of her writing to provide an entry point into discussion of the war just as she lost faith in the Federal troops when they failed her during their occupation.

Fig. 5. “Blountville's Second Oldest Residence.” The Fain home for the duration of the Civil War. Rhea Anderson, Sullivan County, Blountville, Citizens, Homes and Reminiscences. Washington County Historical Society.

Maybe a simpler explanation could attribute this change in writing style to an adjustment to the climate of war. Fighting and combat were no longer new phenomena to Fannie by the third year of the war. Possibly she found herself more comfortable addressing the topic in general and no longer relied on detailed entry-organization for consolation. Accustomed to the constant rumors and flow of troops throughout the county, any qualms Fannie had about commenting on the nature of the war or specifics of combat must have faded by December of 1864. By April of the next year, Fannie’s previous style had reversed itself; her entries begin with direct statements about warfare. Instead of using her family and faith as a way to frame her discussion of combat, she now used the war as an entry into the further discussion of her day. On April 2, 1865, Fannie
began her entry with various rumors of troop movements, and stated that there were
"25,000 at Bull’s Cap, a heavy force building up the R.R. working night & day. Some
think they are on to Lynchburg. Monday I had washing done." Instead of starting with
the everyday and stable nature of domestic work, Fannie began her entry with a
discussion of the war and uncertainty about the circulating rumors, then discussed the
banalities of the past week, and ended with further questions about recent reports of the
war. Just as the reports which promised security proved untrue, her previous style of
writing only provided a fleeting hope for the future; she no longer needed a detailed
structure to reassure her, because—like the reports—the structure would only be a false
sense of reassurance. With the deeper entrenchment into the war, perhaps Fannie
realized that true stability could not come from a writing style or specific army, but could
only come from a break in the violence and the beginning of peace.

A less ambiguous change in writing style is also apparent in Nancy’s diary,
associated with the deaths of her sister, Jinnie, and son, Meade. Nancy rarely mentioned
the war in the first year of her diary—only four references to the war appear in the first
hundred entries. When she did mention the war, Nancy limited her commentary and not
once did she include any substantive material about what was happening in her
community. Her most lengthy observation of the conflict revolved around a November
1862 letter that she received from her husband Charlie written in “Winchester but they In
next day take up march for Fredericksburg, where it is expected there will be a fierce
battle.” Her other three entries follow a similar pattern, addressing the war when it
pertained to participating members of her family. Nancy’s husband and at least three of

33 Fain Diary, April 2, 1865.
34 Figgat Diary, November 25, 1862.
her brothers fought for the Confederacy—a circumstance which allowed her to engage in some discussion of the conflict and hostilities. Distanced from any direct combat, Nancy talked about the war only in terms of how it applied to her relatives and she found no room for impersonal references or circulating rumors.

The deaths of Jinnie in April and Meade in December of 1863 took a harsh toll on Nancy and the tone, substance, and frequency of her entries shifted. She recorded well over one-hundred entries in the first two years of her diary as opposed to a meager twenty-seven in the last two, and in these twenty-seven entries Nancy mentioned the war thirteen times. She still used her family members as an entrance point for most of her references, but during the last two years she included an increased discussion of military movements and how these affected her and her community. Instead of briefly mentioning the war, Nancy switched into a full descriptive mode: “From Bonsack’s depot Rob and Charlie both left and came home [and left] me again and join the Army in their march down the Valley. The enemy retreated to [Kanawha] completely demoralized numbers suffering from starvation.” Nancy continued to explain this particular event and further described the exact movement of troops through the Shenandoah Valley and across the “Potomac in Md” where they then “threatened Washington, cut off communications with the North Va burnt the Gov’s house, [and stole] an immense quantity of horses grain.”

This marked change in subject matter and descriptive style shows an increased focus on the particulars of the war—possibly caused by depression from her sister and son’s deaths combined with increasing worry over Charlie’s welfare.

While Nancy’s depression may have affected her writing style by diverting her attention away from the domestic and towards the public sphere of war, this change in

35 Figgat Diary, June 18, 1864.
writing style could also be attributed to Nancy’s increased interaction with the violence and combat associated with the conflict. Like Fannie, Nancy must have become more accustomed to the dailiness of war—an unwelcome and forced familiarity with military terms and maneuvers. No longer geographically distant from the major battles, Nancy now found herself contending with passing troops and combat related vehicles such as the “large wagon train” which drove through Fincastle “with a good many prisoners, large number of negroes, and bout 700 guard.”\(^{36}\) This did not seem to bother Nancy as much as the “force of 200 cavalry” which passed by a few days before and alarmed her “very much but [did] little mischief.”\(^{37}\) Now the war was not only a reality for her loved ones, but it had become a reality for her at home.

As the war further intruded on their lives and advanced into the safe confines of their communities, Nancy and Fannie found room in their diaries to convey this change. At the start of their diaries the war was an unfamiliar concept which proved difficult for either woman to describe. Possibly confined by gender norms which limited women’s discussion of war and politics, Fannie found solace in a particular form of writing and Nancy largely avoided the topic of war, but both became more comfortable addressing the war as it progressed. As the conflict spread further into their communities, both women found a way to domesticate the violence of the war; they normalized combat in their writing as it became normalized in their own lives.

The onslaught of war brought many challenges, and just as Nancy and Fannie adjusted to the fighting, separation, and general disruption within their communities, they

\(^{36}\) Figget Diary, April 18, 1864.
\(^{37}\) Figget Diary, April 14, 1864.
also became accustomed to the changing nature of work in their household and neighborhoods. Not only did each woman remain responsible for traditional kinds of labor around the home, but Fannie and Nancy both took on new roles—and while neither woman explicitly identified herself as the "head of household," basic survival necessitated some assumption of head of household duties. Even the most traditional "female" forms of labor (washing, cooking, cleaning, etc.) intensified due to the disruption of the war and added to the amount of labor that was expected of them. Along with raising their children and managing the household, their war-time responsibilities now included fulfilling the financial, physical, and emotional needs of their families. Neither woman complained about her new workload or seemed hassled by her new role in the home; in fact additional responsibilities are never mentioned as such.

Although Fannie never complained or objected to her new role, there was a marked change in the way she wrote about her work around the house after her husband left. Fannie spent a late November day, two months prior to John's departure, working on her daughter's bonnets, sewing a pair of pants, and mending a couple of socks, while her husband "and the boys butchered a beef a while after dark."38 Two weeks earlier Fannie had "ground and put away four crocks of sausage" after "Mr. Fain & the black boys killed and cleaned four five hogs."39 While Fannie was involved in much of the work that occurred around her household, it was her husband (and their slaves) who killed and cleaned cows and hogs, and it was her husband who planted and sowed the wheat on the fields of the family farm. While she credited John for these large tasks, she rarely failed to acknowledge her own work in these entries and always mentioned what

38 Fain Diary, December 9, 1863.
39 Fain Diary, November 18, 1863.
she had done around the house, complementing the work of her husband. Fannie
regularly wrote about the sewing, cooking, cleaning, and churning that she did on a daily
basis along with the less frequent tasks of canning, candle making, and grinding sausage.
Hardly an entry passes in which she failed to note her day's work, and while Fannie's
constant mentioning of these tasks may seem trivial and insignificant, this style of writing
does not mean that she relegated her labor to the confines of trivial in her own life.
Fannie valued her contributions and recognized their larger significance in the survival of
her family. She stated a few weeks before her husband left that she "canned a good deal,
knowing everything would be scarce and hard to get this winter."^{40} While her husband
was out doing the "hard labor" which had more material significance, Fannie's work—
and traditional women's work in general—should not be undervalued in this context. It
was the canning, sewing, and cooking that kept her family fed and clothed during the
course of the war.^{41}

Even though Nancy lived in her father's house for the duration of the war, she
was no stranger to work—she often recorded the various tasks that she fulfilled for her
brothers and sisters, and possibly this new location only added to her cooking, cleaning,
and sewing responsibilities which contributed to the survival of the Godwin household.
Nancy not only made clothing for herself, but also ensured that her entire family was
properly clothed—including her husband and brothers fighting for the Confederacy; she
stated that she "sewed hard...to make a bed-tick," "made a pair of drawers for F Rifles,"

^{40} Fain Diary, November 15, 1863.
^{41} For more on women's work in nineteenth century Appalachia, see Mary K. Anglin's discussion of
women's work in western North Carolina in "Rediscovering the Women of Western North Carolina," in
Appalachia in the Making: The Mountain South in the Nineteenth Century (Chapel Hill: University Press,
1995) 185-209. According to her research women's (free and unfree) work was overlooked in the census
taking, listed as "keeping house" or "at home" when in fact many women ran farms (and even when they
didn't, the farms relied heavily on women's contributions), weaved and sewed clothing, thus complicating
the idea of a subsistence level household.
and was "very busily engaged making a dress," all in a matter of weeks. Her family members' position as soldiers probably added to her work and her worry. With the start of the war, Nancy's anxiety about their physical safety and comfort increased. She knew that winter nights could be long and excruciating if one did not have the appropriate clothing and covers to give protection from the freezing temperatures and resulting frostbite.

While a comparison of Fannie and Nancy's diaries shows differences in the types of labor they were doing, both valued their work and recognized its significance in their family's daily lives. Much of this difference can be attributed to their location in specific geographical and social locations. Fannie did not have to worry about a husband without sufficient attire and lived in the much more rural Blountville; both factors explain her emphasis on planting and canning over her sewing. And while Nancy doesn't mention it in her diary, she probably also played a major part in the cooking and cleaning in her home.

As the war progressed and northern business rescued her husband from conscription, Fannie encountered new forms of work and managed to serve as both mother and household manager. She still made constant reference to her sewing, cooking, and cleaning, but now found herself responsible for the general management of her household. While she never acknowledged her new position in her home, Fannie recorded the shift in subtle ways and mentioned her new work alongside her usual tasks, possibly too desensitized by the war, violence, and her worries to be surprised by the additional responsibilities. Her husband was not home to plow the fields and sow the

42 Figgat Diary, December 8, 1862, January 5, 1863, and January 9, 1863.
wheat, so instead of having the revenue from the crops to sustain her family, Fannie found herself putting extra time into her garden and “planted potatoes & onions in Feb., planted peas, tongue-grass, lettuce, radishes, pepper in March,” and a few weeks later she “planted some corn & beans, tomatoes, cucumbers, bunch beans, etc.” in order for her family to have food the coming fall. In January of the next year Fannie “Butchered five hogs on Friday in partnership with Jim Rogers, and a beef cow.” Even if Fannie was not doing all of this by herself she still wrote about it in a different way. Instead of her husband and slaves planting the crops and butchering the hogs and cows while she ground the sausage, she was working in her garden and partnering herself with Jim Rogers—a white farm laborer in Blountville—growing the food and slaughtering the animals which would sustain her household.

While Fannie faced management of the family farm, Nancy took over the household finances, directed numerous checks to their recipients and handled large sums of money in the process. Charlie had been employed as the Cashier of the Bank of Lexington in 1860, and almost certainly he had been in charge of the family’s financial situation before the war commenced. But after her husband left to join the army, Nancy took over the administration of the family economy, sending and receiving checks “on business;” usually these checks were under $100, but on one occasion Nancy received “a

43 Fain Diary, April 10, 1864, Fain Diary, April 17, 1864.
44 Fain Diary, January 3, 1865.
45 Jim Rogers was listed as a fairly well-off farm laborer in the 1860 U.S. Census, Population Schedules, Sullivan County, Tenn. While she may have experienced a new freedom with John’s absence, Fannie still had to work within a gendered system of labor. Although it was her home and farm, she was forced to listen to a well meaning family member when it came to issues about planting. While she never mentions this in her diary, Fannie wrote to John in early August the year he left that “George & Ahab have just commenced mowing the meadow, it seems to me to be late for it, but Bro Hugh thinks not, he just works everything as he pleases, & thinks everything he does, exactly right, but we can’t say a word, but let him go on.” Letter, Fannie Fain to John Fain, August 5, 1864, Mary Nell Dosser Collection, Archives of Appalachia, East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee.
letter from Mr Norgrove containing check for $1378.11. While Nancy mentioned that Charlie attempted to direct these matters, there is some evidence to suggest that she had often taken care of the business before his instructions reached Fincastle. On the same day that Charlie provided a name for their “dear little babe” he also wished Nancy to “send check to State Auditor,” and did not realize that it “had been sent about Nov 15th,” almost three weeks earlier. Nancy received well-meaning but unnecessary direction in her assumption of these new tasks, and while she had presumably not undertaken the role of financial director before Charlie’s absence, there is no evidence to suggest that she struggled or felt overwhelmed with this new position.

In a similar manner Fannie did not seem overwhelmed with the new responsibilities that befell her after her husband’s departure. But while Nancy only wrote about the financial aspect of household management, Fannie had to manage the farm and the few enslaved African-Americans who lived on her land. As the war progressed, Fannie must have encountered a growing resistance from George, Aleck, Jim, and Phebe, the Fain’s slaves. When Fannie described the baptismal ceremony in church one fall

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46 Figgat Diary, February 11, 1863.
47 Figgat Diary, December 2, 1862.
48 Some have argued that East Tennessean’s did not own slaves due to geographical restraints limiting plantation-style farming. John Stanfield suggests that while “the terrain and climate of East Tennessee made extensive plantation slavery impossible, the region did have substantial household and dirt-farming slave systems…[which] produced intimate ties between master and slave.” While Stanfield negates the all-white label in East Tennessee, the stereotype extends beyond this limited geographical region into Southern Appalachia. Carter Woodson was an early scholar who attacked this stereotype, stating that not all mountainers were abolitionists, and that “some slavery existed among them…the frontiersmen hated slavery, hated the slave as such, but, as we have observed above, hated the eastern planter worse than they hated the slave.” Woodson continues, explaining that slavery was limited in the area which led to a different relationship between the mountain master and their slave. James Klotter states that this stereotype took form in the years following Reconstruction, after white missionaries attempted reform in the South and failed after “racism crept into their paternalistic efforts” and change did “not come as quickly as expected.” Disillusioned, white northern missionaries turned their eyes towards the mountainers who “in many ways resembled blacks in their needs, their lives, and their living conditions,” thus constructing and perpetuating a “white Appalachia” to validate their reform efforts. See Stanfield “White/Black Inequality in Urban Appalachia,” 135, Woodson, “Freedom and Slavery in Appalachian America,” and Klotter “The
day in 1864, she recorded that among the recipients into the church were Aleck and Jim
“our Blk boys.” She had apparently “talked to them on the subject” and they “both
seemed very penitent & determined to try to do better, which I hope Jim may do.”

Early the next year Fannie recorded the death of Phebe’s newborn child after a difficult
pregnancy. Fannie expressed sympathy with the death of the infant but soon became
resentful when Phebe refused to do work, was “still sick [and] not able to do anything” in
February, and two months later “Phebe [was] still in her house” and didn’t “come out to
do anything.” While these entries may be benign reflections of a general disorder
caused by the war and depression, possibly they represent a growing discontent in her
“black family.” As the war progressed, perhaps the enslaved population on the Fain farm
did not feel any allegiance or responsibility to their masters. Possibly they didn’t respect
Fannie’s authority as the head of her household. Either way, Fannie subtly expressed
displeasure with her workload and in turn related the insecurities she must have felt as a
white woman in sole charge of at least four enslaved African-Americans.

Neither woman protested their additional responsibilities or explicitly complained
about their increased workload in their discussion of these new forms of labor. Perhaps
they did not struggle with the added jobs and instead saw them as part of their duty as a
good wife during war. With their husband’s departures, Nancy and Fannie accepted
their increased workload as a necessary evil to ensure the survival of their homes and
families, and did not see the labor itself as an intrusion or insurmountable obstacle. They

Black South and White Appalachia” (56-7) in Blacks in Appalachia, William H. Turner and Edward J.
49 Fain Diary, October 2, 1864.
50 Fain Diary, January 15, 1865, February 12, 1865, and March 5, 1865.
placed the blame on the disruptive nature of war and did not see their new role as unusual, only a temporary solution to a bigger problem plaguing all of southern society.

Or maybe they wanted to preserve a memory of the war that excluded certain aspects of their life in favor of portraying a strong and capable war-time experience. In their writing, Fannie and Nancy stoically took on these increased responsibilities sans husbands which provided an opportunity for individual action and agency in a society that did not normatively acknowledge the importance of white women’s work in the household economy. Possibly, as white women, Nancy and Fannie felt pressure to conform to their society’s ideals of femininity and perhaps neither felt comfortable in situations where they had primary authority or made executive decisions. If this is the case, they may have felt compelled to represent their actions and reactions to the new work as normal and typical—erasing the doubts that the community, their husbands, or even they themselves might have had about their competency, and removing any uncertainties that a future reader might have had about their ability to handle the destabilizing situation of war.

Childcare was an area where both women expressed anxiety. When Nancy gave birth to her second son, she prayerfully requested that God “gife me strength to raise him up in the [nurture] & admonition of the Lord, and in his dear fathers absence to be able to give him the care of both.” Distressed by the idea of raising her child alone, Nancy questioned her ability to serve as both mother and father and relied on her faith to provide reassurance. Not only did Nancy request God’s help in raising Meade to be a good Christian, but she also pleaded for his help in a more general sense. She probably conceived of parenting as a partnership which built a family based on a particular

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51 Figgat Diary, October 19, 1862.
structure and set of rules. This structure and gendered mode of child-rearing ensured that the resulting children would be good citizens—rule abiding and caring, strong and sensitive to the needs of others, ethical and just. Without Charlie, who would instill the values imparted by fathers to sons? Could Nancy fill that role and serve that purpose—temporarily or possibly permanently? The birth of her new son forced Nancy to confront these questions, exposing her insecurities about single-parenthood.

Like Nancy, Fannie also conveyed a certain amount of insecurity about her children and her role as a single mother. Fannie mentioned her children in most of her entries and she often wrote about parenting issues. Perhaps when she stated that her “children growing up seem rude & obstinate, the cause of many unkind remarks. My husband & their father still from us, but little prospect of his return,” she was just expressing a normal parental frustration. Possibly with the additional workload Fannie faced and the general lack of stability caused by the war, she might have felt that her

52 By the word partnership, I don’t mean an equal partnership as one might conceive of it today. But possibly she felt that a father was the disciplinarian or the one responsible for instilling a worldly knowledge, etc. while the mother was in charge of the nurturing and caring aspect of parenting. In his cross-class, cross-rank research conducted on letters written by Union soldiers, Stephen Frank discovered that fathers continued to participate (or at least attempted to through letter writing) in child-raising and that “separation from toddlers and infants was a source of distress and even guilt for some fathers, who believed that their presence was required at home for the proper socialization of young children and to serve as helpmates to their wives.” James Marten also argues that fathers held deep convictions about parenting during the Civil War in his research on southern soldiers, stating that they insisted “on providing wide-ranging guidance and instruction...[and] desperately sought to project their authority and love through the erratic mails, remaining fathers in function as well as in name.” See, Frank, “Rendering Aid and Comfort”: Images of Fatherhood in the Letters of Civil War Soldiers from Massachusetts and Michigan,” Journal of Social History, 26 no. 1 (Autumn, 1992), 20, and Marten, “Fatherhood in the Confederacy: Southern Soldiers and Their Children,” The Journal of Southern History 63 no. 2 (May, 1997), 273.

53 Nancy expressed doubts in her ability to properly raise her children in a letter to her husband in the fall of 1862, stating that she hoped “this separation may be over before our little boy gets so large so that you may assist me to teach him what is right. For I know it will be hard to do it of myself, with so many around me to teach contrary to what I do.” These hopes for his soon return suggests that she wanted her husband home not only to help her instill certain values in their children, but also to counteract the surrounding forces which she perceived as undermining her parental authority—proving that parenting was a complicated endeavor. Letter, Nancy Godwin Figgat to Charles Figgat, November 8, 1862, Charles Figgat Papers, Library of Virginia.

54 Fain Diary, September 4, 1864.
children were not getting enough attention and thus running rampant. On the other hand, because Fannie paired the statement of her children’s unruly behavior with the absence of her husband she might have associated the two on some level. Maybe Fannie felt that she could not adequately control her children, and was simply expressing her insecurities about raising her children alone. Fannie might have seen the problems she had with her disrespectful and almost uncontrollable children as stemming from the lack of a father’s presence and believed these issues would be solved with John’s return.

Fannie and Nancy conveyed their distress and questioned their abilities as single parents through the language of absence; both women doubted their abilities to serve as mother and father, and both conveyed a gendered understanding of parenting through their respective comments. Why would they choose to convey their insecurities about raising their children—something which by normative gender standards was “naturally” feminine—and not about their new responsibilities as heads of households—something which was “naturally” masculine? Possibly they saw their husbands as completely filling a role with which they themselves struggled. Assured that they could run their homes and provide for their families in whatever way necessary, they questioned their abilities to serve as fathers—a role associated with masculinity. While bookkeeping, planting, and slaughtering farm animals may not have been traditional woman’s work, it did not absolutely require a masculine identity, which allowed Fannie and Nancy to step in and take over when needed. But in their minds, fatherhood was fundamentally male—and it was in this position that Nancy questioned her ability and Fannie subtly expressed a critical self-examination.
In the absence of their husbands both Fannie and Nancy turned to their families for help with raising their children, and relied on the physical presence of their mothers, sisters, cousins, uncles, and brothers to provide relief from the duties of single-motherhood. After Meade was born, Nancy often had help around the house with childcare—nine younger siblings and an eager grandmother offered loving support and open arms. Apparently Nancy relied so much on her mother Martha Godwin’s help that she conveyed disappointment and slight annoyance when she “could not go to church today, Ma being too [sick] to keep baby.”

Both Meade and Godwin spent days at their Grandfather Figgat’s home and it is evident that the whole household was involved in these formative years. Even though Fannie did not live with a direct source of childcare, she also utilized family members as willing caregivers for her children. She often wrote about the various experiences of her children with relatives, ranging from an overnight stay at Uncle George’s home, to a day-time adventure with Mary who “came up & took down the children…to see Cousin W’s girls.”

And when Fannie was struggling with weaning Jimmie, “the hardest little case to wean,” she left him with his grandmother and aunt to reinforce the separation. Family members and friends filled a significant role in the lives of the Figgat and Fain children—extended family supplemented the childcare that mothers were single-handedly providing in the absence of fathers—demonstrating the importance of family, the surrounding community, and social location.

55 Figgat Diary, November 21, 1862.
56 Fain Diary, February 12, 1865 and December 11, 1864.
57 Fain Diary, February 19, 1865.
Fig. 6. “Map of Fincastle in Botetourt County Virginia, 1880.” O.W. Gray & Son, Philadelphia National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form, 1968. This map shows the location of the Godwin and Figgat households more than fifteen years after the war, and evidences the close family ties in terms of physical location within Fincastle.

Fannie and Nancy relied on community support throughout the war—and not just for childcare. Both women constantly mentioned family and friends in their writing; the daily visits, circulating rumors, and general goings-on were all suitable topics of discussion in their entries. In fact, the subject of family and friends appears most often in both women’s writing; the people who remained in town and the gossip which continued to circulate were constants in each woman’s community, and must have lent a sense of reassurance in a time where so much was changing. Fannie could easily go “down with Cousin Crawford” and eat with “Uncle Tommie” on the same day that her brother Jimmy “reported wounded slightly...[for] the third time” while she prayed to her “Father in Heaven to spare his dear life & the life of all my dear brothers while engaged in this
bloody tragedy. Fannie settled herself and calmed her nerves through her frequent association with family members and friends. While Nancy constantly interacted with family members within her home, she also actively engaged with friends in Fincastle and Lexington; in a late summer entry she described a weeklong trip where she “had a pleasant and long visit to Stone-Castle, met with Misses Atkinson from Alexandria...visited at Dr H’s Miss Goldsboro, a banished refugee from Baltimore” and generally “had a pleasant time with friends.” In this entry Nancy described her visits with friends old and new, perhaps reminding herself of her fortunate position as a settled native-Virginian. Nancy could visit with the refugees and learn about their struggles at the same time that she could catch up with long-time friends—countering the instability of war with the stability of a settled community. For both women family and friends provided a safe space which instilled a sense of stability when doubt and anxiety threatened to overwhelm them.

The Civil War upset Fannie and Nancy’s location. Both quietly adapted to the changes brought by the war without a written complaint. Both struggled to find their place in a reversal of the traditional household model. And both women turned to their social networks for support during the war—evidence of their significant relationships with the places in which they resided. But their war-time experiences greatly differed despite these similarities. Each woman had to find her own way through the Civil War, and each faced different challenges because of her social and geographical location—neither woman’s life can be generalized about or adequately understood without the

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58 Fain Diary, October 23, 1864.
59 Figgat Diary, August 12, 1864.
context of location. A nuanced understanding of Nancy and Fannie’s war-time lives comes from an analysis of their differences; for it was their location that situated both diarists in the familiar, and their location which was prone to particular war-time instabilities. While their reactions might have been similar and the social networks and physical geography may be comparable, the familiar is person-specific and all locations are individually created.
CHAPTER II.

GRIEF AND FAITH

"Oh! May I never doubt, but always believe he will be there ever kind and may I not murmur, but say in all cases 'Thy will be done.'"
-Nancy Godwin Figgat, September 9, 1862

"'God moves in a mysterious way. 'Tis he who afflicts and we must submissively kiss the rod which smites' and say, 'Not my will but thine, O Lord, be done.'"
-Fannie Fain, June 6, 1864

When a husband leaves with only a slim chance of sporadic communication, when a child dies of a devastating infection, or when the shocking news reaches the family of a slain soldier, grief is a natural and expected reaction. The reaction can be emotional, tears overwhelming a shocked and exhausted body. Perhaps the reality of the situation doesn’t quite settle right away, taking days or weeks for the affected loved one to recognize his or her loss. Regardless of any immediate reaction, grief manifests itself in many forms and fashions as a result of varying degrees of separation. The process of bereavement exists along a continuum as varied as the experiences which served to precipitate it. Grief cannot be compartmentalized in practice and thus it is not easily simplified through study. Modern understandings of the bereavement process allow for a personalization of grief, and recognize that it is an individual response not to be judged, pushed, or belittled. While the theories surrounding grief may have changed since the nineteenth-century, loss is still experienced in a similar manner; people still lose loved
ones, whether it is to death, physical separation, or mental incapacity. And these losses are mourned, some more intensely than others, but mourned nevertheless.

When a baby dies, a husband leaves, or news of a casualty reaches one’s ears, how does a person react? What methods do they employ to ease their sorrow? How can they return to normal, and rid themselves of the pain of loss? Many rely on friends and family to provide an underlying infrastructure of support, and recognize the importance of other voices which remind them that they are not alone. Some may turn inward, seeking comfort through prayer or writing, working on their grief from the inside out. Some seek solace through their faith, talking with a preacher or surrounding themselves in a religious community along with the personal aspect of an individual’s spirituality. A reliance on religious beliefs provides another way of easing sadness—creating a discourse of healing around the grief and using the assurance of religion to explain the inexplicable.

The word “faith” does not appear in either Fannie Fain or Nancy Godwin Figgat’s writing, but both women applied their religious beliefs in their everyday life. Preaching, church services, community church gatherings, prayer, reading the Bible and other spiritual texts, and passing God’s love on to their children were all aspects of faith Fannie and Nancy incorporated into their daily lives, and the enactment of their religious beliefs became a crucial strategy of survival for both diarists with the onset of war. Fannie and Nancy lost loved ones over the course of the war; both survived long-term separations from their husbands and lost family members whether it was to old age, infection, or battle.60 While other relatives provided support when they could, faith was the critical

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60 Grief from both death and separations are prevalent in Nancy and Fannie’s writing, but it must be stressed that one form of grief is not more severe than the other. Paul Rosenblatt writes that grief can take
element which eased each diarist’s grief; their religious beliefs provided them with a
coping mechanism which their communities could not.  

Nancy Godwin Figgat was no stranger to separation when it came time for her
husband Charlie “to take his place among his fellow men...in the Army.” Married for
less than three years when she recorded his departure, Nancy had moved from her home
in Fincastle to Lexington, Virginia, where Charlie found work as a bank teller. Nancy’s
natural confidence as the first child of Thomas and Martha Godwin was likely augmented
by a desire to start her own family, motivating her to leave the security of home at age
twenty-four. In a display of how much she was missed and loved, her mother and sister
wrote her less than two weeks later, advising her on household furnishings and urging the
young couple to “be good children and neither of you forget your own homes.” Perhaps
this significant milepost in her life marked the convergence of excitement and guilt. The

many different forms in the writings of nineteenth-century diarists. His examination of grief in fifty-six
nineteenth-century diaries exposes the relationship between grief experienced as a result of separation and
death. Rosenblatt found a “somewhat greater grief in the long run for separation than for deaths” and
argues that this “implies that grief should not be underestimated for people with any kind of long-term
separation.” He determined that in many cases “consequences for social life and day-to-day activities of
the slow accommodation to a separation are undoubtedly complex. It may be that for a separation, as
opposed to a death, others may be less likely to be recruited to fill the role of the missing person or less
likely to be committed to such a role if they assume it.” Because of the extensive effect that grief as a result
of separation has on an individual’s daily life, the overall bereavement process may last longer and the grief
experienced as a result of their loss may be just as intense as that of someone dealing with a death. See,
Rosenblatt, Bitter, Bitter Tears: Nineteenth-Century Diarists and Twentieth-Century Grief Theories
(Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983) 79-80.

61 Drew Faust states that the “convergence of religion with politics, of the sacred with the terrestrial, had
significant implications for white women of the wartime South” because it provided women with a
language to approach the world of war and politics. But, “at the same time, it assumed profound personal
import, serving as an essential intellectual and emotional resource and providing a framework for
understanding and coping with the ordeals of war. Women used divine language and belief to explain the
frightening new circumstances that they confronted, and to provide themselves as well with the strength
and consolation that derives from faith.” Many women explored their faith and employed it in their
everyday lives in order to make sense of the changes taking place around them, using it as a crutch when
necessary and using it to their advantage when they could. Mothers of Invention, 180.

62 Figgat Diary, August 2, 1862.

63 Martha M. Godwin to Nancy Godwin Figgat, December 27, 1859, Godwin Papers, Virginia Tech Special
Collections.
excitement of establishing her own family and traditions must have proved thrilling for Nancy as a young wife. But perhaps she also felt a tinge of guilt or sadness, leaving the family she loved so dearly, with multiple siblings still at home needing the care and attention of an older sister whose absence they had never known.

If she had felt any guilt, it quickly disappeared; soon the roles of wife and mother took precedence in the life of Nancy Godwin Figgat as she lavished her love and devotion on her young son Thomas and his father. The beginning of the war disrupted many families just as Charlie’s decision to enlist interrupted life for his family. On August 2, 1862, the Figgat family made a decision about their future; Nancy joined her nine siblings in her Father’s house, seeking “protection and care, during my husband’s absence.”64 Twenty-seven years of age and seven months pregnant with another little boy, Nancy was re-joining the home in which she had grown up, hoping to find safety in familiar surroundings. Life as an expectant mother would not have been easy in a new environment, but at the beginning of the Civil War most of Nancy and Charlie’s family still resided in Fincastle, an attractive benefit of her move. Entering this stage of her life must have been daunting for Nancy. With her husband away at war, she now relied on her parents, parents-in-law, and siblings to see her through the last months of her pregnancy and help raise little “Thomas Godwin.”

While this move probably settled some of her nerves, the separation from her husband still caused anxiety. The community of Fincastle had witnessed the birth and adolescence of the young couple; Nancy and Charlie had probably known each other from infancy. Growing up in such a small town, had they ever truly lived apart? Nancy clung to illusions of marriage without war, separation, or distance which altered her

64 Figgat Diary, August 2, 1862.
relationship with Charlie. When their second child was born on October 19, 1862, Nancy did not name him immediately. It was a day before she could write to Charlie to “apprise him of our new joy,” and it was more than a month before she could record that he gave “me a name for our dear little babe just the one I wished—his own; and may he prove as worthy of it as his father.” For six weeks Charles Meade Figgat remained officially nameless until his father (of the same name) could reply to the letter informing him of the birth of his child. Hindered by the distance and the tardiness of the post, Nancy relied on Charlie to make a final decision.

Naming practices differ from person to person, family to family, culture to culture, but Nancy determinedly waited on her husband’s input. Was this because she could not make the decision for herself? Both families surrounded her and provided much support; surely they would have helped in the naming process. Possibly she considered the high infant mortality rate, and delayed naming her new son in order to escape the pain of naming a child who would only die. Then again, perhaps she just wanted to make such a decision with her husband (he was their child, after all).

Whatever the case, little Meade remained unnamed until his father could respond to his mother’s letter. Nancy’s reluctance to name “Meade” until word came from Charlie (despite the presence of many family members) evidenced both devotion to her husband

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65 Figgat Diary, October 19, 1862, December 2, 1862.
66 In a letter addressed to Charlie soon after their son’s birth, Nancy expressed a level of frustration that he had not given her any word on a name for their new son and stated that the “children are mighty anxious (especially Henry who would not let me read my last letters in peace) about the baby’s name. Ma said she reckoned you tho’t he wasn’t suffering...” She continued to say that a neighbor and Godwin had both commented the infant’s lack of a name—showing how involved the whole household (and even the community) was in the lives of Nancy and her newborn. While Nancy never stated that she herself was frustrated with his lack of response, she conveyed her disappointment through her family member’s remarks. Nancy Godwin Figgat to Charles Figgat, November 8, 1862, Charles Figgat Papers, Library of Virginia.
and the desire to uphold ideals about her marriage to which she firmly adhered while he
was gone.

Nancy relied on her husband not only for specific requests, but for his guidance
and companionship in general. Charlie’s absence was compounded by the disturbing
news of war that circulated throughout Fincastle, which increased her apprehension about
his welfare. While Nancy’s family provided comfort and support, they could not replace
him, and failed to ease her anxieties. Nancy consoled herself by writing, and on the third
anniversary of her wedding she lamented, “I felt sad, very sad…and I am separated from
the dearest of all others, but I ought not complain for he is protected from the deadly
missiles of our foe.”

Depression over Charlie’s absence appeared repeatedly
throughout her entries, framed by religious thoughts and spiritual requests. Nancy trusted
God to protect her husband, but still fearfully expressed her doubts in her diary. Despite
her relentless attempts at consolation through faith-infused writing, Nancy could not help
feeling lonely and insecure. She missed her husband desperately.

References to her spiritual beliefs abound in Nancy’s writing along with examples
of her depression. She recorded her daily encounters with clergymen, and throughout the
course of her diary she heard the preaching of over seven different ministers. While
Nancy rarely specified a particular church, her son Thomas Godwin was baptized by an
Episcopalian minister on July 30, 1862, and afterwards she outlined her hopes for his
future: “that it may be the greatest pleasure of his life to preach the precious Gospel to a
dying world,” illustrating devotion to her faith and a fluid idea of Christian ministry.

Did Nancy intend to have her son enter the ministry as a professional preacher? If so this

67 Figgat Diary, December 13, 1862.
68 Figgat Diary, July 30, 1862. In her diary she mentions the “E church” and the Southern Episcopalians,
but does not often identify the preacher’s denomination or the church she attended.
could act as a sign of her own personal devotion to her Christian faith—what could glorify God more than training a son to spread His “precious Gospel”? On the other hand, this could reflect her conception and general sense of preaching and religiosity. Perhaps “preaching” referred to the everyday embodiment of good Christian behavior, spreading the Word through daily interactions and good deeds, thereby extending God’s message and recruiting members of the “dying world” back into a religious embrace. In either case, Nancy obviously took her baptismal vows seriously, asking God for strength to guide her as a mother and transmitter of His holy Word.

While Nancy strove to fulfill her religious duty as a mother, she drew strength from the leadership of a multitude of church services and sermons to guide the practice of her faith. On January 3, 1863, Nancy recorded the text of the sermon given that morning at the Methodist church by Mr. Field. The sermon focused on Romans 12:1, which states: “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service.”69 The rest of this verse stressed the importance of a renewal of faith, the centrality of service to the Lord, and an aspiration to dispel evil by benevolent actions. While Nancy only recorded the first part of the verse, “I beseech you present you bodies & c,” presumably Mr. Fields preached on the entire message. After the exposure to this particular verse and sermon, Figgat exclaimed “oh God! Help me to keep [my resolutions] through thy strength.”70 After internalizing the message of the day’s sermon, Nancy committed herself to improving her faith and strengthening her role as a Christian with God’s help. These sermons affected Nancy in untold and implicit ways throughout her writing, and

70 Figgat Diary, January 3, 1863.