

Spring 2020

Gendering Secession: Women and Politics in South Carolina, 1859- 1861

Melissa DeVelvis

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GENDERING SECESSION: WOMEN AND POLITICS IN SOUTH CAROLINA, 1859-
1861

by

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in

History

College of Arts and Sciences

University of South Carolina

2020

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DEDICATION

To my sisters, Addie and Paige. Agents of chaos. The DeVelvi triumvirate.
You've had my heart from the very beginning. Every day I strive to be a person worthy of
your love and friendship. The best version of myself is one that you're proud of.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank OneNote, dry shampoo, my dog, hot yoga, and Radiohead.

I feel like a certain amount of levity is necessary under the circumstances, as we experience a global pandemic in the form of COVID-19. I defended to screens as we all joined the video conference from our respective quarantines. I will use these acknowledgements, however, to remember that though I am completing this process in solitude, I have never been alone.

To my advisor, Mark Smith, who took me in as a floundering second year when he was incredibly busy, and immediately understood and trusted my ideas. He helped weave my historical hunches into thesis statements. He reassured me that one can write about history in an engaging manner without veering into dramatics and allowed me to inject my flowery prose into this dissertation. And yet, I'm sure I held on to several writing samples for far too long in my quest to make them perfect, as he is the most skilled and exacting editor I have ever encountered. He deserves you at your best.

To Marjorie Spruill, who advised me as I started this program and certainly did not stop when she retired. Thank you for opening your home (and porch!) to me for much-appreciated advice, both in Columbia and Folly Beach. Thank you for your investment in me as a person. I now have a near-encyclopedic knowledge of U.S. women's history due to your passion for the subject. I will never, ever, confuse suffragist and suffragette!

To my committee members, Woody Holton and Sarah Gardner, who more-or-less agreed to read my dissertation with little knowledge of my other pieces. I am thankful for your faith in me and the time spent with my work, as I am a huge admirer of yours. Your comments on my work were extremely helpful, and it was an honor to have such top-tier scholars spend so much time and care with my work.

To Steve Berry and Jason Phillips, not only for their critical studies but also their willingness to offer advice when I reached out. Reading and working under Steve Berry taught me how to write. To the generosity of my home for the past five years, the UofSC history department, which has provided me with countless opportunities and critical funding for research and travel. To the professors who had absolutely no ties to my subject matter yet still displayed an interest in me as a person and historian: Andrew Berns, Matt Childs, Kay Edwards, Tom Lekan, and Dinyar Patel. To Lori Carey. To Lori Carey. *To Lori Carey.*

To my darling cohort, my comrades in the struggle, my biggest fans: Jillian Hinderliter, Madeline Steiner, D.J. Polite. Better historians or friends you will never find. Hold on to your cohort, folks, and thanks for the memes.

I am blessed to have played a small part in fostering an atmosphere where women support and uplift other women in academia. To my fellow students who came through the department as I stayed and watched with pride as you went on to do great things: Charlotte Adams, Olivia Brown, Jill Found, Patrice Green, Liz Koele, Christian Lear, and Jennifer Melton. To those who came after me who will soon do great things: Zoe Horecny, Nathalia Cocenza, Rebekah Turnmire, and Carlie Todd. To the Atlantic

Reading Group, who read my work with care (Caleb Wittum, Lewis Eliot, and Patrick O'Brien deserve special mention here). To the grad students who came before me—my fairy godparents—who have entertained my persistent questions big or small: Sam King, Megan Bennett, Bingo Gunter, Robert Greene, Stephanie Gray, Janie Campbell, Antony Keane-Dawes. Thank you for explaining comps. I hope so, so dearly that I helped others in return. Jillian, Megan, Sam, and Liz get extra mentions for reading my writing at the drop of a hat. I'm eternally grateful to have you "on retainer."

To all the mentors and friends made at my "side jobs." To the folks at Historic Columbia, especially Heather Bacon-Rogers. To my second home, the South Caroliniana Library. Not only did I haunt your reading room, but for some reason Graham Duncan and Nathan Saunders let me into the vaults. No one knows more about South Carolina than Graham Duncan (except maybe Allen Stokes!). He also let me process collections directly related to my topic—I cannot be more grateful. To my fellow archivists, "my people," Taryn, Rose, Nick, Mackenzie, Edward, Todd, and Rebecca: thank you for five years of research, processing, and friendship. Speaking of archives, thank you to everyone at the South Carolina Historical Society, especially the angelically kind Virginia Ellison, for making my monthlong research trip to Charleston incredibly fruitful.

The folks at the Kentucky Historical Society changed my life dramatically in a single year. I never had more fun than when I was in Zoom meetings for the Civil War Governors of Kentucky Digital Edition. Patrick Lewis, Chuck Welsko, Emily Moses and Sarah Haywood are people you should get to know. Peter Thomas was the best graduate associate partner in crime. Meeting you all in person at the Southern in Louisville was the cherry on top—thank you for adopting me that weekend.

To my parents, who gave me the “follow your dreams” spiel but actually believed I would, and could, do just that. If they had reservations when I chose to pursue a PhD in History, they sure didn’t show it. I am so grateful for their steadfast confidence in me, and for the extreme privilege of their loving upbringing. I am one of the few, the proud, to truly enjoy living five minutes from my in-laws. Their home has been a peaceful haven for the past five years. To my sisters, Addie and Paige, I gave the dedication, so let’s not inflate their egos any more. They know they each have pieces of my heart.

To my husband, Brian Croft, a scientist who only understands about 25% of the content that I ramble on about. He still says “that’s nice, honey!” at all the right times. I do the same when our roles are reversed. But in all seriousness, thank you for working crazy hours *and* keeping us fed so that I could write this dissertation in a fugue state, emerging at strange hours from my office in a fluffy robe like a wild hermit. I think you’re neat!

As much as I love my spouse, the final shoutout simply must go to my work wife, Jillian Hinderliter. We could probably defend each other’s dissertations at this point. She edits my papers with moments’ notice. She is my greatest advocate and advisor. Her generosity knows no bounds. She still cooks for me even though I no longer live with her. If you see her, please gently remind her to do less, because if not she will help everyone and anyone. I could not have made it through graduate school without her incredible brain and amazing friendship. I am her biggest fan. I don’t know a better person. Again, *I don’t know a better person.*

ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the writings and literature surrounding elite, white South Carolina women from 1859 and 1861 to trace their increasing political consciousnesses surrounding their state's secession and the threat of civil war. Their diaries and letters reveal that though these women and their families were staunch supporters of South Carolina's secession, women reacted to their new circumstances with fears and misgivings that their male counterparts would not, or could not, express. Elite women harnessed familiar and religious concepts to express political hopes and fears, creating a socially acceptable outlet through which to discuss current electoral politics previously considered improper. In tracing events from John Brown's Raid to First Bull Run, this dissertation argues that planter women were astute political spectators and analysts, and uses emotions history and literary analysis to shine a light on their political nature in a way that many secession studies, focused on voting men, do not. It examines women as writers, noting their increasing preoccupation with national events in their diaries and letters and how they processed these changes. They did not let the "political excitement" completely overtake their writings until Lincoln's election in November 1860, after which they blended enthusiastic support for South Carolina with religious fears of a world-ending civil war. This dissertation provides a much-needed bridge between antebellum and Civil War studies and insists that women's thoughts and voices are instrumental in understanding the political, economic, and social transitions of 1860.

PREFACE

It is now easier than ever to find American Civil War materials in U.S. special collections libraries and archives. Many archives have specific Civil War finding aids, and diligently ensure that these collections show up in a “Civil War” subject search. Increasingly, archivists and librarians have gone as far as to organize finding aids for specific subjects such as women during the war, or even women’s diaries during the Civil War. The future is exciting for Civil War scholars, as the number of digitized collections increase each year.

The same cannot be said for scholars of secession, the period between 1860 and 1861 when the Confederacy was born.

To be sure, entering “secession” into a subject search yields results. These results, however, are often limited to specific mentions of secession and can range from the Nullification Crisis in 1832 to South Carolina’s secession in December 1860. Searching for women, secession, *and* South Carolina augments the difficulty. Archives model their subject headings after those of the Library of Congress. When searching for subheadings under “United States—History—Civil War, 1861-1865,” many appear, but only one specifically mentions “women.” Searching “1860” specifically only yields “Presidents—United States—Election—1860.” One might find results through “Women—South Carolina—Diaries” or “Women—South Carolina—Social life and customs” subject searches, but no date range narrows the search. “Plantations—South Carolina” is helpful

as well.¹ To research the year 1860, therefore, the historian must pull all “Family Papers” that include the year in its date range, hoping that the family both wrote in 1860 and preserved the correspondence. An archivist’s attempt to organize materials and catalogue information, while often helpful, determines what is “meant” to be historically important, and clearly omits women from the subheadings of many important subjects. Finding women writers, let alone women writing to other women, is, then, painstaking and challenging. There is something of a roulette quality to this endeavor, more than is the usual case with historical research. Betting on finding the year 1860 is risky; going all-in to find women writing in 1860 borders on the irresponsible.

Initially, the statement “it is hard to find writings from elite, white, southern women in 1860” appears laughable, as it should. After all, it is not as though women’s history is a marginal field. Historians first set their sights on elite southern women in the late 1960s and early 1970s, which resulted in a burst of transcribed diaries of antebellum and Civil War diaries.² Now, if historians discuss these elites, it is to illuminate their

¹ “Library of Congress Subject Headings,” *The Library of Congress*, last modified 26 Mar. 2011, <http://id.loc.gov/authorities/subjects.html>.

² Multiple, (often flawed) editions of these diaries exist—many were published in the early 1900s by friends and family, if not in the immediate aftermath of the Civil War. The following were just a few that gained scholarly attention in the 60s, 70s, and 80s: *The Journal of a Milledgeville Girl, 1861-1867*, ed. James C. Bonner (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1964); *The Diary of Miss Emma Holmes, 1861-1866*, ed. John F. Marszalek (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979); “The Vicksburg Diary of Mrs. Alfred Ingraham (May 2-June 13, 1863),” ed. W. Maury Darst, *Journal of Mississippi History* 44 (May 1982): 148-79; *The Children of Pride: A True Story of Georgia and the Civil War*, ed. Robert Manson Myers (New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 1972); “*Journal of a Secesh Lady*”: *The Diary of Catherine Ann Devereux Edmonston, 1860-1866*, ed. Beth G. Crabtree and James W. Patton (Raleigh, NC: Division of Archives and History, 1979).

In the 1980s C. Vann Woodward produced two hefty edited volumes of Mary Boykin Chesnut’s diaries: *The Private Mary Chesnut: The Unpublished Civil War Diaries*, edited

complicity in the “domestic institution” of slavery, both societally and economically.³ Yet limit the scope to 1860, and these long-studied diaries and letters appear scarce. Narrowing these results to South Carolina women adds another level of difficulty. Louisa McCord, the South’s reigning female political thinker, went silent in 1855 after the death of her husband and requested that confidant Mary Boykin Chesnut burn her correspondence. Chesnut did not begin her famous diary until 1861, and the subsequent revisions made through the years negate its value as a primary source.⁴ Though less avid editors than Chesnut, many women did not document their lives until 1861, when they realized that national events merited recording. Emma Holmes, Sarah Morgan Dawson, Kate Stone, and Anna Maria Green, all women who kept well-known Civil War diaries,

with Elisabeth Muhlenfeld (New York: Oxford University Press), and *Mary Chesnut’s Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981).

The 1990s saw an even larger surge of women’s published diaries, with edits and forwards by historians like Nell Irvin Painter, Jean Berlin, Drew Gilpin Faust, and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese. To name a few: *Kate: The Journal of a Confederate Nurse* ed. Richard Barksdale Harwell (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1998); *The Secret Eye: The Journal of Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas, 1848-1889*, ed. Virginia Ingraham Burr (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990); *The War-Time Journal of a Georgia Girl, 1864-1865*, ed. Jean V. Berlin (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1997). The University of South Carolina Press alone published the following women’s diaries during the 1990s: Keziah Brevard, Ada Bacot, Lucy Breckinridge, Floride Clemson, Pauline DeCaradeuc, and Emmala Reed.

³ See Stephanie Jones-Rogers, *They Were Her Property: White Women as Slave Owners in the American South* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019) for white women as active participants in the economy of slavery.

⁴ Chesnut frequently cut embarrassing passages and added in sections tinted with a rosy retrospection of the antebellum South. In addition, she does not “begin” her diary until February 1861, though her first entry is clearly written after the fact due to its editorial nature. For these reasons, she is not included in the majority of this study. For more on Chesnut, see *Mary Chesnut’s Civil War*, ed. C. Vann Woodward.

began their entries in 1861 or 1862.⁵ “How I wish I had kept a journal during the last three months of great political change,” wrote Holmes in February 1861.⁶ I share Holmes’s sentiments entirely. Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas kept a diary from 1848 to 1889, and her volume from 1859 to 1861 is simply missing.

The preceding factors partially explain why women are largely absent from histories of secession, and why women’s history manuscripts rush quickly through secession and 1860 in particular. Additionally, fewer South Carolina women appear in a “secession” keyword search compared to their southern counterparts. South Carolinians were at the vanguard of secession and did not often find time to write until the whirlwind of events settled. At the end of 1860, the state stood alone as an independent republic, a change so swift that many South Carolinians wondered how they got there. Other southern states had time to sit back, watch, and react before they took the plunge.

This dissertation began as a curiosity—examining the role of personality in two sisters’ views of secession—and evolved into a recognition of 1860 as a crucial, transformational year.⁷ Several monographs focus on a single year as a central organizing premise, and at least two do this for 1861.⁸ In highlighting the preceding year, this

⁵ Steven M. Stowe, *Keep the Days: Reading the Civil War Diaries of Southern Women* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018), xix-xxv.

⁶ Quoted in Sarah Gardner, *Blood and Irony: Southern White Women’s Narratives of the Civil War, 1861-1937* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 13.

⁷ Georgia and Florida King, of St. Simons Island, Georgia, were only years apart in age yet reacted differently to news of secession. The Georgian sea islands are outside of this study, but it sparked my interest in women’s distinctive thoughts on secession.

⁸ See Andre M. Fleche, *The Revolution of 1861: The American Civil War in the Age of Nationalist Conflict* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012);

dissertation explores the slow, stuttering, yet steady way that life as South Carolina women knew it changed and politics became inescapable. It gathers the sources that exist for that year to create a picture of daily routines and rhythms in order to discover how and why their lives changed, and when women became cognizant of this transition from an antebellum to wartime era. Let this dissertation serve as a finding aid for others that take on the challenge of women and 1860.

Adam Goodheart, *1861: The Civil War Awakening* (New York: Knopf, 2011); Emory M. Thomas, *The Dogs of War, 1861* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011) to name a few.

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INTRODUCTION

When Grace Elmore, aged twenty-one, returned to Columbia, South Carolina from her usual summer in the Virginia springs and New York City in October 1860, she arrived to a sea of blue cockades and ever-increasing political discussion. Forcing herself to contemplate the “horrors of war,” she pictured her brother and his friends dead on the battlefield, her mother impoverished and childless. “I held, in imagination, the wolf to my breast and it devoured my heart,” Elmore exclaimed, falling to her knees in tears. The entry abruptly ends, the young Elmore incapable of writing more in her emotional state. When she resumed the next day, she decided to cease all contemplation of these possibilities, explaining that the “Bible says ‘Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof,’” and resolved that she felt a “willingness to suffer all things...rather than Carolina should ever be other than she is, the embodiment of ‘Truth and Honor.’” True to her word, Elmore devoted the remainder of the year’s entries to enthusiastic support of South Carolina and secession.⁹

Grace Elmore’s two-day, emotional diary entry summarizes in several pages what other South Carolinians took months to rationalize: even before Lincoln’s election, she feared an imminent, destructive war, but pivoted with religious resignation to

⁹ Grace Brown Elmore Diary, 19-20 Oct. 1860, South Caroliniana Library, Columbia, South Carolina. Hereafter SCL.

patriotically affirm the righteousness of her state's decision. She went about her summer travels as usual, only noticing the abrupt change in her state when she and other Carolinians returned from their retreats. Finally, she took to her diary to make sense of these strong, emotional, and entirely political feelings, using writing as a safety valve for her feelings until she was too mentally and physically overwhelmed to continue. Her struggle is replicated in countless South Carolinian women's diaries and letters in 1860 as they used comfortable mediums, such as epistolary correspondence, religious metaphor, and language borrowed from popular novels, to express increasingly political thoughts.

Elite white women's writings reveal that though they and their families were staunch supporters of South Carolina's secession, women reacted to their new circumstances with fears and misgivings that their male counterparts could not, or would not, express. Planter-class women were part and parcel—alongside their husbands and fathers—of their state's ruling class. They were highly invested in the institution of slavery, from which they directly profited, but avoided discussing the politics surrounding the institution due to ideas about southern womanhood. A pure and proper woman, in theory, would not engage in political discussions, understood as masculine and corrupting; she was instead to be domestic and pious, nurturing the spiritual lives of her family, inspiring men to rule morally and wisely for her sake.¹⁰ In 1860, South

¹⁰ For the perception of the ideal southern lady in the antebellum South, see Barbara Welter's classic essay "The Cult of True Womanhood, 1820-1860," *American Quarterly* 18 (Summer, 1966), 150-174. See also Nancy Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1935* 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997). It was nigh-impossible for a woman to meet all these expectations for perfect womanhood, however many strove to emulate this pious, domestic woman to the best of their ability.

Carolina's "ladies" harnessed familiar and religious concepts to express political hopes and fears, creating a socially-acceptable outlet through which to discuss current events.

South Carolina women used these concepts to discuss politics during John Brown's Raid in late 1859 as well as during the Democratic National Convention in the spring of 1860, during which all but two South Carolina delegates walked out of the convention and the party. They responded to fears of slave insurrection after Harpers Ferry by affirming the happiness of their own slaves, a defense of domestic slavery well-honed in the years since Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* necessitated white southern women's response. After these events subsided, women quelled their trepidations and resumed the routines of everyday life, where politics were abstract and did not touch them. Though some women referenced the "anxious" or "exciting" times before Fall 1860, they did not let this atmosphere overtake their writings, and self-consciously defended their discussion of national events.

In late 1860 and early 1861, however, elite South Carolina women's emotional language concerning politics shifted. Women indicated their political engagement by filtering their growing sense of unease through familiar forms of writing, modeling their words after the popular sentimental novel.¹¹ Women who believed wholeheartedly in the righteousness of South Carolina's cause nonetheless quickly anticipated the death and destruction that would accompany secession, revealing the complexity of their political beliefs at a time when it was considered improper for women to voice them aloud. To

¹¹ Elizabeth Moss, *Domestic Novelists in the Old South: Defenders of Southern Culture* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992); Mary Favret, *Romantic Correspondence: Women, Politics, and the Fiction of Letters* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

describe their uncertain future, they metaphorically equated their moods to the weather. To discuss the imagined outbreak of war, they wrote of religious apocalypse and God's reckoning. Women managed the overwhelming nature of their emotions by using writing as an outlet to prevent their feelings from erupting around others and to quiet the turmoil in their minds.¹² They also increasingly contacted friends for assistance, taking advantage of the epistolary, or letter writing, tradition between women privileged with literacy.¹³ These comfortable modes of expression provided South Carolina's white women with space to grapple with events that would soon destabilize their zealously-defended domestic sphere.¹⁴

Tightly-held notions of white southern gender roles shaped political opinion. Southern notions of manhood forbade men from expressing their anxieties concerning secession and its consequences for fear of appearing cowardly. Obsessed with defending their honor and sense of mastery, men strenuously avoided showing any hint of cowardice in the face of future conflict. Young men in particular jumped at the chance for fame as well as adventure, believing that dying for their newly-constituted cause and

¹² Stowe, *Keep the Days: Reading the Civil War Diaries of Southern Women*, 32.

¹³ Carroll Smith-Rosenberg notes the importance of diaries and letters in maintaining female bonds, including an example in which a young girl, though insecure of her own writing, felt an "inestimable pleasure" at the "great privilege" of reading one's diary, as it caused them to "lay our hearts open to each other, it heightens our love." Quoted in "The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations between Women in Nineteenth-Century America" *Signs* 1.1 (Autumn, 1975), 21.

¹⁴ For more on letter-writing as a genre with formulaic conventions, and the classed nature of literacy during the Civil War era, see Christopher Hager, *I Remain Yours: Common Lives in Civil War Letters* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018). For more on the formal dimensions of the diary and the stability it provided during times of upheaval, see Rebecca Steinitz, *Time, Space, and Gender in the Nineteenth-Century British Diary* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011): 28.

country would bring them the greatest honor and an immortal legacy. These ambitious men, a female contemporary wrote, enjoyed “beyond all measure the excitement of a life which wakes them out of their ‘bovine’ torpor--& which is such an utter change from the quiet of a planters existence.”¹⁵ Elite white men and women of South Carolina were similarly constrained by gendered ideas of manhood and womanhood within their social class, and their interpretations of the events of 1860 reflect this divide.¹⁶

This dissertation follows the lives of elite white South Carolinian women from October 1859 to June 1861, recreating their daily rhythms to understand how they gradually incorporated politics into their lives in new and exciting ways, as well as how they reconciled their grave fears with patriotic support for South Carolina. It chooses South Carolina as a helpful case study as the state spent the greater part of the nineteenth century attempting to revoke its Union membership. To better understand secession, one must focus on events as they happened, not reminiscences or observations from other states. South Carolinian elite women had no time to think through their actions, and many gave no thought to editing their innermost confessions. Their responses are genuine and reveal much about the changing state of affairs in 1860. Though the wealth of sources from Charleston-based women often sends this study into the Lowcountry, it pays due

¹⁵ Sally Baxter Hampton to Anna Baxter, 11 Jan. 1861, in *A Divided Heart: Letters of Sally Baxter Hampton, 1853-1862* ed. Ann Fripp Hampton (Columbia, SC: Phantom Press Publishers, 1994), 97. Hereafter *A Divided Heart*.

¹⁶ See Stephen Berry, *All That Makes a Man: Love and Ambition in the Civil War South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); Steven Stowe, *Intimacy and Power in the Old South: Ritual in the Lives of Planters* (Baltimore: University of Johns Hopkins Press, 1990); Kenneth Greenberg, *Honor and Slavery: Lies, Duels, Noses, Masks, Dressing as a Woman, Gifts, Strangers, Humanitarianism, Death, Slave Rebellions, the Proslavery Argument, Baseball, Hunting, and Gambling in the Old South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

diligence to women in other regions including Columbia, the state capital located in the “Midlands:” Greenville, a city at the edge of the Blue Ridge; and Society Hill, a community north of Florence and near the North Carolina border. The women range in age from young teenagers to aged widows, yet regardless of their stage of life, these women thought and reacted along similar patterns.

Some voices project louder than others and warrant introduction.¹⁷ Keziah Brevard, fifty-seven, lived alone at her plantation on the outskirts of Columbia. Sally Baxter Hampton also resided in Columbia and socialized with the elite Preston and Chesnut families. A northern-born socialite and muse of author William Thackeray, she attempted—unsuccessfully—to report on events with an unbiased eye. Grace Elmore, twenty-one, also socialized with this politically and economically revered circle in Columbia. After marriage, her sister Sally Elmore Taylor lived next door to her widowed mother in the state capital, limiting the necessity for correspondence.

Several families resided in Society Hill. Ada Bacot, a young widow, lived miserably with her overbearing father and recorded her thoughts on paper rather than express them aloud. Mother and daughter duo Susan and Florence “Flora” Burn frequently corresponded with Susan’s son Charles, attending school in Greenville, South Carolina. Flora, herself a schoolgirl, was sixteen. The surnames of the Charlestonian women should take no South Carolina scholar by surprise: the Grimball, Vanderhorst, Pringle, and Allston families all wrote voraciously during this transition period. Mary Pringle, fifty-seven and resident of what is today known as the Miles Brewton House in

¹⁷ All ages are taken from the year 1860.

Charleston, maintained frequent correspondence with her twelve adult children. Meta Morris Grimball kept both a daily diary and “country” and “city” journals in addition to her correspondence. An astute political thinker, the fifty-year old passed down this trait to her daughter Elizabeth, twenty-nine. Meta’s contemporary, Adele Allston, similarly shared her political musings with her husband, former governor R.F.W. Allston. At fifty, she was responsible for the education of her three young daughters: Adele, Elizabeth “Bessie,” and Jane, ages twenty, fifteen, and ten respectively. All four wrote frequently to their son and brother Charles Allston, away at school for the duration of this study—this historian is grateful for his absence, as it resulted in a marvelous correspondence. Adele the Younger later married Arnoldus, the son of Ann Morris Vanderhorst, who at sixty-five filled her diary with more worldly woes than happiness.¹⁸

Though some historians emphasize the differences between Upcountry and Lowcountry South Carolinians, the female members of this elite group shared similar writing patterns, hopes, and fears.¹⁹ Furthermore, members of the South Carolina elite followed established political and social patterns each year. Both regions attended South

¹⁸ Adele Petigru Allston and Adele Petigru Allston Vanderhorst share the same name throughout this study. I will hereby refer to them as Adele Allston senior and junior, respectively.

¹⁹ Though today, the area surrounding Columbia, South Carolina is known as the Midlands, contemporary accounts simply described going “Upcountry” or to the “Lowcountry.” I will indicate whether I am discussing today’s notion of Upcountry South Carolina or today’s Midlands region throughout. William Freehling, Steven Channing, William Barney, and Lawrence McDonnell all take great pains to describe the political and economic differences between Upcountry, Midlands, and Lowcountry South Carolinians. For elite white South Carolina women, class superseded this level of political minutia.

Carolina College.²⁰ They traveled north to Columbia’s legislative sessions, and south to Charleston’s racetracks. During these travels, Carolinians from both regions met and forged mutually beneficial marriage bonds.²¹ Elite women demonstrated similar patterns, mingling at female academies or socializing during the summer, either in Virginia, the South Carolina mountains, or the Lowcountry beaches. Women’s letters and diaries frequently mention women are described elsewhere in this dissertation, further establishing the extent to which women’s lives were interwoven, thus allowing them to create—and us to reflect upon—a distinct emotional and epistolary community.

This dissertation is divided into six chapters, following a chronology established by Carolinian women themselves. It does not follow today’s notions of spring and summer, but rather those defined by the planting or social seasons that dictated the rhythm of elite women’s lives. Chapter One investigates the final full antebellum year, 1859. It explores how South Carolinian women reacted to John Brown’s Raid at Harpers Ferry with religious fear and hatred towards abolitionists and “Black Republicans.”²² It explains the connection between John Brown, the abolitionist threat, and attacks on the domestic institution of slavery, an outlet through which women could comfortably express their opinions as authority figures. It closes with the holiday season of December 1859 and January 1860, when families reunited and, for the last time, felt no need to

²⁰ Today the institution is the University of South Carolina.

²¹ See William Freehling, *The Road to Disunion: Volume II: Secessionists Triumphant, 1854-1861* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008): 362.

²² “Black Republicans” is a derogatory phrase and blanket term for the Republican party used by southerners and other opponents, including women. The party’s association with abolition led their opponents to “blacken” their image with the term.

acutely worry about political horizons. Chapter Two traces the continuation of these festivities into the “gay season” of balls and parties across the state, culminating in the South Carolina College graduation in May 1860. It explains why the Democratic National Convention held in spring 1860, in retrospect a defining event in U.S. history, surfaced as a small blip on the radar of South Carolina’s elite women. Chapter Three unpacks the “sickly season,” or the summer of 1860, characterized by the threat of mosquito-related diseases in the Lowcountry. It argues that South Carolinians’ insistence upon traveling to their usual vacation haunts, often ending their trips in New York City, reveals a still-uncertain political future. During this “season,” roughly late May to late October, South Carolinians felt time slow and talk of politics, despite the looming November election, faded to the background. Yet while discussion waned, South Carolina’s elite white women continued to express political thoughts, revealing political rivalries with Virginians that coexisted with desires to form social, and therefore economic and political, relations at Virginia’s healing and resort springs.

The jarring return from what today is considered an extended summer vacation forms the basis for Chapter Four, “South Carolina Takes Action.” For some, late September 1860 signaled this temporal and political shift between women’s antebellum political consciousness and a new consciousness that was hyper-aware of politics. By mid to late October, nearly all women surveyed grasped that Lincoln’s impending election brought about a point of no return. This chapter examines the ways in which women grappled with this all-consuming political atmosphere, both with religious reservation and wide-eyed patriotism, all within the constraints of political expression considered suitable for “ladies.” Chapter Five explains the relativity of time for South Carolinians, as

they rolled erratically to secession and then spent the next several months stagnating, waiting for action. Amidst the stillness, this chapter discusses melancholy Christmases, comparisons of weather to the state of the Union, and a restless energy that caused the most pacifist of women to long for action at Fort Sumter.

In Chapter Six, women get their wish. This chapter examines women's reactions to the siege and subsequent fall of Fort Sumter, and their short-lived and heartbreaking hope that it would be the sole conflict that resulted from secession. Their cathartic moment of joy quickly evaporates when their state's soldiers depart for Virginia, leaving them once again in a tormented state of lonely anticipation. Until the events of First Bull Run, when Charleston's elite suffered their first casualties, men's letters home expressed a jovial mood. Thus, while Fort Sumter may be considered the first shot of the Civil War, it takes First Bull Run for South Carolinians to realize the urgency of the conflict and finally, completely, enter the Civil War. After Bull Run, they were well on their way to embodying Confederate womanhood, in which they encouraged their men to fight for Southern independence and made personal sacrifices on behalf of the state.

Much like the date ranges of the chapters themselves, the lengths of each chapter vary based on the attention each period receives in women's letters and diaries. This is a dissertation dictated by the women themselves, an entirely fitting strategy given their historical silencing. In the "long year" of 1860, time did not march by month-by-month, but rather grew or shrank based on women's inner and outer stimuli. This work attempts to do their thoughts and experiences justice by recreating their world to better understand the women that went to war to protect their way of life, rooted in the exploitations and defenses of slavery.

HISTORIOGRAPHY

Historians have long examined secession, its causes, and the conditions that made 1860 ripe for action. Many take a “long approach,” slowly tracing the growing sources of disunion throughout U.S. history. Others craft microhistories of Charleston and South Carolina, but removed women from the discussion as anything other than spectators or participants in political ritual.²³ Women frequently go unmentioned through political analyses of secession. If women actors do appear, it is often simply to describe an event, without much gendered analysis of their viewpoint. More than once, the woman remains unnamed, a mere “wife of a South Carolina rice planter.” This study is greatly indebted to the voluminous works of William Freehling, yet even his meticulously-researched evaluations of secession and its minutia considers women an afterthought.²⁴ Lawrence

²³ For works on the long history of disunion, see William W. Freehling, *The Road to Disunion, vol. I: Secessionists at Bay, 1776–1854* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); Paul Finkelman and Donald R. Kennon, eds., *Congress and the Emergence of Sectionalism: From the Missouri Compromise to the Age of Jackson* (Athens, Ohio: University Press, 2008). Elizabeth Varon’s *Disunion! The Coming of the American Civil War, 1759-1859* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008) delves into the changing meanings of “disunion” as a concept, including gender in her analysis, but comes short of reaching 1860 or 1861. For works with narrower scopes, see David Detzer, *Allegiance: Fort Sumter, Charleston, and the Beginning of the Civil War* (New York: Harcourt, 2001); Steven Channing, *Crisis of Fear: Secession in South Carolina* (New York: Norton & Co, 1974). Channing’s examination of 1859-1860 South Carolina, which argues that the emotion of fear of a slave rebellion prompted secession, ignores the gendered aspect of this fear and mostly focuses on South Carolina’s elite men. Even a published collection of lectures titled “Secession Winter” underutilize gender as an analytical lens. See William L. Barney, Robert J. Cook, Elizabeth R. Varon, *Secession Winter: When the Union Fell Apart* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013). For an excellent examination of gender and disunion during Bleeding Kansas, see Nicole Etcheson, *Bleeding Kansas: Contested Liberty in the Civil War Era* (Lawrence, KS, University Press of Kansas, 2004).

²⁴ William Freehling, *The Road to Disunion: Volume II: Secessionists Triumphant, 1854-1861*.

McDonnell’s well-researched study of “street-level” white Charlestonians during secession explicitly excludes women; McDonnell argues that southern men chiefly focused upon other men and “actively” attempted to “disentangle” women from political discussion.²⁵ However, this does not mean that men successfully did so, as “disentangled” implies that women were, in some way, entangled. Nor should we take patronizing contemporary sources at their word.

This study complements the work of McDonnell and others by adding not only gender but women’s personal thoughts and actions to discussions of secession through use of the history of emotions. Michael Woods’ *Emotional and Sectional Conflict in the Antebellum United States* deploys the history of emotions to argue that women and men alike that strongly desired and believed in the righteousness of secession still responded to its achievement with sorrow and grief. This mourning, however, helped “ease the transition from American to Confederate allegiance,” by appealing to the Christian concept of resignation to God’s will and hope for the future. The Union was dead and it needed to be mourned, but doing so eliminated all chance at reconciliation.²⁶ While Woods correctly observes that Jefferson Davis himself utilized the language of mourning, he overlooks the fact that the rituals and practices of Victorian mourning were most often the responsibility of women.²⁷ In 1860, before the formation of the Confederacy, South

²⁵ Lawrence T. McDonnell, *Performing Disunion: The Coming of the Civil War in Charleston, South Carolina* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018): 18-9.

²⁶ Michael E. Woods, *Emotional and Sectional Conflict in the Antebellum United States* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 217. Woods’s examination of grief, mourning, and Christian resignation after secession is the subject of Chapter 7.

²⁷ Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008).

Carolina's women were already using concepts of Christian resignation to express their political opinions on current events.

Above all, this secession study speaks most directly to concepts raised by Jason Phillips' *Looming Civil War: How Nineteenth Century Americans Imagined the Future*, which incorporates lesser-known female actors like Mary Howard Schoolcraft alongside figures like Edmund Ruffin and explains the ways in which different groups imagined a future of civil war. Phillips uses women's writings to disprove the "short war" myth, or the belief that Americans believed in a quickly resolved conflict. This myth "ignores expectations" of women, who nationwide made dreadful predictions about the war's destruction and length in their private writings. Young women especially "read, spoke, and wrote about political developments" in spite of conventions that made these topics "unfeminine," and in doing so thousands "anticipated the looming war."²⁸ My findings both align with Phillips and diverge insofar as they offer a sustained investigation of why and when South Carolina women felt this way. His work studies the events leading up to the Civil War that prompted the most future forecasting, while I include and analyze events that *did not* produce extreme responses. In addition, I extend his findings concerning women in 1861 into the preceding year.

Examining elite South Carolina women from late 1859 to the Battle of First Bull Run in June 1861 and investigating their emotional reactions to political change provides a much-needed bridge in southern women's history. Typically in women's history specifically and writing on the nineteenth century generally, secession is understood as

²⁸ Jason Phillips, *Looming Civil War: How Nineteenth-Century Americans Imagined the Future* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 173, 195.

either a conclusion to the antebellum period or as an introduction to a study of Confederate womanhood.²⁹ Classic works such as Elizabeth Fox-Genovese's *Within the Plantation Household* and Catherine Clinton's *The Plantation Mistress: Woman's World in the Old South*, understandably coordinate the conclusions of their studies with the end of the Old South, but create the image of an abrupt end to the antebellum period, rather than a slow, then sudden and complete, dissolution.³⁰ Elizabeth Varon's *We Mean to Be Counted: White Women and Politics in Antebellum Virginia* helpfully continues discussion of antebellum Virginian elite women's politics through secession, but her

²⁹ There are a few exceptions. Victoria Bynum's *Unruly Women: The Politics of Social & Sexual Control in the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992); Thavolia Glymph's *Out from the House of Bondage: The Transformation of the Plantation Household* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008); and Stephanie Jones Rogers' previously mentioned *They Were Her Property* discuss antebellum and wartime white women, but their research is not interested in women's political consciousnesses other than, in the case of Glymph and Jones Rogers, white women as defenders of slavery. Bynum's poor, "unruly" women, did not leave written records of their thoughts on secession.

Anya Jabour's *Scarlett's Sisters: Young Women in the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), moves from the antebellum to wartime period without pinpointing at which point these paths diverge, though this is also outside of the scope of her study. Marli Weiner's *Mistresses and Slaves: Plantation Women in South Carolina, 1830-1880* (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1998) encompasses both my subject matter and time period, yet jarringly jumps from antebellum content to Fort Sumter in 1861, with slight references to the war seeming imminent since November 1860, p. 158. Nearly all historians of women are indebted to Anne Firor Scott's *The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics, 1830-1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970) and her analysis of southern women's unhappiness with their role on an antebellum pedestal, however my study does not agree with her argument that southern "New Women" emerged from secession and the Civil War.

³⁰ Catherine Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress: Woman's World in the Old South* (New York: Pantheon, 1984); Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988). See also Cynthia Kierner, *Beyond the Household: Women's Place in the Early South, 1700-1835* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998).

focus, like mine, remains centered upon one state.³¹ Studies of Civil War women do not pick up exactly where antebellum studies leave off but, rather, begin with the start of the war. LeeAnn Whites' excellent examination of Augusta, Georgia in *The Civil War as a Crisis in Gender* lists 1860 as the beginning year in the title, but the main narrative begins with the attack on Fort Sumter in April 1861.³² This temporal designation paints secession as inevitable, rather than as a series of tumultuous months in which the prospect of a Confederacy, its size, and its meaning had yet to be determined. In Drew Gilpin Faust's *Mothers of Invention*, she devotes eight pages to southern women's increasing discussion of politics during and after secession and their conflicting feelings on the topic, analysis that begs expansion.³³

When the Civil War began, South Carolina's women transformed into the Confederate women described in Civil War studies who negotiated new public political roles and struggled to maintain order as *femme soles* on plantations. My research upholds and confirms the arguments presented by historians of elite white women in the Civil

³¹ Elizabeth R. Varon, *We Mean to Be Counted: White Women and Politics in Antebellum Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998).

³² LeeAnn Whites, *The Civil War as a Crisis in Gender: Augusta, Georgia, 1860-1890* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995). See also George C. Rable, *Civil Wars: Women and the Crisis of Southern Nationalism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989); Stephanie McCurry, *Confederate Reckoning: Power and Politics in the Civil War South* (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 2010); Edward D.C. Campbell, Jr. and Kym S. Rice, editors, *A Woman's War: Southern Women, Civil War, and the Confederate Legacy* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 1996); Victoria Ott, *Confederate Daughters: Coming of Age During the Civil War* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2008).

³³ Drew Gilpin Faust, *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South the in American Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), sections "Public Affairs Absorb Our Interest" and "Your Country Calls," 10-20.

War South, and thus asserts that these changes, in fact, began shortly before the war's outbreak.³⁴ An examination of elite white women's shifting political consciousnesses, evidenced by fearful anticipation of secession and war helps connect these two periods and reminds historians that these antebellum and bellum women were the same historical actors. Bridging these two periods adds to our temporal understanding of the nineteenth century and deepens our understanding of women's politics during this period, which too often focuses entirely on northern activists or the suffrage struggle.³⁵

Scholars of women, gender, and politics have long since understood that the definition of "politics" extended far past voting men. Even the "Southern lady," intended to be a source of purity untainted by the corruption of politics, participated in public, political movements long before secession.³⁶ Elite women writers during secession, however, described a clear difference in the atmosphere of 1860 and felt the need to defend their discussion of "Politicks," deliberately given a capital P. When this study

³⁴ Sarah Gardner's work on southern women's narratives of the Civil War, for instance, does not have a section on secession but recounts many of the arguments made during the war days in 1861. Women increasingly turned to their journals to comment upon the surrounding world, shifting "the focus of their journals from themselves to national politics," and expressing a desire to become trustworthy recordkeepers. These characteristics applied to South Carolina in 1860 as well. *Blood and Irony: Southern White Women's Narratives of the Civil War, 1861-1937*, 18-9.

³⁵ Jeanne Boydston, *Home and Work: Housework, Wages, and the Ideology of Labor in the Early Republic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Christine Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789-1860* (Champaign IL: University of Illinois Press, 1987); Bruce Dorsey, *Reforming Men and Women: Gender in the Antebellum City* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002).

³⁶ Varon, *We Mean to Be Counted: White Women and Politics in Antebellum Virginia*; Gerda Lerner, *The Grimke Sisters from South Carolina: Pioneers for Women's Rights and Abolition* (New York: Schocken Books, 1971); Catherine Allgor, *Parlor Politics: In Which the Ladies of Washington Help Build a City and a Government* (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 2000).

claims that women engaged with politics for “the first time,” it is referencing electoral politics, which women’s diaries and letters did not discuss in the 1850s with similar frequency. There are exceptions, of course, but they pale in number and extent to the outpouring of political writings by women in 1860.

To ease their insecurities surrounding this “new” political writing, women turned to the familiar avenue of religion as they expressed their thoughts.³⁷ Religious and political culture became inseparable. Many South Carolina women viewed the events of late 1860 as almost millenarian, which added a sense of urgency to their writings.³⁸ To avoid being criticized for excessive sentimentality, women limited their outward displays of emotion and turned to their diaries and letters; using religious allusions to God’s wrath to justify their claims of hard times ahead. This use of religion as a justification for and vehicle to express political opinions continued throughout the Civil War. Civil War scholars argue that women evoked their Christian purity to gain a new legitimacy in the public sphere; by braiding religion with politics, women found an avenue into the male world of politics without challenging the boundaries of acceptable womanly behavior.³⁹

³⁷ For more on the “omnipresence of religion” in daily life, and thus its frequent mention in diaries, see Steinitz, *Time, Space, and Gender in the Nineteenth-Century British Diary*, 28. Though she writes about England her arguments on the presence and perception of religion are upheld in this study.

³⁸ Millenarianism is the belief that Jesus will return to earth to reign for a thousand years before the final judgment. Before he can do so, however, there must be a first, secret rapture followed by a seven year period of tribulation during which the antichrist will return. See Bill J. Leonard, *Baptists in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 55-6.

³⁹ Faust, *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War*, 180; Drew Gilpin Faust, “‘Without Pilot or Compass:’ Elite Women and Religion in the Civil War South,” in *Religion and the American Civil War*, 255.

The writings of South Carolinians elite women indicate that they used religion in similar ways during secession winter, either to confidently state that God supported the South or that the upcoming election signaled God’s retribution upon mankind.⁴⁰ This familiar method, one cultivated for years beforehand, allowed them to tentatively enter the political sphere in the specific context of 1860. Religion, emotion, and politics united in women’s writings to express their preoccupation with a dying nation.

South Carolinian women’s letters and diaries made clear that they used their emotions, specifically anxiety and melancholy, to express a growing political consciousness inseparable from individual feeling. Their constant references to “great excitement” reveal the need for scholars to closely analyze the meanings of the words women choose through which to describe their feelings, and hold them to nineteenth-century understandings. Emotions must be read in context. The frequency with which elite women discussed “dreadful political excitement” and their “great state of excitement” at the thought of a loved one dying reveals that a woman “excited” by secession was not necessarily pleased, but rather experienced a heightening of emotion, activity, and perhaps anxiety.⁴¹ This dissertation employs emotions history to understand

⁴⁰ Secession winter is roughly defined as November 1860 to February or early March 1861.

⁴¹ Adele Allston to R.F.W. Allston, 3 Jun. 1861, Allston Family Papers; Meta Morris Grimball Diary, 21 Oct. 1860, Margaret Ann Morris Grimball Family Papers. See also Sue Pringle to Maxwell Pringle, 7 Sep. 1860, Pringle-Garden Papers: “The death of Bob’s partner has caused great excitement, it is doubtful whether he died of yellow fever or not.” All collections are at the South Carolina Historical Association, Charleston, South Carolina. Hereafter SCHS.

not only the way women felt, but how they used these emotions as frameworks through which to understand their worlds and express themselves politically.⁴²

By bringing into dialogue emotions and political history, scholars can expand their definition of politics to include marginalized subjects.⁴³ Nicole Eustace argues that strong feelings of nationalism, for instance, can transcend class and develop “among individuals who not only share no common origins but also cannot claim comparable civic status.”⁴⁴ Individuals’ culturally-informed emotions toward secession were

⁴² Though this dissertation continues to use many frameworks familiar to emotions history, there are well-made critiques that the history of emotions has “a tendency to separate emotion from cognition, to treat emotions as if they were a discrete realm rather than...as linked to larger characterological patterns involving modes of perception and thinking as well as feeling.” Daniel Wickberg explains the “History of Sensibilities” as an alternative, which allows the historian to “dig beneath the social actions and apparent content of sources to the...emotional, intellectual, aesthetic, and moral dispositions of the persons who created them,” avoiding fixed, transhistorical definitions. He is correct in his assessment that there are obvious connections to be drawn between history of emotions and history of the senses, and that the history of sensibility could be a better framework to unite the two, but for the purpose of this dissertation works on emotions history speak more directly to my arguments made. Furthermore, many involved in emotions history do not fall victim to the tendency to separate emotion from cognition, as Wickberg suggests. Daniel Wickberg, “What is the History of Sensibilities? On Cultural Histories, Old and New,” *The American Historical Review* 112(3): 682, 670.

⁴³ For works on politics and emotions history, see *Doing Emotions History*, Susan Matt and Peter Stearns, eds., (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2014); William M. Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Nicole Eustace, *Passion Is the Gale: Emotion, Power, and the Coming of the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008); Peter N. Stearns and Carol Z. Stearns, *Anger: The Struggle for Emotional Control in America’s History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986); Barbara Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006); Paul Hoggett and Simon Thompson, eds., *Emotion, Politics and Society* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

⁴⁴ Nicole Eustace, “Emotions and Political Change” in *Doing Emotions History*, Susan Matt and Peter Stearns, eds., (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2014): 175.

reinforced by similar expressions among fellow elite white women, forming a simultaneously emotional, political, and sentimental consciousness and community. Women also formed “fictive affective bonds” through print culture.⁴⁵ Literature scholars argue that the solitary act of reading was in fact a profoundly social one, as reading women found themselves “in a cultural exchange” with the author, publisher, and fellow women. Women readers often read aloud to friends or in literary or sewing clubs, making “engagement with books a collective practice” that allowed them to “construct a common intellectual and cultural world.”⁴⁶ In turn, the wide readership of antebellum magazines indicates a reflection of “the values and customs” of the society in which, and for which, they were published.⁴⁷ This study examines popular women’s magazines such as *Godey’s Lady’s Book* from 1859 to 1861, analyzing how the content both chosen and omitted reveals underlying political tensions. *Godey’s* attempted to use emotions universal to American women in order to preserve, rather than split, the Union. Though unsuccessful, the magazine’s sustained southern readership throughout the war revealed similar tastes in sentimental literature between southern and northern women.

Women’s emotional reactions to national events were genuine and individual. Yet as they took to their writings to think through their feelings, they used culturally-accepted

⁴⁵ Alice Fahs *The Imagined Civil War: Popular Literature of the North and South, 1861-1865* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 9.

⁴⁶ Mary Kelley, “Reading Women/Women Reading: The Making of Learned Women in Antebellum America” *Journal of American History* 83, no. 2 (September 1996): 403; Fahs, *The Imagined Civil War: Popular Literature of the North and South, 1861-1865*, 9.

⁴⁷ Jonathan Daniel Wells, *Women Writers and Journalists in the Nineteenth-Century South* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 3.

and gendered methods of expression and often found that other women of their class did the same. As Michael Woods explains, “emotions are inextricably linked to personal and collective identities, to judgments of weal and woe, to mass mobilization, and to rational decision making, making them an inherent element of political activity.”⁴⁸ By studying women exclusively, this study reveals a gendered anxiety and melancholy separate from yet complementary to Woods’ examination of sectional emotions leading to secession.

METHODOLOGY

Women’s writings, though initially private, signified a gradual transition into the public, political sphere.⁴⁹ Like antebellum and Civil War studies, this examination relies upon women’s letters and diaries to access real-time reactions to political developments and understand how emotions evolved over time. Scholars view private journals and letters as linguistic documents ripe for analysis of culturally-developed ideologies and feelings.⁵⁰ Few sources bring the historian closer to an understanding of the cognitive

⁴⁸ Woods, *Emotional and Sectional Conflict in the Antebellum United States*, 7.

⁴⁹ For more on the debate as to whether diaries are private, public, or semi-public documents, see Margo Culley, *A Day at a Time: The Diary Literature of American Women from 1764 to the Present* (New York: The Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 1985); Amy Wink, *She Left Nothing In Particular: The Autobiographical Legacy of Nineteenth-Century Women’s Diaries* (Knoxville, University of Tennessee Press, 2001); Lynn Z. Bloom, “I Write for Myself and Strangers’: Private Diaries as Public Documents,” in *Inscribing the Daily: Critical Essays on Women’s Diaries*, ed. Suzanne L. Bunker and Cynthia Huff (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996).

⁵⁰ See Wickberg, “What is the History of Sensibilities? On Cultural Histories, Old and New,” 661; William Merrill Decker, *Epistolary Practices: Letter Writing in America before Telecommunications* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Theresa Strouth Gaul and Sharon M. Harris, eds., *Letters and Cultural Transformations in the United States, 1760-1860* (New York: Routledge, 2009). Works on writing during other time periods are similarly helpful to this study. See Konstantin Dierks, *In My*

mechanisms of affect and emotions than a sustained personal diary.⁵¹ While men also wrote in journals, an elite white woman's diary acted as a confidant. Male writers, with a few deviations from the norm, did not refer to their diaries as "my dear friend," nor did they adopt the intimate tone of a female diarist. Female diary-writing was a genre within itself, a "particular kind of intellectual-intimate charge," and thus women became storytellers.⁵² They wrote like novelists, emulating the language of sentimental novels read by American women. Also called domestic novels, these works relied upon scenes of great emotion, or "sentiment," as women relied upon their moral compasses to pass through an immoral world to their final destination—marriage, or death. Sentimental novels were often used by women to address issues of social reform. It is no wonder why women adopted this emotional, moral language to express political thoughts in their diaries.⁵³ They wrote with "a potential future audience in mind," often returning to and

Power: Letter Writing and Communications in Early America (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011); Susan Whyman, *The Pen and the People: English Letter Writers 1660-1800* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

⁵¹ Alain Corbin, *Time, Desire, and Horror: Towards a History of the Senses*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995), 186.

⁵² Stowe, *Keep the Days: Reading the Civil War Diaries of Southern Women*, 4-5, 22. Stowe is explicit on the unique nature of women's diaries, writing that "It matters that the diarists are women, not men" because women had a "talent for sympathy and an affinity for all things moral" (x). Rebecca Steinitz argues that while the form of diary or journal is "itself not inherently gendered or classed," the content of male and female-authored diaries differs. *Time, Space, and Gender in the Nineteenth-Century British Diary*, 106.

⁵³ Letter-writing, or the epistolary form, also found its way into American literature, and thus women's reading. See Elizabeth Hewitt, *Correspondence and American Literature: 1770-1865* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004). For work on the sentimental novel, see Kelley, "Reading Women/Women Reading: The Making of Learned Women in Antebellum America"; Moss, *Domestic Novelists in the Old South*; Nina Baym, *Woman's Fiction: A Guide to Novels by and About Women in America, 1820-1870* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980).

editing past entries that seemed confusing or excessively sentimental.⁵⁴ Addressing imagined readers, Grace Elmore chose to mark her birthday by describing her home and drawing “a pen and ink picture of our life.” Though Elmore did not publish this first diary, she heavily edited later volumes with a clear eye towards publication.⁵⁵

Similarly, letters addressed to a single family member were often passed around and even copied and mailed to others. This circulation created an emotional community with shared language, interest, values, and goals.⁵⁶ Less common was the stipulation that a letter remain private. To be sure, a few women requested their letters burnt after reading. Esther Simons Palmer frequently implored that her children not circulate her correspondence, suggesting either the private nature of the material or that her wishes were previously ignored.⁵⁷ Sally Baxter Hampton seemed far more comfortable with the publication of her letters than her southern counterparts, but even she mandated that her mother edit her words before they appeared in newspapers. Hampton wrote “in such wretched style always from haste & incapacity to pause,” in contrast to her mother’s

⁵⁴ Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 248.

⁵⁵ Grace Brown Elmore Diary, 19 Nov. 1860, SCL.

⁵⁶ Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 247-8. Barbara Rosenwein defines emotional communities as “precisely the same as social communities,” but the researcher must examine what emotional communities “define and assess as valuable or harmful to them; the evaluations that they make about others’ emotions; the nature of the affective bonds between people that they recognize; and the modes of emotional expression that they expect, encourage, tolerate, and deplore.” “Worrying About Emotions in History” *American Historical Review* 107.3 (June 2002): 843.

⁵⁷ Esther Simons Palmer to Harriet R. Palmer, 07 Feb. 1856, in *A World Turned Upside Down: The Palmers of South Santee, 1818-1881* ed. Louis B. Towles (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1996), 197. Hereafter *The Palmers*.

“perfect” epistolary style. Hampton described her own writing style as “*vicious*.”⁵⁸ More commonly, though, women increasingly discussed politics as secession loomed, and in doing so acknowledged that their opinions might reach an audience larger than their social circles, perhaps even the public newspaper.⁵⁹ Cognizant of the possibility that their writings, and thereby a piece of themselves, could enter the public political discussions, South Carolina women composed and edited their words and thoughts with great care.

Historian Steven Stowe recently chided diary editors, both past and present, for editing the “trivia” and “minutia” out of Civil War era women’s diaries for publication. In doing so, he argues, editors reveal their own biases for what was “important in women’s lives--namely, commentary on the Civil War.” Stowe is correct: editing out the trivia does a great disservice to these women and the lives they led. “Gender plays a role here,” asserts Stowe, as editors dismissed gossip and social visits as peripheral, frivolous, and expendable. “There is a lot of trivia in official military accounts of the Civil War,” he continues, “and yet no good editor would think of preemptively cutting these accounts in the name of ‘readability.’” The diary of Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas is an illuminating example. The well-known transcribed volume of her many diaries covers only 70 percent of Clanton’s original 450,000 words. Her editor deleted portions that discussed “weather, time and place,” and, even worse, cut if not completely deleted entries in which Thomas

⁵⁸ Sally Baxter Hampton to George Baxter, 23 Dec. 1860, *A Divided Heart*, 84.

⁵⁹ Diary-writers contended with a larger audience than themselves, but mostly with a mind to their death, a later publishing date, or posterity. Letter-writers experienced a more immediate consideration of publication, as many “eyewitness” letters were published in newspapers during secession and the Civil War. There are some exceptions, however, in which diary excerpts are published in papers. See Stowe, *Keep the Days...*, 22.

was “worried or depressed” and wrote at length of everyday occurrences until she had calmed her emotions.”⁶⁰ Women wrote what was important in their lives and this included romance, their social connections, the events that preoccupied them.

In fact, Stowe argues, it is more meaningful to place Civil War commentary amongst the "trivia" of the rest of the diary entry. Often, women reported news from the battlefield in the same breath as the laundry done during the day. This reveals how women incorporated the events of the war into their lives. The Civil War and the homefront did not exist in separate worlds, and women made sense of their lives by incorporating the two. Only by doing so could they retain some rhythm and normalcy for the next five years. I apply this same logic to women in the years preceding Stowe's Civil War diarists and expand this framework to the epistolary genre as well. Leading up to secession, women gradually spent more mental time preoccupied with politics. As a result, they spent more physical time writing down, and thus wrestling with, these same concepts on paper. Examining the physical space devoted to certain events gives us a glimpse not only into the minds of women but also the rhythms of their lives, and how national events slowly yet surely invaded their mental and physical real estate.

Stowe also discusses writing as a "safety valve" for women's strong feelings. A proper southern lady could not simply express strong feeling--in many cases these women wrote to avoid emotional outbursts in company.⁶¹ Women often described writing as uncontrollable: after reading the nightly newspapers Sally Baxter Hampton became

⁶⁰ Stowe, *Keep the Days...*, 12, 19.

⁶¹ *Ibid*, 32.

“so excited that I cannot control myself nor my pen.” Reading the news created such a sense of emotional overflow that it spilled into her letters to family. She declared that “one might as well try to live without oxygen” if they wished to avoid writing about politics.⁶² Analyzing the physical length of these entries, as well as the page itself as a material object, allows us to gain insight as to the urgency of these letters. Is there simply a mention of "Fort Sumter remaining unprovoked" before the author moves along to more pressing subjects, as if this reporting was a requirement, rather than a personal passion? Is the entry or letter jarringly long in comparison to the usual for this particular author? How many words are underlined, how many ink blots litter the page, how hasty is the handwriting? These physical manifestations of feeling are removed from a transcribed copy of letters or diaries, in addition to the editorial omissions that alter our perceptions of women's lives. Even cross-hatching, a common occurrence in antebellum letters, reveals that the author has written more than they initially expected when they laid out the allotted amount of paper. Often deep feeling or mental preoccupation surprises reader and writer alike, and this in itself is meaningful.

Whenever possible, I compared the edited transcriptions to the originals. Understanding the extent to which southern women later edited their Civil War diaries, changing their views on secession with a Confederate loss in mind, I do not frequently use “Reminiscences,” “Remembrances,” or other journals that underwent multiple revisions. This, sadly, eliminates Mary Boykin Chesnut, as she is not a reliable source for an immediate reaction to national events. Time plays a large role in this study: the dailiness of a diary, as Rebecca Steininitz argues, “produces meaning by representing

⁶² Sally Baxter Hampton to George Baxter, 22-3 Dec. 1860, *A Divided Heart*, 83.

each day in a (theoretically endless) sequence of days... Meaning accrues... through the relation of days to themselves and each other, rather than in relation to external events or ideas. Each and every day must thus be represented fully.” The “trivia” of everyday life is meaningful. When diarists noted significant days, they paused to reflect upon and evaluate the personal narrative they had created thus far, and in doing so judged themselves as individuals.⁶³ Often there are gaps in which women forget to write and then detail their shame when they resume entries: the burden of daily diary-keeping could produce anxiety. Yet from this silence can come hypothesis: perhaps the political events surrounding them were not abrupt enough to warrant writing about until secession was achieved. Though conjecture plays a factor, when women abstained from writing can be as informative as when they did. Even with methodological difficulties, I still believe a diary remains one of the best ways to trace change over time in the minds of nineteenth-century southern women.⁶⁴

Correspondence increases these methodological issues tenfold. Diary entries are bound in volumes, whereas letters can be contemporarily lost in the mail, lost in an attic, or spread across descendants of the author and recipient. Often collections only contain the correspondence received by the subject, and the historian can only guess as to their own responses. Yet even political letters written to women are priceless if the correspondence is regular and we can read their reactions from the responses of others. In addition to letters lost in the mail and lost in time, silences in archival materials are often

⁶³ Steinitz, *Time, Space, and Gender*, 20, 25.

⁶⁴ For accessibility purpose, this dissertation cites the published transcription of papers and diaries, as well as their page numbers.

the result of familial reunification--unless a family member is absent during the holidays, there is little to no written record of those months. This obstacle becomes apparent when important events like secession occur during the holiday season, the last these families will have together for many years.

To account for these gaps in the written record, I avoid making large claims about the meaning of writing or the lack thereof unless the collection contains well-maintained and consistent correspondence.⁶⁵ Callously, this study benefits from familial separation-- a husband in Congress or a child at school increases the correspondence and a woman's desire to update the family member on whatever she deems important, whether that be engagements or politics. This study not only mentions the frequency of political discussion, but also the way in which it enters conversation and how it is recorded physically in the writer's own hand.⁶⁶ It treats "trivia" as a crucial component to women's writing, women's consciousnesses, and women's lives. Only by taking "trivia" seriously can we accurately capture this pivotal and long-overlooked year in South Carolinian, and United States, history.

⁶⁵ For more on reading silences as literary analysis, see the introduction to Patricia Ondaatje, *The Reading of Silence: Virginia Woolf in the English Tradition* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991).

⁶⁶ Christopher Hager adopts a similar strategy for the Civil War letters of less-literate soldiers and families, noting that letters home are filled "less with drama than with the ebb and flow of seasons, illnesses, and the simple passage of time" rather than "what normally seems historically significant." To better understand the items of importance to his subjects, Hager also prioritizes correspondence sustained over a long period of time, in which both correspondents' letters are present, in order to "capture the unfolding story...scattered across months or years of letters" or evolving thoughts and feelings. *I Remain Yours: Common Lives in Civil War Letters*, 4, 7.

CHAPTER 1: 1859, The Last Fully Antebellum Year

There was a rhythm to antebellum South Carolinian life. White elites shaped their lives around the planting season and state congressional terms. The wealthiest made their way north when the summer and “sickly” season hit, returning around October and spending the holidays with their families. In order to trace the gradual, and then insurmountable change brought with 1860, it is helpful to examine the previous year—the last fully antebellum year—and search for any disruptions of the pace of life.

In 1859, this disruption took the shape of John Brown’s raid on Harpers Ferry on October 16. Even this nightmare scenario and manifestation of slaveholders’ greatest fears, however, was not enough to permanently alter the contours of South Carolinian’s daily lives. While Brown surely gave South Carolina’s white women fuel for their anti-abolition sentiments, these women did not predict apocalyptic disunion at this point and returned home for the final antebellum holiday season. Little did they know, this would be their last truly “happy” holiday for years to come.

This is not to say that South Carolina women ignored the raid on Harpers Ferry. They simply did not use the attack as an excuse to dramatically increase their frequency of political discussion. “Politicks” had not yet become so all-consuming that South Carolina women felt comfortable, and ladylike, in expressing their thoughts and fears. Rather, they couched their discussion of Brown and his perceived failures in their

writings as a vindication of their own righteous slaveowning. This political discussion remained a gendered discussion of the domestic ethics of slaveowning, a topic that skyrocketed in frequency after the publication of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin; or, Life Among the Lowly* (1852) which extended the attack on slavery into the private sphere. Thus South Carolina white women's political discussions in late 1859 remained within antebellum boundaries, only discussing what reached their domain—the home.

But first, a description of South Carolina as it was in 1859, the twilight of the antebellum period. South Carolina's elites ruled with an iron fist and drew this power from slavery—economically, politically, and socially. To be eligible to serve in the state's House of Representatives, one needed at least ten slaves and five hundred acres. The Senate required twice as much, and to serve as governor, a man had to own five times the holdings of the Representatives. Lowcountry elites, less than ten percent of the state's white population, controlled over a third of the seats in the state house of representatives and nearly half of those in the senate. South Carolina's state constitution contradicted most ideas about the nature of democracy—by 1860 it was the only state in the Union whose legislature, rather than its people, elected the governor and presidential electors. The South Carolina elite consolidated this power by marrying within other elite families. Women were used as economic leverage, bringing slaves, land, and a pedigree

to their husbands on their wedding day. Marrying a woman whose dowry included slaves was a powerful way to reach elite status.⁶⁷

Women enjoyed wealth's privileges and actively took part in the business and behavioral facets of slaveholding. In exchange, they submitted to their husband as head of both household and southern society. Within the southern household white women were "simultaneously protected, verified, and confined."⁶⁸ They were to be meek, pure, and pious. Though weaker than men, they reigned supreme in nurture, sacrifice, and feeling.⁶⁹ Southern girls experienced the startling transition from popular southern belle, attending dances and entertaining suitors, to married women sequestered on an isolated plantation. They were likely to lose at least one of their children, if not their own lives, during childbirth.⁷⁰ Women's separation from other white women—they were clearly never truly alone, so reliant were they upon the labor of enslaved black women within the household—made communities based in correspondence all the more critical during the antebellum period. Though women often bemoaned the restrictions of living on isolated plantations, being responsible for household management and unable to travel unchaperoned, they were equally complicit in the slave society upon which they amassed

⁶⁷ Freehling, *The Road to Disunion: Volume II*, 354; James Oakes, *The Ruling Race: A History of American Slaveholders* (New York: Knopf, 2013), xvi.

⁶⁸ Fox-Genovese, 101.

⁶⁹ Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood, 1820-1860."

⁷⁰ Death was a constant companion for southern women, with most of their young years spent in a constant state of pregnancy. This put a strain on the health of both mother and child, and the infant mortality rate was 18% in 1860. On average, a white woman in 1860 gave birth five times in her life. See Michael Haines, "Fertility and Mortality in the United States," *EH.Net Encyclopedia*, ed. Robert Whaples. 19 Mar. 2008; Jabour, *Scarlett's Sisters: Young Women in the Old South*, 69.

their wealth. While some women, like Keziah Brevard, expressed reservations about the morality of slavery, these words never translated into action. Brevard kept her large plantation landholdings and oversaw an enslaved household through the Civil War, even though she, a widow, had the power to free them if she wished. Slaveholding women actively empowered the patriarchal structure of the Old South in an effort to maintain their class and racial status and protect their white, economic supremacy.⁷¹

Although hours away from the official state capital of Columbia, most elites owned at least stakes in Charleston and Lowcountry properties. Many also owned plantation in western South Carolina, or the Upcountry. They were among the wealthiest families in the South. Half of all the southern slaveholders with 500 or more slaves resided in the South Carolina Lowcountry. Three percent of free heads of household in the city—around 155 people—owned approximately half the wealth in 1859. Of the population of greater Charleston County—70,000—its 2,880 slaveholders owned 37,000 slaves.⁷² Though historians argue that fewer women’s organizations developed in the Old South due to the isolated nature of plantation “islands,” Charlestonian women organized several benevolent societies, such as the eponymous Ladies Benevolent Society of Charleston, as well as several church-led charity organizations.⁷³ The city’s status as a

⁷¹ See Kirsten Wood, *Masterful Women: Slaveholding Widows from the American Revolution through the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004) for an examination of how wealthy white widows navigated notions of plantation mastery without a patriarchal head of household.

⁷² Freehling, *The Road to Disunion: Volume II*, 353; Walter Fraser Jr., *Charleston! Charleston! The History of a Southern City* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1989), 241; Mark Smith, *The Smell of Battle, the Taste of Siege: A Sensory History of the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 11.

⁷³ Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress: Woman’s World in the Old South*, 8-9.

transnational port, as well as the nascent Irish and German working class population growing among the docks, caused its elites to fret that their bastion of high society was increasingly mirroring northern society.⁷⁴

Elites were right to worry, but perhaps not about northern infiltration. South Carolinian rice farmers never fully recovered from several economic collapses in 1850, and after soil exhaustion in the Upcountry many planters were forced to leave the state in pursuit of fertile land. The cream of the crop of Charleston, such as former governor R.F.W. Allston, were drowning in debt. The city's population in 1859, 40,522, decreased by 2,500 over the previous decade. Regarding national rankings, it dropped from sixth largest city in 1830 to twenty-second in 1860. It ranked a disappointing eighty-fifth nationwide in manufacturing. South Carolina's most prominent region was dying, and though not many citizens admitted it, this knowledge explains why the state might have been to desperate to secede and conserve their glory days for as long as possible.⁷⁵

Elite women from this regimented, though decaying, planter class expressed their social status by avoiding unladylike activities like politics unless political critiques were lobbed towards them. Southern women's first foray into public politics involved impassioned defenses of the "domestic institution of slavery" in response to Harriet Beecher Stowe's wildly-popular and, in the South, infamous, *Uncle Tom's Cabin: or Life*

⁷⁴ Smith, *The Smell of Battle, the Taste of Siege*, 11. For the formation of a Charlestonian middle class, see Wells, *Women Writers and Journalists in the Nineteenth-Century South*; McDonnell, *Performing Disunion: The Coming of the Civil War in Charleston, South Carolina*.

⁷⁵ Fraser Jr., *Charleston! Charleston! The History of a Southern City*, 240-1; Freehling, *The Road to Disunion: Volume II*, 364.

among the Lowly in 1852. Stowe's graphic illustration of the horrors of slavery "condemned the many who professed a desire to remain uncommitted" to the issue of slavery, and made the entire southern family complicit in these moral crimes. Stowe's portrayal of women slaveowners brought the political debate about slavery into the domestic sphere, and as a result, left the author vulnerable to attack from southern women as well as men.⁷⁶ Abolitionists pointed to the separations of black families as a crucial evil of slavery—a direct attack on the supposed Christian benevolence of the southern plantation.⁷⁷ Stowe also chose a popular form of women's fiction through which to present her abolitionist argument in the domestic novel, ensuring that it reached women both north and south. Her connection to the southern audience was almost immediately severed when slaveholding states banned the book, alongside the writings of the Grimke sisters, Charlestonian ex-pats. After *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, southern domestic novelists took great care to reinforce their kindness toward their slaves and their position as "family." Southern authors such as Caroline Howard Gilman, Caroline Hentz, and Augusta Jane Evans created a particular brand of southern sentimental literature centered around the plantation, which portrayed the Old South as a well-ordered, harmonious

⁷⁶ Moss, *Domestic Novelists in the Old South: Defenders of Southern Culture*, 103.

⁷⁷ See Amy Dru Stanley. *From Bondage to Contract: Wage Labor, Marriage, and the Market in the Age of Slave Emancipation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 22-34. For more on the theory of paternalism on the southern plantation, see Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Vintage, 1976), and Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*.

society.⁷⁸ Southern audiences read these books avidly, eager to justify the peculiar institution.

By 1859, South Carolina's elite white women were well-acquainted with *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and the ensuing backlash, and often referenced Stowe in their justification of slavery on their own plantation. In 1855, northern-born Sally Baxter, soon to be Hampton, described her new friend, famous pro-slavery thinker Louisa McCord, and her review of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. In McCord's thirty-paged retort, she accused Stowe of gross slander and libel, indignantly rejecting the idea that an "elegant Southern lady" would ever "keep a cowhide about, and...lay it on."⁷⁹ While McCord is clearly mistaken on this account—historians have illuminated countless instances of plantation mistresses administering corporal punishment on slaves—she, a respected political thinker and slavery defender, dismantled the book chapter by chapter to an extent that satisfied her southern readership.⁸⁰ McCord defended not only her slave holding society but also critiqued Stowe's prose and composition to create the illusion of legitimacy in the southern journal.

⁷⁸ Gardner, *Blood and Iron: Southern White Women's Narratives of the Civil War, 1861-1937*, 19. Gardner writes that "the outbreak of the Civil War forced many of these authors...to abandon such overtly domestic plots in favor of a more explicitly political fiction." No author is more emblematic of this switch than Augusta Jane Evans. See more on Evans, outside the scope of this study yet certainly tangential, in Drew Gilpin Faust's *Mothers of Invention* and her introduction to Augusta Jane Evans, *Macaria*, reprint (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1992).

⁷⁹Louisa S. McCord, "Review of Uncle Tom's Cabin" *Southern Quarterly Review* 23 (January 1853), 81, 82, 99.

⁸⁰ Jones-Rogers, *They Were Her Property*.

Sally Baxter, soon a slaveowner herself by marriage, was convinced of the “inferiority in race” argued by McCord, even cruelly describing the “animal faces and idiot gestures” of “well tended, well cared for” slaves. “Let the abolitionists and philanthropists say what they wish,” she wrote, “they can make them only a superior animal.” Even as early as 1855 this southern sympathizer could not see a peaceful ending to the “unpracticable” southern struggle with “northern fanaticism.”⁸¹ Ann Vanderhorst also predicted the longevity of slavery, writing that southern visitors in two hundred years would “see still Black peasants we their masters.” Referring to the growing threat of free, wage labor to her preferred system, Vanderhorst laughed at the idea of employing “those mean Irish.”⁸² In her visits to the north, Grace Elmore described the overworked nature of white servants, clearly comparing their stressful days to her well-treated slaves.⁸³ Condemning Stowe provided a cathartic opportunity for women to finally join in slavery debates under the guise of domesticity. Even those who did not publish became members of the proslavery literati.

Southern women such as McCord also took aim at the growing women’s rights movement, well aware that most of those involved were also active in the antislavery movement. To the southern women, both movements represented a threat to southern domestic institutions and were therefore appropriate topics for scrutiny. Historian LeeAnn Whites has claimed that the growing independence of women in the North

⁸¹ Sally Baxter to George Baxter, 15 Apr. 1855, in *A Divided Heart* pp22-23. The original copy of this letter could not be found by myself or the editor of this volume.

⁸² Ann Morris Vanderhorst Diary, 20 Aug. 1859, Vanderhorst Family Papers, SCHS.

⁸³ Grace Brown Elmore Diary, 19 Nov. 1860, SCL.

threatened “to transform the status of all household dependents,” in “questioning the proper authority of the white male household head.” This threat, combined with the thought of coexisting with freedpeople of color, threatened to tear down the tenets of southern society based in patriarchal white supremacy. Some southerners combined the two “radical” groups to mock them as far-fetched. Abolitionists were often derisively referred to as “northern free lovers” in reference to their ties to feminist thinkers and “inappropriate” and “taboo” society.⁸⁴

Ever the female spokesperson for the South, McCord likened female subordination to men and black subordination to whites as “God’s plan” and the natural order of things. Upsetting one upset the other. Openly acknowledging that white women held a privileged place in southern society, she questioned why women would want to lose this position. Why, she asked, would anyone wish to fling themselves “from the high pedestal whereon God has placed” them, only to lose the physical protection of men and, physically weaker, be subjected to male brutality? Though meant to reassert the righteousness of the southern social order, McCord and other pro-southern authors merely revealed the precarious nature of their society.⁸⁵

In late 1859, South Carolinian ladies found another topic that permitted female discussion in John Brown’s raid on Harpers Ferry. On October 16, a Sunday night,

⁸⁴ LeeAnn Whites, *The Civil War as a Crisis in Gender*, 18-19. This hierarchy between men and women is also upheld by lower class whites in South Carolina. See Stephanie McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeomen Households, Gender Relations, and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

⁸⁵ Louisa McCord, “Enfranchisement of Woman,” *Southern Quarterly Review* 5.10 (April 1852), 322-341.

Brown and seventeen men entered and took the small town. They soon spread out, assembling an army of slaves by arming them with pikes, making sure that rumors of the raid spread throughout the countryside. They took Colonel Lewis Washington, descendant of George Washington, captive and freed his slaves. Between twenty-five and fifty slaves joined the raiders. Though Brown's men occupied the armory, taking hostages prevented them from gathering weapons from the arsenal and moved to the mountains. By the time the sun rose on October 17, the alarm had been raised, Brown's allies were nowhere to be seen due to a timing miscommunication, and the militia cut off escape over the Potomac. They held out for another day, though forced inside Harpers Ferry's engine house, but on October 18, Colonel Robert E. Lee and the Marines arrived. Lee's men attacked the engine room with a battering ram and captured all raiders within three minutes' time. Brown was sentenced to hang for his crimes and died on December 2, 1859.⁸⁶

In his examination of John Brown's raid, historian Jason Phillips found predictions of apocalypse. Brown's actions brought the most polarizing motivator for disunion to the forefront: that of racial warfare and armed black men.⁸⁷ Though John Brown's raid did not provoke immediate secession, Phillips notes the role of rumors of slave rebellion in creating a self-fulfilling prophecy: "masters went to bed

⁸⁶ Phillips, *Looming Civil War: How Nineteenth-Century Americans Imagined the Future*, 83; Freehling, *The Road to Disunion: Volume II*, 211-2.

⁸⁷ Steven Channing in *Crisis of Fear* anticipates that this was a major, if not the major reason that southerners feared abolition. William Barney also affirms the "centrality of slavery in the coming of the crisis." William L. Barney, *Rebels in the Making: The Secession Crisis and the Birth of the Confederacy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 3.

differently...communities reassessed their priorities, armed their militia, and thus changed the future whether rumors were true or false.”⁸⁸ The ever-militaristic Charleston approved extreme, extralegal methods to police the city after local papers reported “incendiary attempts within the city.” A new Charleston Vigilance Association formed to monitor slaves, free blacks, and “traitorous” whites.⁸⁹ Charlestonians eyed their wealthy free black population of 3,000 plus with growing suspicion. The city had long been paranoid about their black population, most visibly during the Denmark Vesey affair in 1822, which ended with more than thirty hangings of mostly black men and a banning of large black meetings, even for church, over a rumored insurrection. Charleston, like most southern cities, enforced a nighttime curfew for both slaves and free people of color, but in this silence Charlestonians created their own tension. As slaves increasingly learned to live and spread rumors amidst this silence, increasing numbers of whites suffered “frayed nerves and restless nights.”⁹⁰

South Carolinian women now discussed Brown in addition to Stowe as vehicles through which to discuss their distaste for abolitionists. Women used Stowe and Brown to discuss other slave uprisings or misbehaviors. Keziah Brevard placed the blame for any discord amongst slaves on “that wretch John Brown...come to cut our throats,” but later noted that only “some” of her slaves would hesitate to “butcher us—but I am sure most of them would aim at freedom.” She claims she would have a “happy people if

⁸⁸ Phillips, 102, 86.

⁸⁹ Fraser, *Charleston! Charleston!*, 241.

⁹⁰ Ethan J. Kyle and Blain Roberts, *Denmark Vesey’s Garden: Slavery and Memory in the Cradle of the Confederacy* (New York: The New Press, 2019); Smith, *The Smell of Battle, the Taste of Siege: A Sensory History of the Civil War*, 16, 18.

Northern fanaticism had not warred against us,” yet frequently discussed the “impudence” and hatred her slaves had toward her.⁹¹ Ann Morris Vanderhorst went as far as to call the “Beecher Stowes, Wheeler, Cheeves & Palmers” Satan’s “stealthy assassins” for their attempts to “deluge our mouths with blood” and induce “the poor deluded African to rise” and be “strung up for their insurrection.” Later, she favored “Butcher Stowe” as a nickname for the novelist. Continuing her disjointed thoughts, Vanderhorst predicted that the ghost of “Old Brown” would, “with his skelleton fingers...hurl the slave holder to destruction & rock slavery to its base.” All this could have been avoided, she argued, because the South’s slaves were “well clothed, well fed” and “contented if left alone.”⁹² It was only the witchcraft of the Yankee that persuaded enslaved people to rebel. This logic allowed slaveowners like Vanderhorst to continue owning enslaved people without a twinge of conscience at their behavior—it was the abolitionists who were at fault, and enslaved people were happy before this corruption. As long as people like Brown remained silenced, peace would reign in the South.

Vanderhorst’s ideas of the enslaved being perfectly happy were, of course, hypocritical. Earlier that year she described an enslaved man, Jacob, and his punishment for being “disrespectful.” Though he was previously “faithful” and kind, Vanderhorst wrote, with complete disbelief, that he now had the “daring eye of an assassin” who was “not afraid of any white man he said.” Jacob’s punishment was to sit in a solitary cell set to almost one hundred degrees, and though Vanderhorst expressed some pity, she thought

⁹¹Brevard Diary, 13 Oct. 60, 8 Jan. 61, *Plantation Mistress*, 39, 70.

⁹² Ann Morris Vanderhorst Diary, 8 Feb. 1860, Vanderhorst Family Papers, SCHS.

it was for the best that God “humbled” him in this way to make him again a “faithful servant.”⁹³ Jacob’s treatment reveals the hypocrisy of both the Vanderhorsts and the southerners as a whole who responded to Stowe and Brown with claims of a happy enslaved populace. It also shows that white women had intimate, firsthand knowledge of the brutal punishment necessary to keep enslaved people in line. They could not face these realities, however, as doing so would require the repudiation of their entire lifestyle.

South Carolina women responded to John Brown’s raid with alarm and waited with bated breath for the ensuing rebellion. Meta Morris Grimball predicted disunion from the events at Harpers Ferry, claiming that the actions of the “Abolition fanatics...makes the excitement on the subject of North & South more [prominent] than usual...I should deplore a separation of the Union for many reasons.” Her fears for disunion were not as abstract as others, who predicted vague suffering or “great excitement.” As early as December 1859, Grimball anticipated that travel would soon prevent northerners from coming south, and vice versa, after “Vigilant committees are formed, to see after our Northern people.”⁹⁴ Ann Vanderhorst, however, predicted the “banner of blood” to come if Brown, Stowe and other “Witches” “meddled with a brave & determined people who are ready to do or die.” Too late, said Vanderhorst, this peace

⁹³ Ann Morris Vanderhorst Diary, 12 Jul. 1859, Vanderhorst Family Papers, SCHS.

⁹⁴ Grimball Diary, 18 Dec. 1859, Margaret Ann Morris Grimball Family Papers, SCHS.

was now out of reach. In the mind of this elderly slaveowner, “demonic thoughts” put into the minds of the enslaved could only be solved through bloodshed.⁹⁵

South Carolinian author Mary Howard Schoolcraft also predicted that violence would result from Harpers Ferry. In the final chapter of her novel, *The Black Gauntlet: A Tale of Plantation Life in South Carolina*, the secession stage is preceded by slave uprisings, which then necessitated disunion. Schoolcraft, second wife of geographer and ethnologist Henry Schoolcraft, joined proslavery writers such as Edmund Ruffin, Nathan Beverly Tucker, and John Beauchamp Jones in writing futuristic novels to influence current political events.⁹⁶ In a clear reference to Harpers Ferry, Schoolcraft predicted that “We will put weapons in the hands of the Africans; we will supply them with torches, swords, and pikes, instead of Bibles.” The pike was a notable weapon used by Brown and his raiders. With the imagined new “reign of the Anglo-Africans,” she wrote, “the odor of the poppy is to be substituted for that of the rose...the black sons of Ham, from the Niger and the Congo, are to lead to the altar of Hyman the fair and beautiful daughters of Japeth.” She predicted that the president of the “Ethiopian equality party” would be elected, which would immediately prompt an “extensive insurrection of the negroes”

⁹⁵ Ann Morris Vanderhorst Diary, 16 Nov. 59, Vanderhorst Family Papers, SCHS.

⁹⁶ See Phillips, *Looming Civil War*, 123-134. Henry Schoolcraft’s children from his previous marriage to Jane Johnston, an Ojibwa writer, understandably experienced a strained relationship with their father after his marriage to Mary Howard. Howard was an ethnologist slaveholder who, when her half-brother married Henry’s daughter, bemoaned that her “idolized brother was to be connected to that hateful Indian race.” In *The Black Gauntlet*, she referred to Jane as a “squaw.” Though Schoolcraft did not believe that races were separate species, he did begin, later in life, to favor his “Anglo-Saxon” blood. See Jeremy Mumford, “Mixed Race Identity in a Nineteenth-Century Family: The Schoolcrafts of Sault Ste. Marie, 1824-1827” in *Michigan Historical Review* 25.1 (Spring 1999), 21-23; Mary Howard Schoolcraft, *The Black Gauntlet: A Tale of Plantation Life in South Carolina* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & Co., 1861), 126.

bloodier than the “great outbreak of the French Revolution, in 1798.”⁹⁷ Notably, Schoolcraft evokes the Haitian Revolution, a cognitive jump that not many white women duplicated in 1860, but southern men certainly did.⁹⁸ Only after “fire, massacre, and barbarian cruelty and treachery” on every plantation did the South secede and create its own country. This “United States South” prospered in its cotton trade with Europe, because the year of slave uprising stopped the cotton presses in the “United States North.” After pages of political prophesy, she spent the last two pages quickly detailing the happy endings of her novel’s characters and concluded with a Confederacy made necessary by the rebellion of the enslaved.⁹⁹

Schoolcraft also used her proslavery piece to criticize *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, frequently suggesting that “Mrs. Stowe” look more closely at the northern and British workers and their poor health and working conditions. This common proslavery argument painted the slave South as morally superior to a society premised on wage labor; enslaved people were allegedly treated better under slavery than workers were under capitalism.¹⁰⁰ Historian Marli Weiner has argued that Schoolcraft’s writing “advocated a profoundly apolitical stance for women, sanctioned by God, suggesting that their legitimate form of influence was in the domestic realm.”¹⁰¹ But in writing her book Schoolcraft was directly

⁹⁷ Schoolcraft, *The Black Gauntlet: A Tale of Plantation Life in South Carolina*, 562-3.

⁹⁸ See Channing, *Crisis of Fear*, 59.

⁹⁹ Schoolcraft, *The Black Gauntlet*, 564, 567, 568.

¹⁰⁰ Schoolcraft, *The Black Gauntlet*, 73, 215, 243.

¹⁰¹ Weiner, *Mistresses and Slaves: Plantation Women in South Carolina, 1830-1880*, 107.

being political albeit in a fashion that she and other women found “legitimate,” especially through her inclusion of a forward in which she justifies her writing because her husband asked her to write it. The domestic world Schoolcraft advocates for is in itself political, engaging and participating actively in a slave society is political, responding to Stowe and Brown through a utilization of the domestic sphere is political. The reach of Schoolcraft’s work is unknown, but it certainly did not reach the heady heights enjoyed by the writings of Louisa McCord or Augusta Jane Evans.¹⁰² It was not reviewed by national newspapers. Regardless, her political predictions, futuristic prophecy of bloodshed and murder, and social and ethnological rebuttals to Stowe reveal the mind of an astutely political white southern woman who knew her country was on the eve of great change.

After a few tense weeks in the aftermath of the Harpers Ferry raid, when it became clear that another major attack was not on the horizon, South Carolinians largely paused their ruminations on murder and disunion.¹⁰³ Grimball and Vanderhorst were in the minority in their belief that slavery was doomed. Most South Carolinian women used Brown’s action as a chance to boast of the effectiveness and docility of their homes and slaves. “I wish an abolitionist could have witnessed the behaviours of our negros, it is so striking,” wrote Rebecca Pringle to Susan Pringle, on the death of their brother William in 1859. “Instead of the usual boisterous greeting, when Mama walked through they met her with quiet silence & with apparently the deepest pity & feeling shook her

¹⁰² Amy Cummins, “‘Loyal and Devoted Attachment’: Anti-Abolition Rhetoric by Southern Women of Letters, 1852-1860,” *Southern Studies* 14.2 (Fall/Winter 2007), 17.

¹⁰³ Channing, 92. Even secessionists in South Carolina found momentum slowed when the initial excitement surrounding Brown faded.

hand...but most of them shook her hand without saying a word.” The deep reverence the enslaved felt for their deceased master, apparently, was enough to prove to abolitionists that their accusations of mistreatment were baseless. Slavery in the South, they argued, had never been stronger or safer. Caroline Howard Gilman, herself an acclaimed author who defended the southern way of life and whites’ treatment of slaves, wrote “To show you how tranquil I am, dear children, I tell you that I sleep alone, on this floor, without fastening my door. Can the Northern ladies say the same?”¹⁰⁴ The notably verbose Edmund Ruffin boasted that “not even the outer door” of his home was locked overnight, such was his confidence.¹⁰⁵ The Virginian traveled through the South, evangelizing the secessionist cause, and jumped at the chance to use John Brown for his own devices. Yet even those who dismissed fears of enslaved rebellion had to spend time considering the possibility in order to do so. At the very least, Harpers Ferry forced southerners to examine their personal relationship to slavery.

The letters and diaries of South Carolina women during late 1859 suggest that the raid at Harpers Ferry was important. They occupied enough mental terrain to deserve mention amidst the “trivia” of everyday entries detailing social visits and marriages. After Meta Grimball concluded her paragraph on Harpers Ferry with a plea that the “good God will guide, & protect us,” she moved right ahead with similarly pressing affairs, in this case a mention that her daughter Elizabeth “dines with her Aunt every

¹⁰⁴ Rebecca Pringle to Susan Pringle, 21 Nov. 1859, Pringle Family Papers, SCHS; Caroline Gilman to “My Dear Children,” 16 Dec. 1860, Caroline Howard Gilman Papers, SCHS.

¹⁰⁵ Quoted in Phillips, *Looming Civil War*, 96.

Monday, with her grandfather on Wednesday.”¹⁰⁶ Perhaps her fears remained unchanged, and she simply tried to banish it from her mind. It is also worth noting the speed with which conversation surrounding the event faded from women’s writing and thus thoughts. Some, like Jane Pringle, actually found a benefit to the events of October, as “all this fuss about John Brown lowered the price of negroes for the time.” The clearly dismissive “fuss” reveals the extent to which any fears generated by Brown were able to recede to the background for women like Pringle.¹⁰⁷ Instead, Grimball and Pringle focused on enjoying their holiday. Later in 1860, however, elite white South Carolinians would not have the luxury of dismissing these thoughts. John Brown’s actions did not yet make national events all-consuming in the minds of southern women.

Susan Burn’s response to news of Brown’s hanging anticipates future female responses to political events which hinged on a resignation to God’s will. “The way of the transgressor is hard,” she replied after hearing that Brown “scorned the idea of having a minister near him.” She prayed that God would guide her politicians “in the right way...in this time of political excitement. They will be enabled to parse [sic] the right way to protect themselves without injuring innocents.” For Burn, Brown was the worst kind of person—a transgressor in the eyes of God. Yet despite the “political excitement” surrounding Harpers Ferry and the need to prevent any similar rebellions in South Carolina, Burn was able to quickly pivot back to local news and health of the neighbors: this is the only political content and occupies less than half a page of the four-page letter.

¹⁰⁶ Grimball Diary, 18 Dec. 1859, Margaret Ann Morris Grimball Family Papers, SCHS.

¹⁰⁷ Jane Pringle to Poss Pringle, 20 Jan. 1860, Allston Family Papers, SCHS.

To Burn, Brown's hanging was simply another piece of "all the news" she felt was her duty to report to her son.¹⁰⁸

Ella Grimball also resumed discussion of Brown, as she and the rest of the South became "exceedingly aggravated" at the sympathy shown to Brown upon his hanging. "The Harpers Ferry business has shaken the Union more than anything which has yet occurred," she wrote, discussing the state of Congress and predicting a potential separation that would "undoubtedly" end in a most bloody war. She concluded, as her fellow South Carolinian women soon echoed about secession, by trusting "that a merciful God will arrange all things for the best."¹⁰⁹ Grimball reacted to Brown and Harpers Ferry with the fear of separation and bloody war with dread and resignation, reactions that become common in 1860. What she did not discuss, however, was the false alarm in Charleston on Christmas Day of a slave rebellion, which her brother detailed in a letter two days later. This false alarm and jumpiness, he rationalized, was "to be expected as all persons are on the alert since the Harpers Ferry affair."¹¹⁰ Perhaps the Grimball men did not inform their female counterparts right away so as to not disrupt their holiday, a deliberate suppression of the potential political horizon for the sake of familial peace and calm.

¹⁰⁸ Susan Burn to Henry Burn, 5 Dec. 1859, Burn Family Papers, SCL.

¹⁰⁹ Ella Grimball to John Grimball, 28 Dec. 1859, John Grimball Family Papers, SCHS.

¹¹⁰ Arthur Grimball to John Grimball, 30 Dec. 1859, John Grimball Family Papers, SCHS.

Though tales of John Brown's death re-engaged some women on the topic, and the specter of his raid lingered over their heads, most South Carolina women allowed these thoughts to retreat to the background as they looked forward to the holidays and 1860. The frequency of written correspondence declined rapidly during the holiday season, roughly December to February, as families reunited and communicated in person.

Antebellum Christmases were an extravagant affair for elite southern families. Ann Vanderhorst created a visual tapestry of a winter wonderland at her daughter's home, Ravenswood, near Johns Island. "The music floats thro the air, whilst heavens perfect ones glide thro the Dance...the little noisy children scream with delight at seeing the abundance of sugar plums & dolls hung in the tree, the dog jumped in extacy...the numerous wax candle lamps made it look like a fairy temple in the midst of huge oaks." The Christmas tree, a cedar, was decorated with dolls, books, and fancy boxes, its crimson drapings "splendidly illuminated with wax candles & turkish lamps." The guests ate abundantly—"boned turkeys, game, salad, delicious iced creams, french confectionary sugar plums & gilded cakes"—and drunk wine and champagne from the cellars as they danced long into the morning. The "dazzling scene" and opulent displays enchanted Vanderhorst. Distincive for her lengthy entries filled with anxiety concerning family and her place in it, she notably made no room for these worries in this "fairy" scene. A shorter entry detailing the holiday magic of Christmas 1860 appears later in her diary but cannot match its predecessor in splendor and magic. It is certainly a scene that evaporates a year later.¹¹¹

¹¹¹ Ann Vanderhorst Diary, 27 Dec. 1859, Vanderhorst Family Papers, SCHS.

Even antebellum conceptualizations of “quiet Christmas” were filled with dancing, games, and balls. Meta Grimball described her Christmas on the family plantation as mild, but an offhand comment about her son who drunkenly fell asleep on the piazza and narrowly “avoided exposing himself to the ladies” seems to counteract her claims. On New Year’s Day, Grimball made social visits, dined with her father, and gifted everyone “sugar plums, and a kiss, with wishes for a happy New Year, which I hope may be realized.”¹¹² In contrast to the new year in 1861, which caused women to look with trepidation toward their political horizons, even women as politically astute as Grimball focused solely on holiday comradery as she closed out what she could not know was the last, fully antebellum year.

Though they recognized the troubles faced by the nation, few families predicted the political and social turmoil the year 1860 would bring. Most were oblivious to the idea that this would be their last antebellum Christmas, and for many, the last Christmas in the United States. Every holiday after, every New Year’s wish, would be in some way affected by the knowledge that their loved ones could die. Perhaps with deliberate, oblivious cheerfulness, South Carolinians ushered in the New Year. Life maintained its rhythm until the next spike of political activity: the Democratic National Convention.

¹¹² Grimball Diary, 28 Dec. 1859 to 1 Jan. 1860, Margaret Ann Morris Grimball Family Papers, SCHS.

CHAPTER 2: “The Gay Season,” January-May 1860

South Carolina women greeted 1860 with festive holiday spirits and, if not hope for the future, at least very little trepidation towards what lay before them. The clues to the future were just too few to invite prediction. Lowcountry planters continued their visitations before the planting season resumed in April and May each year.¹¹³

Though distant family members returned from holiday visits in early January, South Carolinians in both town and country continued social visits, carriage rides, and dances. January and February made for a “gay season in Charleston,” as Ella Grimball put it in February 1860. A single week, for instance, offered horseracing, the “jockey club ball” and a fancy ball. Wealthy families cemented social connections with frequent visiting and dining.¹¹⁴ In Columbia, the society season lasted through the session of the state legislature, and South Carolina College’s commencement ball was an annual “great event of local gaiety.” Columbia’s elites, like their Lowcountry counterparts, frequented the theater and “supported the race course and dancing master.” Ever comparing themselves to the elder Queen City, residents of the capital felt the need to remind others that Columbia’s “education and industries did not lag behind the older settlement of Charleston.” Before the elite families in Columbia—the Gibbes, Hamptons, Starks,

¹¹³ James H. Tuten, *Lowcountry Time and Tide: The Fall of the South Carolina Rice Kingdom* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2010), 19.

¹¹⁴ Ella Grimball to John Grimball, 7 Feb. 1860, Grimball Family papers, SCHS.

Elmores, Prestons, Guignards, Taylors, Butlers, and Howells—fled to their summer locales, they celebrated the end of their “gay season” with a May party, in which a May queen and her may pole “would march in procession through the streets and to the great pageant of Commencement Day when the Legislature and Supreme Court, with their officers in robes of State, would mark in a body to the chapel of the South Carolina College to witness the graduating exercises.” The Governor reviewed the state militia with fanfare. Columbians found spring “fetes” more exciting than the “stately” winter balls.¹¹⁵

The Democratic National Convention, held in Charleston from April 23 to May 3, 1860, hardly disrupted this gaiety. If women even mentioned the Convention in the months leading up to the event, it was often to discuss the logistics of navigating a crowded Charleston, perhaps renting out spare rooms for visiting politicians. When the Southern Democrats walked out in protest of Stephen Douglas’s nomination as presidential candidate on April 30, women took to their diaries and correspondence, ensuring that they marked this occasion in their role as accurate news keeper, or even historian, within their families. To say that the Convention passed without any anxiety would be deeply misleading. What is remarkable, however, is the extent to which conversation about the Douglas nomination and the ensuing Democratic Party split rapidly faded from women’s consciousnesses and correspondence, as the state prepared for the “sickly season,” or their version of an extended summer vacation where politics fell by the wayside. Though newspapers continued a constant stream of disunion

¹¹⁵ Sally Cantey Elmore Taylor, *Memoir of Mrs. Sally Elmore Taylor, 1909-1901*, Vol. 1, 7-8. SCL. Hereafter *Memoir*.

discussion long before John Brown's Raid, this topic rarely bled into the everyday conversations and writings of South Carolina women. This silence is worth attention. This chapter examines early 1860 and women's reactions, or lack thereof, to the events that occurred, arguing that the Convention did not cause women to think, act, or write like their lives would soon change. Even more so than the Harpers Ferry raid, this event faded into women's subconscious and did not make repeat appearances in their writing. South Carolina's elite women remained discerning judges of what was politically meaningful and relevant, and reflected those decisions through the lengths and topics of their letters and diaries. National events and political futures were not yet all-encompassing: 1860 still had the potential to be a year that maintained the status quo, for better or for worse.

In the February 1860 edition of *Russell's Magazine*, F.A. Porcher wrote that South Carolinians "live in a constant whirl of excitement. We hail eagerly anything," he continued, "that will make us raise our hands and eyes in wonder."¹¹⁶ This excitement was not necessarily political in nature. That would come later. Charleston carried the holiday spirit into the new year with dances and visitations. The wealthy Allston family detailed a "grand ball" in Charleston that required costumes shipped from Europe. Adele Allston Junior took daily carriage rides along the Battery, and her female friends met regularly for a music club. Opera troupes cycled through the city with a frequency that

¹¹⁶ F. A. Porcher, *Russell's Magazine*, 5.6 (February 1860), SCL.

allowed women to attend their favorites with discretion.¹¹⁷ Ann Vanderhorst described live music and dancing, the belles attendance all “Southern Stars & radiate most in Domestic Life.” The Grimball boys also found the “great deal of gaiety in Town” very pleasant. The family attended weekly get-togethers with friends in the city and enjoyed their move to a new home on Meeting Street.¹¹⁸

These enjoyments, however, did not distract the ever-alert Grimball family from political affairs. Avid newspaper readers, women digested the news with the same frequency as their male counterparts, in turn reporting the news in letters and diaries and sometimes sending newspapers in the mail to absent family members.¹¹⁹ This most often took the form of writing to children away at school. Poss Pringle, studying in Europe, did not have access to American newspapers and relied upon his mother for political news, ignorantly asking “Who is Seward? What do the Blk Repubs [sic] want and why should their be a contest?” admitting he had not read the news for over a year. He clearly trusted his mother’s political reporting and opinion, allowing it to influence his own rather blank slate. To read women’s writings, therefore, is to gauge the thought process of these women as they kept abreast of the latest news and then chose what was worthy of repeating. Many overlooked the Congressional elections and C.G. Memminger’s travels

¹¹⁷ Adele Allston Vanderhorst to R.F.W. Allston, 19 Jan. 1860, Allston Family Papers, SCHS; Alicia Middleton to Adele Allston Vanderhorst, 1 Mar. 1860, Harriott Middleton Papers, SCHS.

¹¹⁸ Ann Morris Vanderhorst Diary, 10 Feb. 1860, Vanderhorst Family Papers, SCHS; Grimball Diary, February 1860, Margaret Ann Morris Grimball Family Papers, SCHS.

¹¹⁹ Circulating newspapers and magazines was a common practice. See Kelley, “Reading Women/Women Reading: The Making of Learned Women in Antebellum America”: 403; Fahs, *The Imagined Civil War*, 9.

to Virginia. The Grimballs did not. Only a few women, the Grimballs included, described the deadlock in the House of Representatives over choosing a Speaker in early 1860.

After reading the papers, Jane Pringle turned to her own political analysis and expressed her fears that the Speaker “is a Black Republican which is very bad news I assure you.”¹²⁰ Literate women of the South, whether they wrote about national events or not, always kept abreast of politics, but not everyone felt the personal need to record their importance. These judgements reveal women’s ability and disinclination to discriminate and, right or wrong, weigh the importance of political events.

This chapter does not assert that women remained oblivious to national politics before Lincoln’s election in Fall 1860—it simply notes which events they found themselves unable to stop writing about and discussing. Though South Carolina’s legislature expressed fears that might lead to disunion, its women did not yet find these fears worthy of extensive commentary. Many women knew of William Pennington’s election as Speaker of the House, for instance, but few described this development in their writings. Even Jane Pringle, who informed her son of this “bad news” and her political apprehensions, quickly pivoted to discussion of horses and other family news. Scarcely any women discussed South Carolina’s appointed ambassador Christopher Gustavus (C.G.) Memminger’s ill-fated journey to Virginia in January 1860 to propose a southern convention. Memminger, appointed by South Carolina governor William Gist, was sent to Virginia to negotiate, one sovereign state to another, a new Southern Confederacy. Meta Grimball tied Memminger’s mission to the “distracted state of

¹²⁰ Poss Pringle to Jane Pringle, 1 Apr. 1860, Allston Family papers, SCHS; Jane Pringle to Poss Pringle, 1 Feb. 1860, Allston Family Papers, SCHS.

Politicks and the outrage on the South committed by Brown at Harpers Ferry,” and quoted portions of his speech in her diaries.¹²¹ Elizabeth Grimball also kept tabs on Memminger’s travels. “Are you at all au fait to your countries politics?” she asked her brother, and proceeded to relay him the news from Virginia, a day before her father did the same.¹²²

This side-by-side comparison of letters written by a southern man and woman of equal wealth, class, and family—in this case, a father and daughter—is a helpful exercise to examine the extent to which women expressed a distinct political consciousness from their male patriarchs. That Elizabeth wrote her letter first confirms that her thoughts were organic and not entirely influenced by those of her father.¹²³ Though not immune to her father’s influence, Elizabeth made political claims to her brother that went unmentioned by her father, and both placed emphasis on different news items. This correspondence also suggests that both Elizabeth and her mother Meta were allowed, if not expected, to discuss political affairs. Elizabeth began by discussing the strong southern opposition to the election of the Speaker of the House, disclosing that one representative proposed “they should all resign & there should be new elections over the country,” but noted that self-preservation got in the way: “of course that *was not* carried as many would thereby loose [sic] their seats.” Elizabeth then relayed the news of Memminger’s actions,

¹²¹ Grimball Diary, 28 Feb. 1860, Margaret Ann Morris Grimball Family Papers, SCHS.

¹²² Elizabeth Grimball to John Grimball, 22 Jan. 60, John Grimball Family Papers, SCHS.

¹²³ The envelopes to this correspondence are missing—it is unclear as to whether the family included both letters in one to save postage, as some nineteenth-century correspondents did.

reminding her brother that “Virginia sent Watkins Leigh to us during nullification times.” Optimistically, Grimball pointed out that Memminger was well-received and spent “four hours...reviewing the iniquities of the North.” This political “excitement may all pass off in gas,” she commented, “but it is there now.” Rather than pausing for additional political commentary, she abruptly closed with family greetings and faith in his studies. It is unclear the emotional connotation of “political excitement” in this context. Other than the report of this excitement, Grimball does not spend time unpacking her own emotions surrounding the events, as women will do later in the year.

John Berkley Grimball addressed his son the next day. John Senior wrote that he received his news from *The Telegraph*. It is likely that Elizabeth did the same, as both letters came from the Grimball family home on Edisto Island, The Grove. John Grimball’s discussions aligned closely with his daughter’s: he tied John Brown’s Raid to the likelihood that southern states would secede, and that “The House of Representatives at Washington is not yet organized, and no one can tell when it will be.” This note on Congress is actually less detailed than his daughter’s. John Grimball was more explicit in stating that Memminger arrived in Virginia to discern a course for the “present crisis” and relayed the “intense interest” with which Virginians listened to Memminger’s four-hour speech. In contrast to Elizabeth’s vague “political excitement,” John Grimball predicted that the next few months “may witness some most important events, especially in the “not improbable event” that a Black Republican won the presidency. Grimball, more of a

cooperationist than fire-eater, resigned himself to a future “in the hands of the Almighty.”¹²⁴

Elizabeth and John’s letters describe the same events, but each spends time with and devotes detail to different subjects. Elizabeth never parrots her father: she had her own thoughts. Like his wife Meta, John spent more time tying Brown’s raid to the possibility of secession and resigned his state’s fate to the will of God. Importantly, Elizabeth does not yet share this resignation and simply mentioned the fleeting excitement that “may all pass off in gas” without a melancholy tone of Christian resignation. For Elizabeth, the situation was not yet urgent. Upon penning the letter, Elizabeth most likely returned her focus to the first half of her letter—the balls, gaities, and even polkas that would soon occur in Charleston. After Memminger’s outright failure to persuade Virginia to call a secession convention, despite the actions of John Brown in their state mere months before and the alleged support from Virginia ladies in the legislature’s balcony, Elizabeth let the subject drop entirely from her letters. It became clear to South Carolina that Virginia could not be relied upon to make the first steps to disunion. This disappointment added to the bitterness and antipathy South Carolinian women felt toward their Virginia counterparts, a distaste that becomes more evident in their writings as 1860 progresses.¹²⁵

¹²⁴ John Grimbball to John Grimbball Junior, 23 Jan. 1860, Grimbball Family Papers, SCHS. William Barney argues that older, established planters viewed secession with more caution than their younger counterparts, who faced growing barriers to acquiring elite planter status for themselves. Barney, *Rebels in the making: The Secession Crisis and the Birth of the Confederacy*, 3.

¹²⁵ Lawrence Anderson, *Federalism, Secession, and the American State* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 64.

In early 1860, families that predicted disunion, even the Grimballs, still revealed conflicted feelings toward northerners in their writings. In February, a family came down from New York to visit Meta Grimball's friend for two months. Grimball recorded no antipathy towards the family and remarked that the girls went horseback riding frequently. This politically-aware woman did not blink at a northern family's decision to visit the South or worry about anything other than offering a warm reception.¹²⁶ Yet by March, Grimball comfortably described the differences between northern and southern hospitality: "Northern people are so different in their manners...they never put themselves at all out of the way, to accommodate you."¹²⁷ During the antebellum period, southerners were certainly mistrustful of northerners and felt no hesitation to stereotype. Yet as late as spring 1860, there was still room for friendship between the two. southerners still felt perfectly comfortable traveling north during the summer season. To make sense of this solidifying, yet still porous, boundary between North and South, they wrote.

Nor were all northern women ready to be viewed on the other side of this northern and southern binary. South Carolina senator James Chesnut received a letter from a New Yorker, offering her "warmest thanks and highest admiration" for his "calm and elevated" speech to the U.S. Senate, reprinted in the newspaper in early January. Blaming the North for the "spirit of Abolition," she predicted that "the fairest system ever devised by man's wisdom" would be destroyed in "bloody civil war" if not stifled by northerners.

¹²⁶ Grimball Diary, February 1860, Margaret Ann Morris Grimball Family Papers, SCHS. Grimball did not date all of her entries.

¹²⁷ Grimball Diary, 22 Mar. 1860, Margaret Ann Morris Grimball Family Papers, SCHS.

She then requested that he read resolutions from a council from Cape Cod, reasoning that if their words were read in the Senate “by the lips of the patriot son of the ‘Palmetto State’” it would arouse a “universal response, in all true hearts, in every portion of our union.” Hall showed courage in addressing Senator Chesnut, not only to make this request, but to lament political affairs. She was certainly not the only northerner to abhor abolitionists and feel sympathy with the South, especially in New York, however a direct response and request, which Chesnut clearly did not throw away, is an interesting juxtaposition of the feelings of northern women on the heels of John Brown.¹²⁸ She, like her southern women counterparts, also predicted a bloody war should secession be achieved.

The Democratic National Convention, held in April 1860, was a chance to test the strength of northern and southern prejudices. Unlike Memminger’s mission and Congressional nominations, most South Carolina women discussed the Convention, at least by marking the dates in their writings. Mary Pringle wrote that the “whole community” in Charleston was preoccupied with this impending “important” Convention.¹²⁹ Yet while newspapers filled their pages with buzz concerning the upcoming convention, local Charlestonians were far more invested in crowds and lodging than the fate of the Union. Columbian Sarah Dogan’s only instruction to her daughter Emma was to “be careful about going on the street during Convention,” likely to avoid trouble from rowdy crowds and pickpockets that took advantage of out-of-state attendees.

¹²⁸ Mary J. Hall to James Chesnut, 4 Jan. 1860, James Chesnut Papers, SCL.

¹²⁹ Mary M. Pringle to Charles and James Pringle, March 1860, Alston-Pringle-Frost Family Papers, SCHS.

Both Dogan's husband and son were closely involved in selecting Columbia delegates for the Charleston Convention, yet Sarah did not linger on the politics themselves.¹³⁰ Jane Allston even complained, the day of the Democratic National Convention, that she "finds Charleston very dull at this time," a stark contrast to the secession convention that came at the end of the year.¹³¹ A letter writer to the *Charleston Mercury* mocked the city for its insufficient housing and hotels set aside for the Convention when they had plenty of time to plan. Charleston offered few public inns, and those who did charged heavily-inflated fares amidst the sweltering, unseasonable heat. Some even harnessed delegates' desperation and booked five men per room.¹³² It is clear why housing and crowd control would be the talk of the town, but the lack of conversation around convention politics by South Carolinian women is noteworthy, and supports historians' observations of the silence surrounding this critical convention.

The ladies of Charleston were not alone in failing to sense the importance of what historian William Freehling calls "one of the strangest, most significant, least understood precession dramas." He, like South Carolina's women, noted the lack of "immediate practical consequence" following the Convention, allowing many southern populations to return to a more-or-less antebellum equilibrium. Many important South Carolina leaders "sat out" the event, and its delegates experienced difficulty throwing together a cohesive

¹³⁰ Freehling, *The Road to Disunion, Volume II*, 291; Sarah Dogan to Emma Dogan, 15 Apr. 1860, Arthur Herndon Dogan Papers, SCL.

¹³¹ Adele Allston to Charles Allston, 23 Apr. 1860, Allston Family Papers, SCHS.

¹³² *The Charleston Mercury*, 4 Apr. 1860, SCL; Freehling, *The Road to Disunion: Volume II*, 291.

front.¹³³ Jason Phillips' *Looming Civil War* describes how Americans responded to Harpers Ferry, Lincoln's election, and Fort Sumter by "forecasting" of the future of the nation. The Democratic National Convention in Charleston is notably excluded from this list as an event that prompted avid discussion of future turmoil. Contemporary Americans did not see what we now know to be a momentous political moment for what it was at the time, and South Carolina's women deemed it unworthy of frequent discussion.¹³⁴

Mary Pringle, at least, understood the stakes surrounding the Convention. The presidential nomination excited "much interest," she wrote, "as the nomination will be an indication of our future political horizon." Pringle remained optimistic—"I ardently hope that good may come out of the great evil that has been overshadowing our Republican Union, and that the dangers that has threatened its dissolution will only serve now to strengthen it." Refusing to despair, she told her sons, studying abroad in Europe, that she believed the southern states could successfully strengthen their "foreign trade" and prove to the North that refraining from "interfering with our domestic institutions is their best policy, and thus peace and union may reign, again, among us."¹³⁵ While Pringle still hoped for peace, she was cognizant of the looming danger of disunion. In turn, her political commentary to her sons established her as not only the bearer of news to her boys, but also a political analyst. Like the editorialized newspapers themselves, Mary and

¹³³ Freehling, *The Road to Disunion: Volume II*, 269, 292

¹³⁴ Phillips, *Looming Civil War*.

¹³⁵ Mary M. Pringle to Charles and James Pringle, March 1860, Alston-Pringle-Frost Family Papers, SCHS.

other South Carolinians shaped the news and in turn, the future of politics by controlling the narrative.

Other Charleston families, however, were more concerned with housing than politics. “Madame...told me she was dreading April very much,” wrote Alicia Middleton of her teacher, because “she did not know what she would do with her school, how to feed them when that tremendous crowd comes down from the north.” “I suspect it is a subject of concern with more than Madame,” Middleton correctly mused of the impending housing crisis.¹³⁶ The Allston family hosted General Cushing of New York and a Mr. Randal of Boston throughout the Convention. The former South Carolina governor R.F.W. Allston was not ready to completely disavow his friends in the north.¹³⁷ Rather than jumping at the chance to witness political history, Allston’s daughter Adele lamented her travel to the city to meet the guests because “the country was looking beautiful when we left...so that it was very difficult for us to leave.” They arrived in Charleston to find the town “very full of strangers” and bursting with crowds. During a dinner party, Adele junior and senior did not sit at the main table “as the number of gentlemen is too large.”¹³⁸

¹³⁶ Alicia Middleton to Adele Allston Vanderhorst, 1 Mar. 1860, Harriott Middleton Family Papers, SCHS.

¹³⁷ This is likely Stephen B. Cushing, former New York Attorney General and Democrat. Allston meant “attorney general” rather than “general.” Adele Allston to Charles Allston, 23 Apr. 1860, Allston Family Papers, SCHS.

¹³⁸ Adele Allston to Charles Allston, 26 Apr., 2 May 1860, Allston Family Papers, SCHS.

Local newspapers wrote about both the crowds and the Convention itself. *The Mercury* openly disdained the convention. The delegates and candidates, it scoffed, were “merely the chosen heads of cabals, cliques, and interests, which do not fairly represent the rank and file...it is no wonder that true statesmen...regard the times with fearful portent, and declare that the General Government is going rapidly to ruin. And yet the South voluntarily goes into the Convention.” Editor Robert Barnwell Rhett Junior’s fire-eating paper was still too radical for the general population. Though many publications shared the *Mercury*’s anxiety, less were as desirous of disunion, and thus in late April, delegates from the national Democratic Party descended upon Charleston. Initially, most of the excitement surrounded local Charleston activities, rather than political events. A Ladies’ Fair held on April 20 was filled “with a happy crowd, among whom were many persons of prominence and distinction, attending upon the Convention.”¹³⁹ The fair continued for several days, with live performances drawing visitors to the fair and to the Battery. Young men and women continued their daily carriage rides. No parades, speeches, or military drills filled the Charleston streets; only a large influx of visitors.

At high noon on Monday, April 23, the convention began at Institute Hall. Participants were unaware, though perhaps some felt a premonition, that the convention session and days would extend for days longer than intended when the delegates reached an impasse. As an icy rain chased away the muggy April weather, impatient northern spectators left the city, clearing the visitors’ gallery for the Charleston elites. Tensions heightened within both the Democratic party and South Carolina’s delegation. Political and economic animosities between Lowcountry and Upcountry politicians reared their

¹³⁹ *The Charleston Mercury*, 7, 21 Apr. 1860, SCL.

heads as many of the leading political men in the state—the Hamptons, the Prestons, the Chesnuts, the Pickenses, the Bonhams, and the Keitts—resided in the Upcountry or the Midlands. Charleston, the “home team” with its long list of old money and Revolutionary forefathers, found many men past their prime and others unwilling to leave the gallery and join in the foray.¹⁴⁰ Notably, very few of the women surveyed from Columbia mentioned the Democratic National Convention. Sarah Burn simply wrote that she did not think she or her husband would make the trip to Charleston.¹⁴¹ Whether this was due to animosity, as Lowcountry women often moved in their own geographic social circle, or simply due to the curious lack of urgency surrounding the convention, Upcountry women’s records remain muted surrounding this event.

The Convention drug on until day five, April 27, when two competing reports, one northern and one southern, finally made their way to the floor. William Lowndes Yancey performed a memorable oration in favor of the South, the Convention paused for the Sabbath, and returned to vote in favor of the northern-backed plan, 165 to 138 votes. The southern exodus began. First, quietly, went Alabama. Then, more loudly, Mississippi. Louisiana next. Then, “reluctantly,” South Carolina.¹⁴² The less radical South Carolina delegates, followers of James L. Orr, faced verbal abuse by the locals for their initial pledge to remain at the convention, with shouts of “southern traitor,”

¹⁴⁰ Freehling, *The Road to Disunion: Volume II* 292-6.

¹⁴¹ Sarah Burn to Henry Burn, 28 Mar. 1860, Burn Family Papers, SCL.

¹⁴² Freehling, *The Road to Disunion: Volume II*, 302, 303.

“hypocritical deserter,” and “South Carolina disgrace.”¹⁴³ Yet Greenville’s Benjamin F. Perry, a lifelong Unionist, refused to bow to peer pressure and chose to remain at the convention. He paid the price for his convictions and only after the war did his reputation take modest steps towards recovery.¹⁴⁴

In this time of political chaos, women of the city made their views clear. Charlestonian ladies placed flowers on every empty delegate seat and added the final twenty-six “tombstones of Democracy,” including Georgia’s belated departure from the convention on May 1.¹⁴⁵ This public, political, and symbolic action was well within the realm of propriety of southern women, who were encouraged to participate in political ritual and performed the majority of the duties surrounding Victorian mourning culture. Men wore the black bands of mourning for months—the women responsible for a year of full mourning, followed by “half mourning,” and gradually lessening the amount of black donned. They were expected to purchase and utilize mourning jewelry and stationery as well as clothing.¹⁴⁶ This clear appropriation of Victorian mourning culture, most-often a woman’s duty, was an acceptable means of public political action. The “tombstones” of democracy forecasted gloom and death on America’s political horizons. Though some

¹⁴³ Quoted in Freehling, *The Road to Disunion: Volume II*, 306. Freehling suggests the importance of locale—perhaps South Carolina’s delegates would not have left had they not faced verbal abuse from local South Carolinians. It is possible that these verbal epithets could have been made by women, and one can certainly imagine the upturned noses with which women looked at these “disgraceful” delegates in drawing rooms and on the street.

¹⁴⁴ Elizabeth Perry, “Sketch of the Life of Gov. B.F. Perry. Written by His Wife,” B.F. Perry Papers, SCL.

¹⁴⁵ Freehling, *The Road to Disunion: Volume II*, 305.

¹⁴⁶ Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War*.

write that this decoration was gleefully done, it is unlikely that many elite women would willingly hasten secession, as they so recently associated disunion with bloodshed. Most elite Charlestonian women would eventually believe in secession's righteousness but fear its consequences.¹⁴⁷ It is more likely that this female "delegation" declared the death of democracy with a somber feeling of its necessity.

Perhaps elite women were merely meant to be spectators, but their presence was not only noted but encouraged and expected in conventions. When the "Constitutional Democratic Convention" formed from the southern walkout delegates, convened, they made sure to advertise that "seats are reserved for the ladies."¹⁴⁸ The original Democratic National Convention made a call to clear the floor of all non-delegates, with the exception of "ladies." Women joined the booing and hissing towards Perry when he decided to remain at the convention, an action that, in many other contexts, would be considered unladylike at the very least. They then treated the delegates who left like heroes, "showering" them with kisses.¹⁴⁹ The "hisses" from the Democratic National Convention reveal that women were active participants in an event that they legally should have no say in. In turn, women had the opportunity to see and process this history-making for themselves, spreading the news to their friends and loved ones who could not attend. In creating correspondence, women played a crucial role in shaping political

¹⁴⁷ Freehling does not cite his source for the following sentence: "By high noon on the first day of May, Charleston's lady folk, determined to decorate every empty delegate seat, rejoiced to place flowers in twenty-six more tombstones of the Democracy" (305). This author disagrees with the use of the term "rejoiced." *The Road to Disunion: Volume II*.

¹⁴⁸ *The Charleston Mercury*, 6 May 1860, SCL.

¹⁴⁹ Freehling, *The Road to Disunion, Volume II*, 306.

opinion by disseminating cooperationist or secessionist ideas. They chose what events were important enough to spread to others and—combined with newspapers—had power over what and who should not be the center of attention. Though denied a physical vote, elite women demanded spectator’s rights to political events. The importance of their attendance is later revealed when women wrote an outraged public letter to protest a venue that prohibited female spectators.¹⁵⁰ Even when political spaces were not meant for women, they took the small inroads and openings and used them for their own ends.

The death knell for the South remaining in the United States came with Stephen Douglass’s nomination as the Democratic presidential candidate. After years of compromise, the Democratic party was finally too divided to compete against a relatively united Republican front. America’s two-party system failed—there were no longer southern and northern factions in each party to maintain sectional balance and silence the “slavery question.”

Some predicted this outcome years before, and others, like the *Mercury*, welcomed the dissolution that would lead to secession. On May 6, the newspaper ran an ad for the Carolina Clothing Department embedded with the words “THE PEOPLE OF THE SOUTH KNOW THEIR RIGHTS AND WILL MAINTAIN THEM.”¹⁵¹ These ads and cries for southern, and eventually South Carolinian, rights would only increase in volume throughout the year. Yet for South Carolina’s elite women, despite the tone of the newspapers they received and read, life returned to its normal pace. Adele Allston, still in

¹⁵⁰ *Tri Weekly South Carolinian*, “To Mr. C. H. Suber, Member from Newberry” from “The Ladies,” 15 Dec. 1860, SCL.

¹⁵¹ *The Charleston Mercury*, 6 May 1860, SCL.

Charleston, wrote that “we are all quite interested in the proceedings of the convention, tho nothing was really done by it.” Rather than detailing the proceedings, she considered the affair concluded and began preparations for Charleston’s next fair, this time for the Art Association. Her father and eldest brother had already left the city for their plantation in Georgetown, less than a week after the Convention concluded.¹⁵² Politics were “interesting,” but life went on.

Newspaper reports from spring 1860 reveal that elite South Carolinian women were both present and involved in the Democratic National Convention held in Charleston. They played an active role as political influencers by applying social peer pressures to state delegates reluctant to leave the convention. Despite this participation, women did not devote excessive mental energy towards analyzing political events. For those who did record their reactions, discussion faded into the background as summer approached. The lack of stress and urgency concerning the Democratic National Convention found in South Carolina women’s letters helped create the idea that the convention was a quiet, rather than critical, moment in U.S. history. Through their roles as newsmakers and political actors, women’s lack of attention to the events of spring 1860 helped lead scholars such as such as William Freehling to title the Democratic National Convention one of the “strangest” and “least understood” turning points in U.S. history.¹⁵³

¹⁵² Adele Allston Vanderhorst to Charles Allston, 8 May 1860, Allston Family Papers, SCHS.

¹⁵³ Freehling, *The Road to Disunion: Volume II*, 269, 292.

Northern delegates quickly vacated the Holy City and Upcountry South Carolinians took the train back to the capital. Lowcountry farmers followed the Allstons back to their plantations to oversee the season's planting. The "gay season" gave way to lethargic summer months. The sleepy summer directly contrasted the works produced during the season: while much of spring 1860 lacked correspondence due to the nearness of southern family and friends, the summer was characterized by frequent travel and communicating plans to those left behind. What they discussed was far from what one would expect in the aftermath of the Democratic National Convention, but no less significant.

CHAPTER 3: Escaping “the Sickly Season,” May-September 1860

Wealthy rice planter R.F.W. Allston allotted one month, March to April, for the planting season. Throughout May, June, and July enslaved laborers maintained the grounds until the harvest began in September.¹⁵⁴ Conveniently, planters could leave their overseers and slaves to monitor the crops in their absence as the wealthy escaped the “sickly season,” or what we today know as “summer in South Carolina.” These Lowcountry rice plantations were particularly vulnerable to mosquito-borne diseases. Some simply moved to Charleston, kept healthier due to the sea breeze. Yet even Charleston experienced several outbreaks, so planters used their extensive wealth to extend their vacation, not returning until October. Adele Allston Senior wrote urgently to her husband, expressing the “immediate danger” of his decision to remain on the plantation as late as June rather than going to their summer home at the beach on Pawley’s Island. His son similarly begged him to “take special care...to avoid sickness.” To protect his health, he must either join his wife in Charleston or “take her to the beach.”¹⁵⁵ Though elites delighted in the excuse to travel, fear of disease added urgency to their departures.

¹⁵⁴ Tuten, *Lowcountry Time and Tide: The Fall of the South Carolina Rice Kingdom*, 19. Note that different planters may have had different schedules.

¹⁵⁵ Ben Allston to R.F.W. Allston, 1 Jun. 1861; Adele Allston to R.F.W. Allston, 3 Jun. 61, Allston Family Papers, SCHS.

Summers in the South were characterized by movement. William Freehling gently mocked the “would-be English country gentlemen” whose “annual evacuation of swamp estates most often led to six-month encampments in barricaded...town fortresses.”¹⁵⁶ Planters could choose from a variety of locations for their summer retreats: the mountains and springs of Greenville, beach islands, or, the most popular option, the medicinal springs and resort circuit. Historian Eugene Genovese remarked that “the springs and summer communities figured large in southern politics, although historians have taken little notice.”¹⁵⁷ Despite their “no politics at the springs” informal rule, springs visitors found other ways to make political connections during the summer months. Antebellum elites flocked to the springs in now-West Virginia in droves, cycling through the White, the Sweet, and the Red Sulphur Springs depending on the quality of company at each. Some would then continue north to Saratoga Springs, New York, and pass their time in New York City’s Fifth Avenue Hotel or New York Hotel. Others went directly northwards via steamer, landing in Newport, Rhode Island, a haven for southerners. Regardless of locale, elite South Carolinians muted their political talk and focused on making social, and therefore economic, relations. They clearly were not so fearful of separation that they avoided traveling northwards, as many did later that year.

Though newspapers continued to discuss disunion, few men and even fewer women discussed politics during summer 1860. “There is evidently no interest as yet felt or manifested, by the most of our people, in the political affairs of the nation,” Ben

¹⁵⁶ Freehling, *The Road to Disunion: Volume II*, 356.

¹⁵⁷ Eugene Genovese, *The Sweetness of Life: Southern Planters at Home*, ed. Douglas Ambrose (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 209.

Allston wrote in July.¹⁵⁸ Time, southerners perceived, had slowed, and they no longer felt on the precipice of a crisis. Postponing events that would brutally disrupt their worldly and monthly cycles, South Carolinians retreated to their summer plans and slowed down the doomsday clock. Adele Allston described her summers at Pawley's Island "as if the space intervening were but a dream."¹⁵⁹ She and other elites used this slowdown to enjoy one last summer of normalcy before elections and life returned with a vengeance. By late September, South Carolina's planters began to return from their respites to face the harsh realities of the forthcoming election, still not sure of its effects on their state.

The end of the summer, or "sickly" season marks the end of the antebellum period for South Carolinians. It is in October that the populace, male and female, discuss politics in earnest, unable to avoid the topic. The rhythm of their lives shift, the content of their writings shift, the atmosphere in their state shifts. Time is, of course, a social construct, and many are right to declare South Carolina's secession, the Fall of Fort Sumter, or First Bull Run as the beginnings of the Civil War and therefore end of the antebellum period.¹⁶⁰ From the scope of this study, however, the point of no return and permanent change in social atmosphere arrives in the weeks before Lincoln's election. The state's

¹⁵⁸ Ben Allston to Henrietta Simons, 6 Jul. 1860, Allston Family Papers, SCHS.

¹⁵⁹ Adele Allston Vanderhorst to Ben Allston, 11 Jun. 1859, Allston Family Papers, SCHS.

¹⁶⁰ For more on concepts of time and timekeeping, see Michael O'Malley, *Keeping Watch: A History of American Time* (New York: Viking, 1990). O'Malley argues that time in the nineteenth-century was particularly chaotic due to the switch from local time to a standardized time system brought about by railroads and telegrams.

secession did not start a different way of life but continued what started in the months before.

Families began their various pilgrimages beginning in May. Of the ensuing five-month “summer vacation,” some Carolinians chose to spend the entirety traveling, while others only spent portions away from home. Susan Middleton wrote to her sister Harriott, at the White Sulphur Springs in Virginia that she herself left for New York on July 29th. She did not return home to Charleston until October 11. Meanwhile, yet another Middleton headed to one of the state’s sea islands.¹⁶¹ Meta Grimball also detailed the various travels planned in early June. Her daughter, a Mrs. Butler, and a Mrs. Wayne went north while Ann Vanderhorst and Raven Lewis left for to “the Island,” likely Kiawah Island.¹⁶² The Pringle family visited their sister in Connecticut every summer, shopping in New York and taking day trips on the train to New Haven. They ended their journey in Newport, Rhode Island, to meet with their fellow elites for the rest of the summer. This trip usually took two to three months.¹⁶³ Though there were, of course, exceptions, most South Carolinians spent the sickly season in state at the beach or Upcountry mountains, at the springs of Virginia, or further north in New York and Rhode Island. Some families did all of the above.

¹⁶¹ Susan Middleton to Harriott Middleton, 29 Jul. 1859, 11 Oct. 1859. Middleton Family Papers, SCHS.

¹⁶² Grimball Diary, June 1860, Margaret Ann Morris Grimball Family Papers, SCHS. Raven Lewis and her mother Ann Vanderhorst would leave for New York at the beginning of September.

¹⁶³ Richard N. Côté, *Mary’s World: Love, War, and Family Ties in Nineteenth-Century Charleston*. (Mt. Pleasant, SC: Corinthian Books, 2001), 162.

The Allston family visited the South Carolina shores almost every year, referring to their pilgrimage as simply “the Beach.” In reality, the Allston’s and their relatives owned almost the entirety of Pawley’s Island. Young Adele Allston she did not “greatly object” spending her summer “quietly on the beach,” in contrast to the nineteen balls she attended during the winter season. “It has been so gay this winter that I can afford to be very quiet” noted the popular belle. Adele Allston senior similarly looked forward to going to the “quiet beach,” where “the air is very fresh and pleasant.” Her brother also wrote of the stillness, noting that “every thing and every body move along here in their accustomed, quiet way, few things happen to create excitement.”¹⁶⁴ In such a context, time slowed, the grinding humidity resting heavily on the hands of the clock, and ticking now hostage to the lazy rhythm of waves.

South Carolinians painted an idyllic portrait of their summer travels. “Jane is rejoicing in bare feet again and is getting burnt as brown as a berry” wrote Adele Allston Junior. They were not alone in their enjoyment: “there are a good many persons on the beach this summer.” On Kiawah Island, Ann Morris Vanderhorst watched other hotel guests “dancing & singing at the top of their voices...the Kiawah maidens in high frolic—They danced by the light of the moon.”¹⁶⁵ Young men and women rode horseback along the beaches and attended several bowling parties. Adele Allston Junior received so many invitations from various suitors that she often detailed the rejections

¹⁶⁴ Adele Allston Vanderhorst Diary, 11 Jun. 1860, Vanderhorst Family Papers, SCHS; Adele Allston to Charles Allston, 29 Jun. 1860, Ben Allston to Henrietta Simons, 20 Jun. 1860, Allston Family Papers, SCHS.

¹⁶⁵ Adele Allston Vanderhorst to Charles Allston, 1 Jul. 60, Allston Family Papers, SCHS; Ann Morris Vanderhorst Diary, 29 Jun. 1860, Vanderhorst Family Papers, SCHS.

she doled out in the summer of 1860.¹⁶⁶ Anne Middleton participated in similarly joyful summer celebrations—visiting the Battery, taking nice drives and enjoying dinner with her fellow elites, and visiting “the Island” with her mother and Mary Heyward. “Oh! Such flirtations!” she witnessed. “We all sat out in that immense piazza in those tête-à-tête chairs! You never saw the like!” Such was the animation at the beach that she admitted she was glad she did not go with her father to Virginia for the summer, which was normally her preferred destination.¹⁶⁷

Residents of Bluffton, near Hilton Head Island, apparently did not share the same island joys as those closer to Charleston. Bluffton was “naturally a very dull place but I think it has surpassed itself,” young Anna Parker wrote. Incredibly lonely, she felt trapped in “this charmingly tiresome village,” which was “dull beyond comprehension.” Parker could not wait for summer’s end and a reunion with her friends in the fall.¹⁶⁸ The beach, therefore, was a location more relaxed and less crowded than the springs and northern cities. Whether this quiet environment was welcomed depended on the location and person. Staying in South Carolina and visiting the beach allowed planters to remain close to their plantations should anything go awry. They were also a convenient distance from Charleston should they wish to take a train or steamer elsewhere. It was rather common to spend part of their time by the sea before moving on. Life by the ocean

¹⁶⁶ Adele Allston Vanderhorst Diary, 20 Jun. 1860, Vanderhorst Family Papers, SCHS.

¹⁶⁷ Anne Middleton Hunter to Alicia Middleton, 29 Aug. 1860, Harriott Middleton Papers, SCHS.

¹⁶⁸ Anna Parker to Alicia Middleton, 12 Sep. 1860, Harriott Middleton Papers, SCHS.

embodied the slow nature of this five-month season, before the political and literal hurricane season ushered in seas of change.

South Carolinians unwilling to go to the beach or make the long and expensive trip to Virginia or the north chose the Upcountry for their summer destination. Lowcountry planters looking for healthier options created summer retreats in the pined communities of Walterboro, Springville, and McPhersonville. These local communities were quiet, small, and peaceful, and they too allowed the planter to return to his plantation if the need arose. The Middleton, Allston, Huger, and Perry families were known to meet in Greenville during the sickly season.¹⁶⁹ Greenville vacationers knew their instate town was less sophisticated than other summer destinations, as Anna Cheves felt the need to defend the view from the top of Table Rock Mountain as “although small... very pretty. However as I have already said it is all bold and rugged, and an eye accustomed to the beautiful green swards and cultivated views of the north might experience a feeling of disappointment at what we regard so pretty.”¹⁷⁰ Insecure, Cheves felt the need to measure up to her northern counterparts. Flat Rock, North Carolina increasingly became an additional residence for several well-known Lowcountry planters. “Flat Rock actually gay! Who in the world has noted the wonder?” wrote Anna Hunter with awe. “I can imagine how delightful those projected mountain excursions will be,”

¹⁶⁹ Genovese, *The Sweetness of Life: Southern Planters at Home*, 213

¹⁷⁰ Anna Cheves to Anna Dulles, Sep. 1841, Langdon Cheves Family Papers, SCHS.

she said, anticipating the mountain views and picnic lunches in the crisp, disease-free air.¹⁷¹

Upcountry white elites, in many cases less affluent than elites from the Lowcountry, were more likely to stay in state. The Prestons, Elmores, and Chesnuts, however, all traveled to the springs of Virginia in the summer of 1860. During the summer, the wealthy Elmore family moved from their home in Columbia to “Sand Hills.” The sand hills geographical region of South Carolina is a piney strip of ancient sand dunes that stretches from Augusta, Georgia, through Columbia, and up to Marlboro and Dillon Counties on the North Carolina border. Regardless of the specific location of the Elmores’ Sand Hills, they did not have to travel far from the midlands. Susan Elmore Taylor recalled Sand Hills during the summer as a place for “out-door development of children...especially for the enjoyment of big grained white sand, which, when damp, could be cleverly drawn up over the children’s bare feet, and built into little towns.” Taylor, whose postbellum memory was no doubt tinted with rosy retrospection, remembered the summers as an informal time with children laying out “on the cool India matting at mid-day half dressed.”¹⁷² The slow tempo and warm days of summer allowed for a much-needed lessening of social rules for women whose lives were ruled by clock-time precision and attendant social propriety.¹⁷³

¹⁷¹ Genovese, *The Sweetness of Life*, 206-7; Anna Hunter to Alicia Middleton, 12 Sep. 1860, Harriott Middleton Papers, SCHS.

¹⁷² Taylor, *Memoir*, Vol. I, 18, SCL.

¹⁷³ See Mark Smith, “Old South Time in Comparative Perspective” *American Historical Review* 101.5 (December 1996): 1432-1469.

It was the Virginia springs, however, where the South's elites most often spent their summers. Though they were not supposed to engage in explicit politics at this resort locale, visitors found themselves solidifying regional stereotypes and forging sociopolitical alliances. Virginians and South Carolinians constituted the largest groups in attendance, but by 1860 elites from as far as Texas flocked to the springs, staying at the homes of wealthy planters across the South along the way. First came the coastal, swampy elites, who needed a reprieve from summertime illnesses, and later followed the wealthy cotton planters and other southerners who wished to gain and maintain entry into the elite southern aristocracy.

First the refuge of Lowcountry planters who needed to flee their homes for health reasons, soon other wealthy cotton planters and other southern elites made their way to the springs to socialize and gain and maintain entry into this elite group. The most famous spring, White Sulphur Springs or "The White," is as best known a Confederate veteran postwar haven, but was just as popular in the antebellum years. Vacationers also had the option of several other springs in Virginia and could travel down the mountain ranges to smaller springs in Upcountry Georgia and the Carolinas.¹⁷⁴ In 1860, for instance, the Allston family spent a month at White Sulphur Springs before moving to the Red Sweet Springs, where their Charlestonian friends awaited them.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁴ Genovese, *Sweetness of Life*, 192-3.

¹⁷⁵ Adele Allston Vanderhorst to Charles Allston, 15 Aug. 1860, Allston Family Papers, SCHS. The Allstons began their summer at Pawley's Island before the rather sudden decision to travel to the springs instead.

As early as the 1830s, springs promoters advertised the resorts as a means to forge and maintain unity among the nation's elite. Unsurprisingly, this gained a new urgency in the 1850s. Resort advocates both northern and southern hoped that simple social and vocal exchange would be sufficient to heal the tensions of the Union, much like the springs soothed the body.¹⁷⁶ The resorts were an apolitical vehicle through which the politics of the day could be mended. In 1853 his guidebook to the Virginia springs, William Burke appealed directly to these tensions, writing:

if your [blood] streams have been rendered turbid by prejudice; if too much carbonic acid or unwholesome bile has mingled in their currents... she [the Springs] will render it ruddy and healthy, and send it back bounding with impulse, inspiring fraternal affections and sympathies; and connecting the frame of our social and political Union by tissues that shall not decay, and ligaments that can never be loosened.¹⁷⁷

These advertisers were only partially successful. The springs became invaluable locales for the political elites to form social networks and partnerships, but these pairings became increasingly sectional. By 1860 only 26% of visitors to New York's Saratoga Springs were southern. Susan Middleton visited in 1859, though she dreaded the visit, and once arrived complained that she could not find "a single Carolina woman."¹⁷⁸ Still, many South Carolinians noted that they did visit these New York springs in 1860. The same cannot be said of northerners at the Virginia springs. As early as 1858, Buffalo Lithia

¹⁷⁶Thomas A. Chambers, *Drinking the Waters: Creating an American Leisure Class at Nineteenth Century Mineral Springs* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institutions, 2002), 168, 170.

¹⁷⁷ Quoted in Chambers, *Drinking the Waters: Creating an American Leisure Class at Nineteenth Century Mineral Springs*, 170.

¹⁷⁸ Susan Middleton to Harriott Middleton, 18, 29 Jul. 1859, Middleton Family Papers, SCHS.

Springs and Yellow Sulphur Springs welcomed 98% of visitors from the slaveowning states.¹⁷⁹ If anything, the issue in the Virginia springs was *which* of these southern states made an appearance.

Though a favorite of politicians, visits to the springs were often family affairs. Young women and men certainly searched for romance, but they rarely traveled alone to do so. Alicia Middleton's friend wished for Alicia to continue her romances in absentia when she reached the springs: "if you meet a particular friend of mine there, we should like to exchange messages and perhaps something else, only you must say nothing about it to any one if you should see him, of course I mean Henry do give him my love," then adding, much like lovestruck girls, "do not show this to anyone on pain of my dire displeasure."¹⁸⁰ Vices were kept relatively low by the 1850s, with some betting on horseracing and scheduled drinking times—one in the morning, noon, and night.

Few traveled to the Virginia springs solely for health purposes. Famous theologians like James Henley Thornwell often preached at the springs, and those closer to the University of Virginia invited professors to lecture guests.¹⁸¹ The resorts held not only dress balls and dances but also "fancy balls" in which participants portrayed characters in costume. Adele and Bessie Allston were among the dancers.¹⁸² One Charlestonian, however, found his ball "very tame after the grand fancy ball in

¹⁷⁹ Chambers, 177.

¹⁸⁰ Louise to Alicia Middleton, 4 Jun. 1860, Harriot Horry Middleton Papers, SCHS. The last name of Louise, most likely a friend of Middleton's, is unknown.

¹⁸¹ Genovese, *The Sweetness of Life*, 216.

¹⁸² R.F.W. Allston to Ben Allston, 24 Aug. 1860, Allston Family Papers, SCHS.

Charleston.” Despite this qualifier he enjoyed several “round dances” and learned a new dance from New Orleans visitors. He enjoyed flirtations with his dance partners, all “handsome women.”¹⁸³ In between dances, women took swimming lessons in the fresh water and went horseback riding through the Virginia valleys.¹⁸⁴ Younger girls longed to partake in the festivities. “Next summer I hope to be among the dancers there! That hope keeps me alive,” wrote a woman in Charleston, hardly a sleepy backwater summer resort.¹⁸⁵ The calm, mountain freshwater provided opportunities for southern girls to learn to swim, though few seemed successful during their stay. If this environment proved too exciting, other springs boasted calmer atmospheres. The Allstons, however, did not enjoy the silence at Sweet Springs near the end of the season their friends departed. Adele complained that the Sweet was “not as pretty” and her mother wrote that “Nothing can be more quiet than this place now is; every body has gone except ourselves... We have no books, the mails are not so frequent... so that we are many days without a paper and know not what is going on in the world. She did prefer the food, however.”¹⁸⁶ The Allstons’ displeasure with their isolated nature reveals that they, like most of their counterparts, traveled to the springs for merrymaking within their social circles.

¹⁸³ Berkely Grimball to Elizabeth Grimball, 4 Sep. 1860, Grimball Family Papers, SHC.

¹⁸⁴ Adele Allston to Ben Allston 17 Sep. 1860, Allston Family Papers, SCHS; Adele Allston Vanderhorst to Anna Middleton, 5 Oct. 1860, Harriott Middleton Papers, SCHS.

¹⁸⁵ Anna Parker to Alicia Middleton 3 Aug. 1858, Harriott Horry Middleton Papers, SCHS.

¹⁸⁶ Adele Allston to Ben Allston, 17, 21 Sep. 1860, Allston Family Papers, SCHS.

South Carolinian visitors to the springs paid close attention to the provenance of other guests and complained when few visitors hailed from their state, expressing their personal, sectional politics. Late in the season, the Allstons described run-ins with the Cheves, Vanderhorsts, Lances, and Chesnuts, as well an introduction to a president of the Bank of Charleston.¹⁸⁷ The Preston family also made their appearance in 1860 and the legendarily beautiful Buckie Preston attracted the notice from the most handsome men.¹⁸⁸ Adele Allston was also described as “as pretty & attractive as ever” when at the springs. Earlier visitors to the White and Sweet Springs also noted the Porchers and Manigaults.¹⁸⁹ Though the Allstons arrived late, they reached the White Sulphur Springs in time for the “dress ball” and mentioned that Mary Boykin Chesnut was “in her glory” the night before at a separate springs. Letters written from the springs read like a debutante’s dance card of South Carolina’s elites. Though some today may be tempted to dismiss these lists as trivia, women found these names valuable both to their personal recollections and to stymie the curiosity of friends vacationing elsewhere. The wealth and the status of the names listed in these letters home from the springs reveals the importance of sociopolitical networking at the springs.

¹⁸⁷ Adele Allston to Ben Allston, 17, 21 Sep. 1860, Allston Family Papers, SCHS.

¹⁸⁸ Mamie Cheves to Alicia Middleton, 14 Aug. 1860, Harriott Horry Middleton Papers, SCHS. When in Europe, Buckie Preston caught the eye of Emperor Napoleon III, or Louis Napoleon. He gifted her a horse-riding crop as a token of his admiration. *Hampton-Preston House Tour*, Historic Columbia Foundation, Columbia, South Carolina.

¹⁸⁹ Mamie Cheves to Alicia Middleton, 28 Aug. 1860, Harriott Horry Middleton Papers, SCHS.

The springs' visitors found it uncouth to openly discuss politics while visiting the resort. Even in 1860 newspapers still reported "little talk of politics at the springs." Most springs lived by a rule called "the truce of the waters: no politics." Edmund Ruffin was constantly infuriated when his attempts to proselytize disunion at the springs fell on deaf ears during his 1850s visits.¹⁹⁰ It is highly unlikely, however, that this is entirely true—we can never know what conversations occurred behind closed doors, unless the conversant recorded it later. Ruffin finally found a sympathetic ear at the springs in R.F.W. Allston in the summer of 1860. He also held court with James Chesnut, visiting the White Sulphur Springs with President James Buchanan.¹⁹¹ Chesnut privately complained to Ruffin that the "impudent" southern states expected South Carolina to risk everything alone, and that he would not support secession unless more southern states agreed to join his own state before they took the first steps. A New Orleans man reported hearing "much talk of politics" at the Virginia springs in August 1860. "The Bell & Everett Men seem in the ascendant here-The Virginians contend however that Breckinridge will carry the state."¹⁹² Despite these conversations, most elites kept the code and avoided discussion of electoral politics at the springs. If any South Carolina women had political conversations at the springs in 1860, they did not record them.

¹⁹⁰ Chambers, *Drinking the Waters*, 177; Genovese, *The Sweetness of Life*, 209-210.

¹⁹¹ The White Sulphur Springs were considered President Buchanan's "summer White House." Though a northerner, Buchanan had a notably southern cabinet, though Chesnut was a senator at the time.

¹⁹² Freehling, *The Road to Disunion: Volume II*, 377; Genovese, *The Sweetness of Life*, 215.

Though springs attendees avoided electoral politics, both men and women discussed enslaved workers, a political topic woman felt privy to. Upon viewing the “healthy...evidently not overlooked or oppressed” enslaved workers in the Virginia springs,” one man wrote that he wished Harriet Beecher Stowe could see the scene and be proven wrong about slavery’s immorality. Those enslaved at the springs in Virginia were usually dressed in opulent uniforms and trained in etiquette, all the better to push the advantages of the domestic institution, especially in imagined contrast to overworked, underpaid white servants in the north. From the 1850s onward, southern visitors to Saratoga Springs complained of the treatment they received by free black servants. It is likely that these freedpeople simply dared to assert their autonomy, prompting self-defensive discomfort on the part of slaveholders.¹⁹³

Additionally, forging and cementing social relationships between elites is itself a political act that involved women. If a young man and woman attended the springs and found a partner, they in effect forged an economic union between two wealthy families, who in turn might provide political options for office and economic opportunities for land consolidation. Political figures traveled to the springs to meet other politicians, and though they technically might not have explicitly discussed “politics,” these relationships transformed into alliances when the political ban lifted after the summer.¹⁹⁴ And, as mentioned above, proslavery discussion that centered around enslaved people rather than

¹⁹³ Genovese, *The Sweetness of Life*, 179, 204.

¹⁹⁴ Genovese notes many famous stories of business and political deals that are rumored to have occurred at the springs. He believes they “probably never happened,” but asserts that “politics was everywhere” at the springs, simply “*sotto voce*.” *The Sweetness of Life*, 210.

the politics surrounding the legality of slavery was both permitted and part of everyday life. Women surely participated in this broader form of politics, disregarding the ban, and perhaps felt bold enough to discuss “Politicks” after they indulged in libations. If they did, they were too embarrassed to record their unladylike behavior the next day.

In addition to political alliances, marital or otherwise, and discussions of slavery, South Carolinians expressed politics at the springs by comparing themselves to Virginians. Without a northern presence at the spring to direct one’s animosities, tensions climbed between the two southern states. At one point, they even claimed different springs—Virginia the Sweet and the Carolinians the Salt Sulphur. This tension only increased by summer 1860, with Memminger’s recent failure to sway Virginians fresh in their memories. Women shared this antipathy with equal, if not greater, enthusiasm. Lowcountry South Carolinian belles, “sophisticates” with their Cotillions and Country dances, used social customs to critique Virginians, who performed less-formal reels, jigs, and square dances.¹⁹⁵ Though these competitions and stereotypes were not new to 1860, South Carolinians used the socially acceptable lenses of manners, dancing, and fashion to express political tensions in the summer before secession. This ill-will towards Virginia stemmed from a fear that, as an Upper South state that was beginning to more closely resemble the North, Virginia was creeping toward abolition sensibilities. As secession approached, South Carolina extended this bitterness to Virginia’s role as the “social heart” of the republic and birthplace of a great many presidents and attempt to craft South

¹⁹⁵*The Sweetness of Life*, 198. South Carolinians frequented many springs in 1860, and at least a few visited the Sweet, but this does not disprove the idea that states felt possessive of certain springs, lifestyles, and culture.

Carolina as the true inheritor of the American Revolution.¹⁹⁶ Thus, while most women did not directly discuss politics in their summer visits, they did reveal these underlying political fears and resentments through masked jabs at culture and manners.

In this time of political tensions, South Carolinians doubted that Virginia would make the leap should secessionists emerge triumphant. South Carolinians increasingly suspected that Virginians were increasingly modeling the industrializing North and, because planters exhausted Virginia soils and moved westward, might begin to favor abolition. When his sister described meeting the Prince of Wales in Richmond, Ben Allston responded with disdain towards Virginians:

I am disgusted with the spirit which can make any people behave in such a manner, it is the spirit which will and does make slaves of free men...I hoped better things from Richmond, but cannot say that I am surprised. The monuments of the great men which adorn their capital only seem to show how pitiful and reduced are the present generation. They are virtually living on the names the soil has produced, as some children do on the names and positions of their ancestors.¹⁹⁷

Allston's rant reveals the inner insecurity amongst South Carolinians when attempting to claim the noblest American ancestry. Here, he suggests Virginia's current stock did not deserve to inherit the legacy of their revered founding fathers. Even young schoolgirl Susan McDowall hinted at this fission; "The ghost of Washington, Jefferson & Adams start back, appalled at the scenes which desecrate freedoms once hallowed soil; while our Calhoun approvingly smiles upon the efforts of the old Palmetto state."¹⁹⁸ In addition to

¹⁹⁶ Edmund Burke, quoted in Chambers, 170.

¹⁹⁷ Ben Allston to Adele Allston Vanderhorst, 9 Oct. 1860, Allston Family Papers, SCHS.

¹⁹⁸ "The signs of the times," Susan McDowall Journal, SHC.

its Revolutionary signers, South Carolina now claimed Calhoun as one of the state's founding fathers.

That women were also wary of Virginians reveals a political awareness and consciousness that emerged months before Lincoln's election. In 1853, South Carolinian Ann Pamela Cunningham founded the Mount Vernon Ladies Association (MVLA) to fundraise for and preserve George Washington's Virginia home. Her efforts to inspire and retain patriotic fervor on the eve of disunion reveals women's thoughts on the state of the union as well as their ideas of who could claim both Revolutionary ideals and the Revolutionaries themselves. Correspondence between the South Carolinian members of the MVLA reveals their inner struggle to remain loyal to their Revolutionary forefathers while transforming into patriotic disunionists.

Women's preservation groups, mostly studied during the postwar period, provided a socially acceptable outlet for women's public political action through ritual acts of patriotism and historical engagement.¹⁹⁹ Ann Pamela Cunningham's public campaign and funding for the preservation of Mount Vernon was no less of a political act. Though her contemporaries found these actions appropriate for a wealthy woman of her status, even Cunningham sometimes toed the line of public propriety. Cunningham's mother often worried about her behavior, lamenting "you seem positively to stop at nothing, that even man should not, scarcely *dare* to do," even visiting Mount Vernon

¹⁹⁹ See, for instance, Karen Cox, *Dixie's Daughters: The United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Preservation of Confederate Culture* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003).

without a female companion when only “Mr. Herbert a batchelor [sic]” was present.²⁰⁰ But Cunningham was not deterred. Rendered invalid by a horse-riding accident in her youth, Cunningham dedicated her life to Mount Vernon. It seems that not everyone shared her mother’s concerns, as Cunningham gathered both male and female donors to the MVLA that praised her patriotic sentiments and actions.

When searching for the South Carolinian state representative for the MVLA, Cunningham found a sympathetic ear in Mary Cox Chesnut. Chesnut’s involvement was particularly appealing to Cunningham because she met the first president. At fourteen, Chesnut and other women serenaded Washington during his Inaugural Tour and allegedly “assisted in rendering one of the most touching tributes of gratitude recorded in our past history...which touched the heart & brought tears to the eyes of our Hero Chief!” Cunningham appealed to Chesnut’s patriotic sentiment, arguing that “it seemed peculiarly appropriate to me that the descendants of those who had known him in life—or who had been his co-laborer in the great work of achieving our National Independence, should become the first Gaurdians [sic] of his tomb.”²⁰¹ Revealing the tenuous nature of national politics, Cunningham convinced Chesnut to join the MVLA by appealing to her American patriotism at a time when, in April 1860, men were avidly attempting to sever this union. Her own son later played an active role in disunion.

²⁰⁰ Louisa Cunningham to Ann Pamela Cunningham Papers, 11 Apr. 1860, Ann Pamela Cunningham Papers, SCL.

²⁰¹ Ann Pamela Cunningham to Mary Cox Chesnut, 26 Mar. 1860, Mary Cox Chesnut Papers, SCL.

Chesnut accepted the position of Vice Regent of South Carolina with the understanding that her daughter-in-law, Mary Boykin Chesnut, would perform most duties. At eighty-five, Cox Chesnut recognized that Cunningham “only want[s] my name” to add to the MVLA’s prestige.²⁰² Cox Chesnut’s next task was to contact well-connected women in South Carolina’s districts to become fundraisers and “Lady Managers” for each district. Though Cunningham displayed a national patriotism, she also let her state bias shine through, writing that she desired “no state to stand ahead of South Carolina” in membership and fundraising.²⁰³ Despite Cunningham’s encouragement, many of Chesnut’s Lady Managers had difficulty fundraising in the late summer of 1860. "This place where now the Rutledges, the Pinckneys & the now-dying names of Sumter & Marion," wrote Fairfield District's Clara Dargan, were "so wrapt up in their cotton-fields that they regard every movement in which 'trade' is not concerned as a "humbug."²⁰⁴ At the time of Dargan’s correspondence, September 1860, there is no mention of sectional tension or political distraction as the cause of male apathy but, instead, economics. Dargan essentially found herself more invested in the nation than the descendants of South Carolina’s Revolutionary families.

²⁰² Though Mary Boykin Chesnut did perform some of the correspondence, the majority of the work on behalf of Mary Cox Chesnut for the MVLA was done by her unmarried daughter Sally. Mary Cox Chesnut to Ann Pamela Cunningham, 3 Apr. 1860, Ann Pamela Cunningham Papers, SCL.

²⁰³ Ann Pamela Cunningham to Mary Cox Chesnut, 9 Jun. 1860, Mary Cox Chesnut Family Papers, SCL.

²⁰⁴ Clara Dargan to Mary Cox Chesnut, 19 Sep. 1860, Mary Cox Chesnut Papers, SCL.

Dargan's deliberate reference to elite Lowcountry planters near Charleston—the Rutledges, Pinckneys, Marions, Sumters—an emphasis on South Carolina's Revolutionary forefathers and the fear that those families would die out. In clinging to the state's Founding Fathers, South Carolinians attempted to increase their stature as the "true patriots," a title that usually belonged to the home state of Washington, Jefferson, and Madison, to name a few. The case of Rebecca Holmes, who rejects her appointment as Lady Manager, reveals a deep-seated mistrust of Virginia. Though the Charlestonian was involved in the MVLA's founding and early efforts, by June 1860 Holmes reasoned that "recent developments show that Virginia has very little sympathy with Southern Rights, and in the event of separation, would probably unite with the North, carrying with her the home & grave of Washington."²⁰⁵ Holmes' letter reflects this deeply-held South Carolinian insecurity concerning Virginia's fidelity to the South during a season where few explicitly discussed secession and politics. That she expressed these feelings during the quiet, more-apolitical "sickly season" reflects that Holmes was thinking independently and far more politically than many of her fellow South Carolinians on holiday. She was able to do so, and express her doubts in Virginians, through the feminine outlet of a women's patriotic memorial organization.

Cunningham's organization ground to a halt with the outbreak of the Civil War. During the secession, Lady Managers in South Carolina reported fundraising difficulties because the "crisis" was "of so much deeper interests filling the hearts & thoughts of all

²⁰⁵ Rebecca Holmes to Mary Cox Chesnut, 18 Jun. 1860, Mary Cox Chesnut Papers, SCL.

Carolinians just now.”²⁰⁶ As secession neared, MVLA members struggled as they attempted to navigate their own personal patriotisms and loyalty to their American past while simultaneously pushing for their state’s secession. In doing so, South Carolina women appealed to their own Revolutionary history and argued that to be true to the Founding Fathers, they too had to seek out their own liberty. That Holmes so boldly refused to participate in the MVLA due to mistrust of Virginia as early as June 1860, however, reveals that she was politically active and stood out among her peers in her powers of prediction, though others revealed these mistrusts in less explicit ways.

Most South Carolinian women, however, did not let political tensions prevent them from traveling to both Virginia and the north during the summer of 1860. After stays at the springs, some South Carolinians decided to linger, clearly yet feeling any pressure to return to their home state. One to two months before Lincoln’s election changed the nation forever, and South Carolinians felt no urgency to return home and prepare! Adele and her father R.F.W. Allston traveled to Old Point Comfort and Lexington, Virginia until October 1860. They could afford to do so—or, at least, their creditors made them think they could.²⁰⁷ This well-timed stay in Virginia allowed Allston to see the Prince of Wales when he toured the United States. The Cheves family also saw the prince at First Lady Harriet Lane’s reception in Washington, D.C.²⁰⁸ Meta Grimbball’s

²⁰⁶ Clara Dargan to Mary Cox Chesnut, 9 Dec. 1860, Mary Cox Chesnut Papers, SCL.

²⁰⁷ By 1860, R.F.W. Allston was more than \$200,000 in debt. William Kauffman Scarborough, *The Allstons of Chicora Wood: Wealth, Honor, and Gentility in the South Carolina Lowcountry* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2011), 158.

daughter, who had been in the north for four months, described an opera held for the prince in Philadelphia, which she deemed “nice entertainment.” The prince’s youth and fondness for dancing prompted balls in his honor in every city on his tour. His visit was one of the few events that distracted from political and sectional tensions, noted Meta Grimball. “These are times of such dreadful political excitement that all men seem to feel at ease the North & South are all but [armed] against each other,” she noted, ever-prescient. “Just now,” however, due to the attention surrounding the prince, “we personally seem more comfortable than usual.”²⁰⁹

From Virginia, Carolinians continued to Saratoga Springs in New York, whose growing middle-class clientele created a busier atmosphere than its Virginian counterparts. Annoyed with the rushed atmosphere, southern visitors complained of too many “dandies” in their midst. Traveling north for months was expensive as well—the Grimball family spent \$2,500—almost \$80,000 in 2020—in New York alone the summer of 1856. This travel, slow by today’s standards and likely burdened with the luggage of three months’ worth of shopping, became increasingly difficult as changing litigation made bringing slaves along risky for planters.²¹⁰ South Carolinian F. A. Porcher lamented that “Charleston is rapidly becoming a northern city” when its citizens all traveled north to avoid the yellow fever season, then returning with northern ideals. He feared becoming

²⁰⁸ Adele Allston Vanderhorst to Charles Allston, 14 Oct. 1860, Allston Family Papers, SCHS; Adele Allston Vanderhorst to Anna Cheves, 05 Oct. 1860, Middleton Family Papers, SCHS.

²⁰⁹ Grimball Diary, 21 Oct. 1860, Margaret Ann Morris Grimball Family Papers, SCHS.

²¹⁰ Genovese, *The Sweetness of Life*, 202, 205; “Inflation Calculator,” *U.S. Official Inflation Data*, Alioth Finance, 11 Mar. 2020. <https://www.officialdata.org/>.

closely bound and dependent upon the North and blamed the evils of “the multiplication of railroad and steamboat facilities” and those who “regard Northern watering places as their resource for amusement.”²¹¹

Nevertheless, South Carolinians continued to venture north. If they did not frequent Saratoga Springs, they at least stopped in New York City or Newport, Rhode Island. In 1859, Susan Middleton found Saratoga Springs distasteful, but complained less about her time at the New York Hotel and noted that she liked Philadelphia.²¹² Though Ann Vanderhorst complained frequently about her stay in New York City in 1860, she felt comfortable with sectional tensions to leave for the north by as late as September 1860. When her daughter chose to return South after a month, Vanderhorst stayed in New York, despite alluding to some anti-southern activity. Clearly, the issues were not pressing, or the older Vanderhorst would have taken the steamer home early as well.²¹³ Other northern locales were far less polarizing for their southern visitors in 1860. Mary Pringle frequently visited her daughter at Edgewood, the large estate where she lived with her husband, author Donald Grant Mitchell, in New Haven, Connecticut. Despite her northern locale, Mary Frances Mitchell remained a staunch defender of slavery and the South for the rest of her life. The familial separation she and her family in Charleston endured after 1861 later had devastating consequences.

²¹¹ F.A. Porcher, *Russell's Magazine*, 5.6 (February 1860).

²¹² Susan Middleton to Harriott Middleton, 20 Sep. 1859, Harriot Middleton Papers, SCHS.

²¹³ Ann Morris Vanderhorst Diary, 1 Sep. 1860, 02 Oct. 1860, Vanderhorst Family Papers, SCHS.

One month later, Mary Pringle wrote home from New York's Fifth Avenue Hotel after leaving Edgewood. She could have stopped in Newport, Rhode Island, as she and her family formed "the nucleus" of the "Southern colony" created there. At this international locale, South Carolinians like the Middletons, Allstons, and Pringles spent "lavishly, even wastefully." Julius Pringle's family visited Newport so frequently that two of their children were born there, the latest in 1859.²¹⁴ Susan Middleton and her family loved Newport so ardently that she suffered through Virginia, which she found "tiresome and uncomfortable," in order to end up in Newport.²¹⁵ Northern locales often served as the final stop on Carolinian's summer tours before they returned home to face whatever awaited them.

By June, Charleston was a ghost town. "The town begins to look deserted, so many houses shut up," lamented Susan Middleton. The Battery, a constant destination for young men and women's socializing, became an empty path.²¹⁶ There were a few bursts of activity—a few balls, sailing parties, and the Fourth of July parades and celebrations. Meta Grimball spent the majority of her summer in Charleston and mentioned a few balls and social calls but noted that "more persons have gone away this summer than usual." The Fourth of July passed "very much as usual," without any discussion of sectional conflict, though contemplation and memorialization of Revolution and Union could have

²¹⁴ Quoted in Côté, *Mary's World: Love, War, and Family Ties in Nineteenth-Century Charleston*, 95, 138.

²¹⁵ Susan Middleton to Harriott Middleton, 1 Jul. 1858, Harriott Middleton Family Papers, SCHS.

²¹⁶ Susan Middleton to Harriott Middleton, 29 Jul. 1859, Harriott Middleton Family Papers, SCHS.

conjured such a train of thought.²¹⁷ In a sharp contrast to events months later, locals flocked to Fort Moultrie on Independence Day, serenaded by the U.S. Army band.²¹⁸ The only item of interest surrounding the holiday, according to Grimball, was that “the heat was perfectly outrageous, several persons died of such strokes and there have been 3 cases of paralises [sic].”²¹⁹

By late October, however, the city revived itself as vacationers returned. It began as a slow trickle in September, building to a crescendo until those who arrived in late October were greeted with a sonic shock. Suddenly, it seemed, a switch was flipped and South Carolinian cities buzzed with talk of secession.

Throughout the lazy southern months, women continued to remain politically active and cognizant, but mostly avoided national events. Though the men of the Burn family discussed politics by June 1860, the frequent women writers of the family found nothing on the subject worth mentioning.²²⁰ In summer 1860, most politics discussed were local affairs like nominations for the state legislature. Henrietta Simons took great interest in a court case, but it was later revealed that it involved a family member. She felt comfortable discussing her thoughts on the matter with her fiancé, a sign that she felt comfortable around him or he encouraged her political thoughts. With the Adeles Allston

²¹⁷ Ben Allston to Henrietta Simons, 1 Jul. 1860, Allston Family Papers, SCHS; Grimball Diary, 12, 17 Aug. 1860, Margaret Ann Morris Grimball Family Papers SCHS.

²¹⁸ Smith, *The Smell of Battle, the Taste of Siege*, 20.

²¹⁹ Grimball Diary, 8 Jul. 1860, Margaret Ann Morris Grimball Family Papers, SCHS.

²²⁰ Burn Family Papers, SCL.

as her future mother and sister-in-law, it is likely that her fiancé Ben was accustomed to bright women. In turn, the Allston family women avidly discussed politics from the Virginia springs in September, but only to encourage Ben in his local election, which he lost. The “mortification...will pass away,” his mother consoled. She then focused on the local election in Charleston with “some interest” and revealed who she hoped would win. By September’s end, local political fervor died down, and Ben wrote that “there is nothing of importance after the election which is over.”²²¹ The women invested in South Carolina’s politics in late summer 1860 had a good and proper reason to do so, as their family members were candidates or involved in court cases. This political discussion was viewed as proper and differed from national, electoral discussion.

Increased talk of abolition and disunion in newspapers, however, revealed ominous signs of unrest during the summer of 1860. Local militias tripled in number. In August Charleston’s police systematically went door-to-door, interrogating its free black community and enslaving those who could not prove their emancipated status.²²² Keziah Brevard’s entries concerning her slaves increased as well, though she did not make the explicit connection to national events: “I wish to be kind to my negroes—but I receive little but impudence... it is a truth if I am compelled to speak harshly to them—after bearing every thing from them I get impudence—Oh my God give me fortitude to do what is right and then give me the firmness to go no farther.” She then expressed her

²²¹ Ben Allston to Henrietta Simons, 1, 11 Jul. 1860, Adele Allston to Ben Allston, 21 Sep. 1860, Ben Allston to Adele Allston Vanderhorst, 9 Oct. 1860, Allston Family Papers, SCHS.

²²² Ben Allston to Henrietta Simons, 1 Jul. 1860, Allston Family Papers, SCHS; Fraser, 242.

hope that after her death five slaves be sold as “I cannot think of imposing such servants on any one of my heirs.”²²³ Even if only subconsciously, Brevard reacted to growing rumors of unrest by both contemplating the nature of slavery and her own inflicted punishments. Her callous request that some slaves be sold after her death—one of the cruelest punishments for enslaved families—is matched in cruelty only by her foreboding prayer that when doling out punishment, she goes “no farther” than necessary. Why would Brevard need such a prayer? Sleepy Pawley’s Island also experienced unrest and tensions. “Som negroes, about twenty odd,” wrote Ben Allston, “have taken to the woods, and some of the neighbors were quite scandalized that they should remain unmolested so long consequently they went out in a body some days ago to overtake them.”²²⁴ While we cannot prove, unless explicitly stated, that this alert atmosphere was a direct response to political tension, writings during summer 1860 indicate that slaveowners seemed more hyper-aware than usual, jumping at any sign of unusual movements among their enslaved population.

While in summer 1860, Brevard had not yet begun her long, concerned diary entries on the state of the union, she did record foreboding dreams that were perhaps manifestations of her waking anxieties. “Last night I dreamed there was to be a commotion of some kind in Col [Columbia]...I do hope there will be nothing to correspond with this dream—I don’t wish to be superstitious.” In July, Brevard did not

²²³ Brevard Diary, 18 Sep. 1860, in Keziah Hopkins Brevard, *A Plantation Mistress on the Eve of the Civil War: The Diary of Keziah Goodwyn Hopkins Brevard, 1860-1861* ed. John Hammond Moore (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1992), 33. Hereafter *Plantation Mistress*.

²²⁴ Ben Allston to Henrietta Simons, 20 Jun. 1860, Allston Family Papers, SCHS.

yet lament the state of her country. Her dream, a subconscious inclination that something was, or would soon be, amiss, represents well with her unnamed summertime fears.²²⁵ Keziah's first explicitly political entry arrived in early September, when she expressed fears for the current state of the country through her faith in God: "Lord, Lord—save us—save our dear dear Country first. These are perilous times, perilous because we do not love God as we should."²²⁶ To Brevard, the present national crisis was a punishment upon mankind for their sinfulness. Brevard's diary reveals attempts to incorporate political discussion into her everyday life, beginning an entry with a thorough detail of her chores and errands for the day only to rapidly pivot to the state of affairs, "This night, if reports are true, had been set apart to cut us off—Oh God, because we own slaves—Lord thou knowest our hearts—save us...save this our good country." The next day's entry, however, simply said "At home" and listed enslaved workers who were out for the day.²²⁷ Just as vacationers returned one-by-one beginning in September, Brevard's diary entries slowly begin to blend, albeit abruptly, national politics and her hope that the country could be saved into her normal daily logs. It was early enough in the year that she believed the two could coexist.

²²⁵ Brevard Diary, 31 Jul. 1860, *Plantation Mistress*, 22. For more on Civil War era dream interpretation and study, see Jonathan W. White, *Midnight in America: Darkness, Sleep, and Dreams during the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017).

²²⁶ Keziah Brevard Diary, 7 Sep. 1860, *Plantation Mistress*, 30.

²²⁷ It is unclear what event Brevard is referring to. Papers and word of mouth traveled slowly, and it is possible she was merely receiving a report of abolitionist activity and processing it in her diary. Brevard Diary, 15-16 Sep. 1860, *Plantation Mistress*, 33.

By the end of October, South Carolinians returned home and caught up with Brevard. They felt refreshed, though perhaps also tired, from their travels, whether to other regions in South Carolina, the springs of Virginia and the nation's capital or the north. During the "sickly season" the lethargically hot weather created the illusion that time slowed down, and South Carolinian women enjoyed the change of pace. Despite the disruptions of John Brown's Raid, the Democratic National Convention, and the election in one month's time, women did not feel an urgent need to discuss national politics during this period. This is not to say they were not political, but they maintained their feminine propriety by limiting discussion to domestic slavery, cultural critiques of Virginians, and local elections that involved family members. The majority of South Carolina women's writings during the sickly season centered around social bonds and consolidations, and the desire to track the movements of their friends and loved ones. Often dismissed as trivia, these long lists of people were important to women writers, and should therefore be important to those who study them, as these social relations formed the foundations of South Carolinian society.

CHAPTER 4: South Carolina Takes Action, October-December 1860

In 1860, Grace Elmore of Columbia remained in New York for her summer holiday until mid-October. Returning home, she soon sensed a change in her home state. As the train approached South Carolina, “political talk got stronger.” By the time South Carolina Minute Men boarded the train at Fort Motte, the entire train was abuzz with talk of Black Republicans, Douglas, and disunion. The slow yet steady accumulation of political discussion that surrounded Elmore mirrored the political experience of South Carolina women in the fall of 1860.²²⁸ While many discussed politics before October, few did so in such earnest.²²⁹

Many historians point to the weeks leading up to Lincoln’s election as notably different than those that came before. Political activity exploded, reflected in writing and even the very noise and volume of cities.²³⁰ By late October and Lincoln’s election on November 6, 1860, elite South Carolina did not consider their letters or diaries complete if they did not mention current events—the most important content of their writings. The end of October 1860 marks a shift in women’s writings, both in frequency and their self-

²²⁸ Grace Brown Elmore Diary, 28 Oct. 1860, SCL.

²²⁹ Stephen Berry notes a surprising lack of attention to the election of 1860 in early fall among the southern population as a whole. Newspapers like the *Mercury*, of course, had been discussing the election for months, but both Berry and I find that the majority of South Carolinians did not fixate upon the election until Lincoln emerged the victor. See *All That Makes a Man*, 163.

²³⁰ See Channing, Phillips, Smith, *The Sound of Battle*....

awareness in discussing political events. This chapter traces women's reactions to Lincoln's election, their adaptation to the now-inescapable political atmosphere, and their roles as supportive, if terrified, South Carolinians. To make sense of this rapidly-changing world, they wrote, with even greater vigor, politics into their letters and diaries, alongside social visits and chores, and continued to use religious and emotional ideas of femininity to express their opinions. The chapter closes with South Carolina's cathartic secession and the aftermath that left women gloomy and afraid.

Elmore returned to a buzzing state. Blue cockades were "as plentiful as blackberries" atop the hats of Carolina secessionist men. In late October, news accumulated so quickly that Elmore found it "hard to know what to choose" to discuss in her diary. "The election excitement runs so high," she wrote, "men, women, even children, take part. The papers are full."²³¹ Accustomed to sifting through the news and judging the political events of most importance, now politically-astute women like Elmore found the news so overwhelming that all begged mentioning in writing. Charleston's soundscape exploded in the fall of 1860, a profound and jarring change for the proper and regimented city. By November, southern politicians frequented Charleston's public spaces, filling the air with loud, boisterous, and dramatic speeches. Sure, toasts to secession had been ongoing since July, but never before did they reach

²³¹ Grace Brown Elmore Diary, 28 Oct. 1860, SCL.

near-violent levels backed by the local militia drills.²³² Fueling this atmosphere, the *Mercury* published a letter to the editor that claimed a group of ladies wished the men of Carolina would “turn over the government” to women if their state submitted to Lincoln’s election. This apocryphal tale aimed to shame the men of the South, by claiming that they were more suited for women’s duties like “milking cows and nursing the babies” than “defending their rights.” To the *Mercury*, South Carolinians had two options: “resist Lincoln’s election, or turn over the government to the women—God bless them.”²³³ Though lauding women’s patriotism, the *Mercury* also weaponized gender to challenge the honor of Carolina men not in the secessionist camp.

Non-fictional South Carolina women were less comfortable with outright shaming southern men before Lincoln’s election. Instead, they utilized comfortable antebellum frameworks to express their increasing concern with national events. Sarah Roberts Burn earnestly discussed the fate of the Union in September 1860, with a passion most other South Carolinian women would not express until the next month. Her cross-hatched letter blends biblical doomsday with worried prophecy concerning America’s future.²³⁴

²³² Mark Smith writes that the noise in Charleston reached “a decibel level not heard in generations” and refers to Lincoln’s election as the start of an “auditory revolution.” *The Sound of Battle...*, 18-19.

²³³ “A proposition from the Southern Guardian,” *The Charleston Mercury*, 25 Sep. 1860, SCL.

²³⁴ The concept of cross-hatching, also called a crossed letter, is a letter that contains an additional set of writing over the original at a right angle. This was done to avoid using extra pieces of paper, saving money on paper and postal charges. Here, however, it indicates the length of Sarah’s letter to her sister and the extent to which she contemplated these issues.

We are now entering the time of trouble predicted in David Twelfth chapter, that he tells us would take place at the time of the end of the world... ‘And there shall be a time of trouble such as there never was since there was a nation’... I look for universal war very soon with all its terrible consequences, and for civil war in our own land... we have fallen upon evil times and our affection should sit very loosely to this world, the Children of God wary of them will soon have to encounter the flame and the stake as well as the sword... there is no telling how soon these terrible outbreaks may occur... May the Lord shield and protect us from the terrible storm ahead of us.²³⁵

In a single, urgent letter, Sarah predicted a religious purification, earthquakes, and slave revolts. She was not the only person to do so; secessionist men, such as Virginia governor Henry Wise, looked forward to a “war of purification,” and Charles Burn’s uncle also believed “the great battle alluded to in Daniel is now to be fought... the end will then come” in the next two years.²³⁶ Perhaps millenarianism ran in the Burn family. Jason Phillips writes that an “apocalyptic vision of the future... gripped Americans of every section, race, and gender,” but if it affected South Carolina men, most did not feel bold enough to express these reservations. Steven Channing’s study of South Carolina during secession also asserts that the state’s citizens naively believed that the North would not coerce the South.²³⁷ South Carolinians were unable to express their fear of an apocalyptic future, as to convince their state to secede was hard enough without admitting that war would soon follow. Sarah Burn differs from men in her state by looking towards these apocalyptic visions of end times with dread, not anticipation.

²³⁵ Sarah Burn to Susan L. Burn, 5 Sep. 1860, Burn Family Papers, SCL. Burn mistakenly sources this passage to the book of Daniel, rather than David.

²³⁶ Quoted in Phillips, 156; Susan Burn to Charles Burn, 6 Dec. 1860, Burn Family Papers, SCL.

²³⁷ Phillips, 85. Channing, *Crisis of Fear*.

Even Burn's male relative seemed content in the knowledge that the world would end in two years' time and he would no longer need to seek employment.

Sarah Burn's cross-hatched letter seems rushed, almost as though her pen could not move quickly enough to communicate her thoughts, and the correspondence reads as a disjointed stream of consciousness. It is likely that she, like her sister Susan, was Baptist, as her reference to what should be the Book of Daniel aligns with the Baptist belief in the Rapture and Tribulation before the Second Coming of Christ.²³⁸ She perceived an urgent and very real religious threat on the horizon, which would manifest in the form of a civil war. Sarah's tone indicates that putting pen to paper was a necessary form of catharsis that enabled her to live in a time of looming political chaos. Though it avoids specifically identifying political events or figures, Sarah's letter is political in that she directly discusses her country's present and future.

In October 1860, Keziah Hopkins Brevard expressed similar worries by lamenting the death of her country in religious terms. Her diary's daily nature allows the reader to trace which events took up the most mental, and therefore written, space.²³⁹ Brevard's diary mostly consists of brief, mundane entries that are disrupted by the occasional long tirade concerning the ignorance and misbehavior of her slaves and disgust and terror at the thought of coexisting with free blacks. When discussing the state of her country as secession approached, Brevard's entries similarly doubled in size and sloppiness. The fretful slaveowner used exclamations and dashes rather than periods and

²³⁸Leonard, *Baptists in America*, 55-6.

²³⁹ For more on navigating women's diaries while paying mind to the "trivia" of everyday entries, see Stowe, *Keep the Days...*, 12.

complete sentences, underlining words to physically manifest the urgency of her thoughts and feelings (Figure 4.1, 4.2). Brevard supported the secessionist cause, writing in early October that “it is time for us to shew the rabble of the North we are not to be murdered in cold blood because we own slaves.” Yet even these angry outbursts paled in frequency to her repeated pleas of “Oh My God save this Country!!!,” “My God spare me from witnessing blood and murder,” and that God save them from Lincoln and the “selfish notions” of the “Black Republicans.” The “wicked hearts” of the “Northern cut throats,” she wrote, “know no God or else they never could have the feelings they have toward us.” To Brevard, godless northerners and the sins of mankind were to blame for the impending dissolution of the United States, and only desperate prayer and God’s forgiveness would save the country she loved. Lincoln’s election, she reasoned, would be proof that God punished “his people for sinning against his commands.”²⁴⁰ Brevard clearly believed in a less benevolent God than many of her female counterparts. This pessimism led to frequent entries about God’s role in the state of the world, in turn making Brevard more politically vocal than many of her peers.

Brevard’s ideal escape from the anxieties of 1860 and the death and destruction she and Sarah Burn predicted was to contemplate the afterlife, and lament her life on earth. Rather than survive to see emancipation and live amongst free African Americans, Brevard prayed “Oh that God had made me one of his flock & taken me long before this—My God take me quickly—Oh I fear to stay here.” Brevard frequently contemplated her own sinfulness and hoped that she was “fit” for Heaven and would not

²⁴⁰ Brevard Diary, 12-14 Oct. 1860; 01 Nov. 1860, 24 Oct. 1860, *Plantation Mistress*, 38-40, 43, 47.

be left to “see & know the troubles that are coming upon us.” Though a South Carolina patriot, she longed for rest and eternal peace in the Heaven promised by the Christian God. “I wish my anxiety could be ended,” she wrote days before Lincoln’s election. To Brevard, death was a welcome means to end her worries.²⁴¹ Brevard did not get her wish—she died in 1886 at the age of eighty-three.

Historian Jason Phillips argues that women were uniquely “encouraged...to expect a future that was beyond their control, arrived unexpectedly, and changed the course of their lives,” and that this expectation was reinforced in their social lives.²⁴² A mistrust of the future was necessary for women who frequently lost children and loved ones to complications in pregnancy. Antebellum women clung to the thought of death as peaceful and even desirable, to adjust to death’s constant presence in their households. Countless women took to their diaries and letters to both prepare themselves for inevitable illnesses and deaths to come, or to describe death scenes at length, petitioning God for a peaceful afterlife. Belief in a benevolent God and the hope that they could reunite with loved ones in the afterlife was critical for an antebellum woman to navigate her life with a mix of trepidation and hope.²⁴³ This consideration makes Brevard’s hope

²⁴¹ Brevard Diary, 01 Nov. 1860, 14, 21 Oct. 1860, 02 Nov. 1860, *Plantation Mistress*, 24, 40, 42, 47.

²⁴² Phillips, 205.

²⁴³ Entries marking the deaths of loved ones, particularly infants, were also commonly found in women’s diaries, and often accompanied by a few lines on death. See Cynthia Gannett, *Gender and the Journal: Diaries and Academic Discourse* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1992), 140. See also Randall M. Miller, Harry S. Stout, Charles Reagan Wilson, eds., *Religion and the American Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); Faust, *This Republic of Suffering*.

for death less startling and explains why more South Carolinian women were inclined to think the worst of their political horizons.

Some young women saw the worst on their political horizons before Lincoln's election. Grace Elmore became jumpy at night, and every sound in the stillness transformed into "the groans of the wounded." When her brother joined the Minute Men, she began a thought exercise to harden her heart against "every sorrow that the war might bring." For Elmore, this involved imagining her brother and his friends going to battle, only to be left "slain...on the battle field." Her mind then traveled to her mother, "in her old age shorn of her wealth, her two boys gone, her children scattered." Overwhelmed, Elmore fell to her knees and cried "Hear me oh God! Let this cup pass from me." The entry ended abruptly, her emotions too great for the page, and she acknowledged the next day that "Last night I could write no more. I was utterly unnerved. Dante never saw more clearly the tortures of the damned than I have the possibilities of the Future."²⁴⁴ Fear of a hellish future, therefore, was shared by South Carolinian women both young and old.

Though the fall months of September and October brought about an increased urgency to women's writings about politics, this is not to say that women's fears turned them against the South Carolinian cause expressed by their white male counterparts. Their anxieties and religious predictions of apocalypse coexisted with patriotic support for secession. The morning after Elmore's thought exercises, she reminded herself that anticipated sorrow is harder to bear than the reality," and realized that she still felt a

²⁴⁴ Grace Brown Elmore Diary, 28-29 Oct. 1860, SCL.

“perfect willingness to suffer all things individually and collectively rather than Carolina should ever be other than she is, the embodiment of ‘Truth and Honor.’” Elmore was a bold secessionist, calling future Vice President Hannibal Hamlin a mulatto and Lincoln a “hideous...creature,” coarse and uncultured. It made her “sick” to dwell upon these “puritanical, self-righteous, meddlesome” northern politicians who wanted nothing more than to oppress the “fair and happy South.” Echoing many popular proslavery writers, she compared the sins of city and factory life to the idyllic life of the southern slave.²⁴⁵ Even Brevard, who wished for death, did not mind the idea of dying for a cause, writing “I would give my life to save my country.”²⁴⁶

By the end of October, South Carolina women could no longer go without mentioning the political changes surrounding them. While they continued recording the most important parts of their day in diaries and letters, they increasingly included their feelings about the state of the Union. These thoughts amounted to an explosion when Abraham Lincoln was elected president on November 6, 1860. Messengers shouted the news while others shouted for secession—it became the most sound-filled day in the state’s history.²⁴⁷ Upon hearing the news, Brevard could not stop her pen, writing quickly and anxiously “Oh My God!!!...I had prayed that God would thwart his election...I must trust in God that he will not forget us as untrustworthy as we are...I learnt the sad news that Lincoln was elected—This day corresponds with the note, it is so

²⁴⁵ Grace Brown Elmore Diary, 28 Oct. 1860, SCL.

²⁴⁶ Brevard Diary, 9 Nov. 1860, *Plantation Mistress*, 50.

²⁴⁷ Smith, *The Sound of Battle...*, 18. This “most-sound filled day” would be soon superseded by the siege of Fort Sumter.

gloomy looking.” One entry was insufficient in the face of such a momentous occasion; Brevard resumed writing in the afternoon, wondering if there would be a “crisis” and, despite her nervous tone, declared “We now have to act, God be with us.”²⁴⁸ While strongly in favor of the South Carolinian cause, she filtered her understanding of the nation's political future through comparisons to gloomy weather and pleas to God for mercy and guidance.

South Carolina was filled with “a state of great excitement” when informed of the news. “Lincoln’s election brought out all the South and there were demonstrations every where,” wrote Meta Grimball. “Here in Charleston the state flag was raised in Broad Street and cheered by thousands. The Federal Officers resigned and speeches were made serenades given and a convention called military companies parading.”²⁴⁹ In Greenville, it was “politics along the street” both in homes and at Furman College. Women began shooting lessons. “Cheering and serenading” filled the streets of Columbia, where they were joined by Edmund Ruffin, who knew that “if they [South Carolina secessionists] did any thing it would be at Columbia.” Ruffin was ready for the next steps. The city received speeches by Memminger and Magrath, and South Carolina College held a “resistance ball.”²⁵⁰

News of Lincoln’s election took longer to reach South Carolina’s peripheral towns. Though Society Hill’s citizens donned uniforms, Susan Burn noted that “I don’t

²⁴⁸ Brevard Diary, 09 Nov. 1860, *Plantation Mistress*, 49-50.

²⁴⁹ Grimball Diary, 17 Nov. 1860, Margaret Ann Morris Grimball Family Papers, SCHS.

²⁵⁰ Susan Burn to Charles Burn, 29 Nov., 12 Nov. 1860, Burn Family Papers, SCL.

know how our people take the election, they are so quiet; but still water runs deep.” Six days after Lincoln’s election, she still referred to Society Hill as “our quiet village.” Cheraw, however, experienced another, unnerving form of mobilization. “There is a report that Henry McIver’s carriage driver tried to get the house girl to poison her Mistress by sprinkling poison over the bed...they have put him in Jail...they seem to keep the affair very secretly,” confided C.L. Burn to his brother.²⁵¹ It is obvious why this affair was kept under the radar, as rumors of slave rebellions in coordination with Lincoln’s election would stoke fear rather than resolution.

Spartanburg was similarly mild. Though “the Spartans are participating somewhat more in the general excitement,” hoisting flags and wearing blue rosettes, Clemmie Legg confirmed that the city was “a dull looking place in winter...were you to see it on this cloudy, dark day, you would think we scarcely needed winter to produce dullness and gloomy streets.” She longed to take part in the activity and envied her friends’ frequent riding parties elsewhere in the state.²⁵² Flora Burn reported that “the times are pretty dull up at Cheraw I expect now as there is not much business going on anywhere.”²⁵³ Though the steady stream of politics poured from newspapers, the citizens of South Carolina quickly moved to accommodate Lincoln’s election and its potential future consequences into their daily lives.

²⁵¹ Susan Burn to Charles Burn, 12 Nov. 1860, Burn Family Papers, SCL; C.L. Burn to “My Dear Brother,” 11 Nov. 1860, Burn Family Papers, SCL.

²⁵² Clementia Legg to Hattie Palmer, 15 Nov 1860, Palmer Family Papers, SCL.

²⁵³ Flora Burn to Charles Burn, 10 Dec. 1860, Burn Family Papers, SCL.

When southern “soothsayers” like Edmund Ruffin and John Beauchamp Jones wrote their futuristic novels of a potential Confederacy, they left no public space for women.²⁵⁴ The role of an elite southern woman in politics was symbolic at best. South Carolinian women took up these symbolic roles by sewing cockades, walking in parades, and presenting flags to local militias. The *Mercury* lauded patriotic women who wore dresses and bonnets made from Georgia cotton, “domestic in material,” embroidered with Palmetto trees and Lone Stars. This homespun movement echoed the American Revolution, when colonists resisted using British goods, and the newspaper even noted that “its execution affords convincing proof of how independent we can be of our Northern aggressors, when we have the will.”²⁵⁵ These female “traditional roles,” however, allowed women to use the tenants of “woman’s spheres” to carve their own space within political discussion. Sarah Burn, for instance, wrote that if her state did not secede, she would leave it, and reported that such was the excitement in Charleston that she “would not be surprised if they are needed, if there was a Volunteer Company in Charleston of Ladies— one Lady said if the men had not courage to secede, the Ladies ought to secede from *them*.” White women embodied all that was good and pure in the South, and a southern gentleman felt obliged to protect them. His failure to do so would be the greatest dishonor.²⁵⁶ These patriotic expressions by South Carolina women were

²⁵⁴ Phillips, 128.

²⁵⁵ “A Good Example, *The Charleston Mercury*, 20 Nov. 1860, SCL.

²⁵⁶ Sarah Burn to Charles Burn, 12 Nov. 1860, 6 Dec. 1860, Burn Family Papers, SCL; Berry, 172.

therefore manipulations of masculinity to pressure men to secede. Unable to vote and fight themselves, they used their femininity to political ends.

This did not mean that elite white women always felt confident when wading into the political sphere.²⁵⁷ They accompanied their political writings with frequent apologies for their subject matter. The frequency of such excuses reveals that these subjects remained uncharted territory for most women in South Carolina. An article in popular journal *Southern Literary Messenger* claiming that mixing women and politics would lead to sexual depravity, abuse of power, and the general corruption of the republic indicates that this defensiveness was necessary.²⁵⁸ Sally Baxter Hampton considered “turning a penny by writing political letters” because “people here seem electrified at a woman’s daring to know & talk so much upon such subjects.”²⁵⁹ As a northern-born socialite, perhaps Hampton felt no need to excuse her political commentary.

Other women, however, urgently rationalized their political participation. “I wonder some times if people think it is strange that I should be so warm a secessionist,” Ada Bacot wrote defiantly in her diary, “but why should they, has not every woman a right to express opinions on some subjects in private if not in public.” Bacot was hesitant to speak openly about politics, and reluctant to leave the private sphere. Nonetheless, Bacot felt “as eager for news as any man in the state, but I know I am not able to do any thing for her defense being a woman, still that does not prevent my being interested.”

²⁵⁷ Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 10-11.

²⁵⁸ Berry, 131.

²⁵⁹ Sally Baxter Hampton to the Baxter Family, 10 Dec. 1860, *A Divided Heart*, 73.

“Tis said woman has no business with such matters,” she continued, “but what woman in South Carolina does not have the interest of her state at heart.” The young widow’s love for South Carolina was “that of an affectionate daughter for a mother, the purest love in the world.”²⁶⁰ Similarly, the younger Grace Elmore called South Carolina “my more than Mother, dearer far than self, the embodiment to me of all that is great and high.”²⁶¹ To Bacot and Elmore, patriotism was women’s business as well, and they invoked the language of motherhood and the private sphere to voice their political thoughts and support for secession.²⁶²

Susan McDowall, a young, excited schoolgirl, penned a poem called “Rise, Sons of Carolina!” and wrote an essay after secession called “Sign of the times,” in which she tied South Carolina to the Revolutionary “Spirit of ’76” and declared “Carolina a sovereign-independent state.” As such, “she,” or South Carolina, was “awake, and prepared to assert her authority, her sisters await her movements, and glorious will be her example.” Yet right after this political, bold language, McDowall concluded with women’s passive roles. While men “feel the sparks of enthusiasm kindling patriotic fires in their bosoms & calling them to duty,” it was the duty of “daughters animated with the spirit of a Mother” to “buckle on the armor of the ‘knights of the Blue cockade and urge

²⁶⁰ Ada Bacot Diary, 12 Dec. 1860, 19 Jan. 1861 in *A Confederate Nurse: The Diary of Ada Bacot, 1860-1863* ed. Jean V. Berlin (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2000), 19, 25-6. Hereafter *A Confederate Nurse*.

²⁶¹ Grace Brown Elmore Diary, 13 Nov. 1860, SCL.

²⁶² South Carolinians were not the only women to write lengthy political letters and then demur that they had no political opinion in the close of the letter. For another example, as well as support for my argument that expressing political opinions during secession was a break from tradition, see Jabour, *Scarlett’s Sisters...*, 221.

them on to victory.’’²⁶³ The clear disconnect between her earlier statements and then docile insistence on merely encouraging men shows women’s discomfort with their assigned roles in these events and the need to adopt the language of mother and sisterhood to justify one’s patriotism and political statements. Like Bacot, McDowall played upon stereotypes to insert themselves into political discourse.

Letters from South Carolina men reveal that they were unaccustomed to and uncomfortable with women discussing current events. Women’s political writings were unique in their openness concerning their fears and anxieties toward future violence. The male members of the Palmer family, for instance, certainly did not fill their letters with religious ruminations about death and destruction. Though men also discussed these topics, they did so with less “excessive sentiment,” lest they forfeit their manhood by expressing fears and anxiety. Certain emotions remained in women’s sphere. Men felt swept away in the “romantic & picturesque element” of sacrificially fighting for their state, already viewing themselves “famous as patriots or fallen in a soldier’s duty,” Sally Baxter Hampton observed.²⁶⁴ The importance of honor among the secessionist elite barred them from doing anything other than showing a brave face and even excitement for the chance to die for one’s country.²⁶⁵ If southern men anticipated war and violence

²⁶³ Susan McDowall Diary, “The signs of the times,” SCL.

²⁶⁴ Sally Baxter Hampton to Samuel B. Ruggles, 05 Jan. 1860, *A Divided Heart*, 89.

²⁶⁵ Drew Faust argues that women were more pragmatic about the prospects of war and more willing to express their fears than the men in their life, because male honor prevented them from expressing anything other than romantic excitement for battle. See Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 13. See also Berry, *All That Makes a Man*; Greenberg, *Honor and Slavery*; Proctor, *Bathed in Blood*.

in the wake of Lincoln's election and secession, it was with enthusiasm, not anxiety. Finally, after years of a perceived decline in southern power on a national stage, they could prove their mastery with noble military might.

Selena Best's husband worried that reading the news would disrupt her pregnancy and urged her to "give yourself no uneasiness about war."²⁶⁶ Best's letter reveals a genuine concern for the health of mother and child and his belief that excessive anxiety could negatively affect her health. Her preoccupation with current events was worth comment by her anxious, and perhaps coddling, husband. Other men reacted to women's fears with annoyance. Edward Wells condescendingly informed his sister that she need not be "in the depths of despair" about what she called "our blessed Union" as there was "no use crying over spilt milk." She, like many others, continuously scanned the newspapers to determine the perpetuity of the Union, an act that her brother claimed would merely "put your eyes out."²⁶⁷ These warnings likely fell upon deaf ears, as South Carolina's elite women continued discussing current events and defending the righteousness of them doing so.

Some women were chided not for caring about politics, but instead for having the wrong sentiments. Poor Elizabeth Grimball, living in the north with her aunt until January 1861, made the mistake of expressing less-than-secessionist statements to her brothers. John's response was measured, if condescending: "you will be wise to keep

²⁶⁶ John Austin Best to Selena Best, 18 Dec. 1860, Best and Hext Family Papers, SCL.

²⁶⁷ Edward L. Wells to Mrs. Thomas L. Wells, 1 Jan. 1861, Smith and Wells Papers, SCL.

Politics out of your letters till you come home and get a few ideas on the subject from Pa.”²⁶⁸ Lewis, however, wrote her five pages berating her for advocating “principles at variance with all reason, and traitorous to the best interest of her State.” He was “grieved” to hear her reasoning: that she thought the South had “friends in the North,” and that Lincoln could not do much with a Democratic majority in Congress. The letter reads like a secessionist manifesto, complete with a copied poem and many words underlined, even declaring that “if there be a man in South Carolina, who proposes delay in action, and a further continuance in this Union, he is a vile traitor and should be hung to the first limb that he can be dragged to.” Perhaps the most loathsome of Lizzie’s words, according to her brother, was that “South Carolina is very ungrateful, and her action does not gain her friends.” He responded with “My God Lizzie! What are you writing? You speak as if we are the aggressors...when the fact is the [sic] we are oppressed...if you owned property ...you would not be content to believe the nonsensical stuff that you hear at the north.” He only desired a response to his epistle if she could “write with true Southern sentiment,” underlining southern twice. Even her mother Meta agreed with her sons, stating that Lizzie received “no correct information from the papers she sees & thinks us all wrong greatly to the disgust of her brothers who are very earnest about the South.” By the time she arrived back in Charleston a month later, Lizzie was converted enough to claim aloud “anyone who says the Carolina troops

²⁶⁸ John Grimball to Elizabeth Grimball, 8 Dec. 1860, Grimball Family Papers, Grimball Family Papers, SHC.

would run, should be shot.”²⁶⁹ It is unclear as to whether Lizzie Grimball’s mind quickly changed upon returning to the South, or if she dreaded further berating from her family.

Perhaps to avoid the condescension Elizabeth Grimball and Selena Best encountered, women frequently tied current events to history in their political writings to lend the weight of the learned past to their commentary about the political present and future. It was considered proper, if not socially necessary, for southern ladies to be well-versed in history and the classics, and they used this knowledge as a vehicle through which to write about secession. Mary Howard Schoolcraft’s *The Black Gauntlet* closes what would have been a subpar Anti-Tom novel with a passage set in the future, which evokes imagery of the Haitian Revolution to strike fear into her readers before explaining that in seceding, her imaginary confederation surrendered “none of its faith in the principle of the Constitution of 1790.” To Schoolcraft, the United States began in 1790, with the “utterly fallacious” Union established by the U.S. Constitution. It was this perfectly “constitutional” Southern Confederacy that, “uncontrolled by a central and centralized government,” put into practice the “original purposes” of the “charter of liberty.” Schoolcraft then quoted the Preamble: “We the People...”²⁷⁰ This future forecasting began with the prediction that the Harpers Ferry raid would inspire others to choose violence over sectional compromise, yet closed not with fear, but a justification of the righteousness of her future South. To secede and form a Southern Confederacy, she argued, was to fulfill the true tenets of the Constitution without shame.

²⁶⁹Lewis Grimball to Elizabeth Grimball, 27 Nov. 1860, Grimball Family Papers, SHC; Grimball Diary, December 1860, Margaret Ann Morris Grimball Family Papers, SCHS; Grimball Diary, 12 Jan. 1861, Journal of Meta Morris Grimball, SHC.

²⁷⁰ Schoolcraft, *The Black Gauntlet*, 565-568.

Though not all South Carolina women wrote novels to defend their state by hearkening back to history, many used the language of the American Revolution to justify their patriotism and found it a proper venue through which to do so. Grace Elmore referred to “our forefathers who resisted being trampled upon” when she expressed her support for South Carolina’s secession. “They fought for their rights and so will we,” she declared.²⁷¹ Susan McDowall wrote a patriotic piece called “The Signs of the Times” in her daybook, in which she claimed that the ghosts of Washington, Jefferson & Adams were “appalled at the scenes which desecrate freedom’s once hallowed soil,” while Calhoun looked down with pride from on high. Reminding her imaginary audience that “In ’76, lives and property were sacrificed in resisting open British aggression,” she concluded that the Black Republicans presented an even deadlier foe and that it was right and just that South Carolina take up the Revolutionary mantle and cry “Resistance unto death!”²⁷² Lizzie Gaillard even used the American Revolution to explain why Virginia might be reluctant to join her state with their “hot South Carolina blood,” reasoning that Virginians were hesitant to leave a nation they created.²⁷³ Here, Gaillard nods to Virginia’s larger role in the founding of the United States, a statement that many proud South Carolinians would not dare make.

Women were not alone in the use of this strategy, as Jefferson Davis himself claimed that the Confederacy “merely asserted the right which the Declaration of

²⁷¹ Grace Brown Elmore Diary, 7 Nov. 1860, SCL.

²⁷² “A Sign of the Times,” Susan McDowall Journal, SHC.

²⁷³ Lizzie Gaillard to Mary Ward, 11 Mar. 1860, Ward Family Papers, Library of Congress.

Independence declared ‘inalienable’” during his inaugural address. Historian William Freehling suggests that the allusion to 1776, rather than the dull legalese of secession, provided a “thrill” that would draw the reluctant to their cause.²⁷⁴ Edmund Ruffin did just that in his writings, evoking the Revolution as the “fundamental symbol of America’s challenge to ‘the regnant consciousness’ and “recalling a time when southern masters forged and defended their sovereignty against mighty, tyrannical powers.²⁷⁵ In many ways, women’s evocation of the American Revolution reinforced their roles as the “republican mothers” of old, fitting into a more passive form of patriotism.²⁷⁶ In 1860, however, South Carolinian women used this socially acceptable language to comment on their political past and future, revealing their slow yet sure steps into political analysis.

Sarah Hale, editor of *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, used the language of revolution in an attempt to unite, rather than separate, the states. Hale’s patriotism is most obvious in her push for Thanksgiving as a national holiday, a measure adopted by President Lincoln in 1863 in many parts due to Hale’s ardent campaigning. Her discussion of Thanksgiving in early 1860 is rife with patriotic rhetoric and a call for national unity, and does not once mention the Pilgrims:

Everything that contributes to bind us in one vast empire together, to quicken the sympathy that makes us feel from the icy North to the sunny South that we are one family, each a member of a great and free Nation, not merely the unit of a remote locality, is worthy of being cherished. We have sought to reawaken and

²⁷⁴ Freehling, *The Road to Disunion: Volume II*, 346.

²⁷⁵ Quoted in Phillips, 132-3.

²⁷⁶ For the concept of “republican motherhood,” see Linda Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press and Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, 1997).

increase this sympathy, believing that the fine filaments of the affections are stronger than laws to keep the Union of our States sacred in the hearts of our people...Let Thanksgiving, our American holiday, give us American books—song, story, and sermon—written expressly to awaken in American hearts the love of home and country, of thankfulness to God, and peace between brethren....all our people, as one Brotherhood, will rejoice together, and give thanks to God for our National, State, and Family blessings.²⁷⁷

For the next two months, Hale pushed for greater national involvement in Thanksgiving. The states who celebrated in 1859, Hale noted, lauded the old states of the “confederacy” that “framed the Constitution and decreed the perpetual Brotherhood of citizens of ‘The United States of North America.’” In that same issue, Hale also commended the accomplishments of the Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association, which saved the property from destruction and decay. Hale used words of patriotism and national unity in the face of sectional tension if not outright hatred in an attempt to prevent a national crisis. She reminded the North and South that they were “one family,” though it fell upon deaf ears.²⁷⁸

Though magazine owner L.A. Godey forbade Hale from publishing statements concerning sectional politics, Hale used her position as editor to create an imagined community of women, united by love and dominion of the home as well as ardent patriotism toward the United States of America. Joseph Michael Sommers argues that Hale’s dedication to promoting American unity caused her to appropriate “seemingly innocuous sentimental modes and devices already present in the magazine...as a thin façade masking her antebellum call for union among women who she believed should

²⁷⁷ Sarah Josepha Hale, “Editor’s Table,” *Godey’s Lady’s Book* 60 (February 1860), 175. Irving Rare Books Library, Columbia, SC.

²⁷⁸ Hale, “Editor’s Table,” *Godey’s Lady’s Book* 60 (April 1860), Irving Rare Books Library.

fight against the impending secession of the southern states from the republic.” The sentimental themes used by Hale were “deliberately overlapping, politically-charged literary and journalistic subject matter generic to both Northerner and Southerner” both to keep up appearances and appease Godey with continuous subscribers.²⁷⁹

Throughout 1860, Hale and *Godey's* published pieces that warned against civil war through coded, feminine language that preserved their southern readership and even their endorsement from the *Charleston Mercury*. One such method was through stories set during the Mexican American War. Historical fiction was a genre open to and appropriate for women writers. The first story, “In a Time of War” by Annie Fraust, is also the title of that month’s frontispiece, in which the elderly mother hesitantly prepared to tell her daughter and grandchild that her husband was wounded fighting in Mexico. After frantically reuniting with her husband at his bedside, she finds that he lost an arm in battle.²⁸⁰ The second story, “From Our Own Correspondence” appeared in October 1860. This time, a young woman discovered through a misprint in the newspaper that her beloved supposedly died in the Mexican American war. After an extended period of suffering, she later reunited with her betrothed who lost an arm, rather than his life in Mexico.²⁸¹

²⁷⁹ Joseph Michael Sommers, “Godey’s Lady’s Book: Sarah Hale and the Construction of Sentimental Nationalism,” *College Literature* 37, no. 3 (Summer 2010): 44. Nicole Tonkovich, *Domesticity with a Difference* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1997), 60.

²⁸⁰ Annie Fraust, “In a Time of War,” *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, 60 (February 1860), Irvine Rare Books Library, 113.

²⁸¹ Virginia de Forrest, “From Our Own Correspondence,” *Godey’s Lady’s Book* 61 (October 1860), Irving Rare Books Library.

Though both tales have happy endings, Hale comments in her editor's note that both the story and the frontispiece of "In a Time of War" were "illustrative of the horrors of war." Additionally, both men lost limbs in consequence. It is perhaps not accidental that the second story, published a month before Lincoln's election, spends significantly more time with the woman's extended suffering before discovering that her lover survived. Hale hoped reminders of wartime suffering, as well as the anxious waiting done by women at home, would dissuade future violence. Though she did not prevent war, she remained subtle enough in her editorial changes to maintain a southern readership throughout secession and the Civil War.

All of the above feminine strategies—evoking religion, the language of motherhood, and the lessons of history—emboldened South Carolina women to increasingly speak their minds as secession approached. By December, Susan Burn felt confident enough to give an update on President Buchanan, predict he would "not coerce, but will protect the forts," and boldly claim that once she received the update, "I can judge better what his real intention is toward us."²⁸² Burn did not shy away from her own independent political consciousness. Notably, most women wrote about secession in passive voice, as if calmly reporting the news. Women such as Adele Allston Sr. and Meta Grimball certainly made their own political assessments, but seldom with such bold first-person singular statements in which they openly revealed that they would be making their own decisions about political events without justification. In November, the *Mercury* ran a letter by an anonymous "Woman of Carolina," who boldly declared "I would rather die, than hold a position of inferiority and vassalage to the North, and the

²⁸² Susan Burn to Charles Burn, 6 Dec. 1860, Burn Family Papers, SCL.

dominant feeling of my heart is, to leave a State where men are too cowardly to protect their women, and too mercenary to risk their money.” The editor noted that the anonymous author and the “spirit that actuates” her should be “an example to the sterner sex.”²⁸³ Suddenly, patriotic women were encouraged.

Young, single women were more likely to be excited, outspoken secessionists than their older, world-weary counterparts, and discussed politics with some passion now. “I know you are a secessionist, and I often wonder if your southern blood is as fiery as mine. I am a regular fire eater,” wrote Babe Sims to her friend from school.²⁸⁴ Grace Elmore, Buckie and Susan Preston, and Grace Howell, all young friends, “made speeches” and “declared for secession” at a small social gathering in Columbia. Though Elmore often discussed secession in bold, vague terms; for instance, declaring that South Carolina’s Minute Men would “stand by their state and...defy the whole world in their effort to secure the right of a state to govern itself,” she also revealed an in-depth understanding of South Carolina politics in her diary. She astutely noticed that “most of those men who are before the public” were formerly cooperationists, such as John Preston, Wade Hampton, and James Chesnut Jr. She found herself more of a “close follower of Calhoun,” like her father “born and bred in States Rights.” Elmore preferred the fire-eating speeches of Robert Barnwell Rhett. Finally, revealing not only Elmore’s headstrong nature but also the new freedom she felt under these political circumstances, she even wrote negatively of Colonel John Preston, future commissioner to Virginia on behalf of the state. Since he sat “on the fence” concerning secession, Elmore wrote, “he

²⁸³ “The Women of Carolina,” 23 Nov. 1860, *The Charleston Mercury*, SCL.

²⁸⁴ Babe Sims to Hattie Palmer, 10 Dec. 1860, *The Palmers*, 277-9.

will have no place unless he soon decides he is a Secessionist,” regardless of how “delightful” a gentleman and scholar he was.²⁸⁵ Elmore’s youth made her a daring secessionist.

Married South Carolinian women were often reluctant secessionists rather than rabid fire-eaters. They faced Lincoln’s election with a resignation to God and a hope that cool heads would prevail and prevent violence. “I hope you will keep cool on Politicks,” Susan Burn wrote in the margins of her letter to her son. She herself was happy the South was united, but hoped it would act “calmly and dignified,” and “look to the Lord in this time of trial and need.” Burn’s fears increased when she heard a rumor that Buchanan sent men to Charleston, and prayed that the “Lord direct us in this dark hour.” She immediately pleaded with her sons to be better, more pious Christians in case the end was near.²⁸⁶ Meta Grimball similarly hoped for a Southern Confederacy and “some happy days” but in the meantime prayed to God to “rule & protect us and give us strength & patience to bear all the ills of life.”²⁸⁷

Sally Baxter Hampton attempted to minimize her discussion of politics, “a crisis that absorbs everything,” but frequently exceeded her self-imposed one-page limit. She failed to control her pen or thoughts, writing that “it is almost impossible to bring one’s mind to anything else now.” “One might as well try to live without oxygen,” she

²⁸⁵ Grace Brown Elmore Diary, 7, 13 Nov. 1860, SCL.

²⁸⁶ Susan Burn to Charles Burn, 12, 16, 29 Nov. 1860, Burn Family Papers, SCL.

²⁸⁷ Grimball Diary, 17 Nov. 1860, Margaret Ann Morris Grimball Family Papers, SCHS.

declared.²⁸⁸ Other women, however, did their best to hold their breaths and resume their normal lives in ways that proved impossible after secession. When Adele Allston Jr. wrote to her brother Charlie in November 1860, she did not say a word about Lincoln and instead described Thanksgiving and the concerts they attended in Charleston.²⁸⁹ Sophie Haskell's letter to her mother dated November 16 simply describes her school in Charleston and issues with other girls. Her only mention of the political state of the nation was her lamentation that "Aunt Anna" needed to go north for her health. Sophie did not think Anna would return by the middle of December, as was promised, thus she may have been considering the barriers that would soon block northern and southern, or at least South Carolinian, travel.²⁹⁰

In limiting their discussion of politics, women strove to fit political news into their everyday lives. The shape of their days, and the mental space given to each aspect of the day, becomes clear in letters and diaries. Most commonly, letters began with talk of politics and the atmosphere surrounding women's respective towns, prioritizing political news when mere months before they would have hesitated to speak on it at all. Still, the transition from politics to social news was abrupt. Susan Burn easily pivoted from news of Stephen Douglas to "the Episcopalians had a three days meeting: some Saints day." Regardless of the events surrounding them, women, especially mothers, still

²⁸⁸ Sally Baxter Hampton to the Baxter Family, 10 Dec. 1860; Sally Baxter Hampton to Anna Baxter, 11 Jan. 1861; Sally Baxter Hampton to George Baxter, 22-3 Dec. 1860, *A Divided Heart*, 72, 98, 83.

²⁸⁹ Adele Allston Vanderhorst to Charles Allston, November 1860, Allston Family Papers, SCHS.

²⁹⁰ Sophie Haskell to Sophia Cheves Haskell, 16 Nov. 1860, Langdon Cheves Papers, SCHS.

fulfilled their roles in reporting all aspects of information to their absent loved ones.²⁹¹ Whether they embraced their new voice in politics or resisted the all-consuming nature of secession as much as they could, no South Carolinian, or even American, could remain silent after South Carolina's secession Convention and Major Robert Anderson's move to Fort Sumter.

Immediately after South Carolina's congressmen voted for the next U.S. president, governor William Gist persuaded them to remain in session to call for a secession convention rather than return home. Gist reasoned that if the state dispersed until regular session began on November 26, secession fervor might fade and give more power to the cooperationists remaining in the state. Haunted by their past failures to secede, South Carolina's elites knew that if they moved forward, stood alone, and faltered again, they would be humiliated.²⁹² Perhaps sensing this lack of momentum, Grace Elmore aired her impatience with her representatives' lack of "haste to push matters...they talk only, and evidently do not wish to act." She frequented the state house after Lincoln's election, and left disappointed. "The people," of South Carolina, "are ahead of the politicians," she wrote.²⁹³ Sure enough, a huge rally at Institute Hall on November 9 in Charleston was so well-received by the public that a delegation from the rally "took the next train to Columbia to call for disunion" (Figure 4.3).²⁹⁴ On November 12, after a few days of frantic talks and correspondence, the South Carolina legislature

²⁹¹ Susan Burn to Charles Burn, 12 Nov. 1860, Burn Family Papers, SCL.

²⁹² Freehling, *The Road to Disunion: Volume II*, 352.

²⁹³ Grace Brown Elmore Diary, 10 Nov. 1860, SCL.

²⁹⁴ Fraser, 243.

finalized their plans for a state secession convention in December. In retrospect, the fact that they legislature managed to attain the required two-thirds majority to do so in a mere week's time was remarkable.²⁹⁵ South Carolina men and women, therefore, spent the rest of the month preparing for the convention and knowing what action to take, quite the inverse of what happened after they seceded.

Now that South Carolinians knew that their burning questions would be answered in December, they happily took part in the activities surrounding the impending convention. Residents and visitors described “lecturing and serenading” all throughout town.²⁹⁶ Women attended and participated in invigorating political events, many for the first time. The enthusiasm was contagious, especially for young women as they met men outside their normal family circle.²⁹⁷ Young Babe Sims made a flag for a rally in Columbia and described the atmosphere to Hattie Palmer: “How I wish you were with us. We go to the Legislature and hear all the speeches.”²⁹⁸ Columbia's atmosphere in December provided a delightful change of pace for Sims. Upon learning the initial location for the Convention in Columbia's Athenaeum Hall, which barred women from entering, elite women took to the papers to protest. “The daughters of Carolina,” they

²⁹⁵ This is an oversimplification of the week that passed before the resolution was made. For more on the many deals, speeches, and coincidences that took place, see Freehling, *The Road to Disunion: Volume II*, 395-418.

²⁹⁶ Susan Burn to Charles Burn, 24 Nov. 1860, Burn Family Papers, SCL.

²⁹⁷ Anya Jabour writes that the coming of the Civil War was a time for relaxed courtship rules, and thus a brief moment of sexual freedom, especially for young women. See Jabour, “‘Days of lightly-won and lightly-held hearts’: Courtship and Coquetry in the Southern Confederacy” in *Weirding the War: Stories from the Civil War's Ragged Edges* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2011), 95-121.

²⁹⁸ Babe Sims to Hattie Palmer, 10 Dec. 1860, *The Palmers*, 277-9.

claimed in a letter to the *Tri-Weekly South Carolinian*, “will not admit that their patriotism is less than that of their sons.” Taking care to not appear too political in their protest, they claimed that they by no means championed women’s rights like their northern counterparts, and subtly threatened men to “value our smiles, or dread our frowns.” Though they openly approved separation from the oppressive North, these women did not describe their excitement or passion, but rather their “intense anxiety” with which they looked forward to the Convention.²⁹⁹ Secessionist women, in the most-outspoken form of political expression yet, looked ahead to disunion with worry and care for their country.

On December 17, 1860, over one hundred and sixty delegates convened in Columbia to decide the fate of their state and the country. The largest delegation, of course, was the twenty-three representatives from Charleston. Yet shortly after they began, rumors of smallpox in the city forced the convention to flee to Charleston. This move did not pass without its critics: William Porcher Miles boasted that he would not move until his state left the Union, and that fleeing from smallpox revealed South Carolina’s cowardice. Others cried that these rumors were a ruse to move the voters to the more-secessionist Charleston. To compromise, the delegates pledged to secede upon arrival at Charleston, and hopped aboard the 4 a.m. train to the Lowcountry.³⁰⁰ Once the delegates arrived, they only needed three days to iron out the details of the unanimously-passed secession resolutions, even though delegates had to leave the noisy Institute Hall

²⁹⁹ *Tri Weekly South Carolinian*, “To Mr. C. H. Suber, Member from Newberry” from “The Ladies,” 15 Dec. 1860, SCL.

³⁰⁰ Fraser, 244; Freehling, *The Road to Disunion: Volume II*, 421.

and reconvene at St. Andrew's Hall to focus behind closed doors. Though Upcountry South Carolinians were far less likely to favor preventative strikes against the Union, and often reined in their Lowcountry counterparts, statewide planter solidarity won the day.³⁰¹ On December 20, 1860, South Carolina adopted the Ordinance of Secession. Now it was time for relieved celebration and emotional catharsis.

At 6:45 pm on December 20, the convention delegates approached the crowds surrounding Institute Hall. On the steps of the building, they held up the Ordinance, which was greeted with a “thunderous shout.” Contemporary visitors estimated around 3000 attendants in the crowd as each delegate ostentatiously signed the document. The Ordinance itself was an elaborate production—twenty-three by twenty-eight inches in size, stamped in silver by the “Great Seal in South Carolina.” Robert Barnwell Rhett, celebrating his three decades of secessionist efforts, thanked God from his knees when his turn came to sign the document. This pageantry took over two hours until, finally, the “Independent Commonwealth of South Carolina” was proclaimed at 9:15 p.m. Cheers erupted. Spectators flooded the steps, taking palmetto tree bark as souvenirs. Bands and rifle companies crowded the street in a cacophony of celebration, engaging in an auditory battle with church bells. Towns in peripheral states held parades when South Carolina, the vanguard, seceded.³⁰² When the news reached small towns like Society Hill, newly-formed local militias fired their guns in salute to independence. South Carolinians burned turpentine barrels and placed celebratory illuminations in the windows of homes and

³⁰¹ Smith, *The Smell of Battle...*, 23.;Freehling, *The Road to Disunion: Volume II*, 361.

³⁰² Freehling, *The Road to Disunion: Volume II*, 422; Channing, 285.

businesses.³⁰³ Those quarantined in Columbia, like Grace Elmore and her mother, were forced to “have a hurrah all to ourselves,” but even this shuttered city was filled with the sound of bells proclaiming the news.³⁰⁴ Hattie Palmer expressed her desire to be amidst the action and remarked that “women would assemble in uniform and armed in Charleston such is the excitement.”³⁰⁵ The atmosphere in Charleston was like a sparked fire, and the state of South Carolina became swept up in the flames.

These celebrations, however, often adopted a mournful tone. Public speeches portrayed secession as a solemn, grievous, yet necessary event. Fire-eater newspapers used this imagery of death to accuse the North of murder, and women like Keziah Brevard blamed Lincoln and Vice President Hannibal Hamlin for the country’s death.³⁰⁶ Secessionists deliberately evoked political and public mourning to help the populace transition quickly and remove the possibility of reconciliation.³⁰⁷ Women’s letters and diaries reveal that this mourning was not merely a political ploy, but a genuine emotional response. Three days before secession, Sally Baxter Hampton wrote that her adopted state was shrouded in “heavy sorrow....There are but few voices that do not falter—few eyes that are not dimmed....Men seem quite aware that they are moving towards self destruction.” Even Charleston in late 1860 was not entirely celebratory, according to Adele Allston Sr. Though there was “a good deal of excitement about politics,” she

³⁰³ Susan Burn to Charles Burn, 25 Dec. 1860, Burn Family Papers, SCL.

³⁰⁴ Grace Elmore Diary, 23 Dec. 1860, Grace Elmore Papers, SCL.

³⁰⁵ Hattie Palmer Diary, 11 Jan. 1861, *The Palmers*, 285-6.

³⁰⁶ Brevard Diary, 14 Nov. 1860, *Plantation Mistress*, 51.

³⁰⁷ Woods, 223.

wrote, the town itself was “very quiet. Money is very scarce, rice does not sell and so every one has to be saving.”³⁰⁸ Fully aware of her economic and political context, Allston worried about the economic consequences of secession, which only worsened when the war began.

Young women also felt conflicted toward their state’s secession, though they wholeheartedly supported the plight of South Carolina and longed for the romance and action of war. Babe Sims passionately discussed secession, but even this energetic eighteen-year-old found herself contemplating “nothing but the dark times which hide a halo of glory from our country.” Anna Kirkland described her romantic dances in New York, declaring that while Lincoln was “rotten” and she had become “quite a politician and detest Black Republicans,” she did meet and defend many “kind-hearted” northerners, who “love the south and hate abolitionists.” Kirkland danced with an attractive young northern man that identified as “by no means an abolitionist. He hates them as much as I do,” who remarked that he would “give anything to go south.” Amidst secession fervor, women who simultaneously supported South Carolina and hated Lincoln still thought fondly of many northerners. These acknowledgements likely dampened the excitement towards separation.³⁰⁹

Though women reacted to Lincoln’s election and secession with open anxiety, most closed their writings with religious resignation, or at the very least, belief in God’s

³⁰⁸ Sally Baxter Hampton to Samuel B. Ruggles, 14 Dec. 1860, *A Divided Heart*, 74-5; Adele Allston to Charles Allston, 15 Nov. 1860, Allston Family Papers, SCHS.

³⁰⁹ Babe Sims to Hattie Palmer, 10 Dec. 1860, Anna E. Kirkland to Harriet Palmer, 24 Nov. 1860, *The Palmers*, 274-9.

will. Keziah Brevard mourned Lincoln's election with customary exclamatory grief but declared that "If there is a crisis...we all lay down our lives sooner than free our slaves in our midst."³¹⁰ To Brevard, Lincoln's election meant emancipation and therefore, chaos and death. Fighting back was her only solution. Upon hearing of South Carolina's secession, Grace Elmore took a fatalistic approach: "'Tis hard to say what the other states will do, but as the old hymn says, 'Do thou thy part, And leave to God the rest.' And if we die, what then? After all, life is nothing but honor." Though she feared the outbreak of violence immediately after Lincoln's election, by the time of South Carolina's secession Ada Bacot declared herself "one of Carolina's sons ready to stand by her." Bacot voiced her many misgivings but reasoned "'tis hardly to be supposed that the north will see us go out of the union, without making some effort to prevent, or bring us back. If she should there must be war. My heart does not quail."³¹¹ Anxious women actively invested themselves in the southern cause by witnessing and attending military drills, sewing uniforms, and crafting patriotic cockades. The Emmet Guards thanked the ladies of Columbia for volunteering to make uniforms and sent out the call to the newspaper to attract more female assistance.³¹² South Carolina's women were mournful yet resolved patriots, and they expressed these conflicting emotions in their letters and diaries.

³¹⁰ Brevard Diary, 9 Nov. 1860, *Plantation Mistress*, 50.

³¹¹ Grace Brown Elmore Diary, 23 Dec. 1860, SCL; Bacot Diary, 12 Dec. 1860, *A Confederate Nurse*, 19-20.

³¹² *Tri-Weekly South Carolinian*, 5, 16 Jan. 1861, SCL.

These solemn emotions mirrored—and even perhaps helped shape—the tone of Confederate politicians’ speeches. President-elect Jefferson Davis and his contemporaries memorialized the Union as dead in order to look forward to a new Confederacy with God’s blessing. Conceptualizing the Union as deceased prevented reconciliation, and the familiar language of mourning allowed Confederates to grieve yet look forward to a future with God on their side.³¹³ During Caroline Gilman’s “solemn night watches” for the cannons of “death and destruction,” she felt “the inestimable value of Christ’s revelation.” She concluded her letter willing and determined “to sacrifice every thing to Christian truth.” Susan Burn wrote that though the world was consumed with “wars and the memory of war,” the “Scriptures must be fulfilled, god will over time until the predictions are accomplished. Let us look to him in this day of trouble, for in him alone is our *help*.”³¹⁴ Adele Allston Sr. predicted “we are to have a war...It makes me sick to think about it.” Her solution was to “pray, and put our trust in the good God who has helped us heretofore, and who alone is able to help us, even as he helped David.” Even Brevard, who was in her heart “opposed to breaking up this beautiful union” resolved to “act for my home, home of my forefathers for three generations” who fought and struggled for “right & justice.”³¹⁵ These women reconciled their doubts and

³¹³ See Woods’ chapter, “Mourning and the Mobilization of Reluctant Secessionists, 1860-1861,” in *Emotional and Sectional Conflict in the Antebellum United States*, 217-231.

³¹⁴ Caroline Howard Gilman to “Children,” 20 Jan. 1861, Caroline Howard Gilman Papers, SCHS; Susan Burn to Charles Burn, 25 Dec. 1860, Burn Family Papers, SCL.

³¹⁵ Adele Allston to Charles Allston, 16 Jan. 1861, Allston Family Papers, SCHS; Brevard Diary, 8, Jan. 1861, *Plantation Mistress*, 69-70.

support for their new nation by submitting themselves to God's will. Religion helped bridge fear and grief with a Christian resignation and acquiescence to future bloodshed. They would need this religious faith to make it through the next few months of breathless waiting.

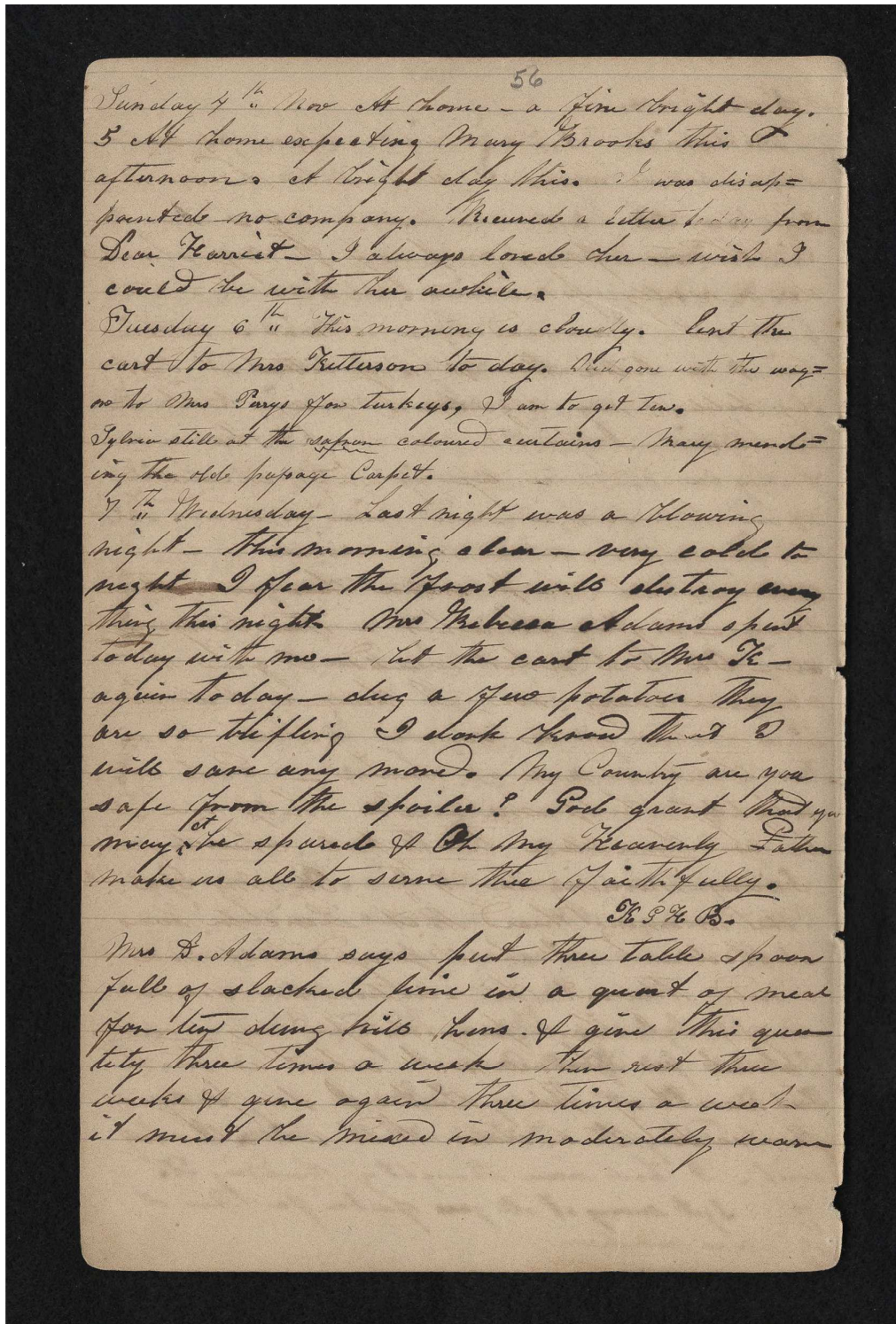


Figure 4.1. Keziah Brevard's diary, November 1860. Note the multiple entries per single page, and the brevity of the entries. Compare to Figure 4.2. Image courtesy South Caroliniana Library.

58

down our lines sooner than free our slaves
 in our midst - No soul on this earth
 is more willing for justice than I am
 but the idea of being mixed up with
 free blacks is horrid!! I must trust
 in God that he will not forget us
 as unworthy as we are - Lord save
 us - I would give my life to save
my Country. I have never been opposed
 to giving up slavery if we could send
 them out of our Country - I have often
 wished I had been born in just such
 a country - with all our religious & civic
 rights & liberties with none of them in
 our midst - if the North had let
 us alone - the Master & the servant
 were happy with our advantages - but
 we had had wild wretches ever making
 things ten fold worse than they would
 have been & from my experience my
 own negroes are as happy as I am -
 happy - I never raise a whip to my ser-
 vants without cause & they give me
 impudence if I find the least fault,
 this is of the women the men are not
 half so impudent as the women are.
 I have left a serious & what has
 been an all absorbing theme to a com-
 = on one - but the die is cast

Figure 4.2. Brevard's diary entry reacting to Lincoln's election. This entry occurs only two pages later than Figure 4.1. This entry began on the page before and will continue onto the next page. Note the change in handwriting and underlining of words, which express her feelings about the event. Image courtesy South Caroliniana Library.

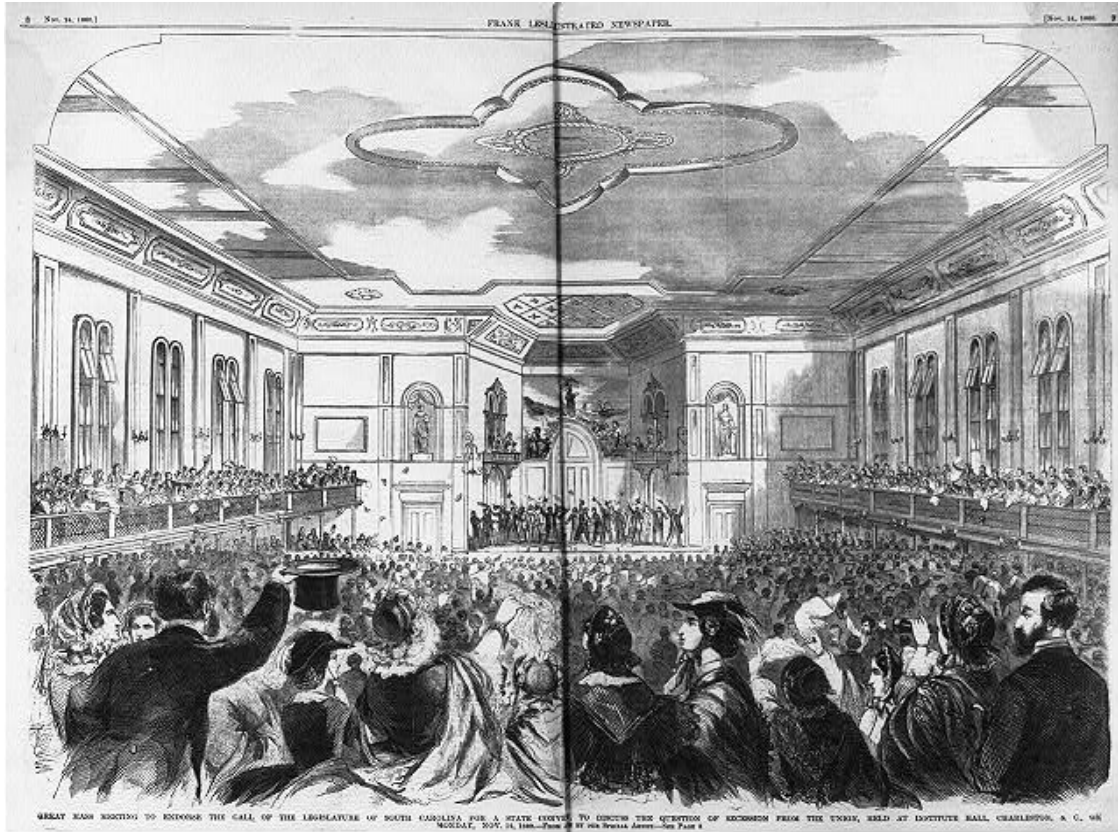


Figure 4.3: “Great mass meeting to endorse the call of the Legislature of South Carolina for a state convention to discuss the question of secession from the Union, held at Institute Hall, Charleston, S.C., on Monday, Nov. 12, 1860.”

This image captures the contagious excitement felt by Charlestonians, and the effect these crowds in favor of secession had on South Carolina’s legislature in Columbia. Notice the women in the back of the image. These finely dressed ladies, though in the back, stand shoulder to shoulder with men in their political engagement. *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* 11.261 (24 Nov. 1860), 8-9. Photo Courtesy Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

CHAPTER 5: The Waiting Game, December 1860-March 1861

Shortly before the Secession Convention, Susan Burn predicted that President James Buchanan would not “coerce” South Carolina upon secession but would “protect the Forts.”³¹⁶ She was astute as ever: six days after South Carolina seceded, Major Robert Anderson moved his troops to Fort Sumter in the dead of night. The fort, with its sixty-foot walls, was not yet completed, but was a far cry more impressive than the walls of Fort Moultrie, which were so cracked and covered with sand that cows were able to “wander over the parapets and into the fort to graze.” Charlestonians awoke to find the older fort evacuated, and eighty-two U.S. soldiers manning Fort Sumter, the guardian of Charleston Harbor.³¹⁷ This military maneuver, though nonaggressive, reminded South Carolinians of the consequences of their actions, sooner than many would have preferred.

In his analysis of the gendered nature with which men and women predicted the future in the nineteenth century, Jason Phillips writes that men “anticipated war” as they could look forward to taking action, while women were left “passively expecting” war, powerless and waiting for “the future to arrive in the mail.” Without a chance to control their futures, it is not surprising that South Carolina women were far more likely to fear

³¹⁶ Susan Burn to Charles Burn, 6 Dec. 1860, Burn Family Papers, SCL.

³¹⁷ Fraser, 245-6. For an auditory description of Anderson’s stealth transfer to Fort Sumter, See Smith, *The Smell of Battle...*, 10, 29.

the personal consequences of war.³¹⁸ For a brief moment during secession winter, 1860-1861, both men and women were forced to undergo this passive expectation, as they waited with bated breath to receive the orders to strike the Fort or be struck themselves.

This chapter interrogates this tense, breathless period of what we now know as secession winter, roughly November 1860 to February 1861. It reveals the effects of stillness and silence on women's mental health, as they associated the gloomy clouds above their heads with the clouds on their political horizons. Some women used writing to relieve their tensions, and others found they could not write. Those that did utilized popular conventions of the sentimental novel to express their political misgivings and described their subdued holidays. It closes with yet another moment of catharsis: the siege of Fort Sumter.

In *The Cotton Kingdom*, published in 1861, Frederick Law Olmstead described the military aura that surrounded Charleston. Even in peacetime, he wrote, "the cannon in position on the parade ground, the citadel...with its martial ceremonies, the frequent parades of militia...the numerous armed police, might lead one to imagine that the town was in a state of siege or revolution."³¹⁹ With the threat at Sumter, this atmosphere increased tenfold. "These soldiers must feel so queer," noted Grace Elmore. "they have always been on such pleasant social terms with Charleston, often entertained at the houses. Now they are faced by guns and troops ready to fire if any attempt is made to

³¹⁸ Phillips, 205.

³¹⁹ Quoted in Freehling, *The Road to Disunion: Volume II*, 574.

supply them with provisions or increase the number of men.”³²⁰ “The whole of South Carolina,” wrote Sally Baxter Hampton, “is at this moment a gunpowder mine & anything so trivial as a cast-off cigar may serve to ignite it.” She feared “the enthusiasm & excitement of so many unoccupied men.”³²¹ These men, so recently filled with joy and action, now chafed at being told to sit still and wait when the enemy was within sight. Women, on the other hand, found that peace merely gave them more time to dwell upon the violence yet to come. “All come so fast one can’t keep up with it all...there has been nothing but waiting and hoping and waiting,” wrote Grace Elmore.³²² Eventually, writes historian Stephen Berry, “when political affairs have achieved sufficient gravity, time begins to warp. The months that stretch out between the election and Sumter become a hurtling calm, a furious wait...timeless and brief, exhilarating and terrifying.”³²³ Women in South Carolina especially experienced this temporal whiplash, and it took a toll on both their mental states and their prose.

For most of secession winter the only movement was that of those scrambling to make it home before new territorial lines were violently drawn. Those who wished to go north for their health moved quickly, knowing that they might soon be prevented from doing so. By December 1860, only sixty-seven girls remained at Limestone College, with over half their numbers returning home in anticipation of political turmoil,

³²⁰ Grace Elmore Diary, March 1861, Grace Elmore Papers, SCL.

³²¹ Sally Baxter Hampton to Samuel Ruggles, 05 Jan. 1861; Sally Baxter Hampton to Anna Baxter, 11 Jan. 1861, *A Divided Heart*, 91, 97.

³²² Grace Elmore Diary, March 1861, Grace Elmore Papers, SCL

³²³For more on secession and perceptions of time, see Berry, 164-5.

regardless of whether they lived in the “Independent Republic of South Carolina.”³²⁴ Some were able to maintain social ties to the north: Isabella Cheves continued correspondence with her sister Annie in Anneswood, New York, without animosity. Perhaps this was because Annie herself lived “as if there was no war. I hear of great suffering in New York [City], but we live so quietly in the country that we see nothing of it.” Others had financial interests: Ann Vanderhorst worried that she would lose her property in New York, which she referred to as her “pin money.”³²⁵

Returning home from Europe was particularly tricky. The Prestons of Columbia made it home from their two-year tour of Europe in time for secession, but the Pringles studying abroad were less fortunate. Mary’s sister Jane Lynch Pringle was also in Europe with her daughter. J.R. Pringle Ravenel remained trapped in Paris as late as fall of 1861, and his letters to his father had to be smuggled in by blockade runners. Of Mary Pringle’s children, Julius was in Paris, James and Charles in Berlin, and their three cousins were in Heidelberg. John Julius Pringle returned through Canada, careful to erase every sign that he was from South Carolina from his luggage and person. James and Charles Pringle made it back by July 1861, and their cousins by February 1862 with the assistance of a Middleton family relative in Philadelphia.³²⁶ Though the Pringles and others encountered countless dangers in finding their way home, their most devastating separation was the case of seven-year-old Hesse Mitchell, “our little fugitive.” Mitchell,

³²⁴ Flora Burn to Charles Burn, 10 Dec. 1860, Burn Family Papers, SCL.

³²⁵ Annie Hunter to Isabella Cheves, 26 Jun. 1861, Langdon Cheves Family Papers, SCHS; Annie Hunter to Harriott Middleton, 21 Jul. 1862, Middleton Family Papers, SCHS.

³²⁶ Côté, *Mary’s World*, 192-193.

visiting her grandparents in Charleston, became trapped in the South after the fall of Fort Sumter. Do not “let our little one forget us or think of us as Lincolnites,” wrote her mother Mary Pringle Mitchell, a staunch Confederate sympathizer living in Connecticut. The Mitchells would never see their daughter again—Hesse became ill in early December and died two days after Christmas 1861.³²⁷

Those who did make it home for the holidays encountered a subdued yuletide. Rather than celebrating secession and their new country, women looked fearfully toward a new year filled with violence. “God only knows” the events to come, wrote Keziah Brevard. “We are all in the dark as to the future,” she complained, and this helplessness weighted heavily on her mind. On Christmas Eve, Brevard despondently lamented that “though I hope and pray for peace I see nothing to hope for.”³²⁸ Sally Baxter Hampton attempted “some semblance of rejoicing,” but “assuredly no-one can feel the spirit for merriment and festivity” in the face of such “gloomy” times and heavy hearts. “Daily, nay hourly” Hampton felt “anguished” when contemplating the fate of the Union.³²⁹ Flora Burn noted that Christmas Day in Society Hill was “a dull day here in many respects.”³³⁰ Some found the heart to joke, like Sophia Cheves Haskell, when she noted that “we will have but a very quiet Christmas and not much for you to do...unless you

³²⁷ Côté, 209-211.

³²⁸ Brevard Diary, 24, 28 Dec. 1860, *Plantation Mistress*, 62-3.

³²⁹ Sally Baxter Hampton to George Baxter, 22 Dec. 1860, Sally Baxter Hampton to Samuel B. Ruggles, 1 Jan. 1861, *A Divided Heart*, 79-83, 85-8.

³³⁰ Flora Burn to Susan Burn, 25 Dec. 1860, Burn Family Papers, SCL.

enlist in Alec's proposed company of mounted rifles." Even South Carolina College's commencement ball, normally a signature of the holiday season, was cancelled.³³¹

New Year's celebrations proved no different. Rather than celebrating, Ada Bacot's last entry for 1860 reiterated that her children were "better off" in heaven than on earth during a "revolution." A "half melancholy feeling...the shadow of some ill about to befall" thwarted Bacot's feeble attempts at holiday cheer.³³² Brevard resumed with urgency her prayers that God "take me to thee," wishing for death instead of facing a new, uncertain year. On the final day of 1860, Brevard awoke from a nightmare featuring fires and "fearful" clouds overhead. It would be difficult to ignore this omen. First Lady of South Carolina Lucy Holcombe Pickens, hearing that U.S. ship the *Harriet Lane* was headed for Charleston wrote that the new year "has opened darkly on our unhappy land."³³³ Then, as now, the holiday season was a time for family reunions, filling even antebellum mansions to the brim with extended family and friends. It became increasingly difficult to celebrate such an occasion when some families were already torn apart by disunion. This irony was not lost on South Carolinians in late 1860, and very few were able to celebrate the holidays despite their triumphant secession.

The silence and anticipatory stillness of Charleston during secession winter caused anxieties to grow. This was compounded by the belief that for women, idleness

³³¹ The commencement itself occurred without the usual balls or processions. Sophia Cheves Haskell to Sophie Haskell, 20 Dec. 1860, Langdon Cheves Papers, SCHS.

³³² Bacot Diary, 28 Dec., 31 Dec. 1860, *A Confederate Nurse*, 21-3.

³³³ Brevard Diary, 28 Dec. 1860, *Plantation Mistress*, 64; Lucy Pickens to Beverly Lafayette Holcombe, 1 Jan. 1861, Pickens-Dugas Family Papers, SHC.

was considered a sin that easily led to laziness and melancholic thoughts and behavior.³³⁴ Many women found that stillness disrupted their ability to sleep at night. Grimball, knowing that an attack on Sumter would happen “even at a great loss of life,” woke up in the middle of the night from fearful dreams, praying “most heartily to my Father in Heaven.”³³⁵ Keziah Brevard had troubled dreams filled with clouds “over my head” and “raging, smoking fires.” Brevard’s subconscious dreamed both in anticipation of events to come, and to handle extreme events that also occupied her waking hours.³³⁶ In Charleston, Caroline Gilman could not sleep at all when “any moment may wake the Fort cannon, which is the signal of death and destruction.” She began her “solemn night watches” in January—she had months of suspense remaining. “God help us for Christ’s sake,” wrote Lucy Pickens, “for we are very illy [sic] prepared for war.”³³⁷ Brevard, Gilman, and Pickens closed their writings with reference to religion and God’s will. Powerless to change their circumstance and feeling helpless in ways that would only increase during the war, women prayed to God for deliverance.

Women took to their diaries, letters, and bibles to help relieve their physical and mental stressors over political events, but they never successfully banished the thoughts from their minds. Nor did they often find writing pleasurable—just necessary to cope

³³⁴ See Jabour, *Scarlett’s Sisters*, 106.

³³⁵ Grimball Diary, 12 Jan. 1861, Journal of Meta Morris Grimball, SHC.

³³⁶ Brevard Diary, 31 Dec. 1860, *Plantation Mistress*, 66. For more on the significance of dreaming, see White, *Midnight in America: Darkness, Sleep, and Dreams during the Civil War*.

³³⁷ Caroline Howard Gilman to “my dear children,” 20 Jan. 1861, Caroline Howard Gilman Papers, SCHS; Lucy Holcombe Pickens to Beverly Lafayette Holcombe, 1 Jan. 1861, Pickens-Dugas Family Papers, SHC.

with their current circumstances. Unable to cope with their overwhelming anxiety, women took action: they wrote. Isolated from society during secession winter, Sally Baxter Hampton used her letters as a pleasurable “out-let.”³³⁸ Others did not take similar pleasure in the activity of writing, yet still found it a necessity. Though diaries and letters from winter 1860-1861 did not bring happiness, they provided a necessary release for women during this unbearably tense waiting period. Their writings, however, failed to stymie women’s preoccupation with current events. Ada Bacot described “constant fear” about Sumter and an ever-present “uneasy feeling” as if “looking for something.” This “constant expectation of bad news” sent Bacot into a depression: “my life is becoming a burden...I never feel lonely but I take no interest in any thing, every thing I do is mechanical. Nothing gives me the least pleasure.” Despite her earlier assertion of readiness for battle, in these anxious later entries Bacot wished for a continued peace.³³⁹ Hattie Palmer’s young friends also felt the stresses that war could bring. “I long for our country to be free” Babe Sims declared, reaffirming her patriotism, “but when I hear of the profanity and the disregard to God’s holy commandments I wonder that God doesn’t leave us to ourselves.”³⁴⁰

Others, like Sally Baxter Hampton, used their writing “out-let” to achieve some sense of mastery over their circumstances by recording events as voices of authority. No longer did Keziah Brevard’s diary contain brief entries detailing chores and harvests. Instead, she wrote until 2 a.m. in the morning, pleading over and over for God to “save

³³⁸ Sally Baxter Hampton to Lucy Baxter, 18 Jan. 1861, *A Divided Heart*, 100.

³³⁹ Bacot Diary, 24 Jan., 24 Feb. 1860, *A Confederate Nurse*, 26-8.

³⁴⁰ Babe Sims to Hattie Palmer, 6 Feb. 1861, *The Palmers*, 289-91

this dear County...My Country!!! My Country!!!.”³⁴¹ Gone were the days where women skirted past political events in their correspondence or defended their “unladylike speech.” Now, they could not help but speak, or at least write. Nearly every letter or diary contained at least one brief update on the status of the ever-growing Confederacy. Often, that update was simply “no change,” or “Sumter still not taken.” Even Jane Allston, at the tender age of eleven, felt it her duty to report that “Anderson is not dead” in her letter to her brother, though she noted that the rest of the family surely already included this and more in their own correspondence.³⁴² Emma Holmes began her wartime diary in early 1861 as a “record of events which mark the formation and growth of our great Southern Confederacy.” She regretted that she did begin sooner.³⁴³ During the Civil War, writes Stephen Stowe, “a diarist wrote to fit brazen war into her life, not to fit her life into war. So she backstopped the strange new things with familiar things...She practiced writing the day and so learned what the practice of war does to time.”³⁴⁴ Though war had not begun, South Carolina’s women were already trying to fit national events into their lives in a similar manner.

Other women, however, found they could not bring themselves to write in such an emotional state and found writing difficult during these troubling times. The Allstons spent such an “anxious winter, never knowing what a day might bring forth,” that they

³⁴¹ Brevard Diary, 31 Dec. 1860, *Plantation Mistress*, 60.

³⁴² Jane Louise Allston to Charles Allston, 30 Mar. 1861, Allston Family Papers, SCHS. The firing on Fort Sumter had not yet begun—it is possible that this was her way of noting that there was no change within the fort.

³⁴³ Quoted in Gardner, *Blood and Irony...*, 18

³⁴⁴ Stowe, *Keep the Days...*, 48.

coped by staying silent. “When public affairs are this disturbed it is difficult...to write of what necessarily fills so large a space in ones thoughts, thus it was that I was reduced to silence,” wrote Adele Jr. Meta Grimball felt the same. Reporting on the lack of action surrounding Fort Sumter in January led to a contemplation of her many family members stationed near Morris Island. The thought was too much—she immediately pivoted to the social visits made that day. “If I were to allow myself to think of these things,” Grimball acknowledged, “I should be wild; but there is no use.”³⁴⁵ Women chose silence as self-defense to cope with their increasing anxieties.

Whether they wrote or remained silent, South Carolina’s elite women underwent extreme anxieties that led to sleepless nights, distracted thoughts, and even physical weaknesses. Before Sigmund Freud redefined anxiety as a psychological term that referred to one’s unconscious, anxiety and nervousness were considered physiological manifestations of one’s literal nervous system. To nineteenth-century doctors, the governance of the nervous system made the human body unstable and continuously vulnerable to the environments surrounding it, whether it be work, climate, or food and drink. Both body and mind, therefore, were exposed to environmental pressures. Nerves gathered environmental information from the senses, and the nerves in turn cued muscle movements. A state of anxiety could disrupt the body’s entire performance. Women,

³⁴⁵ Adele Allston to Mrs. Labrobe, April 1861, Allston Family Papers, SCHS; Grimball Diary, 12 Jan. 1861, Journal of Meta Morris Grimball, SHC.

believed to be more emotional and therefore more vulnerable to anxiety, often felt paralyzed by nerves, and blamed the political environment for their suffering.³⁴⁶

During secession winter, women equated their melancholy moods to the weather. They were not alone in comparing weather to politics. Historian Stephen Berry describes the period between secession and Fort Sumter as the eye of a furious storm with southerners at the center, “safe for the moment but watching nervously as a storm raged about them, beyond their power and their ken.”³⁴⁷ Mississippi congressman Reuben Davis wrote that “the storm cloud of anarchy and blood and carnage and desolation has gathered darkly over our country...its thunders and lightnings come together, telling it of its close proximities” when he contemplated the impact of John Brown’s Raid. In antebellum America, war was often written as a storm driven by impersonal forces, either by the Christian God or a God of Chaos.³⁴⁸ South Carolinians set this whirlwind of events in motion, but eventually found themselves holding on for dear life lest they get swept away.

³⁴⁶ Justine S. Murison, *The Politics of Anxiety in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 2-6. During the Civil War, a diagnosis of “nostalgia” or “homesickness” was enough to send a soldier home on furlough, as doctors believed that a soldier with homesickness (perhaps what we today call depression) that was already injured was more likely to die of his injuries. See Susan J. Matt, *Homesickness: An American History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011). For more on diseases involving the nerves that were supposedly more common for women, see works on hysteria, such as Andrew Scull, *Hysteria: The Disturbing History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

Though today anxiety rests in the realm of psychology, the nineteenth-century idea of mental health was not entirely pseudoscience, as one’s mental health often has physical effects.

³⁴⁷ Berry, 164.

³⁴⁸ Quoted in Phillips, 96, 196.

South Carolina's elite women often described the events leading to secession as a gathering storm.³⁴⁹ Babe Sims asked Harriet Palmer to "pray to the God of battles to girdle our ship that the storm may not overwhelm her." Bacot described "the cloud which envelops our galant little state" as "[d]ark as the mantle of the night" when discussing South Carolina politics.³⁵⁰ Weeks of rainy weather followed South Carolina's secession and women noted this symbolism. Flora Burn dubbed her Christmas day "dull" due both to "clouds in the Heavens; and clouds threatening our political horizon, all the world appears to be agitated at the same time." Caroline Gilman described her tear-filled morning at church as a "gloomy" Sabbath, for both the prospects of violence and the rainy weather itself. Hattie Palmer, whose letters revealed an ardent wish for secession, expressed her fear that the poor weather at the beginning of 1861 was an omen for troubled times ahead.³⁵¹

Keziah Brevard, a *femme sole* planter, paid a great deal of attention to the weather. She borrowed heavily from the conventions of sentimental novels, equating her moods to the weather more frequently than her peers. On the day of Lincoln's election, Keziah Brevard described the cloudy, drizzly day and mused that "Nature seems to be weeping o'er our cause." In her writings, the weather is an actor that determines her day, with "foreboding clouds" that made days "sad...with nothing to cheer us but the fact that

³⁴⁹ Stowe, *Keep the Days...*, 150.

³⁵⁰ Babe Sims to Hattie Palmer, 10 Dec. 1860, *The Palmers*, 277-9; Bacot Diary, 12 Dec. 1860, *A Confederate Nurse*, 19-20.

³⁵¹ Flora Burn to Susan Burn, 25 Dec. 1860, Burn Family Papers, SCL;. Caroline Howard Gilman to "My Dear Children," 30 Dec. 1860, Caroline Howard Gilman Papers, SCHS; Hattie Palmer Diary, 4 Jan. 1861, *The Palmers*, 283.

we have warm rooms.” The “genial sun” had the power to pierce the dark clouds, and Brevard frequently noted when a sunny day was emotionally uplifting. Even the blessing of sunshine could not keep Brevard’s thoughts from going south, however, writing in February 1861 that “the sun is shining now... This is cheering—I wish I could foresee when our country’s prospects would cheer up & let us go to work with hopes of peace & happiness.”³⁵²

Perhaps Brevard allowed the weather to control her mood because she so frequently associated it with messages from God. Frequently, she declared, awful weather made it “seem God is angry with us,” and sometimes, this was deserved: “it matters not how God frowns on us from the elements, we feel we can submit to it.” Though Brevard’s comparisons of current events and moods to the weather were not unique of her social class, the earnestness and frequency with which she made these comparisons can perhaps be attributed to an anxious personality. After all, Brevard, old, lonely, and often ill, also begged for God to “fit me for Heaven & leave me not to hear the dying groans of my Country” far more than others women her age, like Adele Allston and Susan Burn.³⁵³

South Carolina women emulated the dramatic writing styles of their favorite books when linking the weather to their own moods and political climate. During secession winter, women’s correspondence and diary entries were heavily influenced by

³⁵² Brevard Diary, 8 Nov. 1860, 30-31 Dec. 1860, 5 Feb. 1861, *Plantation Mistress*, 49, 65, 87.

³⁵³ Brevard Diary, 18 Dec. 1860, 23, 29 Jan. 1861, *Plantation Mistress*, 60, 79, 82.

the sentimental or domestic novel, the most popular form of literature for antebellum women. Sentimental novels sought to elicit a strong emotional response and often featured scenes of distress or tenderness, as the ability to deeply feel emotions signaled a morally good character. Antebellum women shared this language of sentimentality, creating an emotional community through deep feelings expressed in both fiction and letters.³⁵⁴

Despite the often-melancholy nature of sentimental fiction, women's literature specifically written for late 1860 did not match the downcast atmosphere described by South Carolina women during the holiday season. Rather than addressing the current national discord, popular women's magazines filled their December 1860 issue with images of joyous families and short stories describing holiday celebrations and family reunions. *Godey's Lady's Magazine* featured stories such as "The Christmas Tree" and "A Christmas Story from A Minister's Wife," in addition to images depicting "The Toy Shop" and "Christmas in the City and Christmas in the Country." All reflect a happy holiday and home. The secular pieces in this edition all feature reunions and resolutions, thus symbolizing the editor Sarah Hale's hope that the nation, like the fictional families in *Godey's*, would reunite. The front plate of the November issue of *Godey's* is an image of a mother playing the piano for her children, teaching them the song "Hail, Columbia!" (Figure 5.1). In her "Editor's Note," Hale described this tune as "patriotic and national...Hark to their chorus! All hearts seem to beat in unison with the soul-stirring strain." All hearts did not, in fact, respond as such in November 1860, but Hale continued

³⁵⁴See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (London: Verso, 1991).

to desperately push for a preservation of the union through the language of motherhood and domesticity, a framework that would not be out of place or improper in a woman's magazine.³⁵⁵

This inconsistency between South Carolina women's descriptions of Christmas 1860 and those of their prescriptive literature indicates that women formed their own political consciousnesses in dialogue with, but not dependent upon, their readings. That Hale and *Godey's Lady's Book* did not capture the reality described in these women's letters does not mean that the magazine was out of touch with the South and politics. The theme of family reunion commonly found in the December 1860 issue of *Godey's* suggests that the magazine, in a last gasp attempt at nationalism, was projecting an idealized version of Christmas in America to provide a family reunion in fiction that, for some families, would not occur until 1865.³⁵⁶

Even after South Carolina became an independent republic, *Godey's* continued to publish pro-southern, pro-slavery articles. Fannie Warner's "Sunshine and Shade; Or, The Governess" ran from February to April 1861. In the tale, a northern governess arrived in Augusta, Georgia and was surprised to find that the family respected their slaves with familial titles like Aunt and Uncle. The master of the house, with whom the heroine soon fell in love, replied:

I hope you will have a better opinion of southern planters when you go home; I have no doubt you will acknowledge yourself a Northerner with Southern

³⁵⁵ Hale, "Editor's Table," *Godey's Lady's Book* 61 (November 1860), Irving Rare Books Collection, Columbia, SC.

³⁵⁶ Sommers, "Godey's Lady's Book: Sarah Hale and the Construction of Sentimental Nationalism"; Tonkovich, *Domesticity with a Difference*.

principles, unless you have come here to make a note of the objectionable features of slavery for the purpose of writing a book, which I very much doubt for you look too honest.

When the governess replied, inquiring if she looked like one who could write a book that would “settle the affairs of the nation,” he responded, “not particularly; I have not discovered any *blue stockings* yet.”³⁵⁷ This piece is unique for *Godey’s* in that it not only acknowledged “the affairs of the nation,” or political turmoil in early 1861, but also defended slavery and mocked abolitionist authors like Beecher Stowe. Sarah Hale was a Unionist, but this does not guarantee that she was also an abolitionist. Perhaps, in a concerted effort to continue sales to southern women, she and *Godey’s* owner L.A. Godey decided to appeal to all its readers. In December 1861, its frontispiece represented nurses helping soldiers with no clear uniform markers, allowing *Godey’s* to continue to attract both a northern and southern audience as it had before the war. (Figure 5.2, 5.3).³⁵⁸ They were successful—southern women continued to read *Godey’s* during the war, time, money, and accessibility permitting.

The first week of January brought a brief flash of action to stagnant South Carolina. On January 7, news reached Charleston that the *Star of the West* was en route to reprovision Fort Sumter. When it arrived on January 10, the city was waiting. After Fort Moultrie fired two shots, the ship miraculously turned around. “Yesterday was the opening ball of the Revolution,” announced the *Mercury*. “We are proud that our harbor

³⁵⁷ Fannie Warner, “Sunshine and Shade; Or, The Governess,” *Godey’s Lady’s Book* 62 (February 1861): 114. Irving Rare Books Library. Blue stockings is most likely in reference to an intellectual woman, but the term has a history of being used in a derogatory manner.

³⁵⁸ *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, 1861. Irving Rare Books Collection, Columbia, SC.

has been so honored.” Perhaps, mused South Carolinians, the holidays were simply a short moment of quietude. By February 1861, Charleston harbored 7,000 Confederate troops. Governor Francis Pickens ordered additional guard boats, batteries for Sullivan, Morris, and James Islands, and hulks sunk in the main channel. The Grimballs and other wealthy planters sent their own slaves to build barricades around the Edisto River and Morris Island. “The way the war would affect people,” writes historian Mark Smith, “was previewed in the months leading up to the actual firing on Fort Sumter.” Civilians heard the feverish preparations of war from the nearby forts, the practiced drilling from the Citadel. They were ready for war. But still, the war did not come.³⁵⁹

The sounds of wartime preparation, previously alien to the city, became familiar parts of everyday life.³⁶⁰ As best as they could, South Carolinian women attempted to add some normalcy to their lives. “It seems strange that we should be in the midst of a revolution,” Grimball wrote in January, as it was so quiet in the countryside. “Everything goes on as usual, the planting, the negroes, all just the same; & a great Empire tumbling to pieces about us; and a great pressure in the money market in all parts of the country; *we* strange to say; were never so easy, and I hope thankful... We pass our evenings very pleasantly with music and reading & sewing & talking.” Though two of her sons were “restless” and “anxious” for war, she herself was content and hoped “there will be no war, but a peaceful arrangement of our difficulties.” The city, frozen in suspense, “was so dull,” wrote Ann Vanderhorst. Adele Allston Sr. complained that

³⁵⁹ Fraser, 247; Smith, *The Smell of Battle...*, 30; Grimball Diary, 12 Jan. 1861, Journal of Meta Morris Grimball, SHC.

³⁶⁰ Smith *The Smell of Battle...*, 30

Charleston held “not one ball and but two parties,” and even horseracing “passed with very little excitement, and no gayety.” Lizzie Gaillard’s January wedding was postponed indefinitely due to the “threatening and warlike atmosphere,” and she replaced her wedding jitters by being “almost crazy” with curiosity as to whether her state would be allowed to leave the union peacefully. “Giving flags and going to the dress parades is the order of the way,” wrote Elmore of the daily ritual in Columbia, “but people look and feel grave over the state of things.”³⁶¹ Anyone who hoped for military balls and excitement in the months following secession was sorely disappointed.

Within this stagnant atmosphere, rumors festered. In November and December, patrols increased dramatically as whispers of black unrest spread through the streets of Charleston.³⁶² Abner Doubleday, a U.S. soldier at Fort Monroe and later Fort Sumter, reported that slaves “became excited and troublesome” as they spread the news that Lincoln was coming to free them.³⁶³ Formerly protected by wealthy white patrons, the small yet elite free black community found itself scrutinized and arrested, some even sold into slavery. Rumors also spread through the countryside. Meta Grimball urged her son to keep an eye on the plantation, since “some of Mr. Porcher’s negroes were heard talking

³⁶¹ Grimball Diary, 15 Dec. 1860, Journal of Meta Morris Grimball, SHC; Ann Vanderhorst Diary, 2 Feb. 1861, Vanderhorst Family Papers, SCHS; Adele Allston to Jane North, 21 Feb. 1861, Allston Family Papers, SCHS; Lizzie Gaillard to Mary Ward, 16 Jan. 1860, Ward Family Papers, Library of Congress; Grace Elmore Diary, 6 Feb 1861, Grace Elmore Papers, SCL

³⁶² Fraser, 244.

³⁶³ Quoted in Smith, *The Smell of Battle...*, 24.

over a plan which was to knock him on the head.”³⁶⁴ It is unclear whether there was any truth in this hearsay, but reveals the power of rumor in spreading tensions.

Keziah Brevard was extremely apprehensive about the enslaved people on her plantation. She had long struggled to manage her enslaved household, frequently complaining about their cruel behavior towards her. These complaints increased tenfold as secession approached. “The deception of my servants disheartens me,” she wrote. “I am every now & then awakened to the fact that they *hate me*... My Southern Sisters & brothers who think their slaves would be on our side in a civil war, will, I fear, find they have been artfully taken in.” Long a believer that slaves influenced by abolitionists would murder slaveholders in their beds, Brevard increasingly doubted the behaviors of her slaves and lacked the forceful naiveté of some of her neighbors. In one instance, Brevard woke up to salted coffee. While Brevard wrote it off as a mistake, she did “feel sick a few seconds since” and wondered “can it be possible it was an attempt to poison [?]” She also suspected foul play from Columbia’s enslaved population when the city’s fire engines were vandalized and “rendered useless.” According to Brevard, the only way that the South “would be safe” was if they “find a way to let all the Negroes sent back to Africa... as long as they are here & number so many more than the whites there is no safety other way.”³⁶⁵

³⁶⁴ Fraser, 244. Adele Allston to Ben Allston, 16 Jan. 1861, Allston Family Papers, SCHS.

³⁶⁵ Brevard Diary, 3 Feb. 1861, *Plantation Mistress*, 86-7. Brevard Diary, 10 Dec. 1860, *Plantation Mistress*, 58.

Waiting in silence, with so much at stake, took a toll on South Carolina women's mental health. Its unpredictable interruption by gunfire and drilling did not help by any means. During this waiting period, any auditory disruption of the stillness made South Carolinians jumpy. Every tolling of the bells was an announcement of war. Though long a martial state, now women took new meaning from hearing gunshots. According to the *Mercury*, one woman was "struck dumb by a cannon." To desensitize women and prevent further incident, men invited artilleries to fire guns on their premises. Bessie Allston also found the stillness jarringly disrupted by the sounds of gunfire. "Here is no news at all, everything is quiet as possible," she wrote of Charleston, except that "every now & then we have a great scare at hearing a great many cannon fired & we all run up top of the house to see what is the matter." Gradually, Allston became "quite accustomed to that even." Months later, however, the gunshots would not be false alarms, and Allston would run to their Battery-facing rooftop to witness the siege. Already anxious in disposition, Keziah Brevard became "alarmed" at the mere sight of her overseer on the plantation, because "in these stirring times any thing out of the ordinary routine of things alarms."³⁶⁶

Though not reflected in women's writings, there were major political developments during this period. South Carolina was no longer an Independent Republic. Mississippi, Florida, and Alabama joined the Confederacy in a three-day swoop in early January, and Georgia followed a week later. By the first day of February, Louisiana and February joined the fray. "Things seem to progress," Grimball wrote, "in a slow but certain way." Women jotted down these additions to the Confederacy briefly before

³⁶⁶ *Charleston Mercury*, 20 Nov. 1860, SCL; Bessie Allston to Charles Allston, 1 Apr. 1861, Allston Family Papers, SCHS; Brevard Diary, 14 Jan. 1861, *Plantation Mistress*, 72.

returning to emotional tensions surrounding their own state. Now that South Carolina had support, however, women became even more impatient for action. Grace Elmore blamed Virginia for their reluctance to join the Confederacy, thinking that war could be avoided as the “North would never reach through her.” Though Lucy Pickens was not optimistic of South Carolina’s martial chances, even she proclaimed that “the sword drawn by this brave little state is a solemn & heroic protest against wrong, & in vindication of our natural rights.” Lizzie Gaillard, who initially wished to avoid the “horrors of war” but had confidence in South Carolina’s ability to beat the “Yankees” if provoked, transformed into a war hawk months later when the Confederacy hesitated to take Fort Sumter.

Increasingly, South Carolinian women that were previously fearful of war longed for the attack on Sumter, but desired brevity. “We are anticipating but one battle and that will be over before this reaches you,” wrote Mary Pringle confidently in early March. “When will it be surrendered?” ask Caroline Gilman with annoyance. “The men, ours, have finished their work, & are growing impatient of delay. It requires all the wisdom of their superiors to keep them cool.” Sally Baxter Hampton also noted the growing restlessness of South Carolina soldiers guarding Charleston harbor, and worried about the conduct of hotheaded men with no outlet.³⁶⁷ Routine drilling could only entertain South Carolina’s fire-eaters for so long.

³⁶⁷ Grimball Diary, 30 Jan. 1861, Journal of Meta Morris Grimball, SHC; Grace Elmore Diary, 6 Feb 1861, Grace Elmore Papers, SCL; Lucy Holcombe Pickens to Beverly Lafayette Holcombe, 01 Jan. 1861; Pickens-Dugas Family Papers, SHC; Lizzie Gaillard to Mary Ward, 16 Jan., 11 Mar. 1860, Ward Family Papers, Library of Congress; Mary Pringle to Charles and James Pringle, February or March 1861, quoted in Côté, *Mary’s World*, 192; Caroline Howard Gilman to “My Dear Children,” 31 Mar. 1861, SCHS; Sally Baxter Hampton to Samuel Ruggles, 05 Jan. 1861; Sally Baxter Hampton to Anna Baxter, 11 Jan. 1861, *A Divided Heart*, 91, 97.

Though still nervous regarding military action, Charlestonians also considered the forts a social curiosity, even a tourism site. They visited their many family members working on the batteries and took picnics by the beach. Adele Allston Jr. described the scene in detail: “we went down to the islands to visit the fortifications, it was very interesting especially at Morris Island, where a great number of batteries have been thrown up...there were any number of salutes fired, it was deafening. I thought at one time I was permanently deaf from standing near the guns of the iron battery.” Gilman frequented the batteries and visited her property on Sullivan’s Island, and was so mistakenly convinced of peace that she “carried down a gardener to arrange my flower beds” to prepare for the summer season.³⁶⁸ Soldiers could visit their relatives in the city relatively frequently, and General P.G.T. Beauregard conducted social visits to Charleston’s wealthiest in the days before and after the siege.³⁶⁹

Women’s anxious watching and waiting came to an end in April 1861. On March 29, Abraham Lincoln ordered a naval expedition to reprovision Fort Sumter, and hand-wrote a message to both Governor Pickens and General Beauregard a week later, warning them that “if resupply was neither resisted nor the fort attacked, no attempt would be made ‘to throw in men, arms, or ammunition.’” A week of waiting ensued, the echoes of any noise from the acoustics of Charleston harbor causing soldiers and civilians alike to jump. On April 9, rumors of seven vessels approaching caused the bells of St. Michaels

³⁶⁸ Adele Allston Vanderhorst to Charlie Allston, 24 Mar. 1861, Allston Family Papers, SCHS; Caroline Howard Gilman to “my dear children,” 31 Mar. 1861, Caroline Howard Gilman Papers, SCHS.

³⁶⁹ Beauregard watched the siege of Fort Sumter from the Alston family house on the Battery. This family is not to be confused with the Allston family.

to ring aloud, summoning troops to their stations. Throughout the rainy night Emma Holmes heard the “tramp of armed men...marching to the boats” through streets “thronged and busting with the preparation of war.” Mary Boykin Chesnut, her husband a major decision maker for the Confederates in the harbor, attended the “merriest, maddest dinner” at Charleston’s finest Mills House hotel. “We had an unspoken foreboding,” she wrote, “it was to be our last pleasant meeting.”³⁷⁰ While not entirely correct—Chesnut attended countless Confederate balls and dinners in the next four years—she did accurately note that this would be one of the last meals she shared with her friends during peacetime. At 4:30 a.m. on April 12, 1861, after Anderson refused orders to surrender, Beauregard and Chesnut opened fire on Fort Sumter. The war began.

³⁷⁰ Quoted in Fraser, 250.



Figure 5.1: "Hail Columbia!"

As pictured in *Godey's Lady's Magazine* 61 (November 1860). This engraving depicts a woman doing her duty as a patriotic mother, passing on this love of country by teaching her children. In choosing this image, Hale helped to stress patriotic nationalism the same month that South Carolina clamored for secession. *Image Courtesy The Lincoln Financial Foundation Collection and Archive.org.*

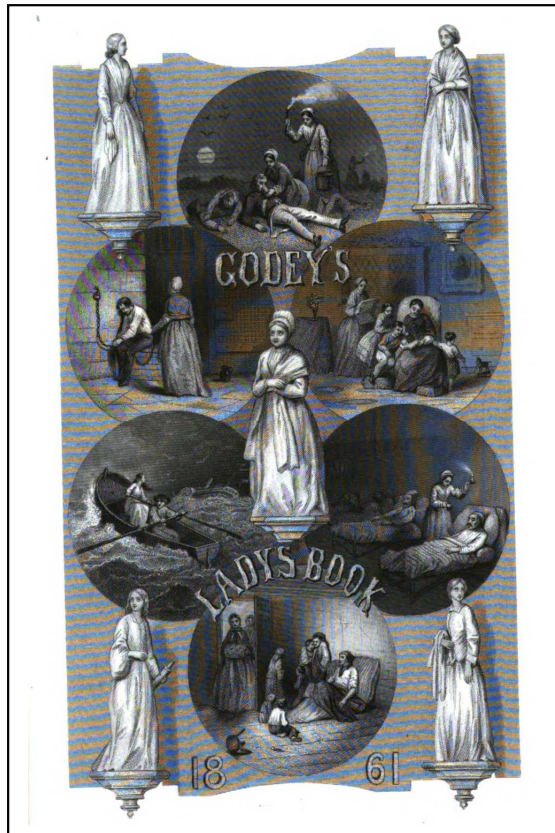


Figure 5.2: *Godey's Lady's Book*, 1860. Figure 5.3: *Godey's Lady's Book*, 1861. These frontispieces were placed at the bounded volumes at year's end. Note the difference in scenes between 1860 and 1861, as well as the lack of Confederate or Union regalia in the 1861 image. Image Courtesy University of Michigan, Hathi Trust.

CHAPTER 6: Catharsis: Fort Sumter and the Road to Bull Run, April-July 1861

South Carolina could not have asked for a better start to the Civil War than the siege of Fort Sumter. Not a drop of blood was spilled until a misfire after Anderson's surrender killed three of his own men. The South rejoiced over this bloodless, miraculous, victory, and many naively hoped for peace. Shortly after the Fort fell, Virginia finally, *finally*, agreed to join the Confederacy. South Carolinian elite women briefly banished their melancholy resignation, reacting with relief and exuberant celebration. Yet once the celebration died down, they found themselves quickly thrown into stillness as the action moved elsewhere. The Union blockade moved into the Sea Island harbors. Their men moved to Virginia, the new battlefield. With startling quickness and to their chagrin, South Carolinian women felt their lives returning to their antebellum rhythm.

Though women did not wish for war, they missed the exciting politics that had surrounded Charleston for the past months. Now, not only would war begin—they would have to sit and wait for news of battles fought hundreds of miles away. It was not until the events surrounding First Bull Run that the nation finally realized that this was a time of war, not simply an isolated skirmish in the country's most hotheaded state. It is with Bull Run, not Fort Sumter, that this study ends, and where any traces of antebellum life are finally, thoroughly, snuffed out.

When the first cannons rang out at 4:30 am on April 12, everyone in the surrounding area awoke from their fitful sleep and ran to the nearest possible vantage point. They were able to see the explosions before the sound traveled across the water.³⁷¹ “In less than five minutes,” remembered Harriott Ravenel, “the whole East Battery was a solid mass of women, children, and old men...the roadway was blocked with carriages. The windows and piazzas...and the wharves along Cooper River, were thronged with spectators, all moved by one fear, one hope, one prayer.” Caroline Gilman’s description was similarly exhilarated. She heard gunfire from 4 am to 7 pm. After every shot, “a cloud of white smoke rose before the explosion, and thus, the sight of every discharge was as distinct as the sound. We could hear the whiz of the balls, and feel the house shake at each concussion.” The violent walls of sound echoed through the harbor. Through the drizzly day, Gilman’s friends came in and out, “the most part of them...immediately employed in making cartridge bags.” “A strange fascination” forbade most from taking their eyes away from the house windows, and when men came to report rumored news Gilman and her friends “clustered around them, as if life and death hung on their words.” Grimball was in a “most terrible state of anxiety and misery,” as several of her sons were at the forts. She spent the day in prayer.

Other than whispered rumors and prayers and the metronomic thundering of guns, Charleston remained silent. An imagine in *Harper’s Weekly* of men and women on Charleston rooftops, though at first glance melodramatic, is rooted in truth. The citizens in the image do not celebrate, but instead hold each other tightly, and several women lay

³⁷¹ For more on acoustics of the battle, see Smith, *The Smell of Battle...*, Chapter 1, “The Sounds of Secession,” 9-38.

on their knees, overwhelmed (Figure 6.1). Harriot Ravenel's report confirms this depiction. Though "the excitement deepened," she remembered, "there were no screams, or groans or violent demonstrations. The nearest and dearest of nearly every one there, was under that fire, and the feeling was too grave for sound."³⁷² The eye had passed and the storm was upon them.

The firing stopped at nightfall, granting everyone a restless night before firing resumed the next morning. The clouds parted to produce a clear and beautiful day, which further illuminated the fort when its magazine caught fire at 8 am. The smoky air was filled with the smell of what one witness called "villainous saltpeter."³⁷³ The blaze spread, and by 2:30 pm on April 13, Anderson surrendered.³⁷⁴ The Lowcountry and, soon, the entire state erupted into motion and sound. Church bells tolled the results, "an outburst of grateful cries arose to Heaven," cannons fired and flags raised.³⁷⁵ Their fears of violence validated and then soothed, women felt they could now breathe a sigh of relief and look forward to South Carolina and the Confederacy's bright future. This military confrontation, free from any casualties, "exalted the senses and the will."

³⁷² Harriott Ravenel, "Reminiscences," Harriott Horry Ravenel Family Papers, 4, SCHS; Caroline Howard Gilman to "Children," 16 Apr. 1861, Caroline Howard Gilman Papers, SCHS; Grimball Diary, 12 Apr. 1861, Journal of Meta Morris Grimball, SHC; Harriott Ravenel, "Reminiscences," Harriott Horry Ravenel Family Papers, 4-5, SCHS.

³⁷³ Quoted in Smith, *The Smell of Battle...*, 36.

³⁷⁴ Fraser, 250.

³⁷⁵ Harriott Ravenel, "Reminiscences," Harriot Horry Ravenel Family Papers, 4-5, SCHS.

Women described the victory as something sublime.³⁷⁶ “Wonderful, miraculous, unheard of in history, a bloodless victory!” Caroline Gilman exclaimed. The victory at Sumter proved that “God must be on our side.”³⁷⁷

Seemingly every letter writer in the state felt the need to detail the event, even with the knowledge that the newspapers reported the same. Some women apologized mid-description, as surely this repetition had become “tiresome,” yet they did not stop their pens.³⁷⁸ Bessie Allston wrote several separate letters to family in the country, as she was the only one to witness the siege. She knew the need for urgency in getting the news to her family as soon as possible: though they could hear the guns from Chicora Wood, the Allston did not receive mail for days afterwards, leaving them in suspense.³⁷⁹ In addition to South Carolina’s secession, the Fall of Fort Sumter catalyzed many women into beginning their Civil War diaries. Few diaries remain that span 1860 as well, unless the author previous kept a journal as a habit. It was the events of spring 1861 that convinced most women that their thoughts were worth noting for future recollection.³⁸⁰

³⁷⁶ Stowe, *Keep the Days...*, 48. South Carolinians’ perceptions of “zero casualties” was before Major Anderson’s soldiers misfired and killed several of their own men during a salute.

³⁷⁷ Caroline Howard Gilman to “My Dear child,” 24 Apr. 1861, Caroline Howard Gilman Papers, SCHS; Samuella Palmer to Hattie Palmer, 15 Apr. 1861, *The Palmers*, 296.

³⁷⁸ Bessie Allston to Charles Allston, 14 Apr. 1861, Allston Family Papers, SCHS.

³⁷⁹ With the exception of her brother Ben, who was on duty at Morris Island. Adele Allston Vanderhorst Diary, 6 May 1861, Vanderhorst Family Papers, SCHS.

³⁸⁰ Ironically, the fall of Fort Sumter was the last Keziah Brevard wrote in her diary, concluding the volume with “the beginning of the war of 1861.” Brevard Diary, 15 Apr. 1861, *Plantation Mistress*, 115.

As the clouds of gunfire cleared, most South Carolina women hoped that this standoff and decisive victory would bring peace. The lack of casualties, wrote Harriott Ravenel made it seem “as if Heaven were giving the countries time, even then, to stop the strife, not yet made desperate by brother’s blood.” The victory solidified her embrace of Confederate nationalism. “Let the N. & S. now compromise & shed no more blood,” echoed Keziah Brevard.³⁸¹ Even fire-eating young women’s bloodthirst was lessened by the conflict at Sumter. They did not have much reprieve, however. On April 15, President Lincoln called for 75,000 troops to put down this “rebellion.”³⁸² While the Confederacy rejoiced that Virginia, as a result of Lincoln’s decrees, decided to join its ranks, it knew that Sumter would only be the first of many conflicts. Sarah Pringle recognized this predicament, writing that the war would be an “awful state of affairs, brother rising against brother...the case of Fort Sumter has been a wonderful victory without a drop of blood spilled, we cannot expect other battles to result with the same success.”³⁸³ Pringle proved correct.

On May 9, less than a month after the fall of Fort Sumter, the U.S.S. Niagara arrived on southern shores, beginning the blockade that would play a large role in bankrupting the Confederacy.³⁸⁴ “Times are very hard and money very scarce,” Grimball wrote of Charleston in June. She, at least, was able to anticipate the oncoming conflict

³⁸¹ Harriott Ravenel, “Reminiscences,” Harriott Horry Ravenel Family Papers, 5, SCHS; Brevard Diary, 15 Apr. 1861, *Plantation Mistress*, 115.

³⁸² Freehling, *The Road to Disunion: Volume II*, 524.

³⁸³ Sarah Maxwell Pringle to James Maxwell Pringle, 1861, Pringle Family Papers, SCHS.

³⁸⁴ Fraser, 252.

and paid off her interests in the north, saving money in Charleston to carry her family through the summer. Adele Allston Jr. noted that the month after Sumter was “a very anxious time,” and even her sister, so thrilled to be in Charleston for the action, complained that “everything is so dismal” by May.³⁸⁵ The “great many weddings” that occurred in Charleston that month, likely in preparation for the whirlwind events to come, were only a brief source of levity for the teenager. One couple set off for Europe, the other north for business before they “lost everything.”³⁸⁶ Well-to-do South Carolinians prepared to leave for the “sickly season” as usual, but this time without the balls and celebrations of the winter season. The flurry of activity during secession winter had come at a greater cost.

Women attempted to resume their summer schedules to the best of their abilities. Unable to visit the springs in Virginia or travel north, the Allstons planned to return to their summer home on Pawley’s Island. Jane Allston attended school in Charleston, an exciting departure from “staying in town doing nothing.” Her sisters continued their swimming lessons begun the summer before. “It will be a great disappointment if we are to remain in Charleston,” Adele Allston Junior wrote. “The only amusement in town now is sailing parties.” Adele was disappointed: the Allstons were trapped in Charleston for the rest of the summer after boat travel to the islands was suspended. This proved a blessing in disguise, as all island families were forced to flee Upcountry when U.S. troops successfully secured most of the coast by November 1861. The Allstons also benefitted

³⁸⁵ Grimball Diary, 12 Apr., 9 Jun. 1861, Journal of Meta Morris Grimball, SHC; Bessie Allston to R.F.W. Allston, May 1861, Allston Family Papers, SCHS; Adele Allston Vanderhorst Diary, 6 May 1861, Vanderhorst Family Papers, SCHS.

³⁸⁶ Bessie Allston to R.F.W. Allston, May 1861, Allston Family Papers, SCHS.

from remaining in the city as they were able to receive mail and therefore news more quickly.³⁸⁷ The Middletons were similarly reluctant to leave for their usual summer in Flat Rock due to postage delays.³⁸⁸ Their concerns about the mail were warranted, as when they left for their summer homes, the able-bodied men in their lives left for Virginia.

Jason Phillips reasons that women were more likely to fear war because “the war’s power over women’s future was more evident than women’s power over the war.” Men could move, could act, and gain honor and glory while women remained at home, “stationery and powerless before...an impersonal force that only God could avert.” The war sent men away, leaving women at home, anxiously praying that they did not receive terrible news.³⁸⁹ While this study reveals that women felt this way long before the actual outbreak of war, they certainly felt this helplessness keenly when they, for a moment the center of the nation’s conflict, were suddenly sidelined and left desperate for news from the front. Sally Elmore Taylor and her mother awaited any updates in Columbia, the gates of their stately homes “wide and braced back, so that heralds bringing news might speed in to tell us what had befallen our men and country...to tell us waiting women of joy or sorrow.” Slowly yet surely, Adele Allston Jr.’s friends left Charleston, leaving them with “no one to drop in and tell us news or try to cheer Mamma. There is now no

³⁸⁷ Ben Allston to Adele Allston, 04 May 1861; Jane Allston to Charles Allston, 12 May 1861; Adele Allston Vanderhorst to Charles Allston, July 1861; Adele Allston to “Mrs. Williams,” 2 Aug. 1861, Allston Family Papers, SCHS.

³⁸⁸ Henry Middleton to Harriott Middleton, 7 Jul. 61, Middleton Family Papers, SCHS.

³⁸⁹ Phillips, 206. Phillips writes of these fears in April 1861 at the earliest, while I support these findings even earlier into 1860.

friend on whom I could call if I wanted anything.” Much like during secession winter, women had to avoid negative thoughts of defeat “even for a moment” in order to go about their days.³⁹⁰

This change of circumstances caused most South Carolina women to dread, rather than wish for, the incoming conflict in Virginia. “The future is very dark I fear, but I hope for the best,” wrote one young woman.³⁹¹ This had a mental and, sometimes, physiological effect on those left at home. “It must be a very desperate fight,” wrote Adele Allston Jr. of the imagined battle. “Anxiety has almost made me sick... You may imagine the intense interest with which I follow the movements of the army.” Her mother’s anxiety did not help her own state: “Mamma is very low spirited about public affairs. She thinks we will be defeated in Virginia.”³⁹² Other women could not bear to believe what they read in the papers and with “very low” hearts prayed for a “speedy and good ending.”³⁹³ A “Mrs. Jones” appeared to a younger woman “badly emaciated,” and when asked why, simply replied “nothing but debility and the times.”³⁹⁴ In a period when a diagnosis of “nostalgia,” a mix of what we would today call of depression and homesickness, would send soldiers home on medical leave, it is not hard to understand

³⁹⁰ Taylor, *Memoir*, Vol. II, 121, SCL; Adele Allston Vanderhorst Diary, 19 Jun. 1861, Vanderhorst Family Papers, SCHS.

³⁹¹ Mary Petigru to Adele Allston, 22 Jun. 1861, Allston Family Papers, SCHS.

³⁹² Adele Allston Vanderhorst to Charles Allston, 31 May 1861, Adele Allston Vanderhorst to “Mrs. Williams,” 2 Aug. 1861, Allston Family Papers, SCHS; Adele Allston Vanderhorst Diary, 11 Jun. 1860, Vanderhorst Family Papers, SCHS.

³⁹³ Minnie Allston to Adele Allston, 19 Jun. 1861, Allston Family Papers, SCHS.

³⁹⁴ Jane Allston to Adele Allston, 22 Jun. 1861, Allston Family Papers, SCHS.

how one's mental anxieties might affect the body in ways more than mere lack of sleep.³⁹⁵

Women worked hard to temper their fears about the future and their absent loved ones in order to attain some semblance of normalcy in their everyday lives. The Allstons' letters to their brother Charlie blend updates on "Manassas" with social visits, such as the large party they attended at Annie Weston's. Adele, a desirable southern belle, continued her social visits with eligible bachelors, even rejecting a few. On the same day that she wrote about her all-encompassing fear that her brother might die in Virginia, she also detailed her awkward breakup with a Mr. Chisolm, whose siblings later encountered her at the Battery and "stared at me so hard." Though she did not wish to attend a sailing party "now that Brother is not here," she was later glad she attended.³⁹⁶ As Stephen Stowe explains, women viewed war as "a presence, not a plot," and wrote it into their lives as best as they could.³⁹⁷

Early camp life before the outbreak of war also achieved a certain levity, as evidenced by men's letters home. "Our camp is visited every evening by a crowd of ladies," wrote Willy Haskell from Richmond, "whose repeated coming & patriotic spirit have given many of our men opportunity to make fair acquaintances, so that there is quite a new feature in camp in the matter of beaux & belles." Henry Middleton reported

³⁹⁵ Matt, *Homesickness: An American History*.

³⁹⁶ Jane and Adele Allston to Charles Allston, 14 Jul. 61; Adele Allston Vanderhorst to Charles Allston, 20 Jul. 61; Bessie Allston to Charles Allston, 20 Jul. 61, Allston Family Papers, SCHS; Adele Allston Vanderhorst Diary, 11 Jun. 1861, Vanderhorst Family Papers, SCHS.

³⁹⁷ Stowe, *Keep the Days...*, 2.

that the camps in Columbia were “having a gay time” and asked his sister to send newspapers and—if she wished to be especially popular—ginger, ham, or wine. He continued his lighthearted correspondence, playfully ribbing his sister and even mocking Wade Hampton’s speech to his legion in “true Carolina style—longwinded bombastic & absurd.” This buoyant spirit continued all the way to Bull Run. Ravenel’s largest complaint was simply that he had a difficult time leaving camp to see his friends in Richmond. Middleton also enjoyed the city and described an extravagant meal of champagne, veal, French coffee, and steak. He grumbled that his company felt cooped up “like animals” in their tents, a small qualm when considering the wartime conditions to come.³⁹⁸

Carolina soldiers’ road to Virginia both revealed and created tensions between the two southern states. “There is not a great desire to fly” to Virginia’s aid, wrote Meta Grimball, reasoning that South Carolina must “first secure our honors.” “The nearer you approach the seat of war,” realized Henry Middleton, “the more quiet & less excited people appear to be.” He was disappointed by the “coolness” with which Virginians greeted them on the march, where “a few ladies waved their handkerchiefs...and a very small boy followed us,” shouting “three cheers for the South Carolinians’ but the men stood on the pavement, looking in apparent apathy.” In fairness to the Virginian citizens, Middleton did note that enough troops had already passed through the city to make the arrival of soldiers unremarkable. Even so, this frosty reception encouraged him to indulge in state-based stereotypes, such as “we all agree with slight exceptions

³⁹⁸ Willy Haskell to Sophia Cheves Haskell, 4 May 1861, Langdon Cheves Papers, SCHS; Henry Middleton to Harriott Middleton, 7 Jul. 61, Middleton Family Papers, SCHS.

Virginians cannot fight.” Middleton also claimed that selfish Virginians only cared about their own state, pridefully claiming that they belonged to the “Home Guard” of Virginia rather than the Confederate troops. This disgusted Middleton and his legion. Enough animosity arose that Middleton accused “half of Richmond” for being abolitionist when they responded unhappily to their state’s new draft.³⁹⁹

Though state allegiances and rivalries continued throughout the war, they paled in importance to survival, which soon took precedence. Middleton’s cheerful correspondence, complaints, and gossip represent leftover facets of the antebellum period that completely disappear after First Bull Run. No longer could soldiers approach the war with carefree levity. Middleton in particular marks the final and irreversible shift into the Civil War era—he was one of the first to die from the conflict. Injured at First Bull Run, he died on July 27, 1861. Middleton’s death, and First Bull Run generally, opened the floodgates to a stream of Civil War casualties that irreversibly changed the nation. Charlestonian society was rattled by his loss. “The glory of the victory,” wrote Adele Allston Jr., “is so saddened by our losses that it is impossible to feel exultant. When I think of those who in weariness and suspense await the arrival of what remains of those dear to them, it is fearful and I wonder to see people walking about with radiant faces.” No longer did they rejoice in their victories, but instead lamented that the thrill of victory “seems very faint amidst all this sorrow and suspense.”⁴⁰⁰ To cope, they turned to religion and writing, their tried-and-true outlets.

³⁹⁹ Grimball Diary, 8 May 1861, Journal of Meta Morris Grimball, SHC; Henry Middleton to Harriott Middleton, 7 Jul. 1861, Henry Middleton to Harriott Middleton, July 1861 (sometime between the 1st and the 7th), Middleton Family Papers, SCHS.

The events of the Civil War provided vindication in its worst form for women like Sarah Burn, Keziah Brevard, and Adele Allston Sr., who predicted death, despair, and religious apocalypse. Drew Gilpin Faust suggests that before the Civil War, southerners believed in a merciful God, and only after war's devastating results realized that their God might be the punishing God of Job.⁴⁰¹ South Carolina's women, especially Baptists, considered this possibility before their southern compatriots. This dissertation has applied arguments about Confederate women to South Carolinians in the years immediately preceding secession and found that they ring true in both cases.⁴⁰² One reason for this is obvious—these historical actors are one and the same. They have simply fallen victim to frameworks that separate the antebellum and Civil War periods, with little inclination of how to treat that brief transition year.

This is not to say that these women's lives did not change drastically during the war—they most certainly did. This study simply suggests that South Carolina women in particular felt their lives changing before the actual war began. Their participation in politics to an unprecedented level began in earnest in October 1860, when they returned from their summer holiday and found a new world awaiting them. Though they

⁴⁰⁰ Adele Allston Vanderhorst Diary, 25. Jul 1861, Vanderhorst Family Papers, SCHS.

⁴⁰¹ Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 180; Faust, "'Without Pilot or Compass:' Elite Women and Religion in the Civil War South," 255.

⁴⁰² Elizabeth Varon's *We Mean to Be Counted* similarly argues that the ways that Virginia's antebellum women participated publicly had much in common with their ideas of Confederate womanhood and, later, their roles in Reconstruction politics.

discussed slavery and national politics during John Brown's Raid and the Democratic National Convention, they allowed the occasions to slip their minds or, at least, away from their pens and returned to some form of antebellum equilibrium. As discerning political minds, they sieved the news, deciding what did and did not merit recording. In many instances, they wrote less than their counterparts in different states—like Adele Allston Jr., they felt too swept away in events to write them down. Other members of the future Confederacy had time to sit back and watch South Carolina step away from the Union and react through the written word. South Carolinians had no such luxury, and their responses are revealing.

Recreating the lives of South Carolina women in 1860 fills a necessary gap in both women's history and secession scholarship. We have created vivid pictures of southern women, especially white elites, during both the antebellum period and the Civil War, but have not thoroughly bridged the two periods. Similarly, most works of secession not only leave out women as central actors, but also skip through to the highlights of 1860, with little attention to the many months in-between. Those who do pay sufficient attention to women, such as Jason Phillips, Drew Gilpin Faust, and Steven Stowe, make conclusions about wartime women that could be extended backward to the secession period, as I have done. They see that women formed communities through letter writing and used writing as a genre through which to express emotional overflows and make sense of their changing world. They discovered that women strongly supported slavery and the South's righteousness, yet still anxiously detailed their anguished fears about the future of their beloved country. Sometimes, these women agreed with their male counterparts, but often tended to express more caution and worry.

This study argues that all of the above are true of South Carolina's elite white women from 1859 to 1861. This dissertation, much like summer 1860, slows down time to examine when, and why, these women thought what they did. We must take women's political consciousnesses seriously if we are to understand not only the collective mind of elite antebellum southern women, but also their politicization during the war. Their immediate, emotional responses to national news and quick pivots back to daily life should not be dismissed as excessive "trivia" and female "hysteria." Finally, to truly understand secession politics, we must expand our focus past delegates and votes, especially considering that South Carolinian elite men monopolized both categories. We must continue to play with definitions of politics, allowing subjects such as fiction and feeling to play a role in our investigations. And finally, we must not base our recreation of past societies solely on those with a Y chromosome.

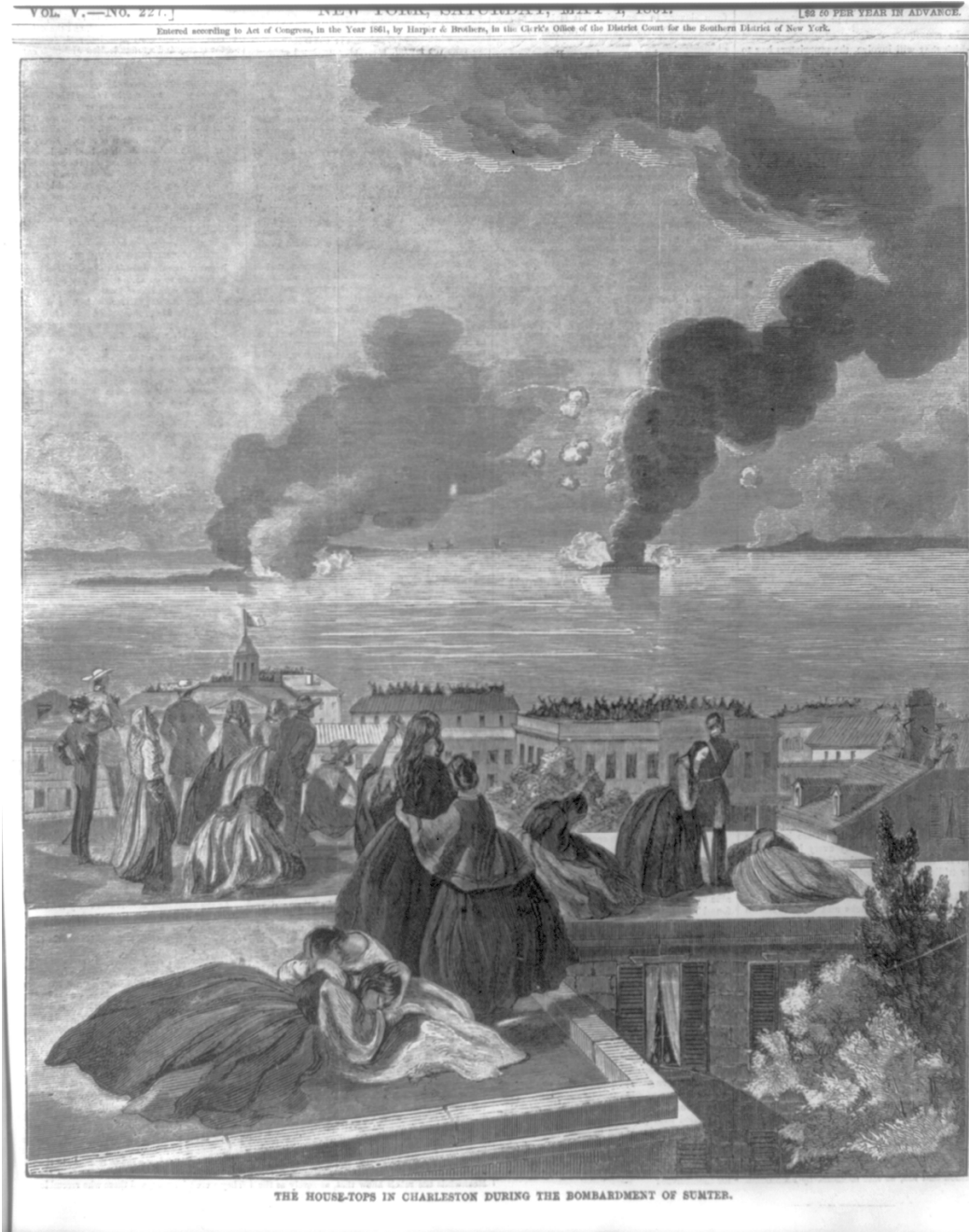


Figure 6.1: “The house-tops in Charleston during the bombardment of Sumter.” The depictions of women, overwhelmed and unable to stand, were not simply melodramatic recreations. *Harper’s Weekly* 04 May 1861. Image Courtesy South Caroliniana Library Digital Collections.

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