

# **'FIGHTING MY WAY THROUGH'**

NORTHERN RURAL WOMEN IN THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR

Lucienne Grace Oppenheimer Guyot

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## **Abstract**

Rural women are almost entirely absent in the voluminous scholarship on the American Civil War. Yet women were more than volunteers and nurses during this conflict; they also worked the land, helping the North to achieve an unprecedented agricultural output, despite the enlistment of millions of Northern men in the army. This thesis tracks the fate of two Vermont farm families in order to analyse rural women's wartime experiences. Using their personal letters coupled with local histories, Vermont newspapers, government documents and a range of printed sources focused on rural life, this thesis maps the way farmwomen coped with the challenges of running farms alone. Widely recognised during the war for their contribution in sustaining the Northern economy and feeding the army, rural women would later be thoroughly forgotten.

## **Acknowledgements**

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## Contents

|   |    |
|---|----|
| <i>Illustrations</i>                    | v  |
| <i>Introduction</i>                     | 1  |
| <i>Chapter One</i>                      |    |
| <b>'Worked Like a Dog All Day Long'</b> | 16 |
| <i>Chapter Two</i>                      |    |
| <b>The Struggle to Make Ends Meet</b>   | 40 |
| <i>Chapter Three</i>                    |    |
| <b>A Broken Promise</b>                 | 64 |
| <i>Conclusion</i>                       | 85 |
| <i>Bibliography</i>                     | 90 |

## Illustrations

|  |    |
|--|----|
| <i>Map of Tunbridge, Vermont</i>                 | 2  |
| <i>Russell Dutton Silsby</i>                     | 5  |
| <i>Map of Moretown, Vermont</i>                  | 18 |
| <i>Farmer Folks in War Time</i>                  | 66 |
| <i>Isaac Newton, Commissioner of Agriculture</i> | 80 |
| <i>Tombstone of Marinda Silsby</i>               | 87 |

## INTRODUCTION

Hannah Glines rose before the sun. Heading to either the well or stream that ran through her property in eastern Tunbridge, Vermont, she drew water for the day's needs. Carried in large wooden buckets to the farmhouse in preparation for household tasks and farm work such as cleaning, cooking and watering of livestock, this laborious but essential chore was a woman's lot until the introduction of underground plumbing in the twentieth century. The amount of water that Hannah carried increased on washing day, which occurred only once or twice a fortnight due to the huge quantity of water required.<sup>1</sup> In springtime, milking was also added to Hannah's early morning chores in order to make butter and cheese. Although not a difficult process, it took Hannah at least an hour to milk all six of her cows. When she was done, she carried the milk — roughly six gallons of it — either back into the house or to a nearby dairy-room.<sup>2</sup> And this was only the beginning of her day.

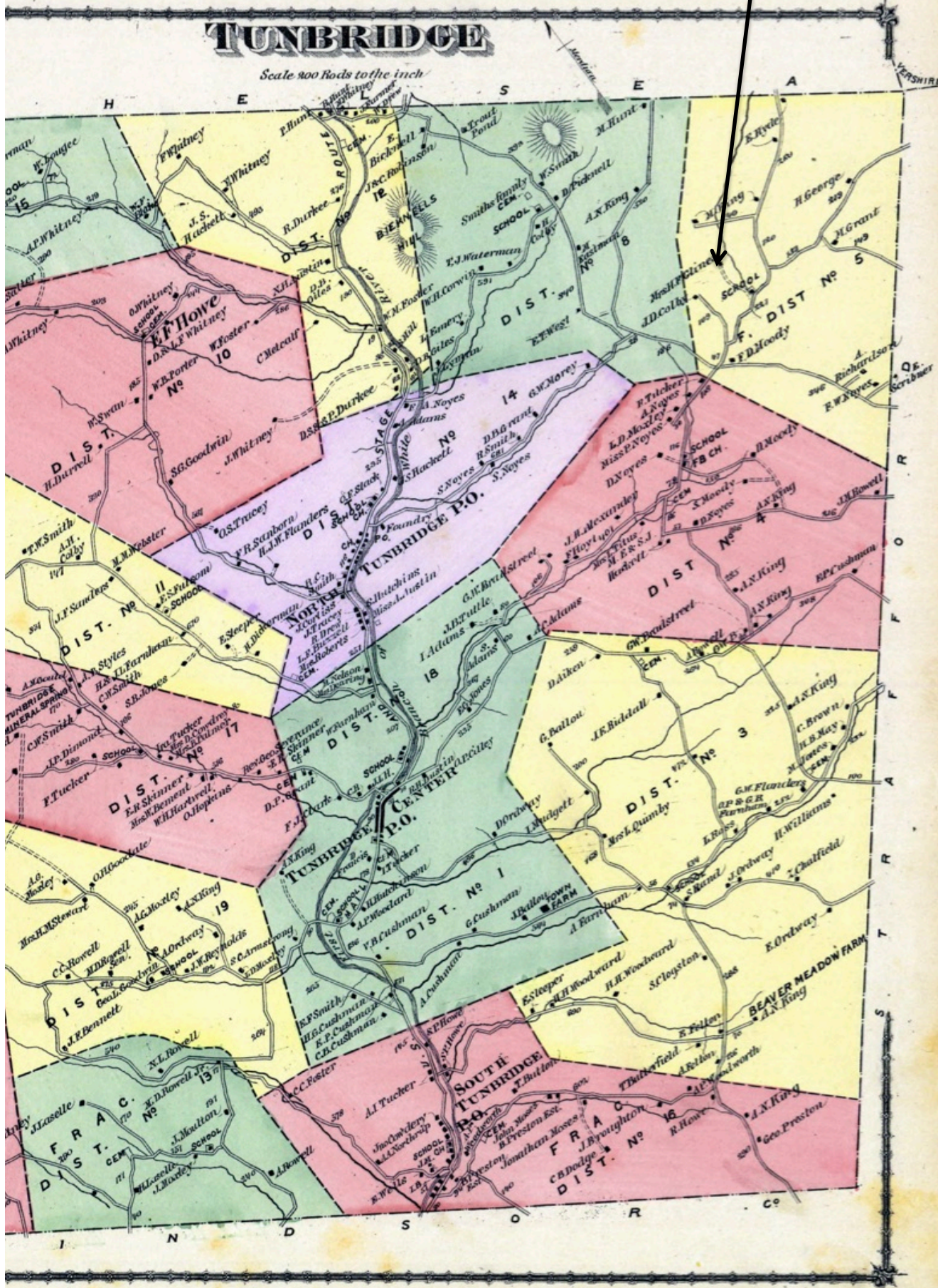
Hannah's next task was to make breakfast, a basic meal consisting of meat and perhaps vegetables, sometimes prepared with a sweetener such as honey, and cooked over an open fireplace. Coal or wood stoves had been developed by this time but were used almost exclusively in urban households, not becoming a mainstay in rural America for many decades after their initial introduction.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> David Danbom, *Born in the Country: A History of Rural America* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1995), p. 97.

<sup>2</sup> Joan Jensen, *Loosening The Bonds: Mid-Atlantic Farm Women 1750-1850* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), pp. 96-97.

<sup>3</sup> Marli F. Weiner, 'Rural Women' in Nancy A. Hewitt, ed., *A Companion to American Women's History* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), p. 156.



Map of Tunbridge, Vermont (courtesy of *Historic Land Ownership and Reference Atlases, 1507-2000* listed on Ancestry.com).

After breakfast each morning, Hannah went outside to collect freshly laid eggs and to feed and water the sheep, cows, hogs, chickens and horses. Next, she tidied and cleaned the house, organised her eldest daughter Emma for school and ensured the youngest two children — four-year-old Ida and two-year-old Francis Major — were clothed and entertained before she began the arduous process of making butter and cheese. For butter, Hannah skimmed the cream off the milk collected two days prior, placing it into a barrel until there was enough for churning. She probably used a dasher churn — a common tool at this time consisting of a large pole or plunger that was moved up and down in an enclosed barrel at a constant rhythm for forty minutes or more, depending on the quantity of cream.<sup>4</sup> This difficult and exhausting activity did not signal the end of production. Once the cream had been churned, Hannah would have spent more time adding salt and manipulating the butter into appropriate portions. This was crucial work, for butter was not just an important household item but also one that could be sold at market for a small profit.

Cheese required considerably more effort to produce. The most common type of cheese was 'two-meal', made from the milk collected at two separate sessions, for example, morning milk and that of the previous evening.<sup>5</sup> The milk had to be combined and curdled for at least forty minutes, then sifted and cooked for between one to three hours. Next, it had to be salted and pressed, a process that took a minimum twenty-four hours, with the cheese removed at intervals, moulded, and then returned to the press at a higher pressure. Finally, the cheese was trimmed, oiled, cured, washed and rubbed — making home cheese

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<sup>4</sup> Paul Gates, *Agriculture and the Civil War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1965), p. 202.

<sup>5</sup> Sally McMurry, *Transforming Rural Life: Dairying Families and Agricultural Change, 1820-1885* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1995), p. 82.



production in the words of one scholar of rural life, an 'extremely exacting, touchy, and laborious process, demanding unremitting attention'.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, the manufacture of dairy goods was a task that continued year round, intensifying in spring when cows began to lactate.

As evident from the above description, the activities of rural women in mid-century America left little time for rest. When their husbands left for war, their duties multiplied. Hannah's husband, Moses, joined the 2nd Vermont Volunteer Infantry in April 1861, leaving her solely responsible for both the farm and her family. Furthermore, Hannah was in the early stages of pregnancy and would see out the full nine months and birth of her fourth child alone. To her daily chores, she now added her husband's as well, including cutting wheat, oats and hay with a scythe or cradle. Cradles required physical strength, skill, consistency and time. Women rarely performed such backbreaking labour until the outbreak of the war. Thereafter, women like Hannah had no choice but to take it up.

In addition to harvesting the farm's grain, Hannah tended to the vegetables and — depending on the season — raked the soil with a type of shovel called a 'hoe', planted seeds or dug up root crops such as potatoes, all tasks requiring considerable muscle. This work continued until it was time to prepare for lunch. Hannah's husband usually butchered the animals, leaving Hannah to preserve the meat in the kitchen for later use. But with Moses away at war, Hannah had to take over this task as well. Having slaughtered the requisite animal (usually a hog), Hannah provided lunch for herself and her children. If she

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<sup>6</sup> McMurry, *Transforming Rural Life*, p. 84. For more on the home manufacturing of cheese, see Sally McMurry, 'American Rural Women and the Transformation of Dairy Processing 1820-1880', *Rural History* 5, no.2 (1994), pp. 143-153.

had been lucky enough to have the assistance of a farm labourer, she would have catered for him at mealtimes as well, but Hannah could neither find nor afford such help. Following lunch, she completed more cleaning and farm work before returning to the kitchen to prepare for dinner. A final round of the farmyard to ensure that the livestock were well fed and watered rounded off her day. The children were put to bed and Hannah retired shortly thereafter.

In the neighbouring county of Washington, Russell Silsby enlisted as Sergeant in his local company of the 13th Vermont Volunteers Infantry. Marching off to war, Silsby left behind his wife, Marinda and their three daughters, Martha, Mary, and Ellen.

Russell Dutton Silsby (courtesy of *U.S. Civil War Soldier Records and Profiles* listed on Ancestry.com)



In the absence of her husband, Marinda too was now responsible for running the family farm. Assistance came in the form of her elderly father-in-law, Asaph, and when she could find it and afford it, hired labour. In November 1862, at a time in the war when morale was at its lowest, Marinda, taking her cue from wartime writers who made analogies between women's war work and soldiering, wrote to her husband that although she had suffered 'all this turmoil and trouble' she

had decided to fight instead.<sup>7</sup> Encouraging him to do the same, she told her husband 'I have put on the armor and I feel like fighting my way through'.<sup>8</sup>

The only documents that record the experiences and feelings of Marinda Silsby and Hannah Glines during the Civil War are a handful of the letters they sent to their husbands — the few that managed to survive the chaos of camp life and the battlefield. These brief accounts offer a glimpse of lives of hardship, compromise, and endurance. Their stories, however, are not unique. With the draining of male labour into the army, rural women across the Northern states were forced to renegotiate their position within the structure of family and farm work. Out of the estimated two million who served the Union throughout the war, farmers and farm labourers made up almost half of the entire army.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, the relative youthfulness of the Union forces (the median age was twenty-five to twenty-six years old) by no means detracted from the impact of the war on farmwomen; the loss of labour affected farms whether that absent male was a son, brother, husband or father.<sup>10</sup> Although some families managed to keep one male relative at home to take care of the many responsibilities entailed in running a farm, many others made do without.

Historical discussions of northern women in the Civil War, however, rarely mention the trials of rural women. Historians have instead tended to focus

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<sup>7</sup> Russell Dutton Silsby to Marinda Brown Silsby, November 12, 1862, R.Dutton Silsby Civil War Letters, 1862-1863, Vermont Historical Society, Barre, VT (MSA 521:01-07). Hereafter 'Silsby Collection'.

<sup>8</sup> Russell Dutton Silsby to Marinda Brown Silsby, November 12, 1862, Silsby Collection.

<sup>9</sup> Bell Irvin Wiley, *The Life of Billy Yank: The Common Soldier of the Union* (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company Publishers, 1952), p. 303; Nina Silber, *Daughters of the Union: Northern Women Fight the Civil War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), pp. 16-17; Phillip Shaw Paludan, *A People's Contest: The Union and Civil War 1861-1865* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1988), p. 156.

<sup>10</sup> Wiley, *The Life of Billy Yank*, p. 303.

on women's voluntary work, and to query the extent to which this wartime participation generated support for women's rights.<sup>11</sup> Despite the fact that rural women made up a substantial portion of the Northern population, they tend to rate only a paragraph or two in most works on the Civil War home front. Historian Nina Silber, for instance, notes that farmers' kin, farm labourers, and industrial workers were the most affected by the conflict in terms of male absence, yet she does not examine how the war affected these groups.<sup>12</sup> Rather, Silber is interested in the way Victorian ideals of domesticity and womanhood shaped Northern women's sense of self and place during wartime — a topic she analyses by focusing largely on urban and middle-class volunteers. She concludes that while the conflict brought women into a new civic space, the war environment did not lead to a widespread sense of empowerment. Reversing previous arguments about the effects of women's roles during the Civil War, she asserts that war work and deprivation were more likely to lead to feelings of disempowerment and inferiority.<sup>13</sup> Despite her unorthodox conclusion, Silber

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<sup>11</sup> See, for example, Jeanie Attie, *Patriotic Toil: Northern Women and the American Civil War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988); Marilyn Mayer Culpepper, *Trials and Triumphs: Women in the American Civil War* (East Lansing: Michigan State University, 1991); Larry Eggleston, *Women in the Civil War: Extraordinary Stories of Soldiers, Spies, Nurses, Doctors, Crusaders and Others* (London: McFarland & Company Inc., 2003); James Matthew Gallman, *The North Fights the Civil War: The Home Front* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee Inc., 1994); Judith Ann Giesberg, *Civil War Sisterhood: The U.S. Sanitary Commission and Women's Politics in Transition* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2000); Kathleen McCarthy, *American Creed: Philanthropy and the Rise of Civil Society 1790-1865* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003); Elizabeth D. Leonard, *Yankee Women: Gender Battles in the Civil War* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1994); Jane Schultz, *Women at the Front: Hospital Workers in the Civil War America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Anne Firor Scott, *Natural Allies: Women's Associations in American History* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1991).

<sup>12</sup> Silber, *Daughters of the Union*, p. 17.

<sup>13</sup> Silber, *Daughters of the Union*, pp. 281-284.

still centres her analysis on the relationship between women's war work and feminism, placing her work within the dominant historiographical canon.

The visibility of women's voluntary work during the war and the desire among women's historians to chart the rise of feminism has resulted in a focus skewed toward urban, middle-class northern women. This trend extends to works that deal with the role of both Confederate and Union women. Historians such as Mary Elizabeth Massey have examined the efforts of northern and southern women throughout the conflict.<sup>14</sup> Massey extensively covers women's various wartime roles as nurses, spies, couriers, guides, smugglers, teachers, 'government girls' and writers. Yet her comprehensive survey devotes only two paragraphs to rural (mostly Southern) women. When historians do mention Northern rural women, they typically quote the words of Mary Livermore, a prominent female rights activist of the 1870s who ran the Northwest division of the United States Sanitary Commission.<sup>15</sup> Contained within Livermore's memoirs of the war was an anecdote on Wisconsin farmwomen whom Livermore observed toiling in the fields during her travels.<sup>16</sup> Livermore utilised these rural women to demonstrate the importance of women to the Union cause, suggesting that rural women were clear proof of the realignment of domestic spaces that she and many of her urban, middle-class counterparts capitalised on after the ceasefire. Thus the association between women's work in the Civil War and post-bellum developments has a long history. A key difference between the early

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<sup>14</sup> Mary Elizabeth Massey, *Women in the Civil War* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, [1966] 1996).

<sup>15</sup> Massey, *Women in the Civil War*, p. 207.

<sup>16</sup> Mary A. Livermore, *My Story of the War: A Woman's Narrative of Four Years Personal Experience as Nurse in the Union Army and in Relief Work at Home, In Hospitals, Camps and at the Front during the War of the Rebellion* (Hartford: A.D. Worthington & Company, 1889), pp. 145-149.

account of Mary Livermore and the later historiography of Massey, however, is an effective erasure of northern rural women.

Interestingly, this lack of scholarly attention does not extend beyond the Civil War. Accounts of northern rural women preceding and following the war are numerous.<sup>17</sup> In the antebellum context, historiography has centred on the lives of rural women and the extent to which notions of domesticity and

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<sup>17</sup> See, for example, Jane Adams, 'Individualism, Efficiency, and Domesticity: Ideological Aspects of the Exploitation of Farm Families and Farm Women', *Agriculture and Human Values* 12, no.4 (Fall 1995), pp. 2-17; Jane Adams, 'Resistance to Modernity: Southern Illinois Farm Women and the Cult of Domesticity', *American Ethnologist* 20, no.1 (February 1991), pp. 89-113; Peggy Barlett, *American Dreams, Rural Realities: Family Farms in Crisis* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993); Linda Borish, 'Benevolent America: Rural Women, Physical Recreation, Sport and Health Reform in Antebellum New England', *International Journal of the History of Sport* 22, no.6 (2005), pp. 946-973; Martin Bruegel, 'Work, Gender and Authority on the Farm: The Hudson Valley Countryside 1790s-1850s', *Agricultural History* 76, no.1 (Winter 2002), pp. 1-27; Christopher Clark, 'The View from the Farmhouse: Rural Lives in the Early Republic', *Journal of the Early Republic* 24, no.2 (Summer 2004), pp. 198-207; Lee A. Craig, 'The Value of Household Labor in Antebellum Northern Agriculture', *The Journal of Economic History* 51, no.1 (March 1991), pp. 67-81; Lee A. Craig, *To Sow One More: Childbearing and Farm Productivity in the Antebellum North* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1993); Deborah Fink, *Open Country Iowa: Rural Women, Tradition and Change* (Albany: University of New York Press, 1986); Carol Groneman and Mary Beth Norton, eds., *To Toil the Livelong Day: America's Women at Work 1780-1980* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987); Wava Haney and Jane Knowles, eds., *Women and Farming: Changing Roles, Changing Structures* (London: Westview Press, 1988); Julie Jeffrey, *Frontier Women: The Trans-Mississippi West 1840-1880* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1979); Joan Jensen, *Loosening the Bonds: Mid-Atlantic Farm Women 1750-1850* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986); Joan Jensen, *Promise to the Land: Essays on Rural Women* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1991); Joan Jensen, *With These Hands: Women Working on the Land* (New York: The Feminist Press, 1981); Joan Jensen, "You May Depend She Does Not Eat Much Idle Bread": Mid-Atlantic Farm Women and Their Historians', *Agricultural History* 61, no.1 (Winter 1987), pp. 29-46; Ann McCleary, 'Domesticity and the Farm Woman: A Case Study of Women in Augusta County, Virginia 1850-1940', *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture* 1 (1982), pp. 25-30; Sally McMurry, 'American Rural Women and the Transformation of Dairy Processing, 1820-1880', *Rural History* 5, no.2 (1994), pp. 143-153; Sally McMurry, *Families and Farmhouses in Nineteenth-Century America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988); Sally McMurry, *Transforming Rural Life*; Nancy Osterud, *Bonds of Community: Lives of Farm Women in Nineteenth Century New York* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991); Nancy Osterud, 'Gender and the Transition to Capitalism in Rural America', *Agricultural History* 67, no.2 (Spring 1993), pp. 14-29; Nancy Osterud, 'Inheriting, Marrying and Founding Farms: Women's Place on the Land', *Women's History Review* 20, no.2 (2011), pp. 265-281.

woman's 'sphere' applied to those living in country areas. Utilising personal accounts, diaries and letters, scholars have uncovered a reality favouring flexibility, necessity and mutuality over rigid gender divisions. Additionally, the historiography emphasises that rural men recognised the importance of their wives' labour to the farm and the family economy. Consequently, these works argue that the nature of farm work inherently required a level of reciprocity and cooperation between the sexes lacking in urban contexts, resulting in a greater degree of equality in rural relationships.<sup>18</sup> Building on this argument, scholarship on post-bellum America often addresses rural women in their capacity as members of the Grange movement.<sup>19</sup> This movement arose from farmer dissatisfaction with laws regulating the agricultural industry. Women were welcomed into the movement and awarded equal voting rights within the organisation, resulting in the high profile and prominent involvement of many rural women through rallies, protest papers and government lobbying. This participation naturally extended into broader suffrage movements, with rural women playing an integral role in the fight for the vote in late nineteenth-century America.

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<sup>18</sup> See, for example, Jensen, *Loosening the Bonds* and Osterud, *Bonds of Community*.

<sup>19</sup> See, for example, Donald B. Marti, 'Woman's Work in the Grange: Mary Ann Mayo of Michigan, 1882-1903', *Agricultural History* 56, no.2 (April 1982), pp. 439-452; Donald B. Marti, 'Sisters of the Grange: Rural Feminism in the Late Nineteenth-Century', *Agricultural History* 58, no.3 (July 1984), pp. 237-261; Jensen, *With These Hands*. For work on the Grange movement generally, see, for example, James Dabney McCabe, *History of the Grange Movement* (New York: B. Franklin, 1967); Thomas Summerhill, *Harvest of Dissent: Agrarianism in Nineteenth-Century New York* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2005); Solon Justus Buck, *The Granger Movement: A Study of Agricultural Organisation and its Political, Economic and Social Manifestations, 1870-1880* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1963); D. Sven Nordin, *Rich Harvest: A History of the Grange 1867-1900* (Baton Rouge: University Press of Mississippi, 1974).

It is surprising therefore that the Civil War — a topic for which there is no shortage of historical scholarship — could be so lacking in attention to northern rural women. The invisibility of this important cohort can be partly attributed to a dearth of documentary evidence. The day-to-day lifestyle of rural women, particularly during the Civil War, did not lend itself to the production and maintenance of records such as diaries and scrapbooks that were popular among the urban middle class. Surviving letters emphasise the lack of leisure time for activities like writing, with many women lamenting having to pen their letters late at night or apologising for the shortness or lateness of their replies. Letters to family members in the army are the closest one can get to the experiences of these women throughout the conflict, and even these are fragmentary.

In the voluminous Civil War literature there are only two works directly addressing the subject of rural women's lives. Judith Giesberg's 'From Harvest Field to Battlefield' explores the Civil War from the perspective of Pennsylvanian farmwomen.<sup>20</sup> Analysing personal and state records, Giesberg establishes that the Civil War forced a renegotiation and realignment of gender 'spaces' within rural households. Careful to distinguish her conclusions from discussions of post-war activism, Giesberg heeds a warning that such a focus can cloud investigations into how the Civil War affected rural relationships. Likewise, historian Nancy Osterud has studied the impact of the Civil War on familial

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<sup>20</sup> Judith Ann Giesberg, 'From Harvest Field to Battlefield': Rural Pennsylvania Women in the U.S. Civil War', *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies* 72, no.2 (2005), pp. 159-191, later reprinted in Judith Ann Giesberg, *Army at Home: Women and the Civil War on the Northern Home Front* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), pp. 17-45.



relationships in Nanticoke Valley, New York.<sup>21</sup> Drawing on the correspondence of three different families, Osterud concludes that the war cemented notions of reciprocity and mutuality as the defining characteristics of rural marriages. Continuing her previous antebellum study of Nanticoke rural women, Osterud argues that the war allowed rural women the opportunity to redefine their relationships and positions within the family structure. The result, she contends, was that women recognised their capabilities and from this recognition, their marital relationships incorporated a newfound 'basis for mutual respect'.<sup>22</sup>

This study builds on the work of Giesberg and Osterud to redress a gap that exists within the current historiography on rural women in the Civil War, namely *how* these women experienced the conflict. Whereas Giesberg and Osterud included working-class women of rural towns in their examinations, this work will focus specifically on women who were left to farm the land. Additionally, while these existing analyses centre on the mid-Atlantic states of Pennsylvania and New York, this thesis extends the discussion to the region of New England, selecting the state of Vermont as the primary case study. Following the broader historiographical trend, local and state histories of Vermont's participation in the Civil War also fail to address rural women.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Nancy Osterud, 'Rural Women during the Civil War: New York's Nanticoke Valley, 1861-1865', *New York History* 71, no.4 (October 1990), pp. 357-385.

<sup>22</sup> Osterud, 'Rural Women during the Civil War', p. 385.

<sup>23</sup> See, for example, Thomas D. Seymour Bassett, 'Vermont in the Civil War: For Freedom and Unity - Vermont's Civil War', *Vermont Life* 15 (Spring 1961), pp. 35-53; George Benedict, *Vermont in the Civil War: A History of the Part Taken by the Vermont Soldiers and Sailors in the War for the Union 1861-1865*, vol. 1-2 (Burlington: The Free Press Association, 1886); David C. Rankin, *Diary of a Christian Soldier: Rufus Kinsley and the Civil War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Howard Coffin, *The Battered Stars: From One State's Civil War Ordeal during Grant's Overland Campaign - From the Home Front in Vermont to the Battlefields of Virginia* (Woodstock: Countryman Press, 2002); Howard Coffin, *Full Duty: Vermonters in the*

However with its geographical isolation from the physical fighting of the Civil War, studying the experiences of Vermont rural women dramatically demonstrates the impact of the conflict on those families left behind. The dominance of agriculture within this state, coupled with the limited influence of industrialisation and urbanisation, make Vermont an ideal state for analysing the war's effect on rural communities. Over half of the state's population was engaged in agriculture and one out of two Vermont men of military age (that is, between the ages of eighteen to forty-five) volunteered for service, compared to two-fifths of men across the Northern states as a whole.<sup>24</sup> Vermonters were thus arguably more affected by the loss of men and labour power during the war than any other Northern state. Expanding on the existing historiography by focusing on a long-settled agricultural region that saw particularly high rates of military mobilisation, this study demonstrates the profound impact of the war on farmwomen and their families.

Beginning with the situation in Vermont on the outbreak of the war, Chapter One focuses on how this status quo affected the ability of rural women to obtain assistance in the running of the farm. The presence of hired labour on a family farm was critical in shaping the experiences of those women left behind, reducing the necessary labour and alleviating some of the pressure involved in managing the farm. The nature of a rural woman's labour in the antebellum period will then be compared to that undertaken during the Civil War. By addressing the actual farm work rural women assumed on the departure of male household members, the true extent of their hardship and suffering is revealed.

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*Civil War* (Woodstock: Countryman Press, 1993); Jeffrey D. Marshall, *A War of the People: Vermont Civil War Letters* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1999).

<sup>24</sup> Rankin, *Diary of a Christian Soldier*, p. 18.

Similarly, analysing a number of differently situated Vermont families serves to highlight the varied and volatile nature of the Civil War on farms in this region.

Concentrating on life outside of the farm, Chapter Two demonstrates that an increase in farm labour was not the only change that rural women experienced during the war. Newfound economic agency and a continuance of antebellum domestic roles also heavily influenced their wartime lives. Alongside managing the farm, rural women also became managers of their family's finances, placing some farmwomen in hostile and often dire situations that could be compounded by the low level of soldier's pay and limited government assistance. These difficulties exacerbated the geographical and emotional isolation that many rural women felt, and for a number of women the inability to share their experiences with someone, the lack of companionship, defined their Civil War.

Finally, Chapter Three explores whether or not the experiences and efforts of rural women were recognised during the Civil War. By examining the treatment of farmwomen in periodicals and government publications, the opinion and place of these women within American society is illuminated. Moreover, it is the acknowledgement by some publications not only of the work undertaken by farmwomen but also their active contribution to the Union war effort that emphatically emphasises the lack of scholarly attention and raises the inevitable question as to why.

Ultimately, the work undertaken by farmwomen during the Civil War was an important contribution to the northern war effort, helping the Union to eventual success over the Confederacy. Men simply could not have continued fighting if wives had not kept the home front functioning and ensured production

of food sufficient to feed the Union armies. This thesis argues that it is only by studying rural women, examining their life and unearthing their experiences during the Civil War, that one can truly understand the impact and complexity of the conflict on the broader female population and the importance of their actions to Union victory.

## CHAPTER ONE:

### *'Worked Like a Dog All Day Long'*<sup>1</sup>

Upon entering the army, Russell Silsby believed his family would manage during his absence. Having engaged a hired labourer, 'John', Russell's main concern was for his father not to be overworked. The trust he had in ensuring the well being of his family was reflected in his first few letters from Camp Lincoln in Brattleboro, Vermont in October 1862. He expressed the wish that 'Father', the only male on the property and aged sixty-two, was not to engage in more labour than he was 'obliged' to.<sup>2</sup> It is clear that Russell did not expect his wife's work patterns to change upon his departure. Rather, he believed that she would continue to perform the same duties she always had. This assurance, however, was short-lived. Within days of his departure, Russell received a letter from Marinda informing him of John's late arrival. Uncertain of the implications of her words, Russell made enquiries to his wife in earnest. In two separate letters, Russell asked Marinda if John had 'come back yet' and urged her to seek help with the hiring of another labourer if possible.<sup>3</sup> A lack of reply from his wife did little to assuage his concerns. Resorting to threats of withholding letters until he received one from home, Russell feared the lack of help had already caused distress to his family.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Hannah Glines to Moses Glines, August 24, 1861, Civil War Letters of Moses C. Glines and James M. Jones, 1861-1862, Vermont Historical Society, Barre, VT (MSA 252:1-3). Hereafter 'Glines Collection'.

<sup>2</sup> Russell Dutton Silsby to Marinda Brown Silsby, October 11, 1862, Silsby Collection.

<sup>3</sup> Russell Dutton Silsby to Marinda Brown Silsby, October 15, 1862; October 20, 1862, Silsby Collection.

<sup>4</sup> Russell Dutton Silsby to Marinda Brown Silsby, October 19-October 21, 1862, Silsby Collection.

This chapter examines the impact of the Civil War on the farm and those left behind to manage it. Addressing how the outbreak of war disrupted antebellum protocols regarding farm labour, the chapter explores the consequences of the withdrawal of male labour for rural women and builds on existing historiography of female farm labour to provide a comparison with the Civil War. By distinguishing between antebellum and wartime farm work, this chapter demonstrates the difficulties faced by rural women on assuming responsibility for the management of the farm. Moreover, this chapter exposes how many women had to perform these crucial farm tasks with limited or no assistance, revealing an important facet of women's wartime experience.

Russell received Marinda's explanation for her delayed response on October 23, a week after she had penned the reply. Given the distance from the farm to the Post Office in Moretown — almost five kilometres — sending and receiving letters involved a visit to town, generally completed on a weekly to fortnightly basis. Poor weather, however, often proved a barrier, particularly given the rugged terrain that surrounded the Silsby property which could turn a routine journey into a dangerous one — a fact that Marinda politely reminded her husband on a number of occasions: 'you know how we are situated ... I hope this [letter] will go tomorrow night but that will depend some upon the weather'.<sup>5</sup> Seeking to ameliorate her husband's anxiety, Marinda confirmed the departure of John but added the welcome news that she had managed to employ for an initial term of one month a local named Oscar Bailey, who is listed in the 1860

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<sup>5</sup> Marinda Brown Silsby to Russell Dutton Silsby, undated c. April 1863, Silsby Collection.

census as a farm labourer for the Printy family.<sup>6</sup> The arrangement was for Oscar to work for a payment of \$13 in addition to the provision of food and accommodation. He would then, she wrote, stay on for the winter months and work for his board.



Map of Moretown, Vermont (courtesy of Norman B. Leventhal Map Center, Boston Public Library)

<sup>6</sup> Year: 1860; Census Place: Moretown, Washington, Vermont; Roll: M653\_1324; Page: 811; Image: 166; Family History Library Film: 805324, 1860 United States Federal Census as listed on Ancestry.com; Marinda Brown Silsby to Russell Dutton Silsby, October 17, 1862, Silsby Collection.

The ability of Marinda to engage another hand so quickly upon John's departure was nothing short of remarkable. The war only exacerbated what was a long-running problem for New England agricultural regions — that of a shortage of farm labourers. By 1860, the inability of farmers to hire help was one of the greatest threats to the future of American agriculture. In the 1850s, agricultural papers undertook a number of surveys to ascertain the extent of the problem. The *American Agriculturist*, the nation's leading agricultural periodical with an estimated forty-five thousand subscribers, appealed for farmers to respond to a series of questions regarding farm labour.<sup>7</sup> The results, published in the *New York Daily Times* in 1855, revealed a clear deficiency of workmen on American farms. Those surveyed hailed from all parts of the country — from Texas to Wisconsin, Mississippi to New York. Their responses suggested that 90 per cent of farmers were in need of labour on their properties.<sup>8</sup> The same survey provided detailed accounts of wages by the day, month and year. The average monthly wage for the summer season was \$13.50, slightly lower than that for the New England states, which stood at \$14. The 'summer season' generally lasted eight months, during which the most manual aspects of farm work were undertaken. Incorporated into the monthly instalment was the cost of board, something that the *New York Daily Times* was at pains to emphasise in championing the lifestyle of a rural labourer. Indeed, one of the questions asked of farmers was if their hands 'have meat in any form once every day?' to which all replied a resounding 'yes', with some adding that meat was consumed 'three

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<sup>7</sup> Frank Luther Mott, *A History of American Magazines 1741-1850* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1930), pp. 10-11.

<sup>8</sup> F.L. Olmsted, 'Work and Wages: Country Demand - Condition, Treatment and Pay of Workmen upon American Farms', *New York Daily Times* (January 29, 1855), p. 2.



times a day'.<sup>9</sup> The intended audience of this promotion was clear: the urban unemployed. The shortage in farm labour across the Northeast had coincided with an equally grave concern of the growing presence of an urban poor within seaboard cities.

Encouraging city citizens to shift to agricultural labour, however, was no easy feat. The main problem facing farmers in settled regions of America, particularly New England, was the expansive and enticing frontier. If urban populations and prospective labourers were moving anywhere, it was west, not north. In the decade before the Civil War the frontier expanded rapidly. Over this period, farmland in Iowa expanded by over seven million acres, and in Illinois by over nine million acres, while the New England region registered a decrease in land dedicated to agriculture.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, the Western states experienced an exponential population growth rate of 5 per cent per annum, more than double that for the North Eastern region.<sup>11</sup>

The West not only attracted potential farm hands but also drew existing labourers away from New England. A key attraction in the life of a hired worker was the prospect of labourers becoming landowners in their own right. Indeed, one regional paper referred to the work of a labourer as 'merely an apprenticeship'.<sup>12</sup> This was an overstatement: some men did, of course, remain hired labourers, unable or unwilling to save enough to buy their own farm, but

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<sup>9</sup> Olmsted, 'Work and Wages', p. 2.

<sup>10</sup> Jeremy Atack, Fred Bateman and William N. Parker, 'Northern Agriculture and the Westward Movement' in Stanley L. Engerman and Robert E. Gallman, eds., *The Cambridge Economic History of the United States: The Long Nineteenth Century*, vol. 2 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 299.

<sup>11</sup> Herbert Klein, *A Population History of the United States* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 90.

<sup>12</sup> 'The Hired Man', *Vermont Phoenix* (January 3, 1857), p.4.

many did make the transition from farm hand to farmer. In 1850, for example, Russell Silsby was living with the Malon family in Moretown, Vermont and working as a hired hand.<sup>13</sup> By 1860, however, he had bought his own property in the region. To any man wishing to make this shift, the West provided their best opportunity. In the antebellum decades, many men took the chance to establish themselves independently in the newly formed and agriculturally rich states of Iowa, Ohio, Illinois, Michigan and Wisconsin where land was cheap. The price of land in the West decreased over the first half of the century and by the early 1850s one could purchase land for as little as \$0.69 an acre.<sup>14</sup> Rubbing salt into the wound for the New England states, a large portion of the people relocating to the West were young married couples or families, more often than not the offspring of those farmers in need of labour.

The West was not the only location luring rural people from their home states; the city also proved a powerful attraction. The growth of industrialisation in the early nineteenth-century revolutionised American society and sparked a shift that would eventually see manufacturing overtake agriculture as the primary industry in the United States (although not until some decades after the Civil War).<sup>15</sup> The relationship between industrialisation and agriculture was

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<sup>13</sup> Year: 1850; Census Place: Moretown, Washington, Vermont; Roll: M432\_928; Page: 270B; Image: 527, 1850 United States Federal Census as listed on Ancestry.com.

<sup>14</sup> Atack, Bateman and Parker, 'Northern Agriculture and the Westward Movement', p. 311.

<sup>15</sup> For more on the relationship between industrialisation and agriculture, see, for example, Earl W. Hayter, *The Troubled Farmer: Rural Adjustment to Industrialism 1850-1900* (Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1968); Steve Hahn and Jonathan Prude, eds., *The Countryside in the Age of Capitalist Transformation: Essays in the Social History of Rural America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985); Jeremy Atack and Fred Bateman, *To Their Own Soil: Agriculture in the Antebellum North* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1987); Lou Ferleger, ed., *Agriculture and National Development: View on the Nineteenth Century* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1990); Trudy Peterson, ed., *Farmers, Bureaucrats and*

defined by love and hate. On the one hand, industrial development opened up opportunities for advancement in agricultural technology. Although most mechanisation occurred in the later half of the nineteenth-century, one particular invention that defined the antebellum period was the reaper. Before its introduction, grain cradles were used in order to farm grain and breadstuff crops.<sup>16</sup> The reaper achieved the same results as a cradle but in less time and with a smaller number of men, saving three to four men's wages from a farm's expenditure. Historians however have questioned the availability of the reaper as an instrument for the everyday farmer in the pre-war period. Given the added cost of transportation and delivery, Jeremy Atack and Fred Bateman determined that the average cost of a reaper for a Connecticut farmer would have been at least \$134.00, a significant expenditure within the family economy.<sup>17</sup> By the beginning of the Civil War, therefore, it was unlikely that labour-saving technology like the reaper had made any substantive impact on the techniques and management of farms in the Northern states, particularly the New England region where grains were not the primary produce. Indeed, Paul Gates contends that New Englanders were 'more cautious' in introducing new technologies to

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*Middlemen: Historical Perspectives on American Agriculture* (Washington: Howard University Press, 1980); Ronald R. Kline, *Consumers in the Country: Technology and Social Change in Rural America* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2000).

<sup>16</sup> A cradle was a form of scythe with large 'fingers' attached to the handle. One would move the cradle side-to-side, cutting the grain. The 'fingers' of the cradle would allow for easy collection by laying the grain in a row, which would then need to be bundled by hand. Paul Gates, *Agriculture and the Civil War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1965), p. 232; Rodney C. Loehr, 'Farmers' Diaries: Their Interest and Value as Historical Sources', *Agricultural History* 12, no.4 (October 1938), p. 319

<sup>17</sup> Atack and Bateman, *To Their Own Soil*, p. 198.

their farms and that cradles continued to be used on fields of the size and terrain typical of the New England area.<sup>18</sup>

The most devastating effect of industrialisation on the agricultural community was the removal of an important demographic, youth. Despite agriculture maintaining its dominance as the chief component in the American economy, the city was quickly becoming the centre of business and production. As the urban metropolises developed, they were fed in part by the relocation of rural families. Similar to the migration phenomenon occurring to the West, those who headed for the cities were young, leaving their home states populated by the middle-aged or the elderly. Emigration of this kind, whether to the West or the city, was crucial to the loss of labour experienced amongst rural communities.

The scarcity of farm hands and broader migration concerns were acutely felt in Vermont, where it was reported that the state had lost over twenty-six thousand of the 'choicest and most productive' people in the decade preceding the Civil War.<sup>19</sup> This loss was so severe that by the 1860 federal census the population was virtually stagnant, recording the lowest population increase of all states in the Union at a paltry 0.33 per cent.<sup>20</sup> The rapid growth of neighbouring New England states such as Massachusetts — which listed a population growth of 23.79 per cent — further emphasised Vermont's fragility.<sup>21</sup> In the decades preceding the Civil War, Vermont retained much of its colonial heritage,

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<sup>18</sup> Gates, *Agriculture and the Civil War*, p. 232.

<sup>19</sup> George W. Bailey, *Fifth Report to the Legislature of Vermont, relating to the Registry and Returns Births, Marriages and Deaths, in this State for the Year ending December 31, 1861* (Montpelier: Freeman Printing Establishment, 1863), p. 87.

<sup>20</sup> Joseph C. G. Kennedy, *Population of the United States in 1860, compiled from the original returns of the Eighth Census* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1864), p. v.

<sup>21</sup> Bailey, *Fifth Report to the Legislature of Vermont*, p. 85.

particularly in the nature of its farming. Scholarship on the New England states has highlighted the estrangement of the region from the rapid growth that defined much of Victorian America.<sup>22</sup> Vermont was a state where 'traditional' rural America continued throughout the nineteenth-century, remaining 'the least affected by urbanisation, industrialisation and immigration'.<sup>23</sup> Census figures confirm these conclusions. In 1850, almost half of the male population listed their occupation as either 'farmer' or 'farm labourer'.<sup>24</sup> Of concern, however, was the median age of fifty-eight, emphasising that with emigration Vermont had become overwhelmingly middle-aged.

This demographic loss is reflected in the changing composition of Vermont families. For example, when the Civil War began Betsey Whitehill was residing on a farm in Morgan, Orleans County. When her husband died in 1849, Betsey was forced to raise her eight children and manage the farm alone, assisted by her eldest son Matthew. By 1860, however, only three children remained in Vermont: Emeline, Matthew and Hugh. Betsey's five other children — Sarah, Lucinda, Janet, Juliett and Moses — had settled elsewhere including Canada, Iowa and Nebraska, thus, by 1861 half of the Whitehill family had relocated outside of Vermont.<sup>25</sup> The outbreak of war and the subsequent

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<sup>22</sup> See for example, Hal Barron, *Those Who Stayed Behind: Rural Society in Nineteenth-Century New England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984); John Donald Black, *The Rural Economy of New England: A Regional Study* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1950); Philip Shaw Paludan, *A People's Contest: The Union and the Civil War 1861-1865* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1988).

<sup>23</sup> Barron, *Those Who Stayed Behind*, p. xi.

<sup>24</sup> Bailey, *Fifth Report to the Legislature of Vermont*, p.76; James Dunwoody Brownson De Bow, *The Seventh Census of the United States: 1850* (Washington: Robert Armstrong, Public Printer, 1853), p. 40.

<sup>25</sup> Edward Miller and Frederic P. Wells, *History of Ryegate, Vermont From Its Settlement by the Scotch-American Company of Farmers to Present Time* (St. Johnsbury Vermont: The Caledonian Company, 1913), pp. 558-559.

draining of men into the army was a loss, therefore, that Vermont could not afford. The depletion of Vermont's younger population and the shortage of hired labour in the antebellum years placed the state in a precarious position that was only exacerbated by war. Less than a year into the conflict, the *Vermont Phoenix* estimated that nearly ten thousand men had already departed for the battlefield, of which seven thousand were agricultural labourers.<sup>26</sup> By employing those remaining men or by their own hand, women were left to fill the staggering gaps in the agricultural labour force.

The war fundamentally altered the system of hired labour. Farmwomen could no longer rely on a male farm hand to last the entire season. When Marinda Silsby engaged Oscar Bailey, she stated clearly her intention for him to remain throughout the winter season.<sup>27</sup> She expressed her relief at finding Oscar, writing that she felt 'quite courageous again now we have some one to depend upon [sic]'.<sup>28</sup> With Oscar present, a pressure was lifted. Although Marinda was still responsible for the farm, Oscar alleviated the hard manual labour she would have had to perform in order to keep the farm running, and also provided a structure of support and protection that Marinda could rely upon during her husband's absence.

Oscar began work at the Silsby property on October 24, 1862. It is clear from Marinda's surviving correspondence that she recognised the impact of the war on the availability of labour and was initially unsure as to the quality of Oscar as a farm hand. She admitted, however, that she liked Oscar's appearance

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<sup>26</sup> 'Vermont State Agricultural Society', *Vermont Phoenix* (January 9, 1862), p. 1.

<sup>27</sup> Marinda Brown Silsby to Russell Dutton Silsby, October 17, 1862, Silsby Collection.

<sup>28</sup> Marinda Brown Silsby to Russell Dutton Silsby, undated c. October 1862, Silsby Collection.

'better than [she] expected to' and was assured of his usefulness by friends: 'people tell us he will be a good hand'.<sup>29</sup> The relationship between Marinda and Oscar aligns with the findings of antebellum surveys conducted by agricultural papers such as the *American Agriculturist*. Oscar was treated not as an employee but as an extended family member. Marinda wrote fondly of him and his humorous character, noting that 'in spite of all my sober feelings . . . [he] will keep one laughing'.<sup>30</sup> This cordiality was brief. Despite a lack of correspondence surviving from Marinda (her next letter is dated March 15, 1863) her experiences on the farm can be gleaned from Russell's responses.

Letters from soldiers have been examined extensively for what they can reveal about military life during the Civil War but they are equally useful in illuminating the lives of their families on the home front.<sup>31</sup> In particular, these letters provide valuable insight into the every-day demands of running a farm and how family members coped with these new responsibilities. On December 4, 1862, Russell took advantage of his spare time to pen a few words to his family, extending his sympathies to his wife on the news that Oscar was 'getting dissatisfied'.<sup>32</sup> He expressed his desire for Marinda to 'persuade him [Oscar] to stay' with the family and, if she failed, instructed her that she 'must try to get some one else [sic]'.<sup>33</sup> Five days later, Russell wrote again: 'I am very sorry that

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<sup>29</sup> Marinda Brown Silsby to Russell Dutton Silsby, undated c. October 25-28, 1862, Silsby Collection.

<sup>30</sup> Marinda Brown Silsby to Russell Dutton Silsby, November 12, 1862, Silsby Collection.

<sup>31</sup> Nancy Osterud, 'Rural Women during the Civil War: New York's Nanticoke Valley, 1861-1865', *New York History* 71, no.4 (October 1990), p. 358.

<sup>32</sup> Russell Dutton Silsby to Marinda Brown Silsby, December 4, 1862, Silsby Collection.

<sup>33</sup> Russell Dutton Silsby to Marinda Brown Silsby, December 4, 1862, Silsby Collection.

Oscar was so unsteady that you could not keep him'.<sup>34</sup> Less than two months into his season, Oscar was no longer working on the farm. Russell's short responses do not specify who made the decision to end Oscar's employment. In her capacity as farm manager, Marinda may have terminated Oscar's tenure, either because he was unsuitable or gave her trouble. More likely, however, Oscar made up his own mind to leave the Silsby property. In an earlier letter, Russell noted that the farm hand was 'dissatisfied' and it is doubtful that Marinda would have willingly given up assistance on the farm — something she knew was in short supply and the benefits of which she readily recognised and accepted. Whoever made the choice the repercussions were potentially severe. In the middle of winter, Marinda and her three daughters were yet again without a hired labourer.

The departure of Oscar Bailey clearly embodied how the war upset antebellum standards of hired labour. Yet the inability to guarantee labour for a whole season was not the only problem facing female farmers: the cost of labour was also a determining factor. Even before the outbreak of war, the high price of labour was recognised. The 1860 agricultural report, compiled from the returns of the eighth federal census, reported that while 'land is abundant and cheap' labour was 'scarce and dear'.<sup>35</sup> Such a result is an unavoidable corollary when demand exceeds capacity and one that was only made more acute by the Civil War. Indeed the longer the war progressed, the more expensive labour became. Russell Silsby frequently urged his wife to hire a man for the impending summer

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<sup>34</sup> Russell Dutton Silsby to Marinda Brown Silsby, December 9, 1862, Silsby Collection.

<sup>35</sup> Joseph C. G. Kennedy, *Agriculture of the United States in 1860 compiled from the original returns of the Eighth Census* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1864), p. viii.



season.<sup>36</sup> He particularly emphasised how Marinda could not rely upon his imminent return, informing her that it was 'quite likely I may not get home before haying time and if I did should probably not feel just like pitching in very hard at first'.<sup>37</sup> However, by early 1863 the going rate for a hired hand was now at least \$16 a month.<sup>38</sup> This was a \$3 increase from the rate that Marinda paid only six months earlier for Oscar. While the rise can be partly attributed to the nature of work that the summer season demanded, \$3 was a steep expenditure. In early December 1862, Russell suggested the employment of a young boy in lieu of a proper labourer.<sup>39</sup> It is evident that Marinda accepted his advice and that some time between the letter of December 6 and April 6, 1863, a boy, Seth, was hired to aid her in the running of the farm. Due to his young age, Seth was paid \$7 a month, a considerable saving from that of a hired labourer. Marinda wrote to her husband that Seth was very efficient and 'sticks to it [work] better than many boys'.<sup>40</sup> Thus while Seth was only able to complete less rigorous labour than an adult hired hand, including chopping, sawing wood and driving stock, his contribution was crucial to the maintenance of the farm and minimised the work that Marinda had to complete.

Whereas Marinda was able to find labour throughout most of her husband's service, and even then could rely on the assistance of her elderly father-in-law, some of her contemporaries were not so lucky. Hannah Glines did

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<sup>36</sup> See, for example, Russell Dutton Silsby to Marinda Brown Silsby, January 28, 1863; February 12, 1863; undated c. March 1863; May 10, 1863, Silsby Collection.

<sup>37</sup> Russell Dutton Silsby to Marinda Brown Silsby, February 12, 1863, Silsby Collection.

<sup>38</sup> Marinda Brown Silsby to Russell Dutton Silsby, April 6, 1863, Silsby Collection.

<sup>39</sup> Russell Dutton Silsby to Marinda Brown Silsby, December 9, 1862, Silsby Collection.

<sup>40</sup> Marinda Brown Silsby to Russell Dutton Silsby, April 6, 1863, Silsby Collection.

not have the support of any extended family members nor an outstanding arrangement for a hired labourer. Instead, she had to rely upon her own labour to ensure the running of the farm. Her pregnancy, however, gradually made this commitment more difficult, significantly impeding on her productivity. Occasionally Hannah's letters imply that she may have managed to obtain some sort of aid in the completion of farm work. A certain man, 'John' (identity unknown) appears sporadically in her letters, though the exact nature of this relationship is unclear. Hannah mentions that John 'is hear now [sic]' or 'has just come' indicating that he did not board with the family, as would a typical hired labourer.<sup>41</sup> She also wrote to her husband saying that John appreciated the present he sent him, suggesting that John was probably a close acquaintance as opposed to an employee.<sup>42</sup> The actual farm work John completed is also suggestive. It is clear that John fulfilled some advisory capacity, instructing Hannah when she should buy more hay, running errands and assisting in the building or renovation of a bedroom.<sup>43</sup> There is little evidence that Hannah enjoyed such assistance with the physical farm work. While she mentioned the possibility of employing a farm boy for \$7 a month, similar to Marinda Silsby, her inability to make ends meet with existing debts rendered that option void.<sup>44</sup> Any aid therefore would have to come from neighbours and her surrounding community.

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<sup>41</sup> Hannah Glines to Moses Glines, August 3, 1861; November 10, 1861, Glines Collection.

<sup>42</sup> Hannah Glines to Moses Glines, August 3, 1861; November 10, 1861; November 17, 1861, Glines Collection.

<sup>43</sup> Hannah Glines to Moses Glines, November 10, 1861; November 24, 1861; December 1, 1861, Glines Collection.

<sup>44</sup> Hannah Glines to Moses Glines, July 21, 1861, Glines Collection.

In antebellum studies on northern rural women, considerable attention has been given to community and kinship networks. Scholars argue that these ties defined the relationships between rural women, their husbands, and the community. Nancy Osterud's seminal work *Bonds of Community* addressed these arrangements in her study of the Nanticoke Valley, New York.<sup>45</sup> Focusing on diaries and letters, Osterud established that cooperation between members of the rural population — neighbours, kin and friends alike — was integral to the success of American agriculture. In particular, it was the security and mutual aid provided by these bonds that resulted in the establishment of a 'familial culture' within rural communities.<sup>46</sup> In her subsequent article on Nanticoke women during the Civil War, Osterud contends that this 'familial culture' served rural women well when dealing with the absence of male labour and the running of the farm.<sup>47</sup> She argues that remaining friends, family and neighbours were critical sources of aid for those women left on properties.<sup>48</sup> The importance of these community bonds is also emphasised in Judith Giesberg's work on Pennsylvanian rural women during the Civil War.<sup>49</sup> She suggests, for instance, that the assistance of neighbours was a source of support and labour that occurred daily. Of particular importance in Giesberg's work was the impact of the Confederate invasion into Pennsylvania on these traditional networks. Giesberg observed how the destruction of property and plundering of farms by

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<sup>45</sup> Nancy Osterud, *Bonds of Community: Lives of Farm Women in Nineteenth Century New York* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991).

<sup>46</sup> Osterud, *Bonds of Community*, p. 92.

<sup>47</sup> Osterud, 'Rural Women during the Civil War', pp. 357-385.

<sup>48</sup> Osterud, 'Rural Women during the Civil War', pp. 382-385.

<sup>49</sup> Judith Ann Giesberg, 'From Harvest Field to Battlefield': Rural Pennsylvania Women in the U.S. Civil War', *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies* 72, no.2 (2005), pp. 159-191 later reprinted in Judith Ann Giesberg, *Army at Home: Women and the Civil War on the Northern Home Front* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), pp. 17-45.

the Confederate army placed unprecedented strain on these community bonds.<sup>50</sup> Nevertheless, she maintains that women 'continued to rely on kin and long-established networks of neighbourly cooperation' while the additional work caused in lieu of the invasion was completed.<sup>51</sup> Thus, both Osterud and Giesberg contend that the success and survival of rural women during the Civil War was contingent in part on the strength of community and kinship ties within rural populations.

This study of rural women in Vermont, however, suggests that community bonds, as distinct from bonds of kinship, were challenged from the very beginning of the war. In a letter dated July 21, 1861, almost three months to the day since her husband departed for the army, Hannah expressed her exasperation at the amount of work she had to complete and the lack of assistance she was receiving. Hannah informed her husband that she was struggling to complete all the requisite work alone, lamenting that she 'asked the neighbors to come and help me one hour one nite but nobody come [sic]'.<sup>52</sup> In a separate correspondence, Hannah retold how she had asked 'Jim' to help her but 'he would not', stating that he 'dont owe you [Moses] any thing [sic]'.<sup>53</sup> Hannah's experience suggests that the system of mutual aid that characterised rural communities in the antebellum period was threatened with the Civil War. As labour became scarce, those that remained were forced to adopt a more insular perspective for the sake of self-preservation and the survival of their families. Russell Silsby mourned the disintegration of such ties, writing to his wife to 'give

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<sup>50</sup> Giesberg, 'From Harvest Field to Battlefield', pp. 172-173.

<sup>51</sup> Giesberg, 'From Harvest Field to Battlefield', p. 173.

<sup>52</sup> Hannah Glines to Moses Glines, July 21, 1861, Glines Collection.

<sup>53</sup> Hannah Glines to Moses Glines, November 24, 1861, Glines Collection.

my respects to all enquiring friends . . . although from what you write there are but few to enquire for'.<sup>54</sup> The inability of Hannah to receive help with the arduous labour of the farm, and the instability experienced by those who were able to engage hired labour such as Marinda Silsby, reflect the dire situation facing many rural women throughout the Civil War and the hardships that were experienced as they struggled alone on farms.

These difficulties arose from the fact that the war not only took away a partner in marriage but also a partner on the farm. Scholarship on antebellum rural communities and the work of women has constructed a reality that stands in opposition to the stereotypical nineteenth-century dichotomy of woman in the home and man in the workplace. Although farm labour was ostensibly gender-orientated, the boundaries were flexible and adhered to the necessities demanded by a rural life over ideological concerns.<sup>55</sup> It was not unheard of, therefore, for a woman to take up work in the fields or for a man to assist with dairying if it was required. For the most part however men cultivated produce

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<sup>54</sup> Russell Dutton Silsby to Marinda Brown Silsby, October 29, 1862, Silsby Collection.

<sup>55</sup> See, for example, Jane Adams, 'Resistance to Modernity: Southern Illinois Farm Women and the Cult of Domesticity', *American Ethnologist* 20, no.1 (February 1991), pp. 89-113; Jane Adams, 'Individualism, Efficiency, and Domesticity: Ideological Aspects of the Exploitation of Farm Families and Farm Women', *Agriculture and Human Values* 12, no.4 (Fall 1995), pp. 2-17; Martin Bruegel, 'Work, Gender and Authority on the Farm: The Hudson Valley Countryside 1790s-1850s', *Agricultural History* 76, no.1 (Winter 2002), pp. 1-27; Lee A. Craig, *To Sow One More: Childbearing and Farm Productivity in the Antebellum North* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1993); Barbara Easton, 'Industrialisation and Femininity: A Case Study of Nineteenth-Century New England', *Social Problems* 23, no.4 (April 1976), pp. 389-401; Sally McMurry, *Families and Farmhouses in Nineteenth-Century America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988); Nancy Osterud, 'Gender and the Transition to Capitalism in Rural America', *Agricultural History* 67, no.2 (Spring 1993), pp. 14-29; Nancy Osterud, *Bonds of Community*; Mary Ryan, *Womanhood in America: From Colonial Times to the Present* (New York: New Viewpoints, 1975); Dorothy Schwieder, 'Labor and Economic Roles of Iowa Farm Wives 1840-1880' in Trudy Peterson ed., *Farmers, Bureaucrats and Middlemen: Historical Perspectives on American Agriculture* (Washington: Howard University Press, 1980).

and raised livestock while women attended to household duties, poultry, basic fruits and vegetables and dairying.

This shared work structure had a number of important implications. First, in the antebellum context of industrialisation and economic change the home was displaced as the centre of production in urban centres and replaced with that of an external workplace — at least for members of the middle class. Accompanying this division was a shift in understanding of what constituted 'labour', with work of a remunerative nature awarded greater importance than that which did not conform to these new standards, such as a woman's domestic labour. This new labour paradigm effectively erased recognition of women's work as a contribution to the family economy. For farm families however, it was impossible to separate the place of production from the home. Rural women, therefore, continued to perform their role within the family economy through the manufacturing of goods such as butter, cheese and eggs for household and market consumption. This commodity production was a crucial contribution to the family's finances and resulted in women maintaining the economic value of their labour and, more importantly, acknowledgement of this participation by their partners.<sup>56</sup>

For Vermont farmwomen, the limited impact of industrialisation on the state ensured that this status quo remained throughout the antebellum years. While states such as New York experienced aspects of industrialisation with the establishment of cheese factories in the early 1850s, it was not until 1867 that

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<sup>56</sup> Joan Jensen, *Loosening the Bonds: Mid-Atlantic Farm Women 1750-1850* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), p. 79; Bruegel, 'Work, Gender, and Authority on the Farm', p. 6; Easton, 'Industrialisation and Femininity', p. 389; Osterud, *Bonds of Community*, p. 140; Schwieder, 'Labor and Economic Roles of Iowa Farm Wives', p. 153.

Vermont received a similar factory.<sup>57</sup> Dairy goods therefore remained primarily a product of household manufacture on the eve of the Civil War. This fact is significant considering that Vermont was the second largest producer of cheese in the United States (behind New York) and the highest producer of all New England states in both cheese and butter.<sup>58</sup>

While the inability to separate home and work in rural communities allowed rural women to maintain the economic value of their labour, it also made the outbreak of Civil War more devastating. Hannah Glines felt the full weight of her husband's absence from the very beginning of the war. Despite her first letter dating from late July, it is clear from Moses' correspondence that as soon as her husband left, Hannah was asking how long it would be before he returned: 'you asked me to write about the ware how long that wood last I carnet tel you yete Bute probly a boute one year [sic] [you asked me to write about the war how long that would last I can't tell you yet but probably about one year]'.<sup>59</sup> A year was a considerable amount of time in the life of a farmer: crops of wheat and oats would have to be thrashed; fields would need ploughing and seeds replanting; sheep and hogs would require fattening, butchering and transporting to market for sale; cows would have to be milked and their milk churned into butter and cheese. These tasks were in addition to the many others

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<sup>57</sup> Black, *The Rural Economy of New England*. For more on the dairying industry in nineteenth-century, particularly that of New York see, for example, Sally McMurry, 'American Rural Women and the Transformation of Dairy Processing 1820-1880', *Rural History* 5, no.2 (1994), pp. 143-153; Sally McMurry, *Transforming Rural Life: Dairying Families and Agricultural Change, 1820-1885* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1995).

<sup>58</sup> Kennedy, *Agriculture of the United States in 1860*, p. xxxiii.

<sup>59</sup> Moses Glines to Hannah Glines, July 12, 1861, Glines Collection.

— from chopping wood to fence mending — that were necessities for every farm family.

On July 21, 1861, Hannah wrote a few words to her husband to inform him of life at home in Tunbridge. She observed that 'every thin[g] looks well' on the farm, grass had grown on the pasture and she had made four new cheeses in preparation for winter.<sup>60</sup> One of her cows, however, was ill. While Hannah had sought the help of Mr Robbins, he had not yet made it to the property and she was unable to make the cow eat or consume medicine. Adding to her woes, Hannah could not finish hoeing because of her hands — torn up and 'blistered' — and she still had not completed all her chores, having to go and collect wood.<sup>61</sup> A few days later, Hannah expressed that she had 'worked so hard that I am most dead' — indeed, in the week between her two letters she had thrashed six and a half bushels of wheat.<sup>62</sup> By November the toll of running the farm alone was evident. Hannah's letters were shorter and most apologised for both the length and delay in writing on account of the farm work. On November 10, Hannah told Moses that she 'could not get time in the da[y]time to write' and that she had 'worked harde [sic] all day and am very tired'.<sup>63</sup> Again on November 17 she excused her lack of writing stating that 'often I cannot get time when I get some of my hard work out of the way'.<sup>64</sup> Though winter was yet to reach its full force (it had not snowed) Hannah's health was in decline. Her sides, she told her husband, 'trouble me very much', injuries that were both caused and

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<sup>60</sup> Hannah Glines to Moses Glines, July 21, 1861, Glines Collection.

<sup>61</sup> Hannah Glines to Moses Glines, July 21, 1861, Glines Collection.

<sup>62</sup> Hannah Glines to Moses Glines, August 3, 1861, Glines Collection.

<sup>63</sup> Hannah Glines to Moses Glines, November 10, 1861, Glines Collection.

<sup>64</sup> Hannah Glines to Moses Glines, November 17, 1861, Glines Collection.



exacerbated by the arduous nature of her labour.<sup>65</sup> Furthermore, by November Hannah was seven months pregnant, hampering her mobility and efficiency with the farm work. Moses displayed his frustration at not being able to aid his wife, commiserating: '[I know it is] horeble for you ... when you[r] he[a]lth is poor [sic]'.<sup>66</sup> The extent to which Hannah struggled with the farm was epitomised when she stated that it was her desire for Moses to come home and 'go about your business you[r] self'.<sup>67</sup> This was not the first time Hannah had appealed for her husband to return to the farm: three months earlier she had demanded that if he could 'get discharged and come home I should think you had better and take care of your little family'.<sup>68</sup>

Numerous scholars have suggested that the Confederates lost the Civil War in part due to the withdrawal of support from the women on the home front. Drew Gilpin Faust suggests that Southern women's belief in the Confederate cause was undermined throughout the conflict as war-weariness set in and their willingness to continue to make sacrifices in the name of the Confederacy grew thin.<sup>69</sup> Southern newspapers identified this low morale and urged women not to 'harass their [soldiers'] minds with murmurs and complaints' but to 'encourage them' and 'fire their souls'.<sup>70</sup> However the pleas of Hannah for her husband to come home demonstrate that such actions were not

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<sup>65</sup> Hannah Glines to Moses Glines, November 10, 1861, Glines Collection.

<sup>66</sup> Moses Glines to Hannah Glines, undated c. mid-November 1861, Glines Collection.

<sup>67</sup> Hannah Glines to Moses Glines, November 24, 1861, Glines Collection.

<sup>68</sup> Hannah Glines to Moses Glines, August 3, 1861, Glines Collection.

<sup>69</sup> Drew Gilpin Faust, 'Altars of Sacrifice: Confederate Women and the Narratives of the War', *The Journal of American History* 76, no.4 (March 1990), p. 1228. See also Drew Gilpin Faust, *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War* (New York: Vintage Books, 1997).

<sup>70</sup> *Selma Morning Reporter* (February 11, 1863) as found in Andrew Coopersmith, *Fighting Words: An Illustrative History of Newspaper Accounts of the Civil War* (New York: The New Press, 2004), p. 168.

unique to Confederate women. Rather, it is evident that for some northern rural women the burdens of running the farm alone outweighed their patriotism to the Union, such that they requested for their husbands to return to assist them with the farm work. It is arguable that where the withdrawal of support by Confederate women has been seen as a critical factor in the South's eventual loss, the extent to which women on the Union home front experienced similar feelings has been clouded by the fact that the North was victorious. It is important to recognise the intricacies of life for Northern women throughout the conflict, particularly those on farms. While their stoic endurance is something to be admired, appreciation for their actions is only increased with acknowledgement of the extent to which many struggled. The difficulties rural women faced during the war are most potently understood in the comparison made by Russell Silsby between farming and soldiering. Russell knew very well what was required to run a farm and what was required to be a soldier, however his experiences on the battlefield had taught him that there was nothing as tough as farm labour: 'You sup[p]ose a soldiers life is very hard but I call it a lazy life[,] to be sure we have some very hard days but on the whole I don[']t call it so hard as working on a farm [sic]'.<sup>71</sup>

For Marinda Silsby, the presence of her father-in-law and hired labourers, however infrequent, resulted in little change from the work that she performed when her husband was present. Marinda continued her domestic and basic farm tasks, producing butter and cheese, taking the surplus to market for a profit, tending to the poultry, drying fruit and making cider. Her ability to employ help allowed her to avoid certain responsibilities that were particularly strenuous

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<sup>71</sup> Russell Dutton Silsby to Marinda Brown Silsby, March 1, 1863, Silsby Collection.

and time-consuming such as maple sugaring. Maple sugar was common on Vermont farms with nearly ten million pounds produced in 1860 alone.<sup>72</sup> This product, however, could only be obtained after a long and vigorous process. The sap had to be conducted into wooden troughs, boiled twice over a period of at least fifteen hours, cooled and then moulded.<sup>73</sup> This procedure required patience and huge amounts of strength to carry, stir and lift the troughs, pans, and kettles that sometimes weighed up to thirty-three kilos. Marinda Silsby expressed her relief in avoiding such a task, writing to her husband that 'I congratulate myself in being so lucky ... to get myself out of a nasty job'.<sup>74</sup> Yet Marinda was unable to avoid all the tasks her husband usually performed. She took up butchering in addition to the preservation of meat, finding her time for writing and visits increasingly limited as a result.<sup>75</sup> The fact that Marinda had help does not detract from the value of her wartime experience. Rather, it adds an important dimension to discussions of northern farmwomen during the Civil War, providing a spectrum on which experiences can be measured and highlighting the wide-ranging impacts that the conflict had on farm families.

The outbreak of Civil War disrupted the labour balance of farm families. A job once done out of necessity became one of responsibility for farmwomen across the north. With men enlisting in the Union army, exacerbating an already dire shortage in farm labour, many rural women had little choice but to accept the

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<sup>72</sup> Kennedy, *Agriculture of the United States in 1860*, p. c.

<sup>73</sup> Kennedy, *Agriculture of the United States in 1860*, p. c.

<sup>74</sup> Marinda Brown Silsby to Russell Dutton Silsby, undated c. April 1863, Silsby Collection.

<sup>75</sup> Marinda Brown Silsby to Russell Dutton Silsby, undated c. December 1862-February 1863, Silsby Collection.

fact that in order to sustain the farm and their family they had to take charge of the farm. This meant performing all essential tasks regardless of whether or not it was one that was usually completed by men. Shouldering this responsibility, many farmwomen struggled under the physical and emotional burdens that were natural and unavoidable corollaries of running a farm in nineteenth-century America.

## CHAPTER TWO

### *The Struggle to Make Ends Meet: Life Off the Farm*

The Civil War not only affected northern rural women by increasing their workload, it was also influential in other areas of their lives. These women were farmwomen, but they were also wives and mothers, bread makers and breadwinners. This chapter examines the lives of rural women outside the farm, noting how the conflict forced an engagement with civic spaces such as the economy and affected a woman's sense of identity. The Civil War brought an emotional, as well as geographic isolation, from family, friends and loved ones. Through exploring these themes, this chapter seeks to encapsulate the northern rural woman's total war experience.

The farm was not the only responsibility that rural women assumed upon the departure of loved ones for the battlefield. Other concerns traditionally undertaken by men such as the family's finances were also redefined and reallocated. While it is clear that men still played a prominent role in the division and attribution of money, often sending detailed instructions on how to distribute funds, women were forced to engage in an economic environment of debts, loans and remuneration unlike anything previously experienced. Although rural women had frequently participated in commercial transactions relating to their commodity produce, the loss of the dominant breadwinner required them to break new ground. While some women cherished their new financial roles, others found them confronting and disheartening. As Nina Silber has argued the

Civil War was not necessarily a period in which women welcomed an expansion of their civic roles.<sup>1</sup> Instead, some found themselves in an environment that was 'hardly ... hospitable and welcoming' with many quickly becoming casualties of these new commercial relationships and the economic climate of the Civil War.<sup>2</sup>

Hannah Glines felt the financial pinch almost immediately upon the departure of her husband. Money issues dominate correspondence between her and her husband. In his first letter, Moses promised his wife that he would send money 'as soon as I gite [get] soam [some]'.<sup>3</sup> His next communication revealed that he had been paid \$19 and had subsequently sent \$15 home by way of a courier, keeping \$4 for his own needs.<sup>4</sup> Their later correspondence continued to revolve around money; every few letters Moses would note that an amount of money — ranging from \$26 to \$47 — had been paid to him and that he would make the appropriate arrangements to deliver the money to Hannah.

Soldiers used a number of different means for sending money from camp to their loved ones. Many sent money within letters while others engaged a courier or even assigned part or all of their pay to a relative at home for appropriate dispensing. It is evident from his letters that Moses alternated between these methods, sending small monetary amounts via letters and larger sums through a courier. More importantly, these amounts and the time at which they were paid were never consistent. From his correspondence, it appears that Moses was paid at least four times at varying sums, while Russell Silsby was only paid twice during his entire year of service. This irregularity made life back

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<sup>1</sup> Nina Silber, *Daughters of the Union: Northern Women Fight the Civil War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), p. 11.

<sup>2</sup> Silber, *Daughters of the Union*, p. 11.

<sup>3</sup> Moses Glines to Hannah Glines, undated c. mid-late May, 1861, Glines Collection.

<sup>4</sup> Moses Glines to Hannah Glines, undated c. late May, 1861, Glines Collection.

home on the farm incredibly difficult. Farm wives could not rely on a steady income from their husbands or sons, placing increased pressure on those women to sustain the family's economic stability.

The amount a soldier was paid for his service varied from state to state and county to county. In addition to the federal payment of \$11 per month for private soldiers (later raised to \$13 per month), each state and local government, as well as many counties, offered additional subscription bonuses for troops who volunteered.<sup>5</sup> Financial incentive therefore proved a great boon for many men in joining the Union forces, particularly after the initial swell of patriotic enlistment subsided. A Vermont private, for instance, could expect a maximum \$13 a month from the federal government and \$7 from the state, totalling the normal monthly salary at \$20.<sup>6</sup> This favoured strongly when compared to the standard income of a Vermont farmer and farm labourer of \$15.70 a month in 1860.<sup>7</sup> More convincing for potential enlistees was the bonus of \$100 promised by the federal government. Initially this amount was to be paid in full once a volunteer was honourably discharged but by the summer of 1862 a quarter of this amount was being paid upfront.<sup>8</sup> The driving force for this policy change was lacklustre

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<sup>5</sup> Megan J. McClintock, 'Civil War Pensions and the Reconstruction of Union Families', *The Journal of American History* 83, no.2 (September 1996), p. 460; Joseph Holliday, 'Relief for Soldiers' Families in Ohio During the Civil War', *Ohio History* 71, no.2 (1962), p. 100; Richard F. Miller, 'For His Wife, His Widow, and His Orphan: Massachusetts and Family Aid during the Civil War', *Massachusetts Historical Review* 6 (2004), pp. 84-87; Carl Russell Fish, 'Social Relief in the Northwest During the Civil War', *The American Historical Review* 22, no.2 (January 1917), pp. 309-324.

<sup>6</sup> John Howe Jr., *Report of John Howe, Jr., relative to State Aid for Soldiers' Families, in Vermont from October 1, 1861, to September 1, 1862* (Montpelier: Freeman Printing Establishment, 1862), p. 4.

<sup>7</sup> Thurston M. Adams, *Prices Paid by Vermont Farmers for Goods and Services and Received by Them for Farm Products, 1790-1940; Wages of Vermont Farm Labor, 1780-1940* (Burlington: Free Press Printing Co., 1944), p. 88.

<sup>8</sup> McClintock, 'Civil War Pensions', p.461; Holliday, 'Relief for Soldiers' Families', p. 99.

recruitment figures. The perceived reason for these low numbers was the reluctance of men to leave their families without first guaranteeing their financial security. The provision of a portion of the federal bounty was thus intended to allay soldiers' fears by allowing them to send an initial \$25 directly to their families. The percentage provided as an initial start-up sum increased across the duration of the war such that by 1863 at least half was offered to soldiers upon enlistment.<sup>9</sup> These payments were supplemented by those offered by local counties who were all competing for the same men to fill their enlistment quotas.<sup>10</sup>

In Vermont, bounties varied enormously depending on the size of the town and the desire to meet their quota figures. In Franklin County, payments for a three-year enlistment for privates ranged from \$25 to \$75 in 1862 and almost doubled in 1863 from \$100 to \$350, reflecting a growing and more pressing need for men in the army.<sup>11</sup> In his work on Franklin and Grand Isle Counties, Hamilton Child, a prominent author of county directories and histories, reported that the highest bounty paid was \$1000 by the town of Fairfield.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Holliday, 'Relief for Soldiers' Families', p. 99.

<sup>10</sup> For more on Northern enlistment, see James W. Geary, *We Need Men: The Union Draft in the Civil War* (Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1991); James W. Geary, 'Civil War Conscription in the North: A Historiographical Review', *Civil War History* 32, no.3 (September 1986), pp. 208-228; Marvin A. Kreidberg and Merton G. Henry, *History of the Military Mobilization in the United States Army, 1775-1945* (Washington: Department of the Army, 1955); Fred A. Shannon, *Organisation and Administration of the Union Army 1861-1865*, vol. 1-2 (Massachusetts: Peter Smith, 1965); Eugene C. Murdock, *One Million Men: The Civil War Draft in the North* (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1971).

<sup>11</sup> Hamilton Child, *Gazetteer and Business Directory of Franklin and Grand Isle Counties, Vermont for 1882-1883* (New York: Journal Office, 1883), p. 44.

<sup>12</sup> Child, *Gazetteer and Business Directory of Franklin and Grand Isle Counties*, p. 44. For other works by Hamilton Child, see for example, Hamilton Child, *Gazetteer and Business Directory of Windsor County, Vermont for 1883-1884* (New York: Journal Office, 1884); Hamilton Child, *Gazetteer and Business Directory of Windham County, Vermont, 1724-1884* (New York: Journal Office, 1884); Hamilton Child, *Gazetteer and*



Compare this to the approximate average of \$28 from Rutland County, and the discrepancies between the counties become stark.<sup>13</sup> In a letter written between October 8 and October 11, 1862, Russell Silsby informed his wife that he had received his pay of \$45.35.<sup>14</sup> He noted that the amount included 'bounty and subscription' but not state or 'government' (federal) pay, which was yet to be dispensed.<sup>15</sup> Taking into consideration Russell's calculation that he had already received \$75.50 from the government with \$25 still owing (figures presumably relating to federal bounty), it is probable that the immediate payment of \$45.35 was a bonus awarded by Washington county or his local village of Moretown.

Despite the increase in bounties throughout the Civil War, these financial incentives coupled with military pay proved to be insufficient for many families of Union soldiers. At the outbreak of the conflict, the resounding consensus was that the war would only last a few months and that a soldier's wage and respective bounty would be adequate for his family during his service. The awarding of bonuses, however, was a double-edged sword for soldiers' families: while intended to give them financial security in their breadwinner's absence, it also caused a steep rise in taxes in order for counties and the state to reach the required funds. On average, taxes in Vermont rose from \$0.126 per acre of real estate in 1859 to \$0.168 in 1861 and rapidly increased the longer the war went

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*Business Directory of Addison County, Vermont 1881-1882* (New York: Journal Office, 1882); Hamilton Child, *Gazetteer and Business Directory of Ontario County, New York, 1867-1868* (New York: Journal Office, 1867).

<sup>13</sup> Thomas D. Seymour Bassett, 'Vermont in the Civil War: For Freedom and Unity - Vermont's Civil War', *Vermont Life* 15 (Spring 1961), pp. 36-39, 47-50; Thomas D. Seymour Bassett, *The Growing Edge: Vermont Villages, 1840-1880* (Montpelier: Vermont Historical Society, 1992), pp. 138-139.

<sup>14</sup> Russell Dutton Silsby to Marinda Brown Silsby, October 8-11, 1862, Silsby Collection.

<sup>15</sup> Russell Dutton Silsby to Marinda Brown Silsby, October 8-11, 1862, Silsby Collection.

on, peaking at \$0.59 in 1864.<sup>16</sup> The falsity of pre-war conceptions soon became apparent and the issue of supporting soldiers' families emerged as a key concern for soldiers and government officials. When a soldier enlisted, he was promised that his family would be cared for in his absence. Local communities and towns were the primary support network who, through public or private programs, assumed the bulk of this responsibility.

The inability of these arrangements to meet the demand, however, left many men questioning those assurances. Russell Silsby noted bitterly on a number of occasions the lack of support his family was receiving. In October 1862 he lamented that people 'so soon forget the families of the soldier that goes to fight the battles of our common country'.<sup>17</sup> His ill feelings were raised again when discussing rumours of an impending draft in Vermont. Russell felt no sympathy for those who faced possible drafting, remarking that 'perhaps they will begin to take an interest in the soldier and his family again'.<sup>18</sup> He recalled the catch-cry of locals upon his enlistment six months earlier and added his own interpretation of events: "'The Dear Soldier! We will take care of his family and if he or they need anything they shall have it" I think now some of those who loved us so well until we had enlisted will have a chance to try the beauties of a Soldier's life'.<sup>19</sup>

Silsby was not alone in his disillusionment towards the treatment of soldiers' families. The inadequacies of the existing federal pension system and

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<sup>16</sup> Adams, *Prices Paid by Vermont Farmers*, p. 64.

<sup>17</sup> Russell Dutton Silsby to Marinda Brown Silsby, October 29, 1862, Silsby Collection.

<sup>18</sup> Russell Dutton Silsby to Marinda Brown Silsby, February 8, 1863, Silsby Collection.

<sup>19</sup> Russell Dutton Silsby to Marinda Brown Silsby, February 8, 1863, Silsby Collection.

the newly introduced state relief legislation were evident early into the war. The federal program initially provided pensions for widows and orphans of deceased soldiers and servicemen only, thus excluding other female dependents such as mothers and sisters from welfare assistance. This anomaly was redressed in July 1862 when Congress passed a new law bestowing eligibility upon dependents left without the primary breadwinner as a result of the war. While a positive step in the direction of supporting soldiers' dependents, the law by no means provided certainty to women struggling to make ends meet. Those who lost relatives in the war might have been entitled to receive assistance, but they first had to *prove* their claims — a process that was often long and fraught. An eligible dependent had to first demonstrate that their male family member was honourably discharged from the army. Additionally, if the claim related to a husband, proof of marriage was required; if the claim related to a son, proof of dependence. These documents then had to be verified by witnesses or the court, a task that could be protracted given the high demand and bureaucratic nature of the pension department. The bureau then deemed claims valid or invalid.<sup>20</sup> Maris

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<sup>20</sup> For more on the development of the pension system and due process see, for example, William H. Glasson, *Federal Military Pensions in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1918); Maris A. Vinovskis, 'Have Social Historians Lost the Civil War? Some Preliminary Demographic Speculations', *Journal of American History* 76, no.1 (June 1989), pp. 34-58; Joan E. Marshall, 'Aid for Union Soldiers' Families: A Comfortable Entitlement or a Pauper's Pittance? Indiana, 1861-1865', *Social Service Review* 78, no.2 (June 2004), pp. 207-242; Larry M. Logue, 'Union Veterans and Their Government: The Effects of Public Policies on Private Lives', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 22, no.3 (Winter 1992), pp. 411-434; Glenn C. Altshuler and Jan M. Saltzgaber, 'The Limits of Responsibility: Social Welfare and Local Government in Seneca County, New York 1860-1875', *Journal of Social History* 21, no.3 (Spring 1988), pp. 515-537; Elizabeth Regosin, *Freedom's Promise: Ex-Slave Families and Citizenship in the Age of Emancipation* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 2002); Theda Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers: The Political Origins of Social Policy in the United States* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1992); Susan M. Sterett, *Public Pensions: Gender and Civic Service in*

Vinovskis notes that unsuccessful claims tended to be those where the applicant failed to establish a link between a soldier's injury, death or disability and his military service (with some men's deaths or illnesses taking place after their discharge for reasons that might or might not have been caused solely by their enlistment).<sup>21</sup> Despite its limited efficiency, this legal development was important in marking the first real movement of the federal government to assume responsibility for soldiers' families, one that was built on further in the years following the conflict.<sup>22</sup>

A prominent issue with federal pensions was the delay in increasing or amending provisions for wounded servicemen. During 1861, the entitlement of wounded soldiers for federal assistance stayed at its antebellum level.<sup>23</sup> It was only in mid-1862 that legislation was amended to address the pressing needs of soldiers and their dependents. Many Union soldiers survived the war but returned different men, incapacitated by injury or illness. For an estimated quarter of a million men, wartime duty had rendered them shadows of their former selves, unable to perform their former work.<sup>24</sup> Injuries were wide-ranging yet this was only reflected in federal legislation in 1864 when a comprehensive grading of disabilities was instituted. For example, at the end of the Civil War, a soldier who lost a little finger or toe could receive up to \$24 a

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*the States, 1850-1937* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003); McClintock, 'Civil War Pensions', pp. 456-480.

<sup>21</sup> Vinovskis, 'Have Social Historians Lost the Civil War?' p. 51.

<sup>22</sup> McClintock, 'Civil War Pensions', p. 463.

<sup>23</sup> McClintock, 'Civil War Pensions', p. 463; Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers*, p. 106.

<sup>24</sup> Claudia D. Goldin, 'War' in Glenn Porter, ed., *Encyclopedia of American Economic History: Studies of the Principal Movements and Ideas*, vol. 3 (New York: Scribner, 1980), pp. 938-939.

year; loss of a hand awarded them \$360 while loss of hearing totalled \$480.<sup>25</sup> According to this tiered structure the most severe disability was a total loss of sight or loss of either both hands or both feet, for which a soldier could receive up to \$1200 a year.<sup>26</sup> For rural women, given the physical demands of farm work, the reality that one or more of their loved ones might come home disabled was akin to losing their labour altogether. Whether wounded or dead, these men would no longer be able to complete the farm work required of them, throwing out the entire rural framework for both farm labour and family life.

This situation was in the forefront of Hannah Glines' mind when her husband was wounded at Bull Run on July 27, 1861. Already concerned about money, Moses' injuries (never specified) further added to her woes. In particular, Hannah was anxious of the impact that his wounds would have on the provision of his soldier's pay. Having enlisted for three years, Moses would not see out his service, discharged for disability in early January 1862. Moses attempted to ameliorate his wife's worries, informing her that she should 'not be afraid' that the money would stop upon his discharge.<sup>27</sup> Despite the fact that Hannah's letter prompting this response has not survived, it is probable from Moses' words that Hannah was under the misguided impression that once he was discharged he would no longer receive any pay. Moses was quick to correct his wife, writing that 'Every one of the ofisar [officer] say that I start ... my disibelly [disability]

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<sup>25</sup> Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers*, p. 140.

<sup>26</sup> Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers*, p. 140. This system was in a constant state of change with a number of legislative amendments created in the second half of the century, for more on these nineteenth-century developments see Glasson, *Federal Military Pensions*, pp.123-148.

<sup>27</sup> Moses Glines to Hannah Glines, undated c. late December 1861 or early January 1862, Glines Collection.

[pension] one half of real pay'.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, Moses applied for a disability pension in March 1862 and was subsequently awarded \$4 a month. Existing records show that Moses continued to receive this pension for the rest of the war until at least 1866, when his name disappears from the register.<sup>29</sup> Based on the annual pension of \$48 that Moses received for his disability, it is probable that he suffered the loss of a few fingers or toes. While his injuries were on the lower end of the pension scale, the loss of fingers, for example, would have severely limited the farm work that Moses could complete, unable to manipulate tools or farming equipment with the skill that he had before the war.

Compared to the federal pension system, state-level assistance from Vermont was pitiful with legislation not even addressing the issue of aid for families of injured soldiers. In 1861 Vermont passed 'An Act to provide for the families of the citizens of Vermont mustered into the service of the United States', a law intended as a response to the need for state aid to families of Vermont soldiers, reportedly the first of its kind out of any northern state.<sup>30</sup> The act established a relief system whereby agents were appointed to towns as administrators and intermediaries between families and the state. The amount of assistance awarded was at the agent's discretion and varied on a case-by-case basis. In order to qualify for assistance, families were instructed to complete a form asking for basic information such as family members' names, ages and

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<sup>28</sup> Moses Glines to Hannah Glines, undated c. late December 1861 or early January 1862, Glines Collection.

<sup>29</sup> *Ledgers of Payments, 1818-1872, to U.S. Pensioners Under Acts of 1818 Through 1858 From Records of the Office of the Third Auditor of the Treasury, 1818-1872* (National Archives Microfilm Publication T718, 23 rolls); *Records of the Accounting Officers of the Department of the Treasury*, Record Group 217 (National Archives, Washington D.C.), *U.S. Pensioners, 1818-1872* listed on Ancestry.com.

<sup>30</sup> Walter Crockett, *Vermont, The Green Mountain State*, vol. 3 (New York: The Century History Company Inc., 1921), p. 507.

health and whether or not 'their heads made proper provisions for them'.<sup>31</sup> They also had to confirm that the monthly state pay of \$7 issued to soldiers was being 'applied for their benefit'.<sup>32</sup> This last measure was apparently designed to stop soldiers from appropriating state aid for their own benefit or for any purpose other than the direct support of needy families. In his report to the Governor of Vermont, John Howe Jr., assigned to oversee the relief program, stated that there were 'many cases' in which government funds were misused in this manner, the most common scenario for soldiers to pay off debts.<sup>33</sup>

Howe's observation provides an insight into the rationale behind the government assistance package. First, the state allocation of \$7 was intended to go directly to soldiers' families; it was a way for the state to provide indirect support via the male breadwinner. Howe emphatically reiterated this point in response to allegations of misappropriation of state pay, noting that the agents would withhold aid to any family who could not establish that the \$7 was being 'rightfully' used.<sup>34</sup> Second, it is clear that the state was reluctant to operate too broadly: Howe rebuked the assertions made by soldiers' families that recruiters had guaranteed that the state would provide directly for them, labelling such claims 'improper'.<sup>35</sup> By supporting soldiers' families only indirectly — providing funds to a household head rather than to families themselves — the state clearly sought to limit the war's potential to disrupt pre-war norms of masculine financial authority and individual self-sufficiency. Yet although Howe sought to enforce a system where dependents continued relying on individual men rather

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<sup>31</sup> Howe, *Report of John Howe Jr.*, p. 4.

<sup>32</sup> Howe, *Report of John Howe Jr.*, p. 4.

<sup>33</sup> Howe, *Report of John Howe Jr.*, p. 4.

<sup>34</sup> Howe, *Report of John Howe Jr.*, p. 4.

<sup>35</sup> Howe, *Report of John Howe Jr.*, p. 5.

than the state, he also had to deal with soldiers who refused to uphold their familial responsibilities. The result was an awkward compromise: a system of paternalistic oversight where the state ostensibly provided money to soldiers for services rendered yet also sought to manage *how* men spent those same funds. Thus, the Vermont relief scheme was envisioned as an ancillary measure, one designed to cater to small pockets of society for whom state aid made the difference between survival and destitution.

Ironically, however, there were no provisions to accommodate those men who returned disabled or wounded, or who never returned at all. Their families trod the fine line between survival and destitution that the system aimed to protect. Howe recognised the difficulties posed by this legal silence in his report, noting that agents were 'constantly writing for instructions with regard to [such cases]'.<sup>36</sup> Yet he gave the issue only minor consideration, remarking that he was unable to respond to such cases because the scenario in question was not mentioned in the necessary law.<sup>37</sup> Therefore, when Moses Glines returned to his farm, his family would have likely received no assistance from Vermont. It should be noted that while Vermont did not make explicit arrangements for disabled soldiers, other states such as Connecticut, Maine and Massachusetts instituted such provisions. There was, however, no unanimous approach to determining aid, with some states continuing payment for only a year while others until the soldier's company was discharged entirely.<sup>38</sup>

Concluding his report, Howe published the financial statistics accrued throughout the previous year. Up until September 1, 1862 — just under twelve

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<sup>36</sup> Howe, *Report of John Howe Jr.*, p. 6.

<sup>37</sup> Howe, *Report of John Howe Jr.*, p. 6.

<sup>38</sup> Howe, *Report of John Howe Jr.*, pp. 6-7.



months since records began — Vermont had aided 454 families, encompassing a total of 1, 900 individuals. During this period, the state spent \$15, 739.66, a paltry sum that would have left each individual with less than \$1 a month over the entire period if funds had been equally distributed.<sup>39</sup> The amount families received per week depended greatly on personal circumstances, with payments ranging from \$0.55 a head per month to \$5. These figures placed Vermont on par with neighbouring states; Maine provided a maximum of \$3 a month; Massachusetts, \$4; and Connecticut, \$6.<sup>40</sup> The amount of aid Vermont provided to soldier's families increased during the course of the war, peaking in 1863 when \$21 509.06 was expended on relief.<sup>41</sup> This figure, however, did not reflect a rise in the amount of aid allocated per family but rather a rise in the number of families seeking assistance. In the year 1863, for example, over six hundred Vermont families sought help from the state.<sup>42</sup> During the four years of war, Vermont spent \$73 542.20 in total on state aid.<sup>43</sup>

Localised aid also formed a crucial component of wartime relief for soldier's families. American philanthropy and poor relief had always been viewed as the primary responsibility of the local community and individuals.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Howe, *Report of John Howe Jr.*, p. 12.

<sup>40</sup> Howe, *Report of John Howe Jr.*, pp. 6-7.

<sup>41</sup> John Howe Jr., *Report of John Howe Jr., relative to State Aid for Soldiers' Families in Vermont from September 1, 1862 to September 1, 1863* in *Journal of the Senate of the State of Vermont, Annual Session, 1863* (Montpelier: The Freeman Printing Establishment, 1863), p. 180.

<sup>42</sup> Howe, *Report of John Howe Jr., relative to State aid for Soldiers' Families in Vermont from September 1, 1862 to September 1, 1863*, p. 180.

<sup>43</sup> John Howe Jr., *Report of John Howe Jr., relative to State Aid for Soldiers' Families in Vermont* in *Journal of the Senate of the State of Vermont, Annual Session, 1865* (Montpelier: The Freeman Printing Establishment, 1866), p. 230.

<sup>44</sup> For a more detailed discussion on antebellum American philanthropy see, for example, Robert H. Bremner, *The Public Good: Philanthropy and Welfare in the Civil War Era* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1980); Lori Ginzberg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics and Class in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (New

Women played an essential role in antebellum voluntary efforts, something that was continued in subsequent war work through soldier's aid societies and wayside hospitals.<sup>45</sup> Whilst benevolent organisations were primarily focused on providing assistance to those on the battlefield, not the home front, the composition of these societies is notable for the dominance of the urban, middle class. Scholars agree that it was this section of the northern population who spearheaded Civil War voluntary efforts yet information regarding the participation of farmwomen in such organisations is sparse — undoubtedly due to the dearth of surviving diaries or letters detailing the activities of rural women in contrast to the wealth of material left by their middle-class city counterparts.<sup>46</sup> Historian Jeanie Attie, nevertheless, has observed how women in agricultural regions contributed only 'meagre' help to organised wartime voluntary efforts, a

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Haven: Yale University Press, 1990); Kathleen McCarthy, *American Creed: Philanthropy and the Rise of Civil Society, 1700-1865* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003); Kathleen McCarthy, *Lady Bountiful Revisited: Women, Philanthropy and Power* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990); Anne Firor Scott, *Natural Allies: Women's Associations in American History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991); Elizabeth V. Varon, *We Mean to Be Counted: White Women and Politics in Antebellum Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998).

<sup>45</sup> For a more detailed discussion on women's voluntary work in the Civil War see, for example, Jeanie Attie, *Patriotic Toil: Northern Women and the American Civil War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998); Linus Pierpont Bockett and Mary Vaughan, *Woman's Work in the Civil War: A Record of Heroism, Patriotism and Patience* (Philadelphia: Zeigler, McCurdy and Co, 1867); Sylvia G.L. Dannett, ed., *Noble Women of the North* (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1959); Drew Gilpin Faust, *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War* (New York: Vintage Books, 1997); Judith Ann Giesberg, *Army At Home: Women and the Civil War on the Northern Home Front* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009); Judith Ann Giesberg, *Civil War Sisterhood: The US Sanitary Commission and Women's Politics in Transition* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2000); Theresa McDevitt, *Women and the American Civil War: An Annotated Bibliography* (Connecticut: Praeger, 2003); George C. Rable, *Civil Wars: Women and the Crisis of Southern Nationalism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989); Jane E. Schultz, *Women at the Front: Hospital Workers in the Civil War America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Nina Silber, *Daughters of the Union: Northern Women Fight the Civil War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005).

<sup>46</sup> See, for example, Bremner, *The Public Good*, p. 21; Giesberg, *Civil War Sisterhood*, p. 4; McCarthy, *Lady Bountiful*, p. 15; Silber, *Daughters of the Union*, p. 166.

conclusion she reached in a study focusing on the United States Sanitary Commission.<sup>47</sup> Attie credits this limited participation to a rural woman's lack of resources. Arguably, however, what such women were predominately lacking was the time necessary to contribute to such movements. With the responsibility of running the farm and tending to large families, it seems obvious that farmwomen would be hard pressed to contribute to charity ventures.

Rural women, of course, were supporting the Union war effort in a different form: actively sustaining both the army through the supply of basic foodstuffs and the Northern agricultural economy. Furthermore, many rural women provided food and clothing — staples of the soldier's aid societies — directly to loved ones in Union camps. Marinda Silsby supplied her husband with a variety of goods, from sugar, butter, cheese and dried apples to gloves and reading material such as journals and newspapers.<sup>48</sup> Hannah Glines, too, noted that she was to send brown bread and cheese to Moses.<sup>49</sup> Assistance provided to Hannah and Marinda and their rural compatriots, however, was few and far between.

In an approach akin to that of the state, towns and communities saw bounties as one arm of assistance for the home front, fulfilling two important purposes to the Union war effort, recruiting men and ensuring their families were adequately supported.<sup>50</sup> Nevertheless the support received was not enough to alleviate the difficulties faced by farmwomen in both a private and public

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<sup>47</sup> Attie, *Patriotic Toil*, pp. 135-136.

<sup>48</sup> Russell Dutton Silsby to Marinda Brown Silsby, November 23, 1862; December 25, 1862, Silsby Collection.

<sup>49</sup> Hannah Glines to Moses Glines, July 21, 1861, Glines Collection.

<sup>50</sup> Holliday, 'Relief for Soldiers' Families', p. 99; Marshall, 'Aid for Union Soldiers' Families', pp. 210; 228.

capacity. On the public landscape, regardless of whether a family received state aid or relied solely on the soldier's pay, money was precious and the importance placed on frugality was high. Of particular focus was outstanding debts, arguably the economic responsibility that caused the most strife for farmwomen. The world of loans and debts could be cutthroat, particularly in the climate of the Civil War where women could be easily taken advantage of, leaving them with a distinct sense of helplessness and vulnerability.

Hannah Glines found her situation dire and stressful. She constantly worried about her financial situation and the amount she had to borrow in order to survive. Writing to her husband, she lamented how she had no money, 'only what I borrow' and the list of expenses was growing fast: the hogs needed grain, the cow required medicine, Mr Robbins the veterinarian had to be paid for his services, taxes were due, basic food items such as flour had to be bought and she was 'destitute' for cotton cloth.<sup>51</sup> Making matters worse was the high inflation of goods. Hannah observed this development when purchasing cloth, writing that 'we hav[e] to pay little more this year on account of the war'.<sup>52</sup> Indeed, during the four-year conflict the price of staple products such as cloth almost doubled in Vermont.<sup>53</sup>

The extent of Hannah's struggle was reflected when she politely refused the gift of a pair of gloves that her husband had sent her, requesting that he tell her how much they cost for she 'need[ed] this pay for them more then I do gloves

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<sup>51</sup> Hannah Glines to Moses Glines, July 21, 1861; August 3, 1861; November 17, 1861, Glines Collection.

<sup>52</sup> Hannah Glines to Moses Glines, July 21, 1861, Glines Collection.

<sup>53</sup> Adams, *Prices Paid by Vermont Farmers*, p. 109.

I have so much to buy'.<sup>54</sup> Hannah's rejection of the present is intriguing. It is clear that Hannah believed that the gloves were an unnecessary and indulgent, bordering on inappropriate, expense and one that the family could ill afford. But it is the inability of Moses to fully comprehend his wife's troubles that is poignant. While he evinced sympathy for her plight, Moses obviously did not understand the extent to which life had changed for Hannah back on the farm. He did not, however, object to Hannah selling the gloves for cash.<sup>55</sup>

Possibly the hardest situation Hannah faced was dealing with the repayment of debts, often to very disgruntled people. On November 10, 1861, she explained how she was visited by a number of individuals, each seeking settlement, remarking 'they all want their pay one calls and another calls'.<sup>56</sup> When she was unable to pay, some took measures into their own hands. Hannah informed her husband that a man named Justin turned up at the farm demanding a shilling that was owed to him. When he did not receive the shilling, he 'took a schyth [scythe - a farming tool] that you had . . . and carried it off'.<sup>57</sup> Powerless to stop this man's appropriation of her family's goods, Hannah could only watch. Nor was this the only confrontation she experienced in her new capacity as the household's financial manager. Having borrowed salt from a neighbour, she was forced to pay 'out every sent [sic] that I had' in order to buy back a bushel of salt when the neighbour came to call in the loan.<sup>58</sup> Similarly, another man refused to assist Hannah with some farm work, refuting her claim that he owed her husband money, which she wished him to repay via his labour. Hannah divulged

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<sup>54</sup> Hannah Glines to Moses Glines, November 17, 1861, Glines Collection.

<sup>55</sup> Moses Glines to Hannah Glines, November 26, 1861, Glines Collection.

<sup>56</sup> Hannah Glines to Moses Glines, November 10, 1861, Glines Collection.

<sup>57</sup> Hannah Glines to Moses Glines, July 21, 1861, Glines Collection.

<sup>58</sup> Hannah Glines to Moses Glines, July 21, 1861, Glines Collection.

to Moses that the man had 'swore and dam[ne]d you and said you was a dam[n] mean lier [sic]'.<sup>59</sup> These incidents emphasise the vulnerability of many farmwomen's wartime experiences. Alone and without the support of her partner, Hannah was thrust into an economic environment that was at times overtly hostile, compounding the anxieties that arose from her many additional responsibilities.

Marinda Silsby had a very different experience. While she made reference to an acquaintance who had fallen into 'great debt' as a result of the conflict and suffered accordingly, Marinda herself seems to have escaped with only minimal difficulties.<sup>60</sup> In fact, she appears to have embraced her economic role wholeheartedly, proudly writing to her husband of her achievements. In her letters, she methodically outlined what debts she had paid, whom she intended to pay next, how much money she had available to her, and how much the family would have left once all accounts were settled. Marinda credited her actions to the desire that her husband would not come home to 'a lot of debts for you to pay'.<sup>61</sup> However she did write in one letter that she took a particular joy in her work, professing that she did 'love to make an X on those little accounts you left in your book'.<sup>62</sup> Russell acknowledged Marinda's capabilities in managing the family's accounts and trusted her to make decent economic decisions, giving her permission to 'dispose of as you think best'.<sup>63</sup> Throughout her correspondence,

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<sup>59</sup> Hannah Glines to Moses Glines, November 24, 1861, Glines Collection.

<sup>60</sup> Marinda Brown Silsby to Russell Dutton Silsby, October 17, 1862, Silsby Collection.

<sup>61</sup> Marinda Brown Silsby to Russell Dutton Silsby, undated c. winter 1862, Silsby Collection.

<sup>62</sup> Marinda Brown Silsby to Russell Dutton Silsby, undated c. winter 1862, Silsby Collection.

<sup>63</sup> Russell Dutton Silsby to Marinda Brown Silsby, May 1, 1863, Silsby Collection.

Marinda demonstrated a keen eye for all things relating to the household economy, even saving a portion of every pay she received for the purpose of tax, telling her husband in one letter 'I have about \$10 and have been keeping it to pay taxes when they call for it on the 10 of May'.<sup>64</sup> In a true testament to her ability to administer finances, Marinda wrote to Russell on June 7, 1863, that she had only one more debt to pay and was not 'owing any store debt'.<sup>65</sup> Further separating her experience from that of her contemporary Hannah, Marinda never fell victim to angry debt-callers. When a Mr Roger inquired about money owed to him, Marinda, apologetic that she could not repay this debt, was told that it was of 'no consequence' and that she could repay him 'sometime' soon.<sup>66</sup>

The stark differences between Hannah and Marinda reflect the spectrum of experiences for Vermont farmwomen during the Civil War. These distinctions can be ascribed to a number of factors. First, the wealth of the family affected the ability of the women left behind to provide for their families. On the basis of both sets of correspondence, the Silsby family appears to have been better off than the Glines' in terms of monetary capacity and the ability to pay off loans. Second, the profitability of the farm affected the income that a family would have received separate from soldier's pay. Such agricultural success was dependent in part on the amount of land one owned and farmed. According to 1860 census data, the value of the Silsby property was \$800, with a personal estate estimated at almost

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<sup>64</sup> Marinda Brown Silsby to Russell Dutton Silsby, April 8, 1863, Silsby Collection.

<sup>65</sup> Marinda Brown Silsby to Russell Dutton Silsby, June 7, 1863, Silsby Collection.

<sup>66</sup> Marinda Brown Silsby to Russell Dutton Silsby, undated c. winter 1862, Silsby Collection.

\$400.<sup>67</sup> The Glines family on the other hand had a personal estate valued at \$300 and a property worth \$700.<sup>68</sup> Finally, the presence of hired help would have alleviated the pressures of running the farm and thus allowed more time to devote to the management of the family finances. As discussed earlier, Marinda had the benefit of obtaining help throughout her husband's absence, yet another testament to their overall wealth compared to Hannah, who was unable to afford assistance and thus was left to weather much of the war alone.

The economic accountability of farmwomen was added to existing duties, already considerable in both time and effort. From the farm work to the housework, arguably one of the greatest difficulties faced by rural women was a lack of companionship. Fuelled by geographic isolation, this loneliness was manifested in the loss of a partner, exacerbated by the increase in daily chores and compounded by bouts of illness that threatened the fragile balance between productivity and poverty. When Hannah became sick, there was neither opportunity for rest and recovery nor time for self-deprecation and complaints. In letters to her husband, Hannah brushed off her ill health, informing him that she was as 'good as could be expected' and that she had 'some sick spells' but 'keep it to my self [sic]'.<sup>69</sup> On the receiving end of her letter, Moses expressed frustration at his inability to come to the aid of his wife and remorse at her suffering in light of his absence: 'I should like to come to you . . . bute I cant helpe you neither cane you helpe me in sickness tis horeble for you I know tis when

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<sup>67</sup> Year: 1860; Census Place: *Moretown, Washington, Vermont*; Roll: *M653\_1324*; Page: *814*; Image: *169*; Family History Library Film: *805324, 1860 United States Federal Census* listed on Ancestry.com.

<sup>68</sup> Year: 1860; Census Place: *Tunbridge, Orange, Vermont*; Roll: *M653\_1323*; Page: *517*; Image: *529*; Family History Library Film: *805323, 1860 United States Federal Census* listed on Ancestry.com.

<sup>69</sup> Hannah Glines to Moses Glines, December 1, 1861, Glines Collection.



you helth is poor [sic][. . . but I can't help you neither can you help me in sickness it is horrible for you I know when your health is poor]'.<sup>70</sup> The strenuous labour required in maintaining the farm did not augur well for good health, particularly if one was heavily pregnant. Moses was also plagued by news of his children's illnesses. At one point in his absence all three of his children were sick. Francis suffered bouts of 'worms' while Emma and Ida were frequent victims of 'bad colds'.<sup>71</sup> Ill children naturally caused much concern for Moses and Hannah, as well as adding an additional burden for Hannah to bear. With sick children to consider, as well as another one on the way, her responsibilities were magnified, leaving her with more chores to accomplish and more anxiety to add to her lot.

Hannah's surviving letters graphically exhibit her loneliness. In her examination of letter writing between nineteenth-century Michigan women, Marilyn Motz describes letter writing as a means to provide a 'tangible and emotional support for family members'.<sup>72</sup> With the distance between the farm and the battlefield, Hannah's letters exude an attempt to create and sustain an intimate connection with her husband. Hannah capitalises on Moses' memories of his family and his home, fondly noting that she had made 'four new milk cheese' and that if he returned to them, he 'could have some with us'.<sup>73</sup> The notion of sharing a meal around the table embodied her wish to reunite with her husband and recalls Motz's observation that in letter-writing women tended to use words to 'persuade without seeming to persuade and to create for

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<sup>70</sup> Moses Glines to Hannah Glines, undated, Glines Collection.

<sup>71</sup> Hannah Glines to Moses Glines, December 1, 1861, Glines Collection.

<sup>72</sup> Marilyn Ferris Motz, *True Sisterhood: Michigan Women and Their Kin 1820-1920* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983), p. 53.

<sup>73</sup> Hannah Glines to Moses Glines, July 21, 1861, Glines Collection.

themselves an illusion of community out of the reality of their isolation'.<sup>74</sup> Hannah expressed her solitude in swift comments with the same tone she used to write about the weather. She remarked in one letter: 'I am hear alone today and it is a terrible day such a blow we have never had since I lived here . . . and to day it rains [sic]'.<sup>75</sup> In another, she assuaged her loneliness with the idea that she would send her husband some bread and cheese, juxtaposing her isolation with the more positive promise of homemade supplies: 'It [is] hard for me I still live alone, I should sent [send] you something to eat . . . we think a great deal of our brown bread and cheese'.<sup>76</sup> Exacerbating her isolation was the failure to record in her letters any visits by friends. Although not all of her letters have survived, it can still be surmised that she had few social calls given the frequent complaints of loneliness in her existing correspondence.

While the same isolation and loneliness are evident in Marinda Silsby's correspondence, it is clear that she did not experience the intensity of seclusion that beset Hannah. Marinda makes several mentions of visits by fellow townspeople. She records how Mary stopped by one day, as did Mrs Jones and Mrs Hobbs.<sup>77</sup> The arrival of the latter was apparently a source of some mixed feelings. Uppermost in Marinda's mind was the appearance that her housekeeping would make on Mrs Hobbs. Relieved that she 'happened to have things in shape', she told her husband of her fear that Mrs Hobbs 'sometimes . . .

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<sup>74</sup> Motz, *True Sisterhood*, p. 81.

<sup>75</sup> Hannah Glines to Moses Glines, August 3, 1861, Glines Collection.

<sup>76</sup> Hannah Glines to Moses Glines, July 21, 1861, Glines Collection.

<sup>77</sup> Marinda Brown Silsby to Russell Dutton Silsby, October 17, 1862; undated c. winter 1862; undated c. May 1863, Silsby Collection.

thought we did not live and appear like [other] folks'.<sup>78</sup> Yet if these visitors were a source of both comfort and concern, Marinda also had the company of a number of hired men at intermittent stages and her father-in-law, companionship that undoubtedly reduced her sense of isolation.

Regardless, Marinda still suffered from the emotional loss of her husband. In her last letter, she was joyous at the prospect of Russell's return. She noted how she had been 'counting the month[s] and weeks' but now could 'count the days' and had to exercise her utmost discretion to 'keep [herself] under control'.<sup>79</sup> Throughout their correspondence, Marinda concealed her longing in humorous anecdotes, conveying to her husband that she had dreamed that he had come home and while he looked well and 'clean and tidy', his pants 'were the worst looking things I ever saw!'<sup>80</sup> These comments were interspersed with accounts of town gossip — the 'broken friendship' between Mrs Jones and an unnamed man — and talk of current military developments such as Major General George B. McClellan and his leadership of the Army of the Potomac.<sup>81</sup> Her final letter, however, revealed the constant fear she held throughout Russell's absence of losing him to the war. When this anxiety was finally ameliorated by the knowledge that he would return in a few days, she noted that 'when you [Russell] stand inside our home once more and I have my arms

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<sup>78</sup> Marinda Brown Silsby to Russell Dutton Silsby, undated c. May 1863, Silsby Collection.

<sup>79</sup> Marinda Brown Silsby to Russell Dutton Silsby, June 26, 1863, Silsby Collection.

<sup>80</sup> Marinda Brown Silsby to Russell Dutton Silsby, April 8, 1863, Silsby Collection.

<sup>81</sup> Marinda Brown Silsby to Russell Dutton Silsby, April 28, 1863; November 12, 1862, Silsby Collection.

around you to be sure you are in the body . . . to know we have met again will be such happiness as I never experienced'.<sup>82</sup>

While a rural woman's work revolved around the farm, their lives did not follow the same trajectory. The Civil War meant more to these women than just an increase in farm labour. As this chapter has demonstrated, the conflict saw rural women introduced to a new aspect of civil life and a new phase of their private lives. Engaging in a foreign economic environment, many rural women found these new commercial relationships difficult to navigate, particularly in the climate of the Civil War. Furthermore, this chapter has shown that soldier's pay and aid programs were not enough to support a family, placing increased pressure on rural women and their attempts to retain economic viability and ensure the survival of their family and the farm. Finally, the emotional void caused by the absence of a loved one and for many, a lack of companionship, reflects the hardship that many rural women faced during the Civil War in the struggle to make ends meet.

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<sup>82</sup> Marinda Brown Silsby to Russell Dutton Silsby, June 26, 1863, Silsby Collection.

## CHAPTER THREE:

### *A Broken Promise*

Entering what was to be the final year of the war, the editors of the *American Agriculturist* reflected on the one just passed. Presenting their picture of the war in 1864, the editorial board declared that it was 'one of the great events in the history of our country and of the world' for the bounty reaped from the crops, the ground and the battlefield.<sup>1</sup> Of particular focus was the return of wounded soldiers to their homes. Having observed that the majority of soldiers were farmers, those who 'wielded the axe . . . swung the cradle and scythe . . . the hands that sowed, and hoed, and harvested', the editors moved on to describe the scenes that greeted a soldier upon his arrival.<sup>2</sup> During his absence, the farm had neither fallen into disarray nor his family been reduced to poverty. Instead, crops had been harvested, livestock raised and butchered, produce gathered and readied for market. With such an image in front of his eyes, the soldier could only do one thing — to 'thank God for an intelligent thrifty wife, under whose good management . . . the farm has been worked'.<sup>3</sup>

To ensure that their readers fully appreciated the poignancy of this scene, the editors provided an illustration. Drawn by Thomas Nast, arguably the most well known illustrator of the day and a frequent contributor to the *American Agriculturist*, 'Farmer Folks in War Time' was composed of five individual

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<sup>1</sup> 'The Record of a Year - Our Picture', *American Agriculturist* (January 1865), p. 17.

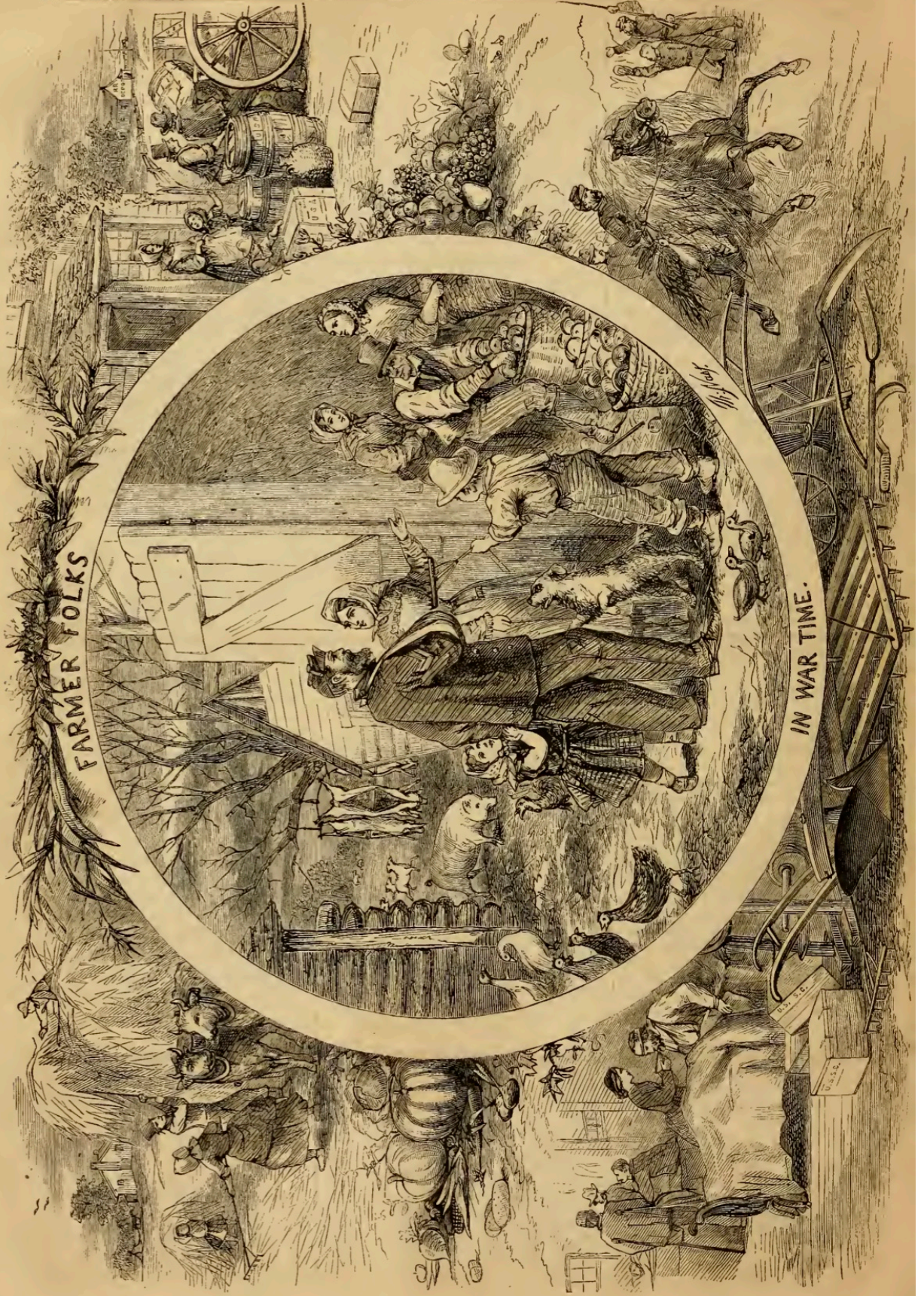
<sup>2</sup> 'The Record of a Year - Our Picture', *American Agriculturist*, p. 17.

<sup>3</sup> 'The Record of a Year - Our Picture', *American Agriculturist*, p. 17.

vignettes.<sup>4</sup> In the centre, a woman gives a tour of the property to her husband, a wounded veteran, gesturing to the barn where two young women and an elderly man are dividing produce into baskets. In the background, livestock roam while a number of hogs have been butchered and are displayed on a tree branch. Bordering this image, a woman oversees the collection of farm produce for the war as men load boxes and barrels labelled 'USA' into a wagon, while below a man is triumphantly riding a horse laden with hay to soldiers cheering on the side. To the left of the centre image, a woman is gathering hay with a pitchfork alongside two men. The final scene shows a female tending to an injured Union soldier, highlighting the voluntary aspect of many women's war work under organisations such as the United States Sanitary Commission. This last image is particularly significant, implying that the products used to save men in the hospitals, as well as feed men on the battlefields, came directly from northern farms. Such a message boasts the ability of the Union to support itself during the hard times of war compared to the struggling Confederacy and against foreign detractors who questioned the North's capacity.

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<sup>4</sup> Thomas Nast, 'Farmer Folks in War Time', *American Agriculturist* (January 1865), p. 16. For more on the life and career of Thomas Nast see, for example, Lynda Pflueger, *Thomas Nast: Political Cartoonist* (Berkeley Heights: Enslow Publishers, 2000); Morton Keller, *The Art and Politics of Thomas Nast* (London: Oxford University Press, 1975).



'Farmer Folks in War Time', *American Agriculturist* (January 1865), p.16

The illustration emphatically conveys the message of the *American Agriculturist* that while the men have been battling for 'the integrity of the country and for the principles of free government' the women have also been serving the Union through means other than direct fighting.<sup>5</sup> The pride expressed by the *American Agriculturist* at the efforts of rural farmwomen was confirmed in the statement that these scenes of women managing farms and literally ensuring the survival of the Union, 'will soon be historic, and in future years this picture may quicken our patriotism by the memories of the year just past'.<sup>6</sup> Yet this prediction that female 'farmer folks' would long be remembered for their services to the Union did not come to fruition. By the end of the decade they were all but forgotten, the promise that their sacrifices and labours would be rewarded, broken.

The *American Agriculturist* exhibited little anxiety on the idea of women taking over from men, particularly in comparison to concerns raised during World War One regarding the same issue.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, this publication readily acknowledged the importance of rural women's labour during the war — in sharp distinction to the lack of scholarly attention afforded to this subject. This chapter examines the extent to which rural women and their efforts were recognised at the time of the conflict. Although *the American Agriculturist* provided the most sustained support, a number of books and articles in periodicals such as *Harpers New Monthly* acknowledged farmwomen's wartime labour. But this recognition did

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<sup>5</sup> 'The Record of a Year - Our Picture', *American Agriculturist*, p. 17.

<sup>6</sup> 'The Record of a Year - Our Picture', *American Agriculturist*, p. 17.

<sup>7</sup> For more on women's work during World War One, see Maurine Weiner Greenwald, *Women, War, and Work: The Impact of World War 1 on Women Workers in the United States* (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1980).



not extend to the government or publications of the Agricultural Department.<sup>8</sup> Here, the work of rural women was ignored in favour of promoting mechanisation and the labour of the few men who stayed behind. By exploring these various representations of rural women in wartime publications, this chapter seeks to understand how farmwomen were received by contemporary mediums and to explain why subsequent histories on women's participation have largely ignored their experiences.

In spite of the incompatibility of the rural lifestyle with the dominant Victorian ideals of domesticity and womanhood that characterised antebellum America, the treatment of rural women by certain publications suggests that on the eve of the Civil War this incongruous relationship had shifted for the first time in favour of rural women. In particular, as I have shown elsewhere, there is evidence of not only a growing acceptance of the nature of a woman's lifestyle and labour but also a promotion of such pursuits, leaving rural women in a prime position to accept the mantle of responsibility bestowed by the outbreak of Civil War.<sup>9</sup> *Godey's Lady's Book* was one such periodical. Established in 1830, *Godey's Lady's Book* was the highest-circulating magazine of the antebellum era and arguably the primary authority on issues of womanhood and female identity.<sup>10</sup> Drawing

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<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Isaac Newton, *Report of the Commissioner of Agriculture for the Year 1863* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1863); Isaac Newton, *Report of the Commissioner of Agriculture for the Year 1864* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1865); Isaac Newton, *Report of the Commissioner of Agriculture for the Year 1865* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1866).

<sup>9</sup> Unpublished paper titled 'The Drudge in the Dairy, or, the Wholesome Woman: Representations of Northern Rural Women in *Godey's Lady's Book*, 1850-1860' completed as part of the Honours program at University of Sydney, Semester 1, 2012.

<sup>10</sup> It is agreed amongst scholars that *Godey's Lady's Book* was the highest circulating periodical of its genre, reaching an estimated one hundred and fifty thousand

on well-established stereotypes of European farmwomen, rural women within *Godey's Lady's Book* were clearly presented as drudges whose beauty and feminine virtues were challenged, and lost, by way of their rural lifestyle; rural women were 'more hideous than that of old age' and 'not exactly a woman, not quite a man'.<sup>11</sup> This had all changed by the late 1850s. Columns specifically designed for rural women were introduced into the periodical, such as the 'Country Housewife', playing into a broader movement within *Godey's Lady's Book* whereby rural women and the rural lifestyle were promoted as worthy of replication. Of particular attraction was the supposed independence and health of rural women. Whereas in the first years of the decade, the editors depicted outdoor pursuits and farm labour as the primary cause of the deterioration of rural women, by the late 1850s these same women had become the 'salvation' for the 'physical and moral degeneracy' that was inflicting women in the cities.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, the perceived ill-health of urban women became the basis for a broader health reform movement led by prominent men and women such as Thomas

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subscribers by 1860. See, for example, Frank Luther Mott, *A History of American Magazines 1741-1850* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1930), p. 581; Laura McCall, "'The Reign of Brute Force is Now Over": A Content Analysis of Godey's Lady's Book 1830-1860', *Journal of the Early Republic* 9, no.2 (Summer 1989), p. 221; Isabelle Lehuu, *Carnival on the Page: Popular Print Media in Antebellum America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), p. 104; Patricia Okker, *Our Sister Editors: Sarah J Hale and the Tradition of Nineteenth-Century American Women Editors* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995), p. 1; Edward Chielens, *American Literary Magazines: The Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), p. 145; Nicole Tonkovich, 'Rhetorical Power in the Victorian Parlor: Godey's Lady's Book and the Gendering of Nineteenth-Century Rhetoric' in Gregory Clark and Michael S. Halloran, eds., *Oratorical Culture in Nineteenth-Century America: Transformations in the Theory and Practice of Rhetoric* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1993), p. 180.

<sup>11</sup> L. Aime-Martin, 'The Working Women of France', *Godey's Lady's Book* (January 1852), p. 89; Reverend Samuel W. Fisher, 'Female Education', *Godey's Lady's Book* (April 1850), p. 280.

<sup>12</sup> J.N.O Stainback Wilson, MD, 'Health Department', *Godey's Lady's Book* (April 1859), p. 372.

Wentworth Higginson and Catharine Beecher.<sup>13</sup> The poster girl of these reformers was the rural woman, constructed and idealised as a perfect specimen of her gender - strong, virile and youthful. In contrast, urban women were fragile, vapid and idle as a result, reformers argued, of their lack of physical exercise. Subsequently, the urban population was encouraged to conduct themselves in the manner of rural women, engaging in outdoor pursuits to develop their physical vigour.

By 1861, rural women had eclipsed their urban counterparts in the eyes of both health reformers and *Godey's Lady's Book*. The dominance of *Godey's Lady's Book* throughout the years leading up to the Civil War positioned the publication as a prime case study for the contention that at the outbreak of war, the nature of a farmwoman's labour and lifestyle was within the realm of knowledge and contemplation of the Union media. The recognition awarded to rural women, therefore, was not an event unique to the Civil War. Rather its significance lies with what happened after the conclusion of the conflict — or rather with what did *not* happen. Instead of continuing the by-now familiar

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<sup>13</sup> For more on health reform in antebellum America, see, for example, Linda Borish, 'Benevolent America: Rural Women, Physical Recreation, Sport and Health Reform in Antebellum New England', *International Journal of the History of Sport* 22, no.6 (2005), pp. 946-973; Linda Borish, 'The Robust Woman and the Muscular Christian: Catharine Beecher, Thomas Higginson, and Their Vision of American Society, Health, and Physical Activities', *International Journal of the History of Sport* 4, no.2 (September 1987), pp. 139-154; Linda Borish, 'Females, Fitness, and the Ideology of Physical Health in Antebellum New England', *Agricultural History* 64, no.3 (Summer 1990), pp. 17-30; Regina Markell Morantz, 'Making Women Modern: Middle Class Women and Health Reform in 19th Century America', *Journal of Social History* 10, no.4 (June 1977), pp. 490-507; Roberta J. Park, "'Embodied Selves": The Rise and Development of Concern for Physical Education, Active Games and Recreation for American Women, 1776-1865', *Journal of Sport History* 5 (Summer 1978), pp. 5-42; James Whorton, *Crusaders for Fitness: The History of American Health Reformers* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982).

discourse of rural women's healthfulness and productivity, the Northern press suddenly dropped the subject almost entirely.

The importance of agriculture to the success of the Union was recognised at the very beginning of the war. The need for food in order to sustain both the army and those left on the home front placed great responsibility and attention on northern rural communities. James McPherson observes that an army of one hundred thousand men 'consumed 600 tons of supplies each day', most of which came directly from Northern farms.<sup>14</sup> As a result, newspapers and farmer's magazines in particular began a campaign to ensure that those who remained in the farming hubs were doing their best to produce and maintain an agricultural surplus. Thus, farmers were reminded that the war would cause 'almost everything that the farm produces [to] be in demand' and that the time was ripe to 'sow oats, to plant potatoes, to prepare for a great crop of Indian corn'.<sup>15</sup> True to this prediction, farm prices in Vermont nearly doubled during the war years.<sup>16</sup> The fact that many farmers would be drawn away from the farm in favour of the battlefield was a factor that was readily accepted as a potential threat to agricultural output. Pressure and expectation was therefore increased on those who remained behind. It was their duty, newspaper editors argued, to ensure that 'those who are left to till the earth . . . leave no land idle'.<sup>17</sup>

While these early war accounts conceded the loss of agricultural labour, a very clear presumption was evinced that there would always be at least one male

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<sup>14</sup> James McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 325.

<sup>15</sup> 'Interesting to Farmers', *Farmer's Cabinet* (May 4, 1861), p. 1.

<sup>16</sup> Thurston M. Adams, *Prices Paid by Vermont Farmers for Goods and Services and Received by Them for Farm Products, 1790-1940; Wages of Vermont Farm Labor, 1780-1940* (Burlington: Free Press Printing Co., 1944), p. 109.

<sup>17</sup> 'Interesting to Farmers', *Farmer's Cabinet*, p. 1.

on the farm to run the property. When mentioned in such articles, rural women were encouraged to participate in small tasks such as planting seed, which required considerably less physical exertion than hoeing or haying. In other words, there was never the acknowledgement that many farms would be left without any men, leaving the labour to be met by women and children. Nevertheless, these accounts did recognise the important contribution that rural women could play in assisting the Union achieve its goals, bestowing upon them a duty to ensure that they conducted an action that was so simple, it was a 'trifling' addition to their usual chores — planting a hilt of corn.<sup>18</sup> Thus, in a similar vein to their husbands, fathers, cousins, brothers and sons, these rural women too could 'serve [their] country in its hour of peril'.<sup>19</sup>

By 1862 Union hopes of a quick suppression of the rebellion had dissipated. It was at this point, particularly towards the later months as the conflict looked certain to carry into another year, that scattered reports of rural women managing and labouring on farms appeared in the agricultural press. The *American Agriculturist* first made the observation on the cover page of their October issue. 'The War and Female Farmers' centred on those women in the West who, upon their husband's exchange of the 'plow for the musket', assumed responsibility for the farm.<sup>20</sup> The short article did not focus on the actual work these women were undertaking but rather was a call for local farmers and farmer associations to be aware of these women and to 'take [them] into their care'.<sup>21</sup> While the article had limited insight into the experiences of rural women

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<sup>18</sup> 'Interesting to Farmers', *Farmer's Cabinet*, p. 1.

<sup>19</sup> 'Interesting to Farmers', *Farmer's Cabinet*, p. 1.

<sup>20</sup> 'The War and Female Farmers', *American Agriculturist* (October 1862), p. 300.

<sup>21</sup> 'The War and Female Farmers', *American Agriculturist*, p. 300.

on the farm and was focused solely on the West, the fact that farmwomen were mentioned at all in relation to their newfound duties assumed in light of the Civil War is significant.

Even more so was the series of articles by 'Diogenes', a column that appeared frequently in the *American Agriculturist* with a specific focus on farmwomen. In 1861, 'Diogenes' set off on a search for a farmer's wife and documented his travels for the periodical. In these earlier accounts, 'Diogenes' expressed the opinion that a farmer's wife should never engage in field labour, focusing instead on the manufacturing of dairy products such as cheese and butter.<sup>22</sup> Women who toil in the field, he argued in his January 1861 column, were reminiscent of the wives of Ancient Greek peasants, women 'little better than a slave'.<sup>23</sup> However as his journey progressed, Diogenes observed that there was a 'great diversity of opinion as to what constitutes a farmer's wife, or what is the appropriate sphere of woman upon the farm'.<sup>24</sup> He visited a 'Contented Farmer's Wife' in May and asked if farming 'paid' as a lifestyle.<sup>25</sup> Mrs Content Rogers' response read like an advertisement for the agricultural industry. She believed wholeheartedly that farming rewarded her 'abundantly' both in a monetary capacity and a moral one.<sup>26</sup> Her family was virtuous, simple but not mired in poverty, and above all, content, 'Our means grow with our wants, and

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<sup>22</sup> 'Diogenes in Search of a Farmer's Wife', *American Agriculturist* (January 1861), pp. 21-22.

<sup>23</sup> 'Diogenes in Search of a Farmer's Wife', *American Agriculturist*, p. 21.

<sup>24</sup> 'Diogenes Visits a Woman of Homespun', *American Agriculturist* (February 1861), p. 45.

<sup>25</sup> 'Diogenes Visits a Contented Farmer's Wife', *American Agriculturist* (May 1861), pp. 149-150.

<sup>26</sup> 'Diogenes Visits a Contented Farmer's Wife', *American Agriculturist*, p. 149.

what can any reasonable being ask more?' she supposedly said.<sup>27</sup> This article can be seen as more than just a promotion of the rural lifestyle, for it constitutes an attempt to remind rural women of the benefits of a farmwoman's life. A concern of antebellum rural communities was the loss of youth, particularly young women, who had greater choices as to their future than previous generations with factories and the cities offering favourable employment.<sup>28</sup> This piece was published a month into the war, when the repercussions of the conflict were already being felt in rural communities as men enlisted into the army. By picturing a wife who expressed abundant happiness with rural life, the article suggested to its audience that the sacrifices made in both peace and war would always be outweighed by the reward reaped, and that rural women should not forget this fact, no matter how hard their situation.

When he finally made his visit to female farmer Mrs Grundy in October 1862, Diogenes enunciated his new, revised conception of farmwomen. Having observed that there were 'not many men farmers', Diogenes came to the conclusion that farmwomen were no longer unsuitable for the fields.<sup>29</sup> Rather, having called on Mrs Grundy and inspected her farm, he noted that Grundy had not only maintained the running of the farm, she had improved it as well. The positive promotion of rural women evident in this article demonstrates more than just recognition of the work rural women were completing during the war, it also shows recognition of their success and active contributions to the productivity of the Northern agricultural industry.

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<sup>27</sup> 'Diogenes Visits a Contented Farmer's Wife', *American Agriculturist*, p. 150.

<sup>28</sup> Borish, 'Benevolent America', pp. 946, 950.

<sup>29</sup> 'Diogenes Visits a Woman Farmer', *American Agriculturist* (October 1862), p. 301.

The *Agriculturist* was not the only publication to acknowledge the fact that many rural women had assumed responsibility for the management of farms. In 1863, Virginia Penny, an author and pioneer of women's labour rights, published *The Employments of Women*, an encyclopaedia of female work.<sup>30</sup> The stated aim of *The Employments of Women* was to inform women of the various avenues open to them so that they might each develop a skill or occupation that would provide them with monetary support in light of their breadwinner departing for the battlefield.<sup>31</sup> Occupations included in this encyclopaedia ranged from seamstresses to teachers and musicians. Of particular note was the addition of 'Agriculturists' as a suitable form of female employment. In this entry, Penny observed that it was not unusual to hear of women who 'not only carry on farms but do the outdoor work, and tilling, reaping'.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore she encouraged women to take up such pursuits, wishing that more women would devote themselves to agricultural labour. She ended with an anecdote about a country family of twelve daughters and one son where the females completed the majority of the farm work, able to 'plough, sow, and rake equal to any farmer'.<sup>33</sup> More specific agricultural tasks were also contained within Penny's encyclopaedia as distinct professions, including cheese making and the

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<sup>30</sup> Virginia Penny, *The Employments of Women: An Cyclopaedia of Woman's Work* (Boston: Walker, Wise and Company, 1863) later republished as *How Women Can Make Money, Married or Single* (Massachusetts: D.E. Fisk, 1870). For more works by Virginia Penny see Virginia Penny, *Think and Act: A Series of Articles pertaining to men and women, work and wages* (Philadelphia: Claxton, Remsen & Haffelfinger, 1869); for more on the life of Virginia Penny see Susan H. Gensemer, 'Penny, Virginia', April 2010, American National Biography Online, <<http://www.anb.org/articles/14/14-01170.html>>, viewed 8 September 2012.

<sup>31</sup> Penny, *The Employments of Women*, p. ix.

<sup>32</sup> Penny, *The Employments of Women*, p. 136.

<sup>33</sup> Penny, *The Employments of Women*, p. 137.



production of maple sugar.<sup>34</sup> The inclusion of 'Agriculturists' in a book dedicated to informing women of appropriate employment options not only validates the comments made by the *American Agriculturist* but also widens the discussion and recognition of female farm labour to works that are not distinctly agricultural periodicals.

This trend continued with *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, which published an article written by prominent children's writer and editor Mary Mapes Dodge in August 1864. *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* was a popular periodical that had an estimated circulation of one hundred and ten thousand readers on the eve of the war and was a sister magazine to the illustrated newspaper, *Harper's Weekly*.<sup>35</sup> In the article 'Woman on the Farm', Dodge first embarked on a history of farmwomen, calling upon the ancient civilisations of Greece and Sparta to prove that the notion of women engaging in agricultural labour was not new.<sup>36</sup> Her goal for presenting these historical facts was to disprove from the very beginning the argument that she maintained was frequently used to 'strangle each new-born proposition relative to women-farmers', that they [women] 'can not do it because they lack the requisite physique'.<sup>37</sup> Women, Dodge argued, had farmed for centuries and were never impeded in their success by their physicality.<sup>38</sup>

In a similar construction to Virginia Penny, Dodge also used an anecdote to emphasise her point, choosing the speech of New York Farmer's Club member

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<sup>34</sup> Penny, *The Employments of Women*, pp. 152, 159.

<sup>35</sup> Alice Fahs, *The Imagined Civil War: Popular Literature of the North and South, 1861-1865* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), p. 42.

<sup>36</sup> Mary Mapes Dodge, 'Woman on the Farm', *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* (August 1864), pp. 355-358.

<sup>37</sup> Dodge, 'Woman on the Farm', p. 355.

<sup>38</sup> Dodge, 'Woman on the Farm', p. 355.

HC Wright. Wright spoke of the Roberts family, farmers who had eight children (seven daughters and one son) for whom the spring work was undertaken by their daughters. It was the sheer amount of work, and at such a quick pace, which caught Wright's attention. Beginning their work on April 19, the mother-daughter team had ploughed, dragged and sowed so that the Roberts farm was now growing '45 acres of wheat . . . 50 acres of oats, 30 acres of flax and are to put in 10 acres of corn, 10 of beans, 8 of carrots, 3/4 of an acre of onions and 10 acres of potatoes'.<sup>39</sup> Dodge used the story as evidence for her proposition that 'women can do farm-work, for she has done, and is doing it still'.<sup>40</sup>

An interesting aspect of Dodge's argument was the comparison of manual farm labour to that of the domestic duties that a rural woman completed as part of her 'traditional' female role. Highlighting a number of agricultural tasks from planting to weeding, Dodge doubted whether these labours were 'less exhausting than the washing, ironing, cooking, and sewing, which so many women must and do accept as their appointment work in life'.<sup>41</sup> Indeed the domestic labour of women involved a considerable expenditure of energy and time. This fact was felt acutely in many rural households, where women were responsible for household tasks such as cooking (which often involved more skill and time than urban women merely on account of having to make items such as bread from scratch) but also farm work including dairying, a particularly time-consuming and onerous process. The implication that farm labour was no more exerting than a woman's domestic tasks was seconded in Mary Livermore's *My Story of*

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<sup>39</sup> Dodge, 'Woman on the Farm', p. 356.

<sup>40</sup> Dodge, 'Woman on the Farm', p. 356.

<sup>41</sup> Dodge, 'Woman on the Farm', p. 357.

*the War*.<sup>42</sup> Although published after the conclusion of the conflict, Livermore's memoirs recalled a conversation with a group of rural Wisconsin women whom she had come across on her travels with the United States Sanitary Commission. These women had taken up work in the fields in light of the departure of males for the army and the subsequent labour shortage caused by the war. One daughter explained to a perplexed Livermore that haying was not any harder than her domestic chores. The real difficulty lay in the fact that they had to 'do both now'.<sup>43</sup> Livermore and Dodge's works both conclude with a celebration of rural women's work. While Livermore retrospectively acknowledged the heroic status of these women in their contributions to the war effort, Dodge encouraged them during the middle of the crisis to continue their efforts, leaving her readers with the parting desire that they go to work with 'stout hearts, clear heads and steady hands'.<sup>44</sup>

It was not just farmwomen who gained attention and acknowledgement for their labour during the Civil War. Many northern women not residing on farms obtained employment through fieldwork and received due recognition for their efforts. The *American Agriculturist* published an article entitled 'Woman's Labor in the Fields' in July 1864 that was duly reprinted in a number of local state and county newspapers including the *Vermont Phoenix*.<sup>45</sup> The author observed a growing trend occurring on northern farms in the hiring of females to

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<sup>42</sup> Mary A. Livermore, *My Story of the War: A Woman's Narrative of Four Years Personal Experience as Nurse in the Union Army and in Relief Work at Home, In Hospitals, Camps and at the Front during the War of the Rebellion* (Hartford: A.D. Worthington & Company, 1889).

<sup>43</sup> Livermore, *My Story of the War*, p. 148.

<sup>44</sup> Dodge, 'Woman on the Farm', p. 358.

<sup>45</sup> 'Woman's Labor in the Fields', *American Agriculturist* (July 1864), p. 206; 'Woman's Labor in the Fields', *Vermont Phoenix* (July 8, 1865), p. 1.

do field labour. According to their estimates, 'thousands' of women had found 'profitable employment' across the month of June in participating in agricultural activities ranging from planting to assisting with haying.<sup>46</sup> At a going rate of \$0.50 to \$0.80 a day, women were a cheaper, but equally useful, form of labour compared to the current average for a male farm hand which stood at \$1.40 a day.<sup>47</sup> The article did not indicate where these women came from, however it is likely that they were landless working-class women from nearby rural towns who found themselves unable to provide for their families after their supporters had left for war and without the income or food sustenance that came from owning a farm.

While rural women were acknowledged and, in some publications, celebrated for their efforts, they received no such recognition from the government either during or after the war. This silence within the official records could explain in part why the subsequent historiography of the conflict has all but overlooked the experiences of northern rural women. Despite the majority of Americans engaging in rural pursuits, it took a war, and the realisation that a strong farming industry would be key to Union victory, for the federal government to institute an official Department of Agriculture on May 15, 1862.<sup>48</sup> Pennsylvanian Isaac Newton was appointed as Commissioner of Agriculture, a surprise and largely unpopular selection amongst agricultural leaders given his next to no experience with the land.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> 'Woman's Labor in the Fields', *American Agriculturist*, p. 206.

<sup>47</sup> 'Woman's Labor in the Fields', *American Agriculturist*, p. 206; Adams, *Prices Paid by Vermont Farmers*, p. 88.

<sup>48</sup> Paul W. Gates, *Agriculture and the Civil War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1965), p. 307.

<sup>49</sup> Gates, *Agriculture and the Civil War*, p. 309.

Isaac Newton, first Commissioner of Agriculture (Courtesy of New York Public Library, New York)



Despite the contention surrounding his appointment, Newton was quick to begin his role of overseeing the agricultural industry and managing the sector's interests. His first report as Commissioner was published in 1863.<sup>50</sup> The main message Newton wished to convey to both the government and the broader public to whom the report was disseminated was that the agricultural industry of the Northern states had not 'materially suffered' nor been 'seriously disturbed' as a result of the war.<sup>51</sup> In fact, he emphasised how the produce yield of 1863 was higher than the two preceding years.<sup>52</sup> In his capacity as Commissioner, Newton put forward three specific reasons for this agricultural success: first, he pointed to the growth of the manufacturing industry and labour-saving technology. These developments, he argued, had allowed

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<sup>50</sup> Newton, *Report of the Commissioner of Agriculture for the Year 1863*.

<sup>51</sup> Newton, *Report of the Commissioner*, pp. 3-4.

<sup>52</sup> Newton, *Report of the Commissioner*, p. 4.

production to continue at the pre-war rates despite the fact that there were fewer men available to operate the farm machinery.<sup>53</sup> Second, he pointed to 'maturing youth' who remained on the farms and filled the void left by their fathers; and, finally, he suggested that immigration had helped to produce these unprecedented agricultural yields.<sup>54</sup> This last cause he took to be the most influential of the three factors. Immigration had increased astronomically from the beginning of the decade, he noted in his report, with the number of arrivals in New York doubling from 1862 to 1863.<sup>55</sup> This influx of mostly unskilled European immigrants had supposedly taken up work on farms and thus offset the losses that occurred as native-born men went into the army.

Historians have long noted the North's increased agricultural output during the war and the ability of the Union to sustain its own army and home front.<sup>56</sup> In particular, emphasis has been placed on the strength of the industry to meet the growing demand from Europe in light of successive crop failures in the early 1860s. From 1860 to 1862, Great Britain produced only twelve million quarters of wheat yet the country consumed an annual average of twenty-one million.<sup>57</sup> This shortage forced Great Britain, along with much of continental Europe, to increase their grain imports — a need that was promptly filled by the United States. Following Newton, however, scholars typically attribute these

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<sup>53</sup> Newton, *Report of the Commissioner*, p. 4.

<sup>54</sup> Newton, *Report of the Commissioner*, p. 4.

<sup>55</sup> Newton, *Report of the Commissioner*, p. 4.

<sup>56</sup> See, for example, Emerson David Fite, *Social and Industrial Conditions in the North during the Civil War* (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1910); Lee A. Craig and Thomas Weiss, 'Agricultural Productivity Growth During the Decade of the Civil War', *The Journal of Economic History* 53, no.3 (September 1993), pp. 527-548; Walter D. Rasmussen, 'The Civil War: A Catalyst of Agricultural Revolution', *Agricultural History* 39, no.4 (October 1965), pp. 187-195; Gates, *Agriculture and the Civil War*.

<sup>57</sup> Eli Ginzberg, 'The Economics of British Neutrality during the American Civil War', *Agricultural History* 10, no.4 (October 1936), p. 148.

feats to machinery or immigration. This is one reason for the lack of interest in northern farmwomen during the Civil War: the assumption that technology and migrants were responsible for the North's unprecedented agricultural output. However, while the war did indeed act as an impetus for the wider use of labour saving technology such as the reaper and the mower, this machinery neither abolished the need for physical labour completely (after all, someone was operating these tools) nor fully replaced traditional farming methods, particularly in the more settled regions of the New England where plots were smaller and farmers hesitant to introduce machinery.<sup>58</sup> Furthermore, while Newton highlights the huge growth in immigration to America in the Civil War years, the number of people who actually went to agricultural regions is debatable. Many newly arrived immigrants were not wealthy, and thus their ability to move out of the cities is questionable. Scholars on nineteenth-century American immigration have observed that while most immigrants were highly mobile, only one third resided in rural areas or, more specifically, on the land, with the majority residing in cities and towns either on the East coast or out West.<sup>59</sup> Finally, as mentioned earlier, the Union army was overwhelmingly young, challenging Newton's assertion that 'maturing youth' were key participants alongside immigrants. Who then, provided the labour responsible for the prosperity of the agricultural industry? With a large portion of men

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<sup>58</sup> Gates, *Agriculture and the Civil War*, p. 232.

<sup>59</sup> See, for example, Dirk Hoerder and Scott Walker, 'Immigration Trends in the United States and Canada: A Historical Perspective' in Carlos Teixeira, Wei Li and Audrey Kobayashi, eds., *Immigration Geographies of North American Cities* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 25; Raymond L. Cohn, *Mass Migration Under Sail: European Immigration to the Antebellum United States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 171, 185; for a more general discussion on immigrant life in antebellum America, see James M. Bergquist, *Daily Life in Immigrant America, 1820-1870* (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2008).

serving in the Union army and limited male labour — whether immigrant, American or maturing youth — by the process of elimination, the demographic remaining is women.

Those rural women left on the farm in the wake of the enlistment or conscription of men, however, have warranted little attention. The fact that some families may not have benefitted from a maturing boy or a hired man did not factor into Newton's report, neither did the fact that many farm families had no assistance from any of the forms Newton prescribed, with women instead being the primary source of farm labour. It is undeniable that women played a substantial role in the North's agricultural success during the war both by assuming responsibility for farms and sustaining — indeed helping to *increase* — their productivity.

Newton's failure to acknowledge the role of these women is interesting in light of the attention that rural women were receiving in high-circulating agricultural periodicals like the *American Agriculturist* at the exact moment when he was compiling and publishing his findings. Perhaps this blind spot can be put down to Newton's estrangement from the agricultural industry, given that he was well known for his lack of practical experience and knowledge of farming. Whatever the reason, at the conclusion of the war Isaac Newton submitted his final report as Commissioner, professing his relief at the end of hostilities and praising the work of those left at home during the conflict.<sup>60</sup> Yet again, however, rural women were absent. Less than a year earlier the *American Agriculturist* had published an image celebrating the contribution of rural women to the Union

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<sup>60</sup> Newton, *Report of the Commissioner of Agriculture for the Year 1865*, p. 1.



war effort and promising them that their actions would not be forgotten.<sup>61</sup> It is clear that the actions of rural women had never registered with the government nor that this promise was ever fulfilled. In fact, by 1867 the first records of female war work by Frank Moore, and Linus Pierpont Brockett and Mary Vaughan, failed to mention any experiences of northern farmwomen separate from that of a charity nature, an approach that has been replicated by subsequent historiography ever since.<sup>62</sup>

This chapter has explored the extent to which contemporaries acknowledged rural women and their work in the Civil War. It is evident from this chapter that the experiences of rural women were recognised by some parts of the Northern media, particularly agricultural magazines. Yet this chapter has also highlighted that the current scholarship has taken largely at face value the official reports of Isaac Newton in his capacity as Commissioner of Agriculture, effectively ignoring the part played by rural women in sustaining farms and increasing food yields during the Civil War. If armies march on their stomachs, as the old adage goes, then it was northern farmwomen mostly toiling away without help or modern equipment that helped to keep these stomachs full.

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<sup>61</sup> Nast, 'Farmer Folks in War Time', *American Agriculturist*, p. 16.

<sup>62</sup> Frank Moore, *Women of the War: Their Heroism and Self Sacrifice* (Connecticut: S.S. Scranton & Co, 1866); Linus Pierpont Brockett and Mary Vaughan, *Woman's Work in the Civil War: A Record of Heroism, Patriotism and Patience* (Philadelphia: Zeigler, McCurdy and Co., 1867).

## CONCLUSION

The American Civil War is one of the most widely covered topics in historical scholarship. Maris Vinovskis estimated in 1989 that there were more than fifty thousand books and articles on the conflict, a figure that continues to grow exponentially.<sup>1</sup> Out of these thousands of works, however, only two articles have addressed northern rural women, in particular those of the mid-Atlantic states of Pennsylvania and New York. This thesis extends the discussion to the New England region, with a case study of the long-standing agricultural state of Vermont.

Rural women and their experiences of the war are critical to our understanding of how the conflict affected rural communities, families and women more generally. The failure of Civil War historiography to address how the war affected these women — the majority of Northern women — has resulted in an incomplete and inadequate understanding of the role of women and their involvement in the war. Recognising and exploring the struggles of rural women helps to illuminate the true impact that the Civil war had on women. More importantly, it demonstrates that northern women were active contributors to the Union war effort in a way that has previously gone unnoticed. The strength and ability of the northern agricultural industry to sustain a large army, the home front and Europe through increased exports, has long been seen

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<sup>1</sup> Maris A. Vinovskis, 'Have Social Historians Lost the Civil War? Some Preliminary Demographic Speculations', *The Journal of American History* 76, no.1 (June 1989), p. 34.

as a fundamental factor in the Union's victory over the Confederacy. This success, however, was built in part on the labour of rural women.

This thesis has argued that the symbiotic nature of farm life meant that when Civil War broke out and men enlisted in the army, a farmwoman's way of living was fundamentally altered. In order to ensure their families survival, women had little choice but to assume responsibility for the management of the property and the farm labour usually completed by men. For women like Marinda Silsby, the level of farm work was ameliorated by the presence of hired labour or family members. Labourers, however, were in high demand and short supply, leaving many rural women unable to afford help. If a woman could not acquire assistance, she had to plant, plough, sow, and harvest herself, in addition to her normal farming and domestic tasks. Such commitments were physically gruelling and exhausting; respite was a luxury many could not justify particularly when the stability and survival of their family rested upon consistent labour. The departure of the primary breadwinner had implications beyond labour on the farm. Women also took control over the family's finances, opening up new economic relationships. Unsatisfactory and insufficient state and federal aid, along with the inconsistent and unreliable nature of military pay, however, placed these women in a perilous financial situation. Furthermore these difficulties were exacerbated by feelings of isolation and loneliness that many rural women felt upon the loss of their partner to the Union army.

There was some public acknowledgement of rural women and their sacrifices made in the name of the Union during the war itself. Publications such as the *American Agriculturist* recognised the important contributions of rural women to the economy and the broader war effort and praised farmwomen

accordingly. But this recognition turned out to be short lived. We know virtually nothing about how rural women experienced the war, even less on how they fared in the decades following. Where we have photographs, official records, diaries and letters of soldiers, we have but few scraps of information from farmwomen. According to census records, in the late 1860s Marinda Silsby moved with her family to Iowa where she gave birth to three more children, and where she remained until her death in 1889.<sup>2</sup> The only place Marinda is memorialised is on her tombstone at Little Sioux Cemetery in Iowa.



Tombstone of Marinda Brown Silsby at Little Sioux Cemetery, Little Sioux, Harrison, Iowa (photo courtesy of P. Morrill).

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<sup>2</sup> Year: 1870; Census Place: *Morgan, Harrison, Iowa*; Roll: *M593\_395*; Page: *85B*; Image: *175*; Family History Library Film: *545894*, *1870 United States Federal Census* listed on Ancestry.com.

Meanwhile evidence suggests that Hannah Glines' relationship with her husband deteriorated after his return from the war. In the 1880 census Hannah was still living on the farm in Tunbridge alongside her son, Francis Major and her two youngest children (she had given birth to four more children between 1862 and 1870).<sup>3</sup> Francis Major was listed as head of the household while Hannah held the status of widow. Moses Glines, however, was not dead. Records detailing surviving soldiers in New Hampshire in 1890 list a Moses C. Glines, Vermont-born, who fought in Company E of the 2nd Vermont Regiment, enlisted in April 1861 and discharged for disability in early January 1862.<sup>4</sup> Thus, it is highly probable that Hannah and Moses divorced sometime in the 1870s and that Hannah subsequently told census takers that she was a widow, rather than face the social ignominy of being a divorcee. Hannah Glines never remarried and stayed on the family property until her death in 1907. It is clear that the trials Hannah endured during the war were by no means her last.

More research on this topic is required that is outside the confines of this thesis. A comparative study of rural women across the Northern states, from the settled New England and Mid-Atlantic to the Mid-West and the frontier, for example, would provide an even greater understanding of the role and contribution of rural women in the Civil War. Undertaking such work would further serve to emphasise that women, in their capacity as labourers, were critical figures in ensuring the victory of the North. A farmwoman's life in the mid-nineteenth

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<sup>3</sup> Year: 1880; Census Place: Tunbridge, Orange, Vermont; Roll: 1346; Page: 229D; Family History Library Film: 1255346; Enumeration District: 145, 1880 United States Federal Census listed on Ancestry.com.

<sup>4</sup> *New Hampshire Census 1790-1890* listed on Ancestry.com.

century was laborious and difficult but a farmwoman's life in the Civil War was even worse. It was a sacrifice for the Union that was never returned, work that was never recognised, and rarely acknowledged.

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