

BURYING THE DEAD BUT NOT THE PAST

Ladies' Memorial Associations & the Lost Cause



Caroline E. Janney

CIVIL WAR AMERICA
Gary W. Gallagher, *editor*



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but Not the Past*

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and the Lost Cause

CAROLINE E. JANNEY

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For my parents,

Robert & Sharon Janney,

and in memory of my grandfather,

Roby Janney

ing willows that bordered the canal, the birds' songs, all made a fairy land," she wrote. "Never have I seen so beautiful a spring," Cabell concluded. Amid such a lovely setting, she could not have fathomed the next day's news.⁶⁹

But Lee's surrender did not mean the end of women's deep devotion to the Confederacy. The war had necessitated the development of a collective woman's consciousness and a new sense of direct participation in the state as women rallied to support their soldiers. Lizzie Alsop, Janet Weaver (Randolph), Lucy Mina Otey, Susan Speed, Mary Gordon Wallace, Bessie Callender, Lucy Webb, Sally Tompkins, and Nancy MacFarland were just a few of the several hundred Virginia women who would build upon their new female networks and extend their intense feelings of patriotism into the postwar period. Hardly relics of the war, soldiers' aid societies, sewing circles, and Ladies' hospitals would transform into equally devoted *LMAS* that honored the soldiers who had not received proper funerals or burials during the war. Southern white women's patriotism and nationalism would find a new outlet and purpose in the memorialization of the Confederacy.



A Fitting Work

The Origins of Virginia's
Ladies' Memorial Associations,
1865–1866

The spring of 1865 brought peace to Virginia, but the scars of war remained visible throughout the state. During the past four years, graves of southern soldiers had been scattered across the Commonwealth, and with each passing month, residents uncovered more and more decomposing bodies and bleaching bones as they resumed their farming activities. Winchester's Mary Dunbar Williams was especially disturbed by the lack of proper burials for the Confederate soldiers who had so ardently defended the Shenandoah Valley town. In May 1865, Williams visited her sister-in-law, Eleanor Williams Boyd, and recounted the story of a farmer who had plowed up the bodies of two Confederate soldiers while preparing his land for corn. The two women decided that they should call a meeting of all the women who had volunteered in the hospitals during the war, with the objective of forming a memorial society to gather all the dead within a radius of twelve to fifteen miles and inter them in one graveyard. Additionally, they agreed it was imperative that the entire town establish an annual tradition of placing flowers and evergreens on these graves. Less than a month after Robert E. Lee surrendered at Appomattox, the first Ladies' Memorial Association (*LMA*) in Virginia had organized to honor and eulogize the fallen South.¹ Within a year, white southern women from Virginia to Alabama followed suit, establishing no less than seventy *LMAS*.²

These organizations, however, did much more than provide centralized resting places for fallen Confederates. Many of the same women who had sewn battle flags, volunteered in hospitals, and snubbed Yankee soldiers during the war turned to the *LMAS* so that they might continue to express their Confederate patriotism through memorial activities. Such work allowed them to expand on two trends that had developed during the war: the creation of an

organized womanhood among southern white women and a sense of white southern solidarity among ex-Confederates. But equally important, southern men and women realized that these Ladies, as they called themselves, might deploy gender in the interest of Confederate politics. Relying on the mid-nineteenth-century assumption that women were naturally nonpolitical, ex-Confederate men recognized that women might be best suited to take the lead in memorializing the South's Lost Cause. After all, if women were not political, then their actions could not be construed as treasonous to the U.S. government. Middle- and upper-class women of the LMAs thus served in the forefront of the postwar battle over Confederate memory, simultaneously allowing men to skirt the issue of treason and inaugurating the traditions of the Lost Cause as early as 1865 and 1866.³

“Although no State of the South had been exempt from the scourge,” wrote Sallie Ann Brock in 1867, “Virginia had borne the brunt of the war.” She detailed the destruction of the once-grand state in her postwar memoir: “Wherever the foot of the invader had been pressed, it left its mark in desolation. Along the Potomac River scarcely a dwelling remained to indicate that that fair region had once been the abode of one of the happiest, most refined and intelligent communities in our country, but charred monuments of destruction betokened the work of the incendiary and the despoiler.” Lucy Fletcher walked along the ruins in Richmond only days after Lee's surrender. She noted that from the south end of Capitol Square to the river, from Eighth Street to Eighteenth Street, scarcely one building remained standing. “All was in ruins and desolation,” she exclaimed. Smoke billowed from the city's burned business district, where brick chimneys stood as stark reminders of the city's antebellum industrial strength. As in Winchester, throughout the Commonwealth the signs of lost lives were omnipresent. Writing to her family in the North, one Union woman recounted the landscape surrounding Petersburg: “We saw many, very many obtruding feet of the dead, some heads were uncovered, and, in many instances, the whole figure was easily traced under a thin covering of earth.” Virginians, like those elsewhere in the former Confederacy, looked around to see burnt cities, exhausted farms, torn-up railroads, battlefields littered with soldiers' remains, and a disrupted labor force. Four years of war had left the region devastated.⁴

Surrounded by the chaos of destruction and exhausted from four years of battle, Virginia's ex-Confederate soldiers joined most other white southerners in grudgingly accepting defeat. A few fiery souls like Colonel Thomas T. Munford attempted to keep troops in the field following Lee's surrender and



Remains on the Manassas battlefield. In 1865 and 1866, Virginia's landscape was littered with the signs of war, including the bones and other remains of soldiers. (Courtesy Collection of the New-York Historical Society)

others like Jubal A. Early and George E. Pickett fled the country, but most soldiers and citizens admitted that their quest for independence had failed. They agreed that Confederates had tried their hardest and had fought honorably, but that they could not overcome the superior manpower and military strength of the well-supplied U.S. Army. Virginia's white residents laid down their guns, abandoned secession, and acknowledged the abolition of slavery, although they remained loyal to old political values and the principle of white supremacy. As historian Anne Sarah Rubin has pointed out, even when Confederate men felt disdain toward the Union, they recognized that it was in their best interest to profess loyalty to the Union in order to regain their con-


fiscated property and political rights. Restoring and rebuilding the defeated South became the primary objective for most ex-Confederate males.⁵

Having no guns to put down, white southern women often found surrendering their service and devotion to the Confederacy more difficult.⁶ In fact, many of Virginia's elite women continued to proclaim their allegiance to the Confederacy even after Appomattox. Two days after Lee's surrender, Mary Cabell still held out hope of "yet seeing the Southern flag float over my beloved Richmond," noting that rumors circulated that France might yet help save the Confederacy. On April 12, 1865, Fredericksburg's Lizzie Alsop scribbled passionately in her diary that "Gen. Lee has surrendered! I pray God that I may yet live to see his vengeance exercised against our enemies." In December 1865, Isabel Maury wrote to her cousin, who had moved to England following Appomattox, boldly announcing that two flags hung on the family's Christmas tree—the Confederate flag and the battle flag. "Gen. Lee, bless his soul, was hung immediately below" the flags, she remarked. And on New Year's Day, Maury proudly claimed that white southerners did not take part in any celebration of receiving visitors, as such was a northern tradition. "We are a distinct and separate nation, and I wish our customs to be as distinct as we are," she declared.⁷

Not only did many upper-class women grieve for their lost cause, but they remained the fiercest opponents of the U.S. government.⁸ When Union troops marched into Richmond, numerous white women fumed about the Yankee invaders. A few openly turned cold shoulders on the occupying forces, as they had done during the war. Lucy Fletcher observed the "capitol square lined with blue coats" and resented the fact that these were "the people who for 4 years have been slaying our brethren, and desolating our land, burning and ravaging our homes insulting and robbing our defenceless women and grey haired men." As Federal troops flooded the streets of the former capital, Confederate women who appeared in public at all did so in mourning dress. Mrs. Charles Ellis noted that the "young ladies have scrupulously avoided the acquaintance or recognition of any of the Enemy and for the first two or three weeks when they went on the streets wore veils 2 or 8 fold." Similarly, Emmie Sublett confided to a friend that she always went out "thickly veiled and never notice[d] the Yanks in the least." In fact, she proudly claimed, having northern soldiers in the city "makes us fifty times more southern in our feelings." Many other women claimed to be too heartbroken to leave their homes. Rather than accept invitations from Union soldiers to come to Capitol Square for fresh air and music, they remained quietly indoors.⁹

But Confederate women did more to indicate their continued devotion to

the failed cause than simply rant about Yankee soldiers. Although the U.S. government provided transportation for men to return home, Confederate soldiers often found themselves hundreds of miles from their homes with no means to get there. Ex-Confederate women frequently took the lead in fulfilling what should have been a government responsibility. Women in both Petersburg and Lynchburg, for example, supplied food and aid to the "famished and shivering Confederate" soldiers returning home from northern prisons; the Petersburg association alone provided aid to more than 12,000 parolees. The Ladies' Soldiers' Aid Society of Richmond likewise discovered even more duties for itself in the wake of defeat. The women cared for wounded Confederate soldiers in hospitals, furnished means for them to reach their homes, and proposed education for those soldiers who had been disabled from wounds so that they might have the means to provide a living for themselves. Confederate women furnished poor, maimed soldiers with artificial arms and legs, helped feed and clothe their destitute widows and children, and generally assisted in relieving the suffering and poverty caused by war. In short, because the now-defunct Confederate government would never be able to extend aid, women took up the banner. Beginning in the spring of 1865 and 1866, these white southern women took on yet another task that should have fallen to the government—that of honoring the Confederate nation's soldiers.¹⁰

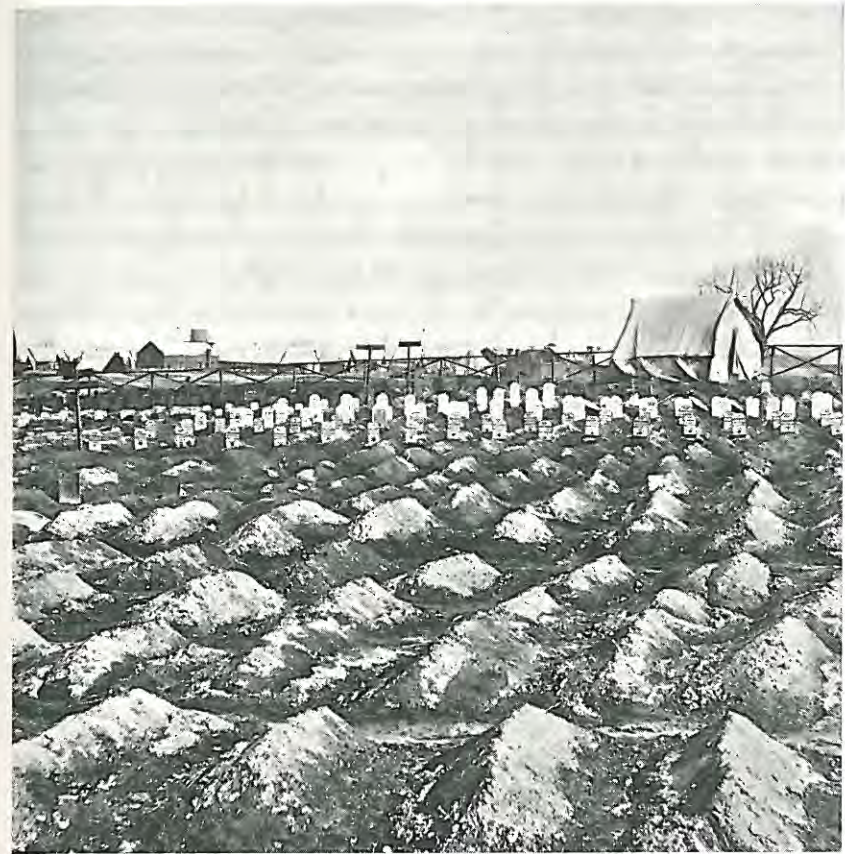
 During the summer of 1865, the women of the Winchester LMA met frequently at the residence of Eleanor Boyd and continued in their efforts to locate the graves of Confederate dead surrounding the town. Late that fall, they issued an appeal to the entire South for aid. The appeal described the destruction in the Valley and noted that "the dead were generally buried where they fell, and their rude graves are fast disappearing beneath the feet of men and beasts." Appearing in newspapers throughout Virginia and into the Deep South, the appeal explained that Winchester's resources had been greatly reduced by the war. "We are therefore induced to appeal to you for aid in this matter, encouraged by the belief that you will feel it a privilege as well as duty to pay this tribute of respect to the memory of those who fell in your cause." Because every former Confederate state was represented among the fallen, the Winchester LMA believed that each should feel obliged to aid the town's efforts.¹¹

Despite the South's devastation, donations for Winchester's cemetery fund began to pour in from across the South.¹² In early March 1866, the local paper in Montgomery, Alabama, reported Winchester's efforts and advocated that

the “daughters of Alabama” should “assist their sisters in Virginia in this pious undertaking.” By spring 1866, Winchester had received \$14,000 in contributions (\$1,200 from Alabama alone), and the Winchester LMA in conjunction with the Stonewall Monumental Association purchased five acres for a Confederate cemetery to be named after General Jackson. Mary Williams and Eleanor Boyd then organized a public meeting at which they assigned a group of men to begin collecting the remains of the dead for reinterment prior to the coming summer heat. By late May, men employed by the Winchester LMA had collected the dead from a radius of fifteen miles around Stonewall Cemetery and buried them in individual graves. Within a year, the Winchester LMA had directed the reinterment of 2,489 Confederate soldiers, providing separate lots for the dead of each state and a section for the 829 unknown.¹³

While the Ladies of Winchester were busy creating their Confederate cemetery during the summer and fall of 1865, Union burial crews had begun the process of recovering the remains of their own soldiers from shallow and mass graves on the southern battlefields. Roused by reports of Union grave desecration throughout the South, the northern public had demanded that its war dead be provided honorable interments such as had been afforded those at Gettysburg.¹⁴ By early June 1865, the quartermaster general had issued orders sending Captain James Moore, assistant quartermaster, to the battlefields of the Wilderness and Spotsylvania to bury the remains of Union soldiers. Captain Moore and his crew successfully interred more than 700 remains, making an effort to inscribe the names of the deceased on wooden headboards at each grave. In early July, Moore and his men were sent to the site of Andersonville prison in Georgia, where they would work (often acrimoniously) with Clara Barton to create a national cemetery, and thus their work in Virginia was suspended.¹⁵

By the spring of 1866, Congress had finally provided the financial support for gathering all the remains of Union soldiers still reposing in “the States lately in rebellion.” This massive reinterment project would send crews across the South to scout for grave sites and organize cemeteries for Union soldiers similar to those that had been created during the war at Gettysburg, Arlington, Chattanooga, Knoxville, and Stones River.¹⁶ As early as February, officers and work crews began arriving in Richmond to gather the remains of northern prisoners who had been buried at Hollywood and Oakwood Cemeteries and at Belle Isle. Modeled after the national cemetery at Gettysburg, the burial corps laid out the grounds so that each grave was of equal importance and provided individual headstones for all remains. From Richmond, the Union detail moved on to Cold Harbor, Seven Pines, Hampton, City Point (near



Union soldiers' graves near the General Hospital, City Point, Virginia. In the spring of 1866, the U.S. Army sent crews across the South to scout for grave sites and organize national cemeteries for Union soldiers. (Courtesy Collection of the New-York Historical Society)

Petersburg), Fredericksburg, and Winchester, repeating the process of identifying the remains and arranging the graves in orderly burial grounds. By 1870, 300,000 Union soldiers had been reinterred in 73 national cemeteries, at least 17 of which were in the Commonwealth.¹⁷

There appears to have been virtually no dissent within the U.S. Army ranks to interring only loyal soldiers; northerners clearly understood that providing proper burials implied bestowing honor on the dead. As historian John Neff argues, “The drive toward honoring the lives and deaths of Union soldiers seems to have necessitated, perhaps understandably, the neglect of the Confederate soldier dead.”¹⁸ But ex-Confederates often deeply resented the deci-

sion. With the presence of the U.S. Burial Corps on the outskirts of Richmond, residents became increasingly angered by the lack of provisions for Confederate soldiers—and by the atrocities they believed were being committed by the Union burial crews. An article in the *Richmond Daily Examiner* opined that “the nation condemns our dead,” leaving them “in deserted places to rot into oblivion.” Newspapers in Petersburg reported stories that Union crews were “digging up skeletons of [Confederate] soldiers” and “selling them to be ground for manure.” Still other Virginians accused the federal government of contracting the labor out to those who would “place a sufficient number of bones in a coffin” to make it “rattle, and then marking the same by imaginary names” so as to make a profit of “\$8 per body.” To increase the compensation, the report alleged that “some parties cut the bodies in four pieces, burying the same in four pieces, and thus receiving \$32 instead of \$8.”¹⁹

Not only were the Union soldiers purportedly desecrating the Confederate dead, but the well-tended, neatly organized Union cemeteries stood in stark contrast to the shallow graves of Confederate soldiers, which were being uprooted by farmers and scavenging animals.²⁰ The real issue, however, was the underlying message of these new “national cemeteries” (as they had been designated by Congress). According to historian William Blair, such a designation suggested that ex-Confederates were second-class citizens within the new nation. The care rendered only to the Union dead “proved to them that northern officials intended to subjugate the Confederate South rather than place the region on an equal footing with the North.” Providing national cemeteries for the northern dead carried the message that these soldiers had given their lives for a noble cause while the Confederate soldiers, alternatively, had died in vain.²¹

Even though the Winchester women had begun preparing Confederate cemeteries in the spring of 1865, the intensified Union practices of expressly ignoring the Confederate dead during elaborate reburial efforts incited the further organization of LMAs and the cult of the Lost Cause during the spring of 1866. In Petersburg, for example, it seems to be no coincidence that the city’s women called for a formal meeting to discuss the plight of the neglected Confederate graves only two weeks after a Union detail began surveying a location for a permanent national cemetery in the vicinity.

But even more galling to Richmond whites than the U.S. Burial Corps was the Evacuation Day ceremony sponsored by the city’s black residents. Much like Emancipation Days staged by African Americans throughout the South after the war, the event was to occur on April 3, 1866 (exactly one year after the city surrendered), and was to include a parade of ex-slaves taking to the

streets to celebrate their newfound freedom. When white residents learned of the planned festivities, they reacted viscerally, vowing to “prevent any demonstration by the negroes.” One Richmond newspaper editor proclaimed that April 3 was no time for merriment but rather “a day of gloom and calamity to be remembered with a shudder of horror by all who saw it, whether it be the Federal soldier, or the resident, whether white or black.” Although the city’s black residents published a notice stating that they did not intend to celebrate the failure of the Confederacy but to commemorate their liberation, their efforts did not prevent violence. Just days before the ceremony, an unknown (no doubt white) person burned the Second African Baptist Church, a freedmen’s school, and the meeting location for those planning the event.²²

Despite the church razing, rumors that effigies of Jefferson Davis and Robert E. Lee were to be burned, and threats by whites that they would “wade through blood” before allowing the celebration, the festivities took place with only one minor incident and no bloodshed. Gathering at the fairgrounds to the northwest of the city, approximately 1,000 to 1,500 black men, many dressed in uniform and carrying muskets, marched, while several hundred more rode horses down the city’s streets. As the procession wound down Broad Street to Capitol Square, a crowd of 15,000 spectators cheered them along. White Richmonders did little to stop the event but warned that black people who had abandoned their work “to engage in the jubilee” would “not be employed again by their old masters.”²³

This combination of the former slaves’ Evacuation Day celebration and the “neglect” of rebel graves by the federal government fueled the fires of resistance and outrage among ex-Confederates. Moreover, President Andrew Johnson’s fairly lenient Reconstruction policies had provided southern sympathizers the climate in which they might freely commemorate their failed rebellion. In the spring of 1865, many ex-Confederates had wondered about their fate. Would they be tried as traitors? Would their leaders be hanged? Would the Federals confiscate all rebel property?²⁴ By the following year, white southerners felt confident that they had escaped their worst nightmares. In fact, members of the Freedmen’s Bureau and military officials testifying before Congress’s Joint Committee on Reconstruction in March 1866 believed that Virginians were more disloyal to the Union at that time than they had been immediately after Lee’s surrender. Under the “benign influence” of the Johnson administration, they claimed, ex-Confederates had become “arrogant, exacting, and intolerant.”²⁵

Given this political atmosphere, Virginia’s white residents refused to sit idly by as the South’s sons continued to molder in unidentified mass graves. It

is no coincidence that within two weeks of the Evacuation Day ceremony, Virginia's white women began to call for the organization of LMAS throughout the state. On April 19, 1866, Richmond women representing the eastern portion of the city known as Church Hill gathered to organize the Oakwood Memorial Association (OMA); by year's end, it claimed 328 members.²⁶ Picking up on their wartime practice of placing flowers on Confederate graves, within a week at least forty women of the Lynchburg Ladies' Relief Hospital, motivated by "humanity and patriotism," agreed to formally transform their organization into a memorial association.²⁷ Between May 3 and 10, some of the most prominent women of the state formed the Hollywood (based in Richmond), Petersburg, and Fredericksburg LMAS. Realizing that Jewish soldiers who had perished in Richmond would not be embraced by either the Oakwood or Hollywood groups, the Hebrew Memorial Association organized on June 5. Within a matter of two weeks, several of the most influential and active LMAS in the state, and in the South, had come into being.²⁸

While the Ladies in several cities appear to have met of their own accord as an extension of their wartime aid societies, women were not the only impetus behind such organizations. Colonel Thomas A. Ellis, president of Richmond's Hollywood Cemetery Corporation, issued a call in the papers inviting all citizens interested in tending the cemetery grounds to meet in St. Paul's Church on May 3, 1866.²⁹ Richmond's women, many of whom had probably been members of the postwar Ladies' Soldiers' Aid Society, responded en masse.³⁰ As in the state capital, the men of Fredericksburg and Lynchburg called for LMAS in their respective communities, recognizing that memorial tributes from the "gentle hand of woman" would be less threatening to the federal government. Even though Lynchburg's women had been tending to the graves of Confederate soldiers since the spring of 1863, the local paper encouraged their efforts. "A fitting work lies before the ladies," the paper wrote in April 1866, concluding that "we doubt not they will do it well and promptly." Fredericksburg's clergy held a meeting on May 10, 1866, so that the city might make arrangements for the Confederate dead. On that Thursday, the city's stores and businesses closed to commemorate the death of Stonewall Jackson, while women, children, and old men gathered at the Episcopal Church to mourn the Confederacy. Following an address by J. Horace Lacy, the women in attendance, including young Lizzie Alsop, agreed to organize an LMA for the purpose of taking care of the numerous Confederate graves that dotted the landscape, as well as those at the city cemetery. Immediately thereafter, the women elected officers and appointed several men to serve on committees to aid their endeavors. After the meeting ended, a large number

of women formed a procession to the city cemetery, where they decorated Confederate graves with flowers and evergreens.³¹

Like most of the wartime associations, the LMAS were organized by women at the community level, and they operated independently of one another. But such local origins did not mean that the groups failed to interact or support each others' efforts. Lynchburg's women, for example, had been especially tied to the Richmond groups through the Gunboat Association. It seemed only natural that they might build on these connections in their efforts to commemorate the Confederacy. The Lynchburg LMA adopted the OMA constitution and followed the Richmond women's lead in selecting May 10 as their Memorial Day. Fredericksburg, too, borrowed from the Richmond memorial associations. Less than a month after first meeting, the Fredericksburg LMA distributed a copy of the Hollywood constitution and bylaws as a model for its own founding documents.³²

At least four LMAS discussed the possibility of uniting their organizations. Less than two weeks after the Hollywood Memorial Association (HMA) first met, the women of the Oakwood association proposed that the two groups unite so that they might have more success in raising money and tending to the soldiers' graves. The groups agreed that each would select two men to represent their interests at a meeting on May 24. Before that meeting could take place, however, three HMA women attended an OMA meeting, proposing that the two associations be dissolved and then reorganized under the name "The Memorial Association of the Ladies of Richmond." Though the OMA had initiated talks, its members rejected the HMA plan, anticipating a loss of both financial and political control of the association, presumably because of the HMA members' more elite status. Regardless, it is obvious that as discussions continued, the OMA became increasingly concerned about its tenuous status as the capital city's inaugural memorial society. At one point during the talks, the OMA representative even suggested dividing Richmond so as to leave "an equal portion of the city open to the collectors of the Oakwood Association." Surprisingly, the suggestion "met with the entire approbation of the HMA" and the city was thus divided between those in the east who supported the Oakwood association and those in the west who donated to the Hollywood women.³³

Fredericksburg's LMA also sent a delegation of men to speak with the neighboring Spotsylvania LMA regarding a union between the two societies. The Richmond groups had commenced talks as a way to aid their memorial work, but the Fredericksburg Ladies exhibited a far more pretentious reason for negotiations with Spotsylvania. In early June 1866, neither community had

yet established a Confederate cemetery. The groups agreed to meet to discuss the practicality of establishing a single cemetery in which both LMAS would cooperate. Fredericksburg LMA representative J. Horace Lacy enumerated the reasons why their city should be selected. First, the city commanded better transportation accessibility with its railroads, thereby making it an obvious place for common interment of the dead. Transportation to Spotsylvania, however, was all but impossible. Perhaps most audaciously, Lacy claimed that Fredericksburg's battle and siege made it of "greater . . . historic celebrity." The Spotsylvania LMA unsurprisingly turned down these overtures to join with its Fredericksburg neighbor.³⁴

These early attempts at unification should not be interpreted as failures to create statewide organizations. Instead, they suggest that women of the LMAS wanted to preserve the autonomy of their local relief associations even as they understood that collaboration among groups would benefit all. Rather than creating a state or regional organization, the LMAS remained independent but agreed to cooperate with one another.


In order to reach those sympathetic to their cause, LMA women employed the gendered language of family. As they had during their wartime nursing activities, women of the LMAS saw themselves as filling the symbolic role of the grieving mother. They believed it was their Judeo-Christian duty to serve as surrogate mothers (and thus mourners) for boys and men who had died beyond the reach of their families. The women of the Petersburg LMA speculated on the importance of this work in one of their early meetings: "We can picture to ourselves the aged mother as she seeks the column that reports our celebration. Her son was in the army in Virginia . . . but she thinks of the simple bouquet affections offering, placed by the woman's hand on the green mound, and her heart echoes the thought—perhaps my child lies there. This is but one ray of that consolation we seek to afford. Who will refuse it? None—no, not one!" Their cemetery work offered comfort to mothers across the South, creating a common bond among all southern women who had lost a loved one to the war. Just as important as maternalism, however, was the notion of sisterhood. Through sewing societies and other wartime associations, Confederate women had found a community of women who shared their passions, worries, and tribulations. But with the end of the Confederacy and the reduced need for such societies, many women looked to rekindle those female networks and redirect their energies through memorial work. Playing on a latent Confederate nationalism, the Ladies of Charlottesville, Virginia, urged all those who wished to "embrace the sisterhood of those who once called the Confederate cause their own" to enlist.³⁵

To attract members to the ranks of their family of ex-Confederates, the LMAS frequently relied on well-established personal and political networks. Nancy MacFarland, president of the Hollywood association, asked the vice presidents and managers to nominate suitable persons who might "represent the association in the different cities of the South." Because the husbands of many HMA members had been government officials during the war, these women presumably had many connections throughout the South. These networks, along with family ties, surely helped bolster the HMA's fund-raising efforts. The Fredericksburg LMA began its campaign by writing letters to those persons who previously had lived in the city as well as those who might consider themselves "friends of the Society," including Robert E. Lee. The LMAS in Petersburg, Richmond, and Lynchburg likewise invited the former leader of the Confederacy to participate in their own memorial activities. Though Lee gratefully accepted their honorary membership, he offered neither financial nor other support to any of the associations.³⁶

All of the LMAS relied heavily on circulars, either reprinted in southern newspapers or sent by mass mailings, to rally white southerners and especially other women to their cause of tending to Confederate graves.³⁷ In February 1866, Colonel T. B. Roy, former chief of staff to Lieutenant General William J. Hardee, sent a letter to the *Montgomery (Alabama) Mail* requesting that the editor publish the enclosed circular soliciting contributions for the Winchester LMA. Roy asked that several Alabama women volunteer to collect subscriptions, as he was "impressed with the belief that ladies are more successful in such enterprises." The Winchester Ladies managed to muster a significant sum of money, and their efforts subsequently encouraged the women of Montgomery and other southern locals to organize similar associations. The HMA Ladies likewise issued an appeal addressed to "the Women of the South," in which they reminded their "southern sisters" that they remained united even if the Confederate war effort had failed. "The end we propose is the cause of the South . . . the permanent protection and adornment" of at least 13,000 "Confederate dead interred in Hollywood Cemetery." Even in defeat, the women claimed to have an "inextinguishable sympathy" for the Confederate cause.³⁸

LMA relationships with other women's organizations both within and beyond the state reveal that white southern women's associations were both more established and better connected than historians of women have often assumed. Some historians have argued that southern women failed to participate in organized clubs or public life until the latter part of the nineteenth century because of a distinctive southern gender system. But evidence from

LMA reveals that white women in fact expanded on their feminine role as caregivers, mourners, and, ultimately, Confederate nationalists, to elaborate a more public and organized role for themselves after the war. In Richmond, Fredericksburg, Winchester, Lynchburg, and Petersburg, no fewer than 500 women immediately joined the ranks of the LMAs, and that number fails to take into account at least 19 additional associations active in the state.³⁹ These women expected other LMAs to support their projects and, as the Richmond and Fredericksburg cases indicate, initially considered merging their organizations. These extensive networks among associations and the speed with which women joined and supported LMAs throughout Virginia and the region suggest that, contrary to numerous historians' assertions, women's associations were not absent in the mid-nineteenth-century South, nor did they vanish with the Civil War. On the contrary, they were alive and flourishing.

 Theoretically, any woman in the community could join these associations. In fact, nearly every society created committees to canvass particular sections of the city and solicit membership or, as in the case in Fredericksburg, placed a register at a local store for women to enroll. Those who pledged to join the association were then expected to provide their "subscription," or dues, ranging from fifty cents annually for the OMA and the Fredericksburg LMA to fifty cents monthly in Petersburg. Despite the claim that "every person [woman] of good character properly vouched for" could become a member, the membership rolls of each group reflected an obvious elite bias.⁴⁰ Not surprisingly, women who joined LMAs between 1865 and 1870 were overwhelmingly the wives and daughters of the cities' businessmen and civic leaders.⁴¹ The LMAs' executive boards generally included women whose husbands or fathers were politicians, physicians, insurance agents, merchants, tobacco manufacturers, and lawyers.⁴²

Most of the women who joined the LMAs were born between 1830 and 1850, and therefore, had experienced the Civil War as young women. Thirty-four-year-old Bessie Meade Callender, member of the Petersburg LMA, was representative of the earliest members of the memorial associations. She was born to John and Rebecca Meade in Prince George County at the family home, Cedar Level, in 1832, where her father made his living as a wheat and tobacco planter. Bessie married David Callender, a cloth manufacturer, in 1855, and moved to Petersburg, where she gave birth to three children. During the war, David sold cloth to the Confederate army, and Bessie proudly served as treasurer of a soldiers' relief society while enduring the siege of the city. Like many of her counterparts in Petersburg, she continued to demonstrate

her allegiance to the Confederacy as a founding member of the Petersburg LMA in 1866.⁴³

Although older than many of her counterparts, Mary Gordon Wallace was also a typical LMA member when it came to class and wartime experiences. The former president of the Fredericksburg Soldiers' Relief Association, she was sixty-three-years-old when the war ended. After the battle of Fredericksburg, Wallace and her husband, Dr. John H. Wallace, had become refugees from the sacked city. They returned in 1865 to find that their house had been spared, but their provisions had been reduced to one hen, a cow, and a small supply of cornmeal. Despite her impoverished condition, Wallace's leadership ability made her the natural selection for president among the members of the LMA. Her fellow members of the Soldiers' Relief Association, including Sarah Alsop and Mrs. James H. Bradley, also served on the Fredericksburg LMA board of directors.⁴⁴

Women in the capital likewise adapted their wartime organizational skills to postwar memorialization projects. Nancy MacFarland's position as president of the HMA was a natural outgrowth of her experiences during the war. MacFarland had served as the president of the Soldiers' Aid Association of Virginia, organizing a network of the women's volunteer societies throughout the state and the Confederacy. She had declined the treasurer's office for the Gunboat Association, noting that although her heart was in the cause she would not be able to do it justice, given her other commitments. Her colleague in the Soldiers' Aid Association, Mrs. Samuel Price, transferred her role as treasurer to the OMA.⁴⁵ Members of Richmond's Gunboat Association also joined memorial associations in the capital city: Martha Greenhow Maury, Mrs. George Gwathmey, Mrs. F. Nelson, Mrs. John Purcell, and Mrs. B. Smith all joined the HMA in 1866.⁴⁶

Proximity to Civil War deaths likewise prompted membership in the LMAs. Many of the women who believed it their duty to provide centralized cemeteries for Confederate soldiers had first witnessed the anonymous and lonely deaths of soldiers in wartime hospitals. Eleanor Boyd and Mary Williams, founders of the Winchester LMA, had fed, clothed, and nursed wounded soldiers in the town's numerous hospitals. Nora Davidson, who operated a school for young children after the war, had frequently tended to wounded soldiers in Petersburg. Some women, such as HMA's Janet Henderson Randolph, had welcomed wounded soldiers into their private homes. A handful of LMA members had served in the more official capacity of nurse. "Captain" Sally Tompkins, who had operated her own private hospital in Richmond, was quick to join the HMA, as was fellow Richmond nurse Lucy Mason Webb.⁴⁷


Lynchburg provides one of the most direct examples of women transforming their soldiers' aid societies and nursing activities into an LMA. The president of the Lynchburg Hospital, Lucy Mina Otey, realized that a cemetery for soldiers would be needed to deal with the mounting death toll in the city's hospitals. Though busy with the arduous task of managing the hospital in 1861, Otey attended to the last rites of the first soldier buried in the town, Private Robert Feemster of the 11th Mississippi. Soldier burials in the Old Methodist Cemetery continued throughout the war, and in April 1866 several of Otey's colleagues at the hospital organized a memorial association to enclose the graves and arrange an annual Decoration Day. Although Otey died at age sixty-five in May 1866, hospital directors Susan Speed, Cornelia Christian, and Mrs. Robert L. Brown helped continue her work through the town's memorial association.⁴⁸

For some, simply having endured the devastation of their communities was enough to sustain their Confederate patriotism after the war. At least two of the Fredericksburg LMA vice presidents had witnessed the destructive battle of their city. Fannie S. White, a widow and mother of three small children, had remained in the town during the 1862 Union shelling and occupation. Friends and family had desperately urged her to leave, but she had thought it best to remain in her home to protect her household. When the bombardment began on December 11, she hurried to the cellar with her children, slaves, and two men visiting from Stafford. After the shelling stopped at one o'clock in the afternoon, she surveyed the damage to her property. Cannon balls and broken shells littered the garden, limbs had been knocked off trees, and several large holes had been torn through the house. Given the condition of her property, the two men from Stafford finally convinced White to take refuge near Salem Church. Anne F. Fitzhugh, too, endured staggering losses following the battle. When an effort began in December 1863 to compensate Fredericksburg citizens who had lost property during the shelling, Fitzhugh reported a list of losses, including \$3,845 in household items and \$15,000 in damage to the residence and outbuildings. The families of HMA members Mrs. Lewis Crenshaw, Anne Grant, Alice Brown Haxall, and Nancy MacFarland reported losses ranging from \$3,000 to \$68,000 following Richmond's evacuation.⁴⁹

Though a systemic survey of every LMA member is virtually impossible, most members had supported the war effort and had experienced its hardships in some fashion. These wartime experiences had generally intensified women's bitterness toward Federal soldiers (who now occupied their communities and focused reburial efforts solely on the Union dead) and strengthened their identities as Confederates. What better way to demonstrate their

disdain for Yankees and their undying loyalty to the Confederate cause than by honoring the South's dead?

Along with their intense and continued loyalty to the defunct Confederate nation, women who joined memorial associations were also motivated by more personal reasons. Namely, membership in the Ladies served as a marker of class status. In the antebellum South, a "lady" had been defined as a white woman of the slaveholding class who was delicate and refined, exhibited exceptional manners, and remained obedient and submissive to the men in her life. Although the reality of even elite southern women's lives often contradicted this image, the ideal "lady" was one who was freed from the burdens and drudgery of work because of her reliance on slave labor. But slavery as a marker of elite status had vanished with the surrender, and former white slaveholders were forced to find alternative markers of class status. One such symbol of class for women was membership in a memorial society. As the membership rolls suggested, only the community's wealthiest women, the wives of doctors, lawyers, and business owners, could afford to join the LMAs. Membership required dues and free time, both no doubt difficult to come by for many families immediately following the war. But even more important was the name the women selected for themselves. Hardly anyone could dispute their position and purpose when they declared themselves "the Ladies." These women were not only ranking members of society but (presumably) were confined to the domestic sphere and therefore naturally disinterested in anything political. Elite white women, then, would employ their class status as a political shield.⁵⁰

 Although many historians have described LMAs as merely "memorial," and by implication, irrelevant, these associations demonstrated continued evidence of Confederate nationalism and had profound implications for southern identity in the postwar period. Recent scholarship suggests that even though the Confederate state ceased to exist, many white southerners continued to identify themselves as a distinct cultural group well into the late nineteenth century. LMAs, more than any other individual or group in the immediate postwar period, cultivated this notion of southern distinctiveness and fostered a residual Confederate nationalism that would endure for generations.⁵¹

Beyond establishing Confederate burial grounds, LMAs sought to make the cemeteries physical reminders of the cause, albeit a lost one. The women of the OMA, for example, believed that "it is for the living . . . that such memorials are held, to inspire their lives with the memory of the lives and deeds of the

great and noble dead." As such, the OMA laid out its long-term goals: to turf and mark each of the 16,000 graves, to lay out and decorate the grounds, and in the future when finances would permit, to replace the wooden headboards with those of "enduring marble." Similarly, women in Lynchburg agreed that they should enclose the space around the graves in order to protect them for future generations. The local newspaper concurred, arguing that leaving the thousands of graves exposed to the elements would be "a shame, and a reflection on the people of Lynchburg."⁵² That is, if contemporary white southerners did not act quickly, future generations would never know of the sacrifice and devotion of their Confederate forefathers and mothers.

These southern cities of the dead bound the slain soldiers together in eternal rest and created opportunities for surviving Confederates to foster a sense of white southern solidarity. From Winchester to Lynchburg, Ladies appealed to a unified South to raise funds to continue their work.⁵³ Both the Fredericksburg and Winchester associations called on every state of the former Confederacy, observing that scarcely a town or a county was unrepresented on the city's battlefields. The Hollywood women's appeal addressed "the South as one family" and believed that "the southern heart throbs with one impulse." The OMA women declared that their work was to be performed "for the honor and credit of the entire South."⁵⁴ The Petersburg LMA claimed that the entire South should be expected to provide "aid of a work which has equal claims on them as on ourselves." These pleas for aid did not go unanswered. Donations reached the women of the LMAs from as far away as Louisiana and Texas. Because of the number of Alabama soldiers who reposed in the Old Dominion, the state's women were especially generous in their donations to Virginia's LMAs, sending contributions to the Winchester, Hollywood, and Fredericksburg associations. An anonymous gift of twenty dollars in gold arrived for the Fredericksburg LMA from Mobile. The Montgomery LMA not only offered its cooperation in caring for Alabama's dead but also pledged to donate the proceeds from a charity ball held in Montgomery.⁵⁵

Two surprising but important membership characteristics confirm that continued patriotic devotion to the Confederacy rather than mere sentimentalism motivated the women of the memorial associations. First, many of the LMAs' male relatives, especially husbands, did not serve in the Confederate military; rather, they tended to remain in the community, either because of job obligations or of age. For example, Rev. Andrew H. H. Boyd, husband of Winchester LMA vice president Eleanor Boyd, was an adamant supporter of the Confederate cause but remained in the town throughout the war because of his position as minister of the Loudoun Street Church. Phillip Wil-


liams II, Boyd's brother-in-law and husband of Winchester LMA president Mary Williams, probably did not join the army because of his position as a town councilman and his age of fifty-nine when the war commenced. Both men, along with several other prominent townsmen, however, were taken prisoner during the course of the war by Federal forces. Charles Button, husband of Lynchburg LMA vice president Mary Button, stayed in Lynchburg to operate his paper, the *Virginian*. HMA president Nancy MacFarland's husband, sixty-two-year-old William H. MacFarland, served as a Virginia delegate to the Confederate Provisional Congress from 1861 to 1862 and therefore did not join the military. The same held true for HMA member Henrietta Lyons's fifty-nine-year-old husband, James.⁵⁶

Second, it appears that even when their loved ones did serve in the military forces, most of the Ladies in Virginia did not lose male relatives in the war. Captain Charles Tackett Goolrick, brother to Fredericksburg LMA member Virginia Goolrick, was wounded at Chancellorsville and resigned due to disability in February 1864, but he survived the war. Colonel Robert S. Chew, the brother of another Fredericksburg LMA member, Ellen P. Chew, served as an officer with the 30th Virginia Infantry and returned home safely in 1865, as did Lizzie Alsop's uncle, William Alsop. Captain Richard Pegram, husband of Petersburg LMA member Helen Pegram, and Major General William Mahone, husband of Petersburg LMA vice president Otetia Mahone, likewise returned home after the war. The LMA women, then, were not grieving for their own kin. As the OMA's constitution expressly noted, a "deep and living sympathy for bereaved families" motivated the women. The notion of "our" bereaved families was conspicuously absent.⁵⁷

The fact that LMA members tended not to be the widows and orphans of men who died in the fighting reveals in part their political agenda. The "mourning" demonstrated by these women at Memorial Days and cemetery dedications was not of a personal nature; they were not there to secure the proper burial of their own fathers, sons, and brothers, or, in most instances, even to decorate the graves of a loved one. But that does not negate the very real mourning they felt, which was the bereavement for the loss of the Confederacy, for the death of their cause. The act of hiring burial crews, establishing cemeteries, and organizing elaborate Memorial Day spectacles all represented means by which they could keep alive their intense feelings of Confederate patriotism and demonstrate their continued commitment to the cause. Moreover, these projects gave them reason to foster ties with other like-minded southern "ladies," providing for greater coordination and cross-fertilization among the region's women than historians have previously acknowledged.

Clearly, these women did not see the end of the war as severing their cultural and emotional ties to the former slave states. Rather than fading, their identification with other ex-Confederates seemed only to intensify after the war. The LMAS called on the entire white South, not just their own communities or even states, issuing appeals to people hundreds of miles away to aid in their efforts. Virginia's Ladies, moreover, petitioned the whole region for good reason—they cared for a substantial percentage of the Confederate graves. Within just the seven LMAS located in Fredericksburg, Lynchburg, Richmond, Petersburg, and Winchester, the Ladies would eventually reinter more than 72,520 remains, nearly 28 percent of the South's total war dead. At a minimal estimate of one dollar per body, that was a hefty price tag for these organizations to assume, especially given the financial circumstances of the postwar South.⁵⁸

But it was more than just a need for pecuniary support that led them to contact their southern sisters and brethren. These women considered themselves loyal Confederates and identified with the common plight of white southerners across the region who had sacrificed sons, brothers, fathers, and lovers. The LMAS maintained that their men had fought a gallant fight, and now the women bore responsibility for keeping alive their cause and memory. These women, from Virginia to Texas, were united by common losses—the experience of so much death and destruction as well as the loss of their Confederate nation. More than just having a mutual understanding of each other's suffering, women in Virginia, North Carolina, Alabama, and beyond expected a collective and cooperative effort to bury the dead. Although the South had been defeated on the battlefield, Confederate sentiment continued to thrive for decades in the South's cities of the dead because of the Ladies.

 If establishing Confederate cemeteries motivated Virginia's women to organize LMAS, their most visible and popular activity was the annual celebration of Memorial or Decoration Days. White southerners celebrated these days in the spring as a sign of renewal and rebirth, but each community chose its own symbolic date on which to gather. Fredericksburg, Lynchburg, and Oakwood in Richmond all selected May 10, the anniversary of Stonewall Jackson's death. The women of Hollywood agreed on May 31, the anniversary of the day Richmonders first heard the cannons of war. Schoolchildren repaired to the graves of Blandford Cemetery for an informal ceremony under the direction of Petersburg LMA member Nora Fontaine Maury Davidson on May 26, but the Ladies selected June 9 for their official services. It had been on that day, two years prior, that the "grey haired sires and beard-



Petersburg's First Memorial Day, June 9, 1866. The recently remounded graves were adorned with floral tributes typical of Confederate Memorial Days regardless of date or location. (Courtesy Museum of the Confederacy, Richmond, Virginia, copy photography by Katherine Wetzel)

less youths" of the home guard defended the city until Lee's troops could arrive.⁵⁹ Finally Winchester's Ladies settled on June 6, the day the Valley's hero, General Turner Ashby, was killed.

Regardless of the date, Memorial Days tended to follow similar patterns. The women of the LMAS gathered on the days preceding the event to make evergreen and floral arrangements and requested that young men or boys perform any physical work, such as remounding. On Memorial Day, hundreds and even thousands of citizens gathered at some central location in town, perhaps a church or town hall, and then marched in procession to the cemetery, where the Ladies and children decorated the graves with flowers and evergreens. Subsequently, orators chosen by the LMA delivered prayers and evocative speeches. Even though women selected men to serve as the featured guests and speakers, everyone understood that the Ladies ran the show. As city newspapers noted, Memorial Day was "under the direction of the Ladies"—they selected the date, chose the orators, invited groups to participate in the procession, and even picked the musical selections.⁶⁰

Despite the omnipresent rhetoric of mourning at these Memorial Days, white Virginians knew they were treading on dangerous ground when they

invoked the “sacred” memory of the Confederacy so soon after defeat. Petersburg’s Sara Pryor later recalled that the Ladies recognized the need for discreet behavior, given the continued presence of the Federal Army in the city. In order to avoid any confrontations with the Union soldiers, Petersburg LMA president Margaret Joynes had quietly sent notes to all the members, requesting their presence at Blandford Church on the afternoon of June 9, from which the services would commence. Perhaps it was an effort to prevent Federal Army censure that the Ladies also decorated the Union graves that were scattered among those of the Confederates.⁶¹ On Lynchburg’s first Memorial Day, May 10, 1866, the city newspaper admitted that the services would “doubtless excite harsh and malignant remarks in certain quarters of the North, and be taken as evidence of a mutinous, malcontent spirit pervading our people.” But, the writer maintained, “we are sure” that “this sentiment will for the main part be confined to men who took no active *battle-part* in the war.” Northern soldiers, and perhaps their devoted wives and daughters, would surely recognize the need to honor the remains of those who had died “valiantly in the opposite ranks.”⁶²

Indeed, ex-Confederates had every reason to suspect that the U.S. Army and northern press closely monitored their actions. In May 1866, an unidentified northern paper charged that the money obtained for the dead should have been donated to the destitute living. The southern press defended the actions of their women, pointing out that “they can bury the dead but once; they are feeding the poor daily.” White southerners, however, knew the real motive behind the accusation. “The secret of this carping is not because the fund was not applied to the relief of the poor, but because it was applied to preserving the memory of our dead,” a Lynchburg newspaper insisted. Representative Thomas Williams of Pennsylvania clearly indicated the political significance of Confederate memorializing, noting that “the memories of the traitor dead have been hallowed and consecrated by local public entertainments and treasonable utterances in honor of their crime.” In the days following the first Confederate Memorial Days, an anonymous northern woman lamented that “we have few flowers for the graves of our heroes, but we have crowns and honors for the heads of traitors.” She implored her fellow northerners to “not forget Andersonville, nor Libby, nor Castle Thunder, nor Belle Isle! Let banishment at least be meted to this man who tortured and slaughtered our brothers.” The *New York Times* concurred, warning northerners that the “Southern Spirit” was continuing to grow “with wonderful rapidity.” “Its most fruitful feeders,” it noted, “are the Memorial Associations.” The paper reminded its readers that these seemingly “noble” Memorial Days provided

forums for ex-Confederate men to make speeches, “wherein [they] adroitly inculcat[e] hatred of the North. . . . These memorial days have now become painfully frequent, and on every one of them recruits are gathered to the Democratic banner.” The *Chicago Tribune* agreed, denouncing the Ladies of Richmond for strewing flowers on the graves of the Confederate dead, charging that these women sought “to keep alive the political feeling of hostility to the Union.”⁶³

Northerners perhaps were inclined to view southern white women’s behavior as overtly political because of female activism in their own region. Women had long been active in the abolitionist movement, and in 1848 Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott had called the first women’s rights convention at Seneca Falls, at which they declared that men and women were created equal. During the next seventeen years, a small but growing number of northern women began to demand rights, such as control of their own earnings, guardianship of their own children in cases of divorce, and, eventually, the right to vote. During the war, Anna Dickinson embraced partisan politics when the New Hampshire State Republican Committee invited her to speak in favor of the Republican gubernatorial candidate in the spring of 1863. By the end of year, Dickinson had helped the Republicans defeat Democrats in four states, soon thereafter becoming the first woman ever to address Congress. In the wake of the war with emancipation secured, northern women like Dickinson, Mott, and Stanton once again turned their attention to the vote, pressing for an amendment that would ensure universal adult suffrage. Northern critiques of southern women’s graveside services, therefore, came from a context in which women were increasingly seen as overtly public and political.⁶⁴

But safe within the cloak of “motherly and sisterly undertaking,” former Confederates defended these floral tributes under the direction of the Ladies. “This poor privilege is all that is left us now,” they claimed. The *Richmond Whig* likewise responded that “political significance is not attached to these funeral ceremonies in the South,” as it was not the habit of southern women to form political conspiracies. Rather, the paper proclaimed, “if the men of the South contemplated treason and ‘civil war,’” they would not put “forward their wives and daughters to do the dangerous work.” But for all their reasoning and justifications, southern white men did just that.⁶⁵

If southern men simultaneously recognized and denied the political nature of the women’s activities, the LMAs clearly understood that their work spoke to issues of loyalty and bordered on treason.⁶⁶ The Petersburg LMA, for example, invoked the military leadership of both the Revolution and the Con-

federacy in its founding documents. The Ladies believed that they would be untrue "to our birthright of glory—untrue to the hand of a Washington and a Lee did we not give every energy to this work." Here, the Ladies continued the tradition of equating the American struggle for independence with that of Confederate hopes and also noted their continued devotion to the South's unsuccessful rebellion. In Georgia, members of the Athens LMA recalled years later that their men had initially discouraged memorial efforts, as they had sworn an oath to the Union. The women pointed out that they were under no such parole and so would continue in their work.⁶⁷

Such carefully chosen rhetoric confirms that Ladies' associations throughout the former Confederacy recognized the political implications and the religious symbolism inherent in their floral graveside tributes. Minutes from the Ladies' meetings, speeches delivered at Memorial Days, and even newspaper accounts were filled with biblical overtones. At the HMA's first meeting, Rev. Charles Minnegrode opened the gathering with a prayer and then commenced to speak "of the sacredness of the movement and offered up an earnest petition that success might attend the holy enterprise about to be inaugurated." In a reference surely intended to invoke the image of Mary Magdalene at Christ's grave, a Winchester newspaper noted that "while man had shown energy and industry in preparing and mounding the graves of the dead, the hand and heart of woman had been enlisted in the decoration of the sacred ground." These floral tributes revealed that Virginia's "sympathizing daughters" had been first at the tomb. Several years later, in Wilmington, North Carolina, former general Raleigh E. Colston used the same analogy: "Unwearied by all their labors and self-sacrifice during four years of war, they were, like Mary, the first at the graves of their beloved dead. Therefore, to them we may safely entrust the holy ark of our Southern faith."⁶⁸ By framing their discourse in the language of a pious undertaking, the Ladies hoped to further remove themselves from the political sphere. The divine, of course, was beyond the realm of partisan and sectional politics. But even more, such rhetoric suggested that the Confederacy, like Christ, might yet rise again.⁶⁹

During 1866, inaugural memorial celebrations occurred throughout the South. On May 10, the third anniversary of Jackson's death and the very day that Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and other northern women were congregating to form the American Equal Rights Association in New York, the OMA paid tribute to their dead Confederates for the first time. Richmonders suspended business, and more than a thousand gathered for religious services at St. John's Church, where Patrick Henry had given his "Give Me Liberty or Give Me Death" speech, before marching in a procession to

Oakwood Cemetery. At the burial grounds, the participants scattered flowers on the 16,000 graves, before listening to Rev. Manning appeal to God to console and bless the wives and orphans of those Confederate soldiers who had fallen in war. Robert E. Lee had been invited to be the day's orator but declined the invitation. Instead, the final speaker of the afternoon was Raleigh E. Colston. After his speech stressing the loyalty of the enlisted men to the Lost Cause, 200 Confederate survivors saluted him with a rebel yell. Despite this blatantly militaristic display, Richmonders were quick to remind any unionists who might be watching that women had directed the entire affair. The officers of the OMA and their invited guests, the HMA, occupied center stage on the speakers' stand, and newspapers pointed out that the day's activities were "under the management of the ladies." Richmond's ex-Confederates hoped that women had depoliticized the event by their leadership and presence, thereby providing a forum for Lost Cause advocates such as Colston to voice their unwavering support of the Confederacy.⁷⁰

Not to be outdone, the HMA organized an even more impressive, and more militaristic, memorial celebration. Prior to the day's affair, Major Thomas A. Brander offered the services of the city's military companies to the HMA. The men formed themselves into companies and marched out to Hollywood on May 28 and 29 to remove weeds, remound, and place properly marked headboards on nearly 6,000 graves. One observer commented that "the arms worn on that day and the duties to be performed were quite different from what they were some months ago. The musket, the sword, and the bayonet, gave place to the spade, the shovel, the pick, and the rake."⁷¹ Replicating the freed slaves' Evacuation Day procession a month earlier, on May 31, twenty-three military companies participated in what could only have appeared to many northern observers as a military demonstration. Wearing their uniforms without military insignia or buttons as the law required, thousands of Confederate veterans made their way to Grace Church where they joined the HMA. From there, the men and women formed a single procession to the burial ground. "It was a strange and splendid spectacle," one newspaper reported. "The carriages, filled with lovely women, were covered with flowers; wreathes and garlands decked the roofs of the omnibuses usually devoted to baser burdens, and all the treasures of Spring seemed to blush and tremble."

Stores across Richmond, except those owned by Republicans or African Americans, remained closed for the day, and an estimated 20,000 people congregated in Hollywood Cemetery. Although no ceremonies or speeches occurred, the HMA members placed evergreens and garlands on the graves while the veterans solemnly paid tribute to privates and generals alike. Again

the newspapers tried to assure everyone that the affair was not intended to provoke Union authorities; rather it had been formulated by the “spontaneous demonstration” of “self-sacrificing” Richmond women.⁷²

Though smaller than the Hollywood ceremony, white southerners argued that the festivities in Winchester on June 6, 1866, were equally free of treasonous spirit. As in Richmond, businesses closed, while thousands of locals and visitors filled the town’s streets for its inaugural Memorial Day. Three hundred former Confederates, primarily survivors of the Stonewall and Arnold Elzey brigades, were followed by fourteen young girls wearing white dresses and black sashes, accompanied by other citizens in a procession traveling from the Episcopal Church to the new cemetery. Upon reaching the site, the women and young girls decorated every grave with wreaths and garlands of fresh flowers and greenery. Finally, the crowd gathered to hear three speakers, all former Confederate majors, pay tribute to the fallen soldiers. Surely northern troops stationed in Winchester must have—or at least should have—frowned upon the large gathering of southern sympathizers, not to mention the hundreds of ex-Confederate soldiers who paraded through town only a year after the war’s end.⁷³

In order to avoid cries of treason from northerners, Winchester’s men, like their counterparts in Richmond, consciously framed the day’s blatant displays of Confederate patriotism within the domestic sphere of women. “The mothers and daughters of Virginia are the chief mourners and actors in these touching obsequies,” one of the day’s speakers, Major Uriel Wright, proclaimed. For Wright and other former Confederates, the language of mourning and feminine virtue were virtually inseparable when justifying tributes to their “lost cause.” This rhetoric, if not full-fledged belief, allowed them subtly to protest not only the outcome of the war, but also the uncertainty of what a reconstructed South might look like in those first years after Appomattox. Who knew what changes might lie ahead? Already the region’s labor and racial systems had been overturned. By placing the responsibility for protecting the past in the firm but gentle hands of women, white southern men could claim that memorializing the Confederacy was by no means a political gesture.⁷⁴

Wright made sure that white southerners, as well as any northerners who might be watching, understood that despite Confederate veterans’ support, these ceremonies were solely the work of the South’s women. “Mothers and daughters of Virginia,” he exclaimed, “this noble enterprise is your work. Scenes like this, rising up wherever our dead lie, gild with melancholy light the desolation of the land. They took their origin in the brains of no politician, no schemer, seeking individual distinction or plotting the renewal

of strife.” Because this tribute had been born in the heart of women, he argued, it could only be interpreted as true and pure. These women certainly could not be viewed as traitorous—they were simply exhibiting the qualities nineteenth-century Victorian ideology attributed to women: sentiment, emotion, and devotion to one’s menfolk. In fact, Wright declared that southern white women “were not political casuists.” They had not paused “to enquire whether the teachings of Jefferson, Madison, or Mason furnished the true interpretation of the Constitution, and correctly marked the boundaries of State and Federal powers.” Just as members of the southern Whig Party had done since the 1830s, postbellum Virginians agreed that women were naturally “disinterested” in politics and therefore must possess pure motives. In denying the political nature of women, Wright simultaneously denied the very political nature of their work: if women were not political, then, by extension, their actions could not be construed as such. Therefore, memorial activities, clearly within the province of female mourning (and hence the domestic sphere), posed no threat to sectional reunion.⁷⁵

What he failed to mention, however, was that under the direction of the Ladies, Memorial Days provided legitimate venues for ex-Confederate veterans to march into towns, for thousands of white southerners to gather in a central location, and for former generals and political figures to praise the Confederate cause in a public forum. Protected by their gender, white women were able to escape charges of treason during Reconstruction, for which men, as “political-beings,” would have been found guilty. Moreover, ex-Confederate men could practice what Anne Rubin has termed “political ventriloquism.” That is, by allowing white women to take center stage at memorial activities, men could both express their bitterness toward Yankees and assure the federal government of their loyalty.⁷⁶

If Winchester’s Memorial Day celebration in June 1866 should have been enough to raise northern eyebrows, then the elaborate reburial of General Turner Ashby and three other Confederate officers the following autumn should have been seen as outright treason. Believing that Winchester rather than Charlottesville would be a more appropriate burial location for the Valley’s dashing hero, the Winchester LMA proposed that Ashby and his brother Richard, killed fighting on Kelly Island, Maryland, in 1861, be reinterred in Stonewall Cemetery.⁷⁷ Joseph Holmes Sherrard and James Averitt, writing on behalf of the LMA, drafted a letter to the Ashbys’ sisters in August 1866 requesting permission to reinter the bodies. The men assured one of the sisters, Mary Moncure, that both the brothers “seemed attached to our people, where they had hosts of warm and instant friends.” They claimed that “there are

none to whom the guardianship of these remains would be more appropriately committed than those whose homes and firesides they tried to defend." The sisters willingly consented to the reburial.⁷⁸

In early October, men hired by the LMA exhumed the bodies of both Ashbys and prepared them for transfer to Winchester. They placed Turner Ashby's body in an elaborate coffin paid for by the "patriotic women" of Jefferson County, West Virginia. Made of black walnut and covered with black cloth of the finest fabric, it was, the newspaper noted, "nearly enveloped in silver fringe and platings." The brothers' bodies were transported first to Charles Town, West Virginia, and then on to Winchester, where they joined the remains of two other comrades on the night of October 24. The hearse, drawn by four white horses and accompanied by sixty former military officers and local officials, wound through small Valley communities until reaching Stonewall Cemetery. The elaborate processional must have been a spectacle reminiscent of Confederate military parades through towns during the war.⁷⁹

On Thursday morning, October 25, nearly 10,000 Valley residents and guests gathered to await the reburial of the Confederate officers and dedication of Stonewall Cemetery.⁸⁰ Morning trains on the Winchester and Potomac line brought eleven passenger cars crowded with enthusiastic spectators from Virginia and Maryland. Even West Virginia was well represented by the "fair women and brave men" of Jefferson and Berkeley Counties. According to the local paper, they ignored "their unnatural separation which has, temporarily we trust, deprived them of their birth rights as Virginians" and "gathered around the tombs of the Confederate dead." Men and women alike thronged the bustling streets of Winchester, and all recognized the vital role the fairer sex played in the day's events. One observer noted that "an early visit to the cemetery revealed to us the fact that, while man had shown energy and industry in preparing and mounding the graves of the dead, the hand and heart of woman had been enlisted in the decoration of the sacred ground." Women from West Virginia to North Carolina had contributed to the affair. A collection of flowers sent by the women of Shepherdstown, West Virginia, and an elegant floral cross, a gift of women from North Carolina, decorated Ashby's grave. Monuments marking the lots appropriated to each state had been "wreathed and twined with evergreens, myrtle, and cedar, whilst the numberless bouquets resting on the hills marking the repository of the heroic dead, told plainly the sympathizing daughters of Virginia had been thus early at the tomb."⁸¹

The Ladies of Winchester and their sisters from surrounding areas, however, served a more valuable purpose than mere decorators. As had been the

case only months before, at Winchester's first Memorial Day, women once again proved to be an important political symbol for the ex-Confederacy's message of triumph through defeat. As the keynote speaker at the dedication, former governor Henry A. Wise spoke neither of mourning nor of reunion. Instead, he encouraged the crowd to look to the dead for the power and strength to deal with surrender and submission. He told them to ask themselves what the Mighty Stonewall would do in their situation. "Would he have praised proclamations of peace! Peace! When there is no peace?" he asked. "Would he not have demanded as lawful rights the withdrawal of military force and of Freedman's Bureau, and the restoration of Civil Rule and the writ of Habeas Corpus?" Responding to the frequent and hearty applause, Wise declared that Jackson would have never disavowed the cause for which his comrades died. Again referencing Jackson (and invoking the biblical rhetoric so common at Lost Cause gatherings), Wise proclaimed: "The Captain of our Salvation was conquered; He died that the cause might live." With the Federal troops watching from across the field, he thundered: "A lost cause! If lost it was false; if true, it is not lost!" He closed his remarks by noting that the state of West Virginia was "the bastard child of political rape," but promised that "there is still substance enough left in Virginia to insure her honor and more than restore her preeminence." With this, Wise stepped down from the podium. Surely U.S. troops stationed in the town must have looked on in astonishment. As historian William Blair has pointed out, Turner Ashby had been reinterred in a town in which he had never resided, in a cemetery named after Jackson (who was buried in Lexington as opposed to Winchester), at a dedication that featured a recalcitrant rebel in Wise. How could northerners look upon the spectacle in the Valley as anything other than pro-Confederate political behavior?⁸²



Women of the LMAs were not puppets of the South's men; they clearly orchestrated the creation of Confederate cemeteries and Memorial Days. But it was equally clear that men supported these displays of residual Confederate patriotism. In several instances, men had encouraged women to form associations and, in nearly every instance, had provided the labor for preparing the Confederate graves. They could claim that these "Ladies" were disinterested in politics, but women had literally provided the platform from which ex-Confederate men could lament their defeat. This fact was not lost on Republicans and Union occupying forces and did little to persuade them that these displays had no political content. On the day of Hollywood's services, for example, some Federal soldiers arrived in Richmond from Fredericksburg to

prevent any emergency or hostility that might arise between the white southerners and the occupying forces. Governor Francis Pierpont believed that the observance at Hollywood indicated that treason remained alive in the former Confederacy.⁸³ The U.S. Burial Corps stationed in Winchester had refused the request of a woman to lower the flag at its camp during Ashby's reinterment and later that afternoon brandished their weapons at a group of the town's residents. Despite these close encounters, Union forces did relatively little to prevent these intense displays of Confederate patriotism in the spring and fall of 1866. Under the auspices of the Ladies, from Winchester to Petersburg, Virginia's first Memorials Days passed without incident.⁸⁴

Within a year of Appomattox, white women had successfully launched an effort to venerate the defeated Confederacy. Hundreds of Virginia's leading daughters transformed their wartime aid societies into memorial associations and launched campaigns throughout the South to raise funds for their national Confederate cemeteries, which only furthered the sense of southern solidarity and sectional animosity. Ex-Confederate men and women alike recognized the pivotal role women played in maintaining and re-creating Confederate identity in the aftermath of defeat. The LMAs had created a permanent reminder of the Confederate war effort through their cemeteries. They had provided a forum through Memorial Days and tributes such as the Ashbys' reinterment that allowed white men like Wise to expound on the virtues of the Confederacy and advocate resistance to Reconstruction. Although challenges awaited the women after implementation of more rigid Reconstruction policies in 1867, using the cloak of feminine mourning, the LMAs had set in motion Lost Cause traditions that would continue into the next century.⁸⁵



The Influence and Zeal of Woman

Ladies' Memorial Associations
during Radical Reconstruction,
1867–1870

Even in the “tender” hands of southern women, Memorial Days and cemetery dedications smacked of unrepentant rebellion. The relatively lenient period of presidential Reconstruction had not quelled the Confederate spirit; in fact, it appeared to have stoked it. Southern Unionists and northerners fumed over such reports, repeatedly declaring that they were attempting reconciliation while ex-Confederates continued to exhibit bombastic and sectional behavior. One Unionist newspaper editor condemned the federal government's policy of avoiding controversy: “Union men must keep quiet, hang their heads, and look on in submission, allowing young loyalists of the South . . . to do as they please and to vaunt as they choose about the past.” Some white northerners even denounced the commemoration of Confederate heroes and “the annual floral decoration of soldiers graves” as a “deeply laid plan in Virginia extending throughout the South, to keep alive for future use the hopes, purposes, and organization of the late disunion conspiracy.” Others claimed to have discovered the real motives of Confederate memorial services: to “keep alive the rancors of hate.” Moreover, the elaborate memorial celebrations of 1866 led U.S. major general Philip H. Sheridan to declare that an “undoubted change for the worse” in the attitude of white southerners had occurred in the last six months.¹

Former Confederate soldiers parading through the streets, the southern press's tirade against Reconstruction policies, southern whites' treatment of freedmen, and President Andrew Johnson's moderate policies toward the South all prompted Congress to begin passing a series of Reconstruction Acts in March 1867. The first of the acts stipulated the terms by which the southern states might reenter the Union. Each of the eleven Confederate states, exclud-