern Populism: Yeoman Farmers and the Transformation of the Georgia Upcountry, 1850-1880* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983); Lacy K. Ford, *The Origins of Southern Radicalism: The South Carolina Upcountry 1800-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); Stephanie McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

47. Mattie Prentiss, June 1862, cited in Wills, "Shades of Nation," 65. Echoing the conclusions of William Blair in *Virginia's Private War*, Wills argues that "as Union actions became increasingly heavy handed, the reactions they provoked often reinforced a sense of Confederate nationalism among the civilians they encountered." Ibid, 66. The opposite view, however, is given in a study of Alabama: Malcolm C. McMillan, *The Disintegration of a Confederate State: Three Governors and Alabama's Wartime Home Front, 1861-1865* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1986).

48. Cecil-Francis, *Common Whites*, 209.

BARTON A. MYERS

A More Rigorous Style of Warfare

Wild's Raid, Guerrilla Violence, and Negotiated Neutrality in Northeastern North Carolina

During the final days of December 1863, Union brigadier general and Massachusetts abolitionist Edward Augustus Wild was a thoroughly frustrated man. By his own admission, Wild had undergone a major change in recent weeks. When he sat down on December 28 to pen the official account of his recent operation into Pasquotank, Camden, and Currituck counties, part of the Albemarle region in rural northeastern North Carolina, he tried desperately to explain (in eighteen handwritten pages and three appendices) his aggravation with waging counter-guerrilla war on the southern home front.¹ Wild had just led the first major Civil War operation in the eastern theater using a full brigade of African American troops in a counter-guerrilla effort against companies of Confederate irregulars, and by the general's account, his men had done their duty well.²

Wild described to Major General Benjamin Butler, his superior at Norfolk, Virginia, how he and his soldiers had conscientiously followed the broad directives they received before the expedition: protect the loyal Union population along the coast of North Carolina, free the remaining slaves held in the northeastern counties, and destroy the menacing guerrilla force operating there.³ But Wild had "found ordinary [military] measures to little avail" in his three-week expedition. As his black soldiers entered Pasquotank at the beginning of the raid, his brigade had at first adopted a strategy of "judiciously discriminating in favor of the worst rebels." Proceeding cautiously, Wild's troops impressed crops and livestock and punished only the disloyal, burning three buildings that were homes for two guerrillas and the barn of a Confederate supporter.⁴ General Wild even drew up a list of fifty-three Unionists in Pasquotank with their addresses. After the raid, he suggested to his commander that these Unionists of Pasquotank be protected.

But when Wild left Pasquotank and entered Camden and Currituck,