“Again in the Providence of God:” Two Appalachian Women Inscribe Community, Family, and Faith on the Civil War

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INTRODUCTION

Fannie Fain spent the day of November 27, 1863—her husband's thirty-eighth birthday in the second year of the Civil War—visiting family, "sewing a little," and visiting the town ruins. Since the start of her diary much had occurred in her little town; she witnessed the burning of homes during the Battle of Blountville the past summer, and said goodbye to friends and family—perhaps forever. On the same day that Fain quietly contemplated the implications of military movements in East Tennessee, Nancy Godwin Figgat sat down to write in her own diary just 150 miles away. Her infant son was sick, and she feared the worst. Figgat conveyed her distress in her diary and implored God to "spare my child...help me to be resigned, be with me in my trial." While Nancy and Fannie recorded this day side by side, deeply entrenched in the everyday of their similar communities, their lives diverged dramatically as the war progressed. Despite the different paths their lives would follow during and after the war, Fannie and Nancy both chose to write during this tumultuous time; their diaries functioned as a safe space for each woman to release anxiety and apprehension about their changing world. While neither diarist knew where the war would lead, both used their diaries to work through the daily challenges it brought them.

Fannie Fain of Blountville, Tennessee and Nancy Godwin Figgat of Fincastle, Virginia wrote diaries that reflected their experiences of the war, individual levels of self-awareness, and attention to the context of their communities. The challenges which arose as a result of the war produced a transformation in both women. Suddenly they

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1 Diary of Fannie Fain, 1863-1865 (hereafter Fain Diary), Archives of Appalachia, East Tennessee University.
2 Diary of Nancy Godwin Figgat, 1862-1865 (hereafter Figgat Diary), Special Collections, Virginia Tech.
encountered situations that altered their roles and responsibilities. The war started, seized their husbands, and left Fain and Figgat to manage their lives in a new way, isolated from their partners. Figgat saw her role transition from wife and mother in her own household into a single parent in her father’s home when she moved back in with her birth family after the departure of her husband Charlie. Her role shifted again with the birth of a new son, and yet again with his death. She managed her household’s finances through all of this; she sent check after check and recorded all bank transactions for the year in the back pages of her diary. Like Figgat, Fain longed for the return of her husband John. Fannie lived in a close knit community and her role as wife and mother was complicated by the intrusion of other family members into her home during the war. Due to her husband’s absence, Fain was forced to rely on the advice of well-meaning relatives (when to plant, mow, etc.) against her better judgment. Male family members subtly questioned her ability to manage her own home by inserting themselves into her household business.

Fannie came to contest their decisions and challenge their authority (at least through her writing) in a time when contemporaries may have considered her completely dependent on male relations. Separated from their husbands, both women became managers of their own homes and families, seeking guidance when necessary and adapting to life as single parents.³

³ Through diary writing women bestowed upon themselves new identities, distinct from their husbands, granting them access to a world of which they previously had only rare glimpses. Literary scholar Jennifer Sinor states that the way women write is important in understanding a diarist’s life, and that a woman could use the “diary to assert her identity and concretize the hierarchy of tools and privilege, seizing an unmarked moment and naming an unnameable reality.” Amy Wink also discusses the importance of diary-writing in nineteenth-century women’s conceptions of identity, stating that “through writing, women have been able to express and understand themselves within a patriarchal system which inhibits and discourages their self-actualization.” For further discussion of diary writing and identity, see Sinor, The Extraordinary Work of Ordinary Writing, (Iowa City: Iowa University Press, 2002) and Wink, She Left Nothing In Particular: the Autobiographical Legacy of Nineteenth-Century Women’s Diaries, (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2001) xiv.
Fannie Fain “arose by daylight” on February 19, 1865, a “bright, beautiful, quiet day.”\textsuperscript{4} Perhaps Nancy awoke on similar mornings to the sun creeping over the mountains, slowly trickling into her house through the trees and scratched window panes, taking a similar pause in her day to admire the beauty of her surroundings. Situated in the region that modern researchers call “Appalachia,” Blountville and Fincastle are both enclosed by the Appalachians to the west and the Blue Ridge in the east—each nestled in the Holston and James River Valleys, respectively.\textsuperscript{5} This “beloved Valley” had witnessed the significant moments in both women’s lives: the days of their births, marriages, the deaths of loved ones.\textsuperscript{6} The mountains bore witness to these changes and the surroundings would remain a constant for them throughout the rest of their lives.\textsuperscript{7}

The familiarity of the landscape must have provided relief during times of stress; perhaps the security of the mountains presented a reassuring signal of strength.

Fannie and Nancy also relied on their religion as a foundation of strength throughout their diaries and their Protestant faith united both diarists in a larger, common experience of the Civil War. Because religion was an intrinsic part of their lives, both women relied on their diaries to voice fears and concerns to God, seeking guidance and sustenance in a time of instability. Their writing functioned to reassert their beliefs on

\textsuperscript{4} Fain Diary, February 19, 1865.
\textsuperscript{5} Researchers have typically identified the mountainous region stretching from northern Mississippi, Alabama, and Georgia up into Southern New York as the “Appalachian Region.” “Appalachia” as a descriptor of the mountainous region of the South is a relatively modern term. It’s emergence as a culturally distinct area of the South appeared in popular and historical literature near the end of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century. Many researchers, past and present, have perpetuated this illusion of cultural distinctiveness and many modern scholars have criticized this “exceptionalism” and essentialism. For further discussion of the term “Appalachia” and its beginnings as a socially constructed term, see: Mary Beth Pudup’s \textit{Appalachia in the Making} (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995). Richard B. Drake’s \textit{A History of Appalachia} (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2001) also provides useful information in observing the intricacies of Appalachian history.
\textsuperscript{6} Figgat Diary, December 2, 1862.
\textsuperscript{7} From census data can see that both Fannie and Nancy continued to live in valley towns for the remainder of their lives. The 1860, 1870, 1890, 1900, 1910, U.S. Census, \textit{Population Schedules of the United States}, Botetourt County, VA and Sullivan County, TN.
paper. Fain exclaimed, “I rejoice that this is one day appointed unto man for just to draw his mind and heart from earth to Heaven,” and generally reserved her writing for the Sabbath. Figgat wrote in a prayer-like fashion, and framed her entries around specific extollments to God. While these women displayed their religiosity differently, faith was ever-present in their lives—a fluctuating force reflected in their writing.

Time and place, family circumstances and personal relationships all shaped southern women’s understanding of their world. The impact of these individual circumstances extends into Civil War historiography, muting over-generalizations. But as varied as women’s lived experiences were, scholars have revealed the importance of gender constructions on women across mid-nineteenth-century America. Southern white women existed in a highly gendered society, one which imposed constraints on their actions and behaviors—women’s activities were limited as were the subjects about which they could talk. The war (as discussed in military terms) was off limits because discussion of it violated prescribed gender norms. Nancy and Fannie dealt with these prescribed restraints in subtle ways; the care of their families and homes necessitated a certain neglect of social gender norms.

The challenges of war forced women to re-evaluate their place within southern society and renegotiate their social location. Scholar LeeAnn Whites recognizes the

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8 Fain Diary, January 5, 1865.
9 It is important to recognize the reality of gender norms for both women and men in the nineteenth-century. Men also lived with gendered social constraints and were expected to conform to a particular idea of masculinity. Many scholars have noted the impact of gendered social expectations during the nineteenth-century and specifically during the Civil War. For a discussion on the importance of a united masculine identity in antebellum South Carolina, see Stephanie McCurry’s “Politics of Yeoman Households” in Catherine Clinton and Nina Silburg, eds., Divided Houses: Gender and the Civil War (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992). Like Faust and Whites, George Rable also asserts that women became politically active—transcending traditional boundaries—when it became clear that southern men were not fulfilling their masculine duties in “Women of the Confederacy,” Divided Houses.
importance of these challenges and the subsequent changes they evoked. Through her research on southern women during the war, she argues that gender is one of the most neglected aspects in the scholarly discussion of the Civil War—stating that like all wars, the Civil War was a highly gendered experience, affecting men and women in distinct and powerful ways. Whites analyzes how the Civil War affected conventional gender roles: the increasing dependence on homespun fabrics created a deeper valuation of women’s labor, the rising number of casualties in the Confederate Army proved that women could not always rely on men to protect them, and the eventual defeat of the Confederacy severely curtailed the rights of southern white men. Because of this decline in white men’s power, southern white women could experiment with their new freedoms, pushing the limits of their traditional “spheres” and advocating greater public roles for themselves.10

These new roles proliferated during the war years, and provided a public voice to the importance of women’s work. Women were integral to the war movement contributing time, money, and labor to support their men’s fight for “independence.” Whites notes how women formed leagues to raise money and make clothes, independently managed their households, and directly confronted war at their doorsteps during Confederate and Federal occupation. Fannie Fain planted the crops and slaughtered the pigs which sustained her household, and continued to wash and sew the garments which clothed her family. Nancy Figgat helped outfit Confederate soldiers, gave support to her husband Charlie through constant letter-writing, and vocally supported the Confederacy—all while facing her own internal battle against depression. These types of experiences brought women face-to-face with the public sector, and

enabled them to recognize their importance within the southern economic and political system. This reversal of roles transformed southern society, forcing a visible yet fleeting change in gender norms and relations between men and women in their communities.\footnote{Whites, \textit{Civil War as a Crisis in Gender}.}

Some scholars have argued that the Civil War provided an arena for women to test out their agency and new independence in a world without men. Drew Faust addresses southern white women’s reactions and responses to the invasion of war into their lives by examining the experiences of southern women through many different lenses. By focusing on women’s entrance into the workforce, their marital relationships, the importance of writing in their lives, and the shift they witnessed in organized religion (among other things), Faust examines women’s reactions to the war. Faust argues that for many of these women—specifically members of the elite slaveholding class—the war created a new space for agency and autonomy. While the conflict had originally reinforced conventional ideas about war as a man’s cause, it soon infringed on the homes and daily lives of southern women. Women, out of necessity, were now expected to run households and govern their lives without the constant supervision of a male authority. Faust contends that this empowered women, giving them access to a new kind of life, one which they themselves decided upon.\footnote{Faust, Drew Gilpin, “Altars of Sacrifice: Confederate Women and the Narratives of War,” \textit{Journal of American History} 76, no. 4 (March 1990) 1200-1228. And also Faust, \textit{Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War} (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996). In Faust’s analysis, southern women’s lives rested solidly in the system of southern paternalism, and the course that women’s lives took became enveloped by the overwhelming importance of male protection. Faust argues that women soon became discouraged by the war after a series of realizations: war was dangerous, husbands were not immortal and many of them were not ever going to return home. These women’s dying husbands were sacrificing their lives and the future of their families for a “lost cause.” The system of paternalism which had protected southern white women for so long was no longer adequately in place. The new spaces forged by women and in which they had found empowerment were complicated by the end of the war, only to be replaced by uncertainty regarding the function of gender in southern society. Faust states that it was only with the return of their men that southern communities restored the gendered social arrangements which allowed some southern women to happily return to the safety of their.}\footnote{Faust, \textit{Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War}.}
Both Fain and Figgat faced tremendous adversity and encountered unfamiliar situations as a result of these changes. Their diaries served a similar purpose and allowed them to work through the problems (death of family members, invading armies, and uncertainty on a devastating level) that arose on a daily basis. In the same way that religious beliefs can grant the faithful a sense of peace, the diaries provided both women a place to voice their concerns and find relief from their anxiety. They sought comfort through the ink on their pages. In this way diary writing functioned as a sort of religious expression, allowing the writer to assess and reaffirm her faith through the act of writing—faith not only in God, but in herself, her husband, and American society as a whole. Both the act of writing and the incorporation of personal faith into that writing allowed these women to talk about things which were traditionally off limits. By infusing the public world of war and politics into the folds of their paper and the piety of their thoughts, they domesticated the unruly and unfeminine, providing a safe space for the discussion of “inappropriate” topics.
Both diarists manipulated traditional ideas surrounding diary writing and women’s piety to expand their written roles in their families and communities. Fannie and Nancy both addressed the conflict with religious language and invoked ideas of God and devotion to support their involvement in the activities and discussion of the war. Using religious language Fain devoted six pages of her diary to attacking a visiting minister, whom she felt gave “a strange sermon,” the result of a “vile, wicked war.”¹³ While they remained within the appropriate “woman’s sphere” through diary writing and religiosity, they expanded their boundaries by incorporating the public into their private

¹³ Fain Diary, February 19, 1865. Fannie wrote that she wished she could “write out the whole synopsis, word for word,” incensed by the way the minister was describing the South as faultless and the North as a place ruled by “fanaticism & infidelity.”
lives. Diaries played distinct and meaningful roles in the lives of their owners, giving the writers the opportunity to define themselves in an uncertain era. Both Figgat and Fain found themselves living independently of their husbands, and the act of writing in a diary provided an opportunity to convey thoughts and feelings without interference.

Fig. 2. A page from Fannie Fain’s February 19, 1865 entry in which she accuses a traveling minister of preaching distrust and perpetuating the separating nature of war. Fannie A. Fain Papers, Archives of Appalachia, East Tennessee State University.

The changing themes their writing covered and the structure of the diaries themselves indicate that both women experienced a transformation in their own

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14 Linda Kerber offers a critique of the language of separate spheres in “Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman’s Place: The Rhetoric of Women’s History.” Kerber analyzes the use of the language of separate spheres and recognizes it as a historical and political tool taken up by women’s historians, but also criticizes its over-use and limited applicability, stating that continuing “to use the language of separate spheres is to deny the reciprocity between gender and society, and to impose a static model on dynamic relationships.” See Kerber, “Separate Spheres,” The Journal of American History 75, no.1 (1988): 38.
conceptions of identity as a result of this newfound independence. While Fain used the diary to record and relate weekly events, Figgat had a less regulated form, and her writing reflected the changing way she thought about the world. At the same rate, their silences are informative. Much can be deduced from what they do not mention, especially in comparison to previous entries. Jennifer Sinor argues that women could say just as much by not including aspects of their lives in their writing, and when these omissions were paired with repetition, women’s diaries could convey “stability and sameness” in a time when these qualities were hardly visible in reality.15 Both Fain and Figgat returned to their diaries days after the fact, and recorded what they remembered as if they were writing on that day. Did they feel guilty for neglecting their diaries? Possibly they could not find the time to write and were forced to return to the diary during a subsequent day. This shows that both women wanted the reader, whether it was themselves or their children, to read the entry as she herself constructed it. This form of writing was a way to make the day and its events real—not just a fictionalized story. It is ironic that by adding, editing, possibly even fictionalizing their days, both women were lending their writing a sort of validity and stability which could theoretically only come from in-the-moment writing.

15 Sinor, The Extraordinary Work of Ordinary Writing, 155. Cynthia A. Huff writes that “the self-presentation in women’s diaries often tells the truth slant by leaving out as much as leaving in. The use of encoding, whether in the form of silences and gaps or foreign and special phraseology, invites us to interrogate the public/private construction of the diarist as well as the truth value and presumed historical objectivity of the diary record.” Similarly Jane E. Schultz argues that women purposely leave out topics deemed inappropriate for the subjects of female conversation, and that these elisions can tell much about gender roles and how they functioned in the context of Union invasions during the Civil War. For these discussions of “reading the silences” in women’s diary writing see: Huff, “A Theoretical and Critical Introduction,” in Suzanne L. Bunkers and Cynthia A. Huff, eds., Inscribing the Daily: Critical Essays on Women’s Diaries (Amherst: Univ. of Mass. Press, 1996), 19-20 and Schultz, “Mute Fury: Southern Women’s Diaries of Sherman’s March to the Sea, 1864-1865,” in Helen M. Cooper, Adrienne Auslander Munich, and Susan Merrill Squier, eds., Arms and the Woman: War, Gender, and Literary Representation (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1989): 59-79.
Fannie Fain began writing in her diary on June 15, 1863, with the birth of her third child. Her entries were sporadic until June of the next year when she commenced writing every two weeks, usually on the Sabbath. Her bimonthly entries tended to be long and all-inclusive—each attempted to cover as much ground as possible. Nancy’s diary took a much different form; her almost-daily writing speaks to the more traditional idea of a diary. While Nancy did not regularly interpret or analyze the quotidian, it is obvious that the diary provided a means for her to think about her life in a new way. Both women filled their pages with comments about their personal faith, family and friends, death, and the war; news of the war and the frequent deaths which plagued their communities were interspersed between accounts of sermon subjects and family visits. Diary writing offered Figgat and Fain a safe space to voice worries and fears while simultaneously giving them courage to face the unknown. The way both women approached their writing and the topics they addressed provides a glimpse into specific constructions of gender and the unique effect of the war on two rural Appalachian women.16

Like any war-torn area, Appalachian communities underwent considerable transformations, yet the significance of their place in the overarching history of the Civil War has largely been reduced to clichés. In their collection of essays, *The Civil War in Appalachia*, Kenneth Noe and Shannon Wilson stress that individual communities

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16 Wink also addresses the construction of diary entries in her research on nineteenth century American women diarists. She states that women used their diaries to make sense out of difficult situations, and comparing women’s diary writing to quilt making as a form of women’s everyday art and creative expression she states, “women’s diaries offer us a particularly powerful example of the manner in which women chose to structure their interpretations of their experiences.” See Wink, *She Left Nothing In Particular*, xvii.
experienced and responded to the Civil War in unique ways. Although the bulk of scholarship regarding the Civil War has other foci, Appalachian communities played key roles in the struggle and should not be ignored. The complexity of the war in Appalachia cannot be generalized; no one political motivation existed in this region and the reasons behind secession were as varied as the individual communities. Although many contemporaries and scholars assumed that all Appalachian residents were Unionists, that was not the case.\footnote{John Incoe’s, "'Moving Through Deserter Country': Fugitive Accounts of the Inner Civil War in Southern Appalachia" in Kenneth Noe and Shannon Wilson, eds., \textit{The Civil War in Appalachia: Collected Essays} (Knoxville: Tennessee University Press, 1997) 158-80, discusses the genesis and evolution of these stereotypes. Incoe states that the construction of Appalachia as a bastion of Unionism served northern interests by uniting the South after the Civil War. Other scholars have discussed reasons behind the creation of these stereotypes and their impact on the historical and popular discourse surrounding Appalachia today. See William H. Turner and Edward Cabbell’s \textit{Blacks in Appalachia} (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1985).} While there was widespread support in some regions for the Union, there was equal support for the Confederacy in other areas. According to Noe and Wilson a single characteristic of Appalachian Civil War experience may never be found, suggesting that in order to understand the impact of the war on the Appalachians, historians must look beyond the geographical limitations and recognize the individuality of each experience. The differences in Fain and Figgat’s diaries point to this fact; it is only through looking at Appalachia’s separate parts that one can begin to understand how the Civil War functioned as a whole.\footnote{Noe and Wilson, \textit{The Civil War in Appalachia}, xxi.}

Both Fannie and Nancy faced the challenges of war and death in their Appalachian communities. They encountered loss, isolation, and alienation, which soon enveloped their lives. Both lived in small valley towns (Blountville and Fincastle) similar in population size and economic structure. Fannie Fain lived in Sullivan County, Tennessee, which had a total population of 13,552 residents, including over 1,000 slaves,
in the year 1860. The county’s manufacturing economy included milling, mining, and wool carding, and the cash value of the land in Sullivan County amounted to close to three million dollars. Nancy Godwin Figgat, resided 150 miles away in Botetourt County, Virginia. Botetourt County had a total population of 11,516 on the eve of the Civil War, including 2,769 slaves. Flour and meal, pig iron, and lumber were the county’s three major products, and the cash value of the land in Botetourt County amounted to almost three and a half million dollars. Despite the geographic and economic similarities of the two counties, differences of religious life and occupational opportunity helped to create unique identities for the residents of Blountville and Fincastle.

![Image of map showing Virginia, Maryland, and Delaware]

Fig. 3. “Colton’s new topographical map of the states of Virginia, Maryland & Delaware.” J.H. Colton, 1862. Library of Congress Digital Maps Collection.

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20 The Federal Census shows Fincastle as having multiple physicians, merchants, and other specific types of laborers (such as tailors, carpenters, and saddlers). While Blountville’s residents had a similar variety of professions, many more farmers resided within its city limits, suggesting a more rural character as opposed to that of Fincastle. 1860 U.S. Census.
Fig. 4. Map of Blountville and Fincastle with present-day state and county boundaries.

The Civil War brought about significant changes, however. While the two diaries show the personal effects of the war, statistics relay the impact of the struggle on the community as a whole and only ten years later, the value of land in both counties dropped considerably. The war took its toll on the whole country, its ramifications apparent in all regions of the South. The area known as the Southern Highlands, or Appalachia, was plagued by multiple aspects of the war. The struggle for control and the lack of real authority in the area were evidenced by a significant amount of guerilla warfare, which occurred in both Southwest Virginia and East Tennessee and served to shape and transform elements in each woman’s community. Figgat and Fain constantly comment on the lack of stability in their towns. Agriculture, production, demographics, and religious practices all underwent great transformations. Crop production fell, and occupying soldiers usurped what remained (along with horses, pigs, and anything else of value). Church attendance dropped one Sunday only to rise the next. Men left their...

towns in droves—some never to return—leaving gaping holes in a once-lively community. The trajectory of the war and the changes which troubled each woman’s community were unpredictable—the only constant was the ever-changing nature of life in the region.

Both Fannie and Nancy chose to keep a diary during the Civil War despite the turmoil and commotion created by the conflict, which upturned their lives and dislocated their families. They wrote to make sense of their changing lives, to give voice to their every day, and to express and reflect on their personal faith. The fact that Nancy and Fannie kept diaries in this particular time and place unite them both socially, geographically, and historically, as women who lived through the Civil War in Southern Appalachia—an accurate but unfulfilling and incomplete definition of their wartime experience. Even a simple examination of the diaries reveals Fannie and Nancy’s divergent and complicated conceptions of existence amid the dislocation in their war-torn towns, illuminating the vast and intricate differences within their apparent similarities.
CHAPTER I.

LOCATION AND DISLOCATION

“We may disavow time, but we cannot dispel it. Our own mortality, if nothing else, obligates us to life within its boundaries, and our bodies tie us physically to place... ‘Oh, I am not much interested in landscapes,’ a writer will say, ‘except as backgrounds. What interests me is people.” As if this constitutes a viable distinction, as if a person might be understood without reference to time and place...”

-Paul Gruchow, Grass Roots: The Universe of Home

“Mountains are giant, restful, absorbent. You can heave your spirit into a mountain and the mountain will keep it, folded, and not throw it back as some creeks will. The creeks are the world with all its stimulus and beauty; I live there. But the mountains are home.”

-Annie Dillard, Pilgrim at Tinker Creek

As Paul Gruchow explains, an appropriate understanding of place and the infinite effects of location is necessary to understand a person and the period in which they lived. A more complex understanding of life—an awareness which includes physical space as well as personal experience—is essential. Time, geography, spiritual beliefs, community, and family all intertwine to form the subtleties of life and the individuality of existence. A concentration on the social environment of individuals is important to a more complete understanding of their lives, but the importance of geography cannot be ignored or denied—specific terrains imply specific meanings of space. Residents of a small rural community may lead considerably different lives as compared to big-city dwellers; their landscapes necessitate a different range of occupations and lifestyles. But these disparities also lead us to a complex understanding of sameness—for even in “similar” places vast differences can exist.

These differences significantly affect the daily lives of residents based on their individual connection with the space in which they are living. The significance of
location cannot be generalized or universalized; each individual must come to terms with their own space, and form their own relationship with place. While geography plays an important role, this relationship can be affected by friends, family, history, and economics. A region-specific Civil War led to the development of unique relationships between a location and its inhabitants based on particular experiences. While distinctive war-time occurrences proved vitally important to Fannie and Nancy’s conceptions of their communities and localities, their relationship with place was formed by more than just physical settlement in a particular geographical location.

Many scholars have addressed the similarities of regional experience in southern Appalachia, and the similarities of a valley landscape had a significant impact on the lives of Nancy Godwin Figgat and Fannie Fain. Historically, scholars and activists have constructed this area as secluded and distant from the southern theater of the Civil War, but in reality the Appalachian region was deeply involved in the conflict. Both Southwest Virginia and East Tennessee were highly contested regions politically and militarily. The political divisions within these mountain communities ran deep and stemmed from multiple causative factors. These schisms led to intra-regional fighting and community disagreements, and led Fannie and Nancy to write openly about their own political beliefs and—sometimes with condescension—those of their neighbors. Whether it was the importance of the railroad line or allegiance to those areas considered

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22 For a thorough discussion of the historiography of Civil War Appalachia, see Noel Fisher’s “Feelin’ Mighty Southern: Recent Scholarship on Southern Appalachia in the Civil War,” *Civil War History* 47, no. 4 (2001), 334-346.

23 Richard Drake argues that as a general rule, east Tennesseans remained loyal to the Union while much of southwest Virginia supported secession. By using the metaphor of a “borderland” Drake exposes the war as a “true Civil War” with extremism on both sides found within small regional sections, and goes on to state that the war took a distinct toll on southern mountaineers, with guerilla warfare completely upsetting many Appalachian communities. *History of Appalachia* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2001) 93-115. See also, Mary Campbell’s, *The Attitude of Tennesseans toward the Union, 1847-1861* (New York: Vantage Press, 1961).
“loyalist,” East Tennessee and Southwest Virginia proved to be important and significant locations for the Union. Although geography limited the extent of battle and provided excellent terrain for the deserter and conscription-avoider, it did not prevent the intense fighting of guerilla warfare.24 Bushwhackers and wandering, hungry troops harassed both Nancy and Fannie’s communities, causing frustration and undermining support for the Southern “cause.”

Fannie and Nancy found themselves trying to negotiate the specifics of their location during the war. The problems resulting from their geographical position and the advantages of their social location among friends and family abound in each diarist’s writing. Nancy and Fannie wrote from locations where they were deeply rooted; both women grew up in the towns in which they were writing. While neither explicitly addressed particular emotions or connections with place, they were surely affected by their space and felt a deep connection to their community. Their neighbors had seen them grow since infancy, and the links between residents were strong and reliable. This proved valuable during the Civil War; both Fannie and Nancy underwent significant changes in their daily lifestyles and depended on their family, friends, and communities for strength and support. They relied on a personal connection with place to re-establish themselves in a changed world; location gave them the tools they needed to make sense of the shifts and transitions brought on by the war, giving them an infrastructure of support in a time of destabilizing change.

In her work on women’s literacy in rural Nebraska, Charlotte Hogg writes about the importance of settlement and location—especially in times of distress. Place

24 Drake goes on to say that bushwhackers were a serious threat to almost all southern mountain communities and engaged home guards in serious battles for authority. Drake, *History of Appalachia*, 104.
becomes incredibly significant when faced with adversity and amid transitional periods, and Hogg states that “part of settlement means being situated for these changes.”

Without discounting geographical location, we must recognize the importance of Nancy and Fannie’s social location, just as they recognized and appreciated their social surroundings. While both women found themselves writing in towns where they had spent most of their lives, settlement does not necessarily have to mean permanence in a particular location. It can represent a certain attachment to place or symbolize an important relationship with place based on past memories and present connections. Both diarists had this special connection with their community—they were settled and attached citizens who had formed their relationship with the space and the people who inhabited that space over the course of their lifetimes. Their permanence in that space reassured their neighbors just as their neighbors’ permanence reassured Nancy and Fannie. When Nancy and Fannie confronted war in the form of death and separations, they turned to loving relatives and neighbors for support in a mutual exchange of care and protection, a vital tool of survival during war-time.

If the social community held so much value in the lives of Fannie and Nancy, what implications did this have on their understanding of their physical location? Which was more important, their social or geographic space? In the end, one cannot be understood without the other, for what meaning can a place hold if it has not been or will not ever be inhabited? Residents (or visitors) give meaning to location just as the space gives meaning to its population. Does this mean that place can only be understood in terms of the people who inhabit that place? Not necessarily. People shape the world

around them just as much as geography determines certain aspects of their lives. Geographical position determined the type of war both Fannie and Nancy encountered, the type of work they were doing, and even the amount of social support that they required or requested. The specific problems residents of Blountville and Fincastle encountered as a result of the Civil War necessitated a reliable infrastructure of support; the linkage between physical and social location became increasingly important in Fannie and Nancy’s lives and shaped the way they dealt with the unsettling nature of war.

This destabilization of war came in waves; the violence and threats of conflict affected Fannie and Nancy at different times and in different ways. While Fannie had the slight benefit of knowing that her husband was relatively safe, having escaped the conscription act and fled north to conduct business, Nancy was left alone with her children and her worries as Charlie fought for the Confederacy.26 Neither welcomed this separation from their loved ones, in fact both made constant mention of a desire to see their husbands home safely, but as each woman adjusted to her new situation, the changes became more familiar.

In her early entries, Fannie rarely mentions the war and despite her first entry, which described the Battle of Blountville in detail, over the next three months references to the war appear only four times. Her husband John’s presence proved reassuring, and while she had brothers fighting for the Confederacy, thoughts of war did not overwhelmingly occupy her daily, written, thoughts. But when John left in January of 1864, Fannie’s writing became more concerned with military movements and tracking

26 Charlie served as a clerk for the course of the war, first under General Stonewall Jackson, and later under Generals Richard S. Ewell and Jubal A. Early. “Our Bank Wrecked!,” Rockbridge County News (Lexington, VA), February 21, 1895.
the armed forces. A specific form of entry-organization enabled Fannie to speak more broadly about military operations, the general political atmosphere, and rumors which widely circulated through Blountville. In an entry soon after her husband’s departure, Fannie accounted for the day’s “raw, wet” unpleasantness, recorded the traffic of troops through her town, stating that “nothing disturbed the quiet save the passing to & fro of soldiers,” and went on to describe the rumors of specific troop movements. She later surmised that “Longstreet has evacuated all of E. Tenn.” but “how long [he would hold it] I cannot tell.”

Her writing could reflect a growing community involvement—as the war progressed, the battle for East Tennessee intensified. As conflict and warfare became more familiar, Fannie’s writing reflected this change and her pages filled with news of the war and its effects on the surrounding area.

While this may seem like a drastic change—first no mention, then constant reference to the war—Fannie did not automatically jump into observations or contemplate the fighting as soon as her husband left. She eased into her discussion of the war in a particular fashion, and structured her writing in a way which allowed her to focus on the securities of life—friends, family, faith, the weather—before any mention of the war or specifics about the fighting. After complaining about the “oppressively warm” weather, recounting family events from the past week, and describing the past Sunday’s sermon on “the text, ‘No one liveth unto himself,’” Fannie finally addressed the real “excitement” which had occurred since her last entry. A rumor had circulated in Blountville that the “Federals were coming, were at Kingsport,” and caused a mass exodus of the town’s male citizens, but the “excitement was over in a day or two, and they didn’t come at all.” Fannie continued to write about specifics of this misadventure,

27 Fain Diary, April 10, 1864.
and ended abruptly with “Cousin Bet Bachman is visiting up here now, been up two weeks.” 28 While this structure may not have been intentional, Fannie placed her discussion of the war and its affects on her family, community, and herself in the center of her writing. She began an entry with stability and she would end with stability. Faith remained unchanged, as would friends and family. What better way to counter-act the insecurity of war than with the grounding presence of these established constants? This structure must have provided a safe space for a discussion about the conflict and its affects on the everyday, bringing Fannie the reassurance that she surely sought.

Fannie’s writing style changed in late 1864, however, after Federal forces finally took control of Blountville in December of 1864. 29 When considering her political background, this change in writing style might be attributed to the Federal occupation of East Tennessee which was a highly contested area during the Civil War. 30 The area was under Confederate control when John Fain escaped to the North, and while Fannie had brothers fighting for the South, she and her husband did not support the Confederacy. Fannie envisioned a future Union presence in East Tennessee as a protective force which would provide relief to the area succumbed by an overwhelming invasion of ragged Confederate troops. While Fannie never explicitly displayed her political leanings in her

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28 Fain Diary, June 26, 1864.
30 Mary Emily Robertson Campbell argues that East Tennessee was not only highly contested militarily, but also politically. For almost two decades prior to the Civil War, East Tennessee was divided politically on the issue of slavery, and saw this as an issue separate from that of secession. When Tennessee voted to secede, East Tennessee “citizens voted 2:1 against separation from the Union while Mid- and West-Tennessee voted 2:1 in support of secession.” This caused major political differences within East Tennessee communities, and left the area highly divided politically, making it a ripe area for military contestation. Campbell, Mary Emily Robertson, The Attitude of Tennesseans Toward the Union, 1847-1861, (New York: Vintage Press, 1961), 202.
writing, there is much to suggest that she came from a family of Federal sympathizers.\(^{31}\) If this is the case, Fannie must have been ever-conscious of her minority position within Confederate-occupied Blountville prior to Federal occupation. Possibly her diary provided an outlet for feelings and emotions or even just a discussion of war rumors, which she could not express in an open setting for fear of retribution. In this way, her diary allowed her to communicate these thoughts in a safe space.

Unfortunately when the Federal troops finally took control of Blountville in December of 1864, it was not at all what she had imagined, and her writing style changed as her high hopes for Federal salvation were crushed with the actions of northern soldiers on the eve of December 18. After they had rummaged through her mother’s cellar, “carried off all her milk...salt, [and] some pork out of the smokehouse,” stolen “Pet” (the Fain family horse), and threatened her neighbors with death, Fannie conveyed her disappointment exclaiming, “Oh, what destruction & depredations they have committed...I was deceived in them, never thought they w’d treat us so, have no confidence in them whatsoever.”\(^{32}\) After this incident Fannie rarely employed her previous cautious approach to discussions of the war. This change in her writing style could reflect a general frustration with the course of the war; Fannie had relied on the northern troops to protect her community and when they proved just as vicious as the southern army, she became more and more ambivalent about the outcome and thus less concerned about how to reference the war in her writing. Fannie lost faith in the structure

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\(^{31}\) Fannie writes on February 19, 1865 about a preacher who rails against the North in one of his sermons, and “the South, he seemed to think comparatively speaking, was faultless.” This sermon upset her very much and is one of the few obvious displays of her personal political leanings which appear in her diary. William Speer, *Sketches of Prominent Tennesseans: Biographies and Records of Many of the Families Who Have Attained Prominence in Tennessee* (Nashville: Genealogical Publishing Company, 1888), 218. See also, John N. Fain’s *Sanctified Trial: The Diary of Eliza Rhea Anderson Fain, a Confederate Woman in East Tennessee* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2004) 309n.

\(^{32}\) Fain Diary, December 18, 1864.