

“You must write soon and often”: Southeastern Ohio Women and Their Impact on the  
Civil War

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## Introduction

Fascinated by the book *Gone with the Wind* as a child and prone to letting my imagination run wild with thoughts of the “Old South,” I developed a love for Civil War history that seemed to grow with every mention of the era in school. From there, I enjoyed learning the details and locations of battles and the types of weapons and strategies used. But as I have progressed through my academic career at Malone University, it becomes evident with every class that what I find most intriguing is social history—the history of the people who do not write the history. Studying those who are “ordinary people” sometimes reveals mood and consequences of an era that reviewing only the events of the era cannot fully capture.

At first, and largely due to my “Women in American History” class, the women, or “ladies,” of the planter aristocracy caught my attention. I was certain I should write about the fact that their lives were not so simple, and that they did not merely sit on the porch and attend parties like the Antebellum era life depicted by *Scarlett O’Hara*. However, I was both exasperated and pleased to find that many historians and Civil War enthusiasts have already come to that conclusion. Fortunately, an Ohio history class I took my first year at Malone proved that I also had great passion for Ohio history in addition to that of women. I wanted to weave together the importance of women’s voice in the historical narrative and the uniqueness of the Southeastern Ohio experience, and it just so happened that my passion for the Civil War provided a period for my study of the combined two histories. This research seeks to explore the lives and roles of Appalachian women, particularly those from Southeastern Ohio, during the late-Antebellum and Civil War eras.

It has only been in the last half century that women's contributions during the Civil War, whether as nurses or even spies, have been the subject of scholarly research. However, women on the home front also contributed to the Union's efforts through other avenues. Letters, their "typical" communication with male loved ones away at battle, were one such avenue. Through these means of correspondence, women could express their concern, love, and support to the soldiers in their lives—caring expressions on a level the men were unlikely to receive within their own regiments. The tendency for women to be relational and community-focused allowed them to unite in support of the same men they had been writing to and ultimately form associations within their communities that helped them and their loved ones bear some of the wartime tragedy that disrupted their lives. Previously entrenched social groups sparked wartime partnerships amongst women that enabled them to produce supplies and outfit local soldiers quickly, thus adding to the comfort women provided to soldiers through written communication.

### **Literature Review**

The Civil War is one of the most popular and well-researched topics in American history, and the literature on battle strategy, motives, and people involved is extensive. Women, on the other hand, have historically not commanded much attention in that narrative. Throughout the last few decades, historians, independent scholars, and even public educators have attempted to highlight the contributions of women on a larger scale. Many books and articles exist that offer a plethora of information regarding the role women play in the larger historical narrative, and how some great women dared valiantly to challenge social norms. One such book on women's history is *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War*, in which Drew

Gilpin Faust describes the daily lives and motivations of elite Southern women throughout the Civil War based upon their own diaries, letters, and works. Faust notes the strides toward independence women made during the war and the way they detached themselves somewhat from the Confederacy and men in their lives.<sup>1</sup> While Faust and others draw conclusions related to women in the Union or Confederacy overall, this research explores the lesser known lives of regional women and their unique ability to support soldiers because of their firmly established networks.

While this study does not assume to be an exhaustive examination of women in Southeastern Ohio during the 1860s, it does provide evidence of the impact seemingly ordinary women had in the Civil War. As in many histories, “common” people from Appalachia, and certainly the lives of Appalachian women, have been ignored or under-examined in literature on women’s history. The mundane becomes vitally important in history, but it is often little noted until multiple voices over the years deem it valuable. A review of Faust’s *Mothers of Invention* refers to the nuances in “analyzing a war that was fought largely by volunteers from both sections, by ‘ordinary’ Americans who left behind families and friends whose support efforts were *essential* to battlefield successes” [my emphasis].<sup>2</sup> These details lend meaning to the seemingly “mundane” lives of Americans on the field and at home. Further testament to the contributions of homebound Northern women during wartime comes from Judith Giesberg, who identifies

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<sup>1</sup> Jean H. Baker and Drew Gilpin Faust. "Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War." *The American Historical Review* 102, no. 1 (1997): 191. Accessed March 4, 2019. doi:10.2307/2171410.

<sup>2</sup> Nina Silber. "The Crisis of Confederate Womanhood." *Reviews in American History* 25, no. 3 (1997): 422-26. Accessed March 4, 2019. doi:10.1353/rah.1997.0083.

how they “combined support from local authorities with that from kin to keep farms and families functioning.”<sup>3</sup> This theme is evident among many Appalachian women during the war, as well. Southeastern Ohio women similarly depended upon their community support networks and local officials to manage the shifts of a wartime economy without men present to “run the farm.” Jane Turner Censer deems Giesberg’s research necessary in women’s history and argues that perhaps “the activities and beliefs of rural Northern women merit still greater attention.”<sup>4</sup> Over time, as women’s history becomes a prevalent category of study, women’s historian Laurel Thatcher Ulrich’s words resonate even more: “It is not as easy as it once was to dismiss domestic concerns as ‘trivia.’”<sup>5</sup>

### **Theoretical Underpinnings**

“Domestic concerns,” to borrow from Ulrich, refers to those tasks and roles involved with life within the home. Typically, women were responsible for tending to the family needs—cooking, cleaning, and childcare, among others. Antebellum and wartime women, like their colonial predecessors, generally accepted the concept that men were the dominant gender for biological reasons. Men’s physical strength and “self reliance which enables one to assert full rights” prevailed as the stronger over women’s perceived frailty. As gender theorists and feminists historians look back on these stereotypes, the

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<sup>3</sup> Jane Turner Censer and Judith Giesberg. "Army at Home: Women and the Civil War on the Northern Home Front". *The American Historical Review* 115, no. 3 (2010): 844-45. Accessed March 4, 2019. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23302993>.

<sup>4</sup> Censer, 845.

<sup>5</sup> Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, 1938-. *A Midwife's Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on Her Diary, 1785-1812*. (New York: Knopf: Distributed by Random House, 1990), pg. 27.

evidence suggests masculinity and femininity are ideas constructed by legal and religious notions in society and are rooted deeply in American thought.<sup>6</sup> Specifically, in the Antebellum North, women were typically viewed as the loving mothers or caretakers and the role models who were socially adept, while men were viewed as the workers who must produce to provide food, shelter, and wealth for their families. Overall, women differ from men, and those differences led them to play unique roles in private and public life, despite how systematically disadvantaged they might be.<sup>7</sup>

Another theory that factors into the study of women's history is known as Standpoint Theory, which suggests that those on the margins of society may have a "clearer vantage point than those with status and power."<sup>8</sup> In this case, the standpoint being studied is that of women, who could possibly offer a clearer view of life in Ohio during the Civil War than their more "powerful" male counterparts. According to Sandra Harding and Julia T. Wood, "gender is a system of meanings that sculpts individuals' standpoints by positioning most males and females in different material, social, and symbolic circumstances."<sup>9</sup> For the women of Southeast Ohio during the war, the challenges and perspectives they experienced vary from those of men from that region, especially since a significant number of men were away at war.

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<sup>6</sup> Linda K. Kerber, Jane Sherron De Hart, Cornelia Hughes Dayton, and Judy Tzu-Chun Wu. 2016. *Women's America: refocusing the past Volume 1. Volume 1*, Introduction p. 4.

<sup>7</sup> Kerber, et. al, 4.

<sup>8</sup> Em Griffin, Andrew Ledbetter, and Glenn Sparks. "Standpoint Theory of Sandra Harding & Julia T. Wood." In *A First Look at Communication Theory*. 10th ed. (New York, NY: McGraw-Hill Education, 2019), 398.

<sup>9</sup> Griffin, et. al, 397.



Standpoint theory suggests that even among women, not all share the same social location or status. My research of Appalachian women revealed that many of them were farmers' wives and mothers, who seemed to have a deep desire and the means to join other women in associations. Standpoint theory also notes the difference in how men and women communicate, with the masculine community using speech to "accomplish tasks, assert self, and gain power," while the feminine community uses it to "build relationships, include others, and show responsiveness."<sup>10</sup> Concepts like "connection" and "belonging" emerge as important among women at home during the war, and the words of the men writing home seem to follow the accomplishment of tasks and self-assertion standard—at least when they are communicating with other men. To understand the way men's and women's lives diverged during the Civil War period, it is helpful to reference the background and customs of Southeastern Ohio at the time.

Women's historian Mary Beth Norton agrees. Norton, a proponent of the "from the side" view of history, serves as a professor of American History at Cornell University and past president of the American Historical Association. She recently wrote "History on the Diagonal," for her American Historical Association's Presidential Address, in which she discusses her advocacy for "asking historical questions in new ways—from the side, as it were, or from the standpoint of 'the other'."<sup>11</sup> Norton also admires the recent studies historians have conducted by exploring the past through the lenses of race and

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<sup>10</sup> Griffin, et. al, 399.

<sup>11</sup> Mary Beth Norton, "AHA Presidential Address: History on the Diagonal." *American Historical Review*, February 2019, 1.

class, but she notes that “even in such studies, gender has often been elided or ignored.”<sup>12</sup> Her recent charge for a more immersive and central exploration of women’s history exhibits the need for gender studies and historical perspectives beyond the “great men” of an era.

### **Southeastern Ohio and the Women Who Lived There**

When European Americans first moved to settle permanently in Ohio, they sought the open, southeastern share of the state—primarily Marietta because of its accessibility to the settlers. These pioneers acquired land previously inhabited by Native Americans that was mostly forested and hilly, but the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains also gave way to river valleys full of rich soil.<sup>13</sup> Ohio became an ideal place for settlers in the Northwest Territory because it offered suitable farmland and access to major rivers, like the Muskingum and Scioto rivers—both of which empty into the Ohio-Mississippi river valleys. The land near the rivers in this portion of the state proved exceptionally fertile, and it was from this foundation of good land that the economy of Southeastern Ohio was able to prosper.

Eventually, the settlers in the area found other crafts and niches within their local economy, but farming provided an immediate form of subsistence because they lived on such fruitful ground. Soon, corn, grain, wheat, oats, cattle and swine emerged as both necessary and profitable goods, both for the early settlers and those that came years after.

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<sup>12</sup> Norton, 2.

<sup>13</sup> Douglas R. Hurt, *The Ohio Frontier: Crucible of the Old Northwest, 1720-1830*. (Indiana University Press, 1996), 14. 4; George Knepper, *Ohio and Its People* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1989), 4.

The region became known for being a largely agrarian society from there, and so farming, trade, and sale of those crops characterized the employment and daily life of those residing there. From 1840 to 1880, industrialization and the beginning of more factory-based labor drove thousands of people into the nation's cities searching for work. In Ohio, cities like Cleveland and Cincinnati, along with other urban areas in the state, thrived upon this shift to mechanized labor. However, most of Southeastern Ohio maintained its rooted dependence upon and success from agricultural endeavors, and even into the present to some degree.

While the region's agricultural economy thrived, women, too, participated in household production, even if their work was "differentiated" from their husbands and sons.<sup>14</sup> Even prior to the Antebellum era, women were expected to assist men in the planting and sale of crops in addition to their usual jobs of caring for the children, making clothing, gardening, and milking the cows. Although more prevalent among the New England settlers of the Western Reserve, women often milked the cows in areas like Marietta and Belpre.<sup>15</sup> One Ohio frontiersman even commented, "there is nothing so healthy for young ladies, in particular, as to be engaged at milking a few minutes each morning before sunrise."<sup>16</sup> Women worked long hours every day, usually starting with the sunrise and ending with putting the children in bed. Rural life's difficult nature required both sexes to contribute. Cooking, for example, was women's work, but the

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<sup>14</sup> Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, "'Friendly Neighbor': Social Dimensions of Daily Work in Northern Colonial New England," *Feminist Studies* 6:2 (Summer 1980), 393.

<sup>15</sup> Hurt, 230-231.

<sup>16</sup> Ruth Schwartz Cowan, *More Work for Mother: The Ironies of Household Technology from the Open Hearth to the Microwave*. (New York: Basic Books, Inc, 1983), 24.

preparation of “tools and foodstuffs” for meals was viewed as men’s work.<sup>17</sup> Similar instances occurred with the crops, because men usually harvested, and women made beer or spun linen from the yields. This shared responsibility between men and women provided means of survival and sometimes increased the<sup>89</sup> standard of living for the household. However, it did not eliminate the trials of farm life in the region. Belpre’s Sophia Barker Browning spoke of the hardship of being a farmer’s wife in this era: “Take it all in all the life of a farmer’s wife is much harder than any other class of females in America.”<sup>18</sup>

Many women in Southeastern Ohio during the 1840-1860-time frame experienced a similar life to Browning’s. Another Southeastern Ohioan, Eleanor Kelley, describes her everyday practices and tasks in some detail in her letters to her son throughout the 1850s-60s, relaying to him that she had been gathering chestnuts or that she would send him some butter but she “is so long gathering a churning it is not good when she does get it.”<sup>19</sup> Making butter and cheese was another female task that remained as such throughout the pioneer days and into the Antebellum years. This sentiment echoed from Ohio’s first settlers to the onset of the Civil War. Kelley also mentions going into town to find ingredients or items to aid her in making clothing. The work of a woman in such an agrarian society during the Antebellum and wartime periods was unique, but often

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<sup>17</sup> Cowan, 24.

<sup>18</sup> Tamara Gaskell Miller, “Seeking to Strengthen the Ties of Friendship: Women and Community in Southeastern Ohio, 1788-1850.” PhD diss., (Brandeis University, 1994), 81.

<sup>19</sup> Letter from Eleanor Kelley to Joseph Aplin Martin, undated, The Joseph Aplin Martin Collection, Mahan Center for Archives and Special Collections, Ohio University Libraries.

all-encompassing and never finished as she aided her husband and family with household and farm chores.

Southeastern Ohio proved to be unique in other cultural ways, as well. Multiple counties located in this region are part of Appalachia—Washington, Athens, Meigs, Ross, Scioto, and Vinton counties to name a few—and the Southeastern portion of the state shared many characteristics of Appalachian culture. Little research thus far has been done on lives of Appalachia women north of the Ohio River, however. In much of Ohio, a strong push toward mechanized means of labor and the growth of new cities as centers of population revealed the state's expanding nature—both in size of population and in pursuit of industry. However, Southeastern Ohio was a special case because it remained primarily agrarian and true to the Appalachian region, which included areas loyal to the Confederacy.

People living in Ohio's Appalachian counties before and during the Civil War were a mixed group—most at least nominally supported the Union's ideology, but some sympathized with the Confederacy. These sympathizers ranged from those with family members living in the South to Copperheads, or Peace Democrats, who did not agree that the federal government had a right to limit slavery.<sup>20</sup> Abolitionist tendencies tended to be weaker overall in this region, and soldiers from these areas sometimes wrote of their

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<sup>20</sup> Peace Democrats, commonly known as "Copperheads," sympathized with slaveholders who were often family members in the South and opposed the war due to their own economic ties with the South. Furthermore, these Peace Democrats feared the freed slaves from Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation would flood the Northern job market, creating competition with whites. "Copperheads." Copperheads - Ohio History Central. Accessed March 19, 2019. <http://www.ohiohistorycentral.org/w/Copperheads>.

disapproval of freeing the slaves entirely.<sup>21</sup> Even women's associations in Southeastern Ohio counties specifically "steered clear of issues like moral reform, anti-slavery, and women's rights."<sup>22</sup> These women did not participate in associational activity to expand their roles in society the way women in larger cities or Northern parts of the state were at the time. Due to the mixed nature of cultural norms and people, Southeastern Ohio seemed a unique insight into the lives of women on the U.S. home front compared to their Northern counterparts.

### **Meeting Joseph Aplin Martin and the Value of Written Correspondence**

Once the Civil War began and men went off to battle, the lives of both men and women began to change. Before, families all lived in a shared space, where duties were clear and routine with few interruptions to daily life. Now, almost all the men in the area had left for Camp Zanesville or Camp Chase in Columbus to assemble into more than 260 regiments that Ohioans formed for the Union army. President Lincoln's call in 1861 for volunteers sparked large amounts of support in the state of Ohio, and about 311,000 Ohioans served in the army during the war out of about 582,000 males ages 15-50 who resided in the state at the time.<sup>23</sup> Over 53% of Ohio's males within that age range fought

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<sup>21</sup> Martin Collection, October 29, 1862.

<sup>22</sup> Miller, 219.

<sup>23</sup> US Census Bureau. "1860 Census: Population of the United States." 1860 Census: Population of the United States. January 16, 2018. Accessed March 20, 2019.

<https://www.census.gov/library/publications/1864/dec/1860a.html>.; and "Civil War Facts," Ohio History Connection,

<https://www.ohiohistory.org/learn/collections/history/history-blog/2011/april-2011/ohio-in-the-civil-war-interesting-facts>

in the war, which does not include the fact that “colored” men could not serve until at least 1862. The war immediately captured the attention of the entire state, and many families had to quickly adapt. Written communication emerged as one of the most significant areas of adjustment once the war began.

Where women could before simply speak to their husbands, brothers, and cousins before the outbreak of the war, they now had to write to them as the men chased the “Rebels” throughout Appalachia. Letter writing was soldiers’ only way of communicating between the battlefield and home, and letters were a high priority among authorities, second only to military telegrams. *The Journal of American History* quotes an Army of the Potomac soldier: “Since I have been in the service, there is nothing more interesting to pass away the many lonely hours than to read and write letters.”<sup>24</sup> Indeed, this was the case for numerous soldiers during the war, and during long hours of waiting for orders at camp, they often wrote home to both immediate and extended family. When the correspondence between battlefield and home front grew scarce or was lost in the delivery process, it is evident in the next set of letters how both parties felt desperation to transmit a message to a loved one. Regardless of handwriting form or standard of literacy, people recognized that written communication was necessary both from the war front and home front. News from home, regimental movement, business transactions,

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<sup>24</sup> Ervin L. Jordan, Jr., and Christopher Hager. "I Remain Yours: Common Lives in Civil War Letters." *Journal of American History* 105, no. 3 (December 1, 2018): 17-53. doi:10.4159/9780674981805-002.; All primary diary entries and letters are quoted in their original spelling and grammar to reflect period literacy and character.

grief, and joys could only be represented through letters, making them a vital part of the war effort and a way to ease the pain of separation.

An example of this correspondence lies in the wartime communication of Joseph Aplin Martin, a Guernsey County native who fought with the 97<sup>th</sup> Ohio Volunteer Infantry.<sup>25</sup> As one who is perhaps representative of Southeastern Ohio and its people, Joseph Aplin Martin reveals many insights about this region during the Civil War. Martin's regiment was organized on September 2, 1862 at Zanesville, Ohio, and was largely composed of his friends and acquaintances from his hometown of Claysville. The regiment fought in only three battles prior to Martin's death in 1864—the Battle of Chaplin Hills, the Battle of Stones River, and the Battle of Missionary Ridge.<sup>26</sup> Born in 1843, Martin would have been 21 years old at the time of his death in a Tennessee hospital. A poet writing to Kelley's mother after his death mentioned that Martin was his mother's "loved only son" and expressed how Martin died not of the sword, but of wounds after a battle, and that he died nobly for his country. In his own writing to his

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<sup>25</sup> Martin Collection.

<sup>26</sup> Joseph Aplin Martin embarked with the 97<sup>th</sup> O.V.I on a campaign chasing General Braxton Bragg of the Confederacy through Kentucky and into Tennessee. Proving steadfast in the Battle of Stones River (also known as the Battle of Murfreesboro) in 1863, his regiment moved forward with the Tullahoma campaign near Chattanooga, TN. This campaign was dangerous but overall successful, and the regiment, along with others, began to move south through Tennessee as part of General Sherman's Atlanta campaign. Somewhere in skirmishes along the way, Martin was wounded by a gunshot to the leg and died in the U.S. General Hospital at Tullahoma on July 2, 1864. He was first buried in the cemetery at Murfreesboro, but his remains were returned to New Concord, OH—near his hometown of Claysville—in 1866; U.S. General Hospital at Tullahoma, Martin Collection, July 30, 1864; and "Mrs. Ellen Kelly, A Soldier's Mother," Martin Collection.



mother, Martin addresses the status of the regiment on the war front, his political beliefs about the war, and the tasks of everyday life that connect him to his home.

Over the course of many letters, Martin expressed discontent and boredom with the lack of battle involvement seen by his regiment. Writing to his mother on November 9, 1862, Martin said, “I guess I that I had a chance to see good land if there was any for I marched clear across the whole state (Kentucky) and feel like marching across this one (Tennessee) if it will do any good.”<sup>27</sup> Later in the same letter, he again remarked about the constant movement of his regiment, writing “I don’t believe that there is any rest for the old 97th.” Due to his regiment’s marching-and-waiting nature during the war, Martin had time to write his mother rather frequently. His mother, Eleanor Kelley, remarried after the death of her first husband and took care of the home with efficiency while he was away. She expresses her concern for her son at length in the very few letters of hers that remain. Martin had a wide network of cousins and other extended family, as well as local acquaintances and friends, who wrote to him or his mother about his health and success in the military.

Throughout the exchange of letters between Martin and his mother, he often reported on the health and location of men from Claysville. 9 He notes that she specifically requested to know about all the “boys” from the area before he left for the war, presumably to pass word along to other concerned families and the community. On November 30, 1862, he writes, “the Claysville boys are all in tolerable health,” but also asks Eleanor for pills to give to a friend from their hometown who is with him.<sup>28</sup> Again,

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<sup>27</sup> Martin Collection, November 9, 1862.

<sup>28</sup> Martin Collection, November 30, 1862.

on December 15, 1862, he writes, “the Claysville boys are all well with the exception of John Vessels.”<sup>29</sup> Later in the war, Martin writes in 1863 that the “Claysville” boys want and need some supplies, among which were tobacco, thread, envelopes, dried beef, and pepper, to name a few. In June of the same year, he notes that a friend and fellow resident of Claysville received his box with pills in it and he will soon recover.<sup>30</sup> Letters home provided the perfect opportunity to ask for provisions, especially at times when the regiment was staying somewhere with limited availability of “extra” food. A final example of letters that kept up with local soldiers on the war front was on August 8, 1863, when Martin wrote that he “saw in the Guernsey Times that the 62<sup>nd</sup> regt had been in a pretty hard fight and several of the Claysville boys were hurt.”<sup>31</sup> Much of the communication between Martin and his mother served as a means of explaining the state of those from Claysville and making sure those on the home front were alerted should one of those soldiers need aid.

Another subject Martin and Mrs. Kelley often wrote about was that of the war and its politics. This connection was important because the only way Martin could receive clear and relatively accurate details of events taking place in Washington was from his mother or a newspaper, the latter being something that was hard to access. Martin was immensely loyal to the Union but opposed emancipation of slaves because he feared the freed men would claim Northern jobs and take opportunities from white men. For example, Martin made it clear in his letter on October 29, 1862 that he opposed the

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<sup>29</sup> Martin Collection, December 15, 1862.

<sup>30</sup> Martin Collection, June 19, 1863.

<sup>31</sup> Martin Collection, August 8, 1863.

Emancipation Proclamation following talks of its possibility, and even wrote to his mother that all the “colored people” from the North should be “put where they ought to be, and that is under a Master.”<sup>32</sup> Here, Martin echoes the sentiments of many in his regiment and the attitude of many in the North who feared freedom for blacks also meant loss and control of their own employment. As letters continue during the most grotesque periods of the war, opinions are often conveyed in harsh tones from Martin and it becomes obvious how much he detests the “Copperheads” in the North who he believes will prolong the war.

A telling example of Martin voicing his political stance on the Peace Democrats appears on June 19, 1863. He writes to Eleanor, “I want you to tell Al Sims for me that if he votes for [Peace Democrat Clement] Vallindigham that he is no better than the traitorous old Devil himself.” Martin spends another few lines degrading Vallindigham, and then at the end of his letter urges his mother, “Give my respects to James Barnett for I will bet that he wont vote for Vallindigham.”<sup>33</sup> Martin writes his views to his mother

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<sup>32</sup> Martin Collection, October 29, 1862.

<sup>33</sup> Clement Vallindigham, whose name was misspelled in the letters by Joseph Aplin Martin, was an Ohio Congressman who was best known for his opposition of the war and sympathy toward the Confederacy. As a strong “Copperhead,” Vallindigham spoke out against an order that denoted Confederate sympathizers in Ohio as treasonous, and supposedly urged his supporters to openly resist the Union General who declared the order. In May of 1863, Vallindigham was banished to the Confederacy, where he continued to oppose the Union’s war efforts before fleeing to Canada. Martin writes against Vallindigham and any that would support him, but what Martin is referencing when he urges against voting for Vallindigham is unclear, since he was already banished and out of Congress by the time Martin penned the letter. This possibly exemplifies the speed at which news traveled from the home front to the war front, and vice versa. Martin Collection, June 19, 1863; and Ohio History Central, “Copperheads.”

perhaps due to his understanding that the only way to reach his community is through their letters back and forth. He is charging his mother with the task of passing his opinions along to others at home as an attempt to still exert some influence over community affairs. His mother's communication of these ideas would carry less weight than his own, but she is his only way to publicly convey the need for more support of the war at home.

In this same letter, though, Martin also expresses his desires and those of his fellow soldiers to be released from the exhausting and disturbing struggles of war. He explains that "if those at home would come out and bear the hardships of a soldier's life a year or so they would be in for arming the colored people and the dogs too if they could."<sup>34</sup> He is frustrated with the people at home not giving enough support to the Administration's efforts to crush the rebellion. By this time, the overall mindset of the Union Army was to stop the rebels at any cost. Though not from the Southeastern part of the state, Ohio native Ulysses S. Grant even wrote to his wife after the Battle of Shiloh in April of 1862 that he "gave up all idea of saving the Union except by complete conquest."<sup>35</sup> Complaints and concerns like those of Joseph Aplin Martin were shared by many in the Union army, and perhaps the best and only outlet for those concerns was through written correspondence home, with hope that word would spread and give way to changed minds.

A third, and perhaps most common, link between Martin and his mother through their letters to one another lies in the connection to everyday life at home. In the letters

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<sup>34</sup> Martin Collection, June 19, 1863.

<sup>35</sup> Derick Schilling, "Letters to Julia." *The Civil War Monitor*, Winter 2018, 40-44.

between them, Martin can be somewhat involved in and procure a knowledge of home life while he is at war. His mother can also know of his daily life even while he is traveling with the 97<sup>th</sup>. The first letter he writes Eleanor from camp is entirely about him attending church as he should and the denomination of the preacher. He is sure to mention he has obtained a copy of the “testament” from church and he already read six chapters.<sup>36</sup> He reported to his mother that he went to church, which could be merely all he had to write about, or it could be that he wanted to make sure his mother knew he was doing as he was “supposed to.” This could also be an effort to make his mother proud. When it comes to reminding soldiers of home, Martin actually boasts to his mother in May of 1863, “I am getting pretty good over a wash tub, I think that I can make about as clean clothes as any woman.”<sup>37</sup> The letter Eleanor sent in reply no longer exists, but this comment to his mother was clearly a way for Martin to relate to her and his regular life at home even amidst the seriousness and stress of war and does so in a way that he takes pride in his laundry abilities. This desire to prove he can perform routine tasks is something one might typically expect from a son writing to his mother.

Furthermore, Martin’s letters to his mother were sometimes an outlet for him to convey his feelings about the war or about his present situation. For instance, one morning in November in 1863, Martin and a few others from his regiment went on picket and found four “rebel conscripts” that immediately put their guns down and surrendered to them. After learning of more Confederates coming and promptly firing on them, one of them got scared, fell, and cut himself on a rock. Martin then writes, “poor fellow was

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<sup>36</sup> Martin Collection, August 17, 1862.

<sup>37</sup> Martin Collection, May 3, 1863.

scared nearly to death.” Then, upon observing one of the captured Confederate’s ration of corn bread for an entire day, he notes, “I know that I could have eat three times as much at one meal.”<sup>38</sup> The Confederates told the 97<sup>th</sup> they need not try to starve out the Confederacy because it was already going to reach mass starvation on its own and they informed the regiment of the already-staggering desertion rates. In this letter, Martin shares this story with his mother and writes with sympathy for the rebel soldiers—one which he was not convinced the other “Claysville boys” shared. The letters exchanged between Martin and his mother allowed him the space to process his anger, frustration, and fear during his time at war, but also helped him express a sort of empathy and sympathy for the enemy when such emotion was never made known in camp—possibly due to peer pressure to be “tough,” or perhaps because it was believed to be disloyal or weak behavior.

All these instances exemplify the ways in which soldier’s communication with the women back home, especially in Joseph Aplin Martin and Eleanor Kelley’s case, was beneficial to them while on the march or at war. This correspondence gave them a place to vent, a place to relate, and a place to connect with home when they felt most unfamiliar and alone. Notably, in Martin’s case, he communicated differently when writing to his mother or his female cousin than he did to the men in his life. Most of the men in his life, namely the “Claysville boys,” were around him every day and in a similar situation. They were all in a regiment together and constantly close by, so not much written communication to men was necessary. But when writing to Joseph Kelley, a presumed relation but not a defined one, or J.B. Walker, whose tie to Martin is also

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<sup>38</sup> Martin Collection, November 19, 1863.

unknown, he writes differently than he does to his mother. When John W. Perry, a friend of Martin's, writes a joint letter with Eleanor, the two write about totally different subjects—one focusing heavily on Martin and his welfare, and the other on the war, itself.

Because Southeastern Ohio was so dependent on its agriculture, the men at war had not only their present selves to think of, but of their families' well-being for years to come, depending on crop production and prices in their absence. Martin rarely discussed these topics with his mother through their letters. This could be due to Martin trusting his mother to handle those affairs, given her experience living without a husband and her persistent hard work in and out of the house. It could also be because the farming and crops, at least on the market level, were typically handled by men in the Antebellum period and he may have just not thought to address those concerns to a female as much as to a male. Upon writing to Joseph Kelley, Martin begins hassling Kelley about the price for corn and oats. He argues he usually produces about 100 bushels of corn, and he heard it is worth 65 cents a bushel, but Kelley told him it was only 55 or 60 cents per bushel. He disagrees and thinks his corn should be worth more, so he writes Kelley specifically for business reasons.<sup>39</sup>

Again, when writing to J.B. Walker in early 1863, Martin writes about how he is taking a liking to “soldiering” and how some boys would love to be discharged but he is “not that sick of it yet.”<sup>40</sup> He also tells Walker about the corn they loot from near Nashville and the way they take it to the mill in town. To Walker, Martin tells only of

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<sup>39</sup> Martin Collection, June 19, 1863.

<sup>40</sup> Martin Collection, February 9, 1863.

how he is glad to be a soldier and about the material success of his regiment—even if the crops are stolen from the enemy. A final example of Martin corresponding with a male in his life is when John W. Perry co-writes a letter to Martin along with Eleanor Kelley, in which Eleanor addresses her own aging appearance (she sends him her likeness), some of the news in crop prices around town, and addresses the women gathering that evening for a soldiers' aid society. She writes regarding agricultural business to Martin, but he does not write of this business to her. Perry, on the other hand, writes quickly of his discharge due to injury and how he hopes to go back to the front by the next week and then remarks that the only men left around their hometown are all Copperheads. Before he goes, Perry says, "I have not time to write as there is not less than 2 doz girls here. I want to talk with some of them a few minutes."<sup>41</sup>

As indicated in the content of Joseph Aplin Martin's letters, a possible difference exists in what a soldier writes home to women in his life versus the men in his life. Martin is but one soldier out of thousands from Ohio that served, so it is unlikely that this is the case across all Union soldiers, but the differences present themselves as significant enough to suggest there is distinctiveness in male and female correspondence. Overall, the evidence from Martin and his mother demonstrates the importance of communication with home during the war and the way men relied on the women's letters from home as a sense of security even when the war posed threats and depressing circumstances. Even just after arriving at Camp Zanesville, Martin wrote his mother to say, "You do not know how much good it does us boys to get a letter from home...it tickles them nearly to death."<sup>42</sup> Though not a tangible effort by the women on the battlefield or within the camp,

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<sup>41</sup> Eleanor Kelley and John W. Perry, Martin Collection, June 30, 1863.

<sup>42</sup> Martin Collection, September 17, 1862.



the support offered through faithful and consistent letters to soldiers aided the men in ways beyond just knowing crop prices or asking for supplies—it helped keep them grounded. The letters provided a measure of comfort to those on the battlefield and those at home. Eleanor Kelley and other Southeastern Ohio women, alongside their consistent letter writing and tending to the home, were busy with other activities, as well. A woman’s sense of self extended beyond her role as a housewife, and often into her associations with friends and female kin.

### **Women During the War and a Sense of Place through Friendship**

Women’s communication with men at war gave soldiers an emotional connection to home, but the ability of women to bear the consequences of such a conflict and utilize their communities to contribute also stemmed from “average” home life. In one of the few works about Southeastern Ohio women during the war, “Women and Community in Southeastern Ohio” between 1788-1850, Tamara Gaskell Miller explores the ways in which women’s kinship ties with one another led them to experience comfort and organize support for the larger community in times of crisis. This concept carried into the Antebellum period and eventually into the war, because women relied upon these networks to survive and support their volunteers. Miller’s study of women in Washington County, and specifically Marietta, suggests that bonds of kinship were vitally important to a woman’s sense of self in Antebellum Ohio. Women were “covered” by men in their ~~property rights, income, legal~~ issues, and inheritance.<sup>43</sup> Therefore, the only parts of life a

<sup>43</sup> The English had the established view of “coverture” since the 1600s. This meant that “When an Englishwoman married, her husband became the owner of all movable things she possessed and of all the property or wages she might earn during their marriage.” Essentially, the concept that a woman was “covered” by her husband was to have her legal identity and very being incorporated in his and performs

woman could often control were her relationships with friends and family. According to a local woman of the era, Lucy Woodbridge, “My whole enjoyment and almost my existence depends upon my friends.”<sup>44</sup>

Strengthening bonds with their relations gave women an “alternative source of material and emotional support,” but it also “mitigated the inequalities of the gender system and improved the quality of their lives.”<sup>45</sup> The lives of men and women differed greatly in the Antebellum period, and women especially were the “moral guardians” of homes—often being expected to instill virtue and piety into those under their influence. While men worked in the fields and dealt with finances and women worked primarily inside the home, all major family decisions were typically made by the men. Women seemed to grasp tightly to their sense of community with other women to create an important niche for themselves within larger society. When war came, and nearly all the able men left to fight the rebels, wives, daughters, mothers, sisters and cousins alike found themselves reliant upon the communities they had built to keep balance with their new responsibilities. So important were these ties that when young Catharine Barker returned to Southeast Ohio to visit friends and family after a long trip to Iowa, she was given 97 quilt squares for an “album quilt.” Each friend’s square she made was purple and white with her name sewn in the middle, and each relative’s square was scarlet and white, again with her name sewn in the center. Scarlet and white squares went in the

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everything under his “protection” and “cover.” This idea carried into the Antebellum era, even if to a lesser degree, which meant women in Southeastern Ohio would have experienced this form of domestic relations.

Kerber, et. al, 84.

<sup>44</sup> Miller, 35.

<sup>45</sup> Miller, 36.

middle of the quilt to symbolize kin, and purple and white squares surrounded it as a larger social network.<sup>46</sup> Barker had enough squares to make four quilts, which serves as a testament to the strength of female bonds in Southeast Ohio in the 1850s. The necessity of those bonds, though, was not fully displayed until they were tested in the tumultuous home front conditions during the war.

Once the Civil War began, the call for civilian support was immediate and widespread. The Civil War can and has been classified as a total war, referring to its reach into not just the military, but the life of every ordinary citizen. Women built on their kinship ties and participation in women's societies to contribute to the war effort. For example, newspapers across the state, including a few entries from the *Chillicothe Gazette* in Ross County, captured the needs of the army and the help needed from women. On October 22, 1861, the Gazette published in the paper a call for woolen socks for the army. It featured a step-by-step guide to knitting the socks, including details down to the number of stitches and exactly what color the yarn should be. On another page of the same paper, a story titled "An Appeal to the Ladies" appears. It comes from Major General Rowe of Chillicothe, asking women "to knit a good strong pair of woolen socks and gloves for the use of our volunteer soldiers."<sup>47</sup> He writes on, noting "A moment's reflection will show the immense amount of suffering, which a little labor, timely bestowed in this way, by our ladies, will save. I therefore trust that they will respond to the call with their accustomed promptness, and at as early a day as possible." Appeals like this one became commonplace in newspapers throughout the United States, and women answered the call.

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<sup>46</sup> Miller, 66.

<sup>47</sup> James Rowe, "An Appeal to the Ladies." *Chillicothe Gazette*, October 22, 1861.

Within clear networks women possessed in each of their localities, the mobilization of women toward supporting the war effort occurred rather naturally. Women in Washington County and other Southeastern Ohio counties had already formed several women's associations dedicated to various aspects of society, namely the Female Missionary Society, the Female Tract Society, and the Female Friendly Society and Prayer Meeting. While all three of these had religious roots and little to do with wartime circumstances, the key to these societies was the intersection it provided of women in the same community and the friendships formed from them. Miller references the number of women involved in more than one society or association, and how these constant meetings with the same women fostered a sense of togetherness. Nancy Woloch, a Research Scholar at Barnard College of Columbia University, writes in detail about similar women's associations, noting that "Since the only pre-requisites for membership were piety and motherhood, rather than time, funds, or local clout, maternal societies involved a broad social range of women, especially from rural and small-town constituencies."<sup>48</sup>

Overall, "overlapping memberships reinforced the ties between these organizations, and between the women involved."<sup>49</sup> With so many duties at home, women from smaller, rural communities gathered and developed local unity largely due to their inability to travel. The difficult daily life of farmers' wives prevented long travels or more progressive civic work, but associations gave women "an outlet for their skills, a

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<sup>48</sup> Woloch, Nancy. *Women and the American experience*. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1984), 169.

<sup>49</sup> Miller, 221.

community of peers, and a foothold outside the home.”<sup>50</sup> Although they did not seek reform or a more public role in society whatsoever, the women’s societies in these areas built a place within their respective communities where women helped each other through grief, suffering, and difficulty so much so that they were able to direct their attention to helping the Union from home.

From Ross County alone, stories of devoted women’s societies created for the betterment of soldiers’ conditions emerge. In a speech by Pat Medert, Ross County Historical Society’s archivist, she outlines what she has found regarding this effort. According to Medert, a ladies’ group formed in Chillicothe soon after the war began. One afternoon, sixty of those women “met at Odd Fellows Hall with seven sewing machines and nearly completed ninety red flannel shirts.” They collected money to make “bedsacks” and sent freshly canned preserves to military hospitals. When the 73<sup>rd</sup> regiment needed instruments for its band, the women organized concerts, dinners, and fairs to raise the money. This group called itself the Ladies Union Relief Society, and adopted the motto: “Not words, but deeds.”<sup>51</sup> They certainly delivered on this motto, because they also sparked a movement in Chillicothe where women in nearly every household started making homemade flags<sup>52</sup> to show their support of the war effort. This organization of women was only one of several in Southeastern Ohio and throughout the state.

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<sup>50</sup> Woloch, 170.

<sup>51</sup> Pat Medert, Interview by Marina Rarick. Chillicothe, OH, March 2, 2019.

<sup>52</sup> Women did not always have the materials or the ability to make Union flags to exact specifications, but women made flags out of what they had, in all sizes and a few different shapes, to fly outside their homes in support.

In one of Eleanor Kelley's letters to Joseph Aplin Martin, she told him, "The ladies met last Thursday and organized a soldiers aid society and have been getting all they can this week and meet this afternoon to fill a box."<sup>53</sup> She talks about appointing officers in each school district to solicit contributions. Clearly, local women's associations were meaningful for female participants once the Civil War was underway. However, wartime "ladies" societies only emerged as they did because women were already forming those bonds prior to the war, and perhaps even more so in rural societies like those in Southeastern Ohio. Miller suggests that women in Washington County could rely on other women for comfort during childbirth, care of one another's children, exchange of labor, and nursing in final illness. A woman who helped her female kin "could expect assistance in her own time of need."<sup>54</sup> These patterns of support and mutual care existed since the 1820s and were already being carried into the 1850s and 1860, even before the first shots of the Civil War were fired. It is through the foundation of these networks—throughout the United States but uniquely strong in Southeastern Ohio counties—that women were prepared, experienced, and motivated to organize for the good of their own local regiments of volunteers.

## **Conclusion**

Women in Southeastern Ohio provide valuable insights into the history of the Civil War in smaller nonurban areas, both in their letters with soldiers and their contributions through community associations. Despite numerous historians' coverage of women's history, and even studies of women during the 1860s, Appalachian women and

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<sup>53</sup> Eleanor Kelley and John W. Perry, Martin Collection, June 30, 1863.

<sup>54</sup> Miller, 37.

others living in small, rural areas throughout the North are often entirely overlooked. These agrarian communities fostered a sense of unity, a sense of pride, and a sense of emphasis on hard work, but were also home to those who opposed emancipation of slaves and generally disdained large-scale social reform. The details that characterize Southeastern Ohio women in this period reveal the region's relevance to the war, such as the roles women played in daily life, the impact of their written correspondence on the war front, and their eagerness to provide for the war effort using their social networks.

The onset of the Civil War and recognition that the event would not be over quickly tasked Southeastern Ohio women with work that many other women in the country experienced. In the absence of the men in the family, a woman performs not only her ordinary duties, but extends those duties to encompass the jobs men carried out daily to hold the household together. Similarly, women banded together and relied on help from one another in hardship to hold the society together. Post-war livelihood depended on the women's ability to maintain common practices during the war, and men often wrote asking about the state of affairs at home from a perspective of returning soon. They inquired about the way women were stewarding the land while they were gone. To women from this region, the war brought change and stress, but perhaps in less copious amounts due to the women's prior business of helping with farm labor amidst responsibilities of motherhood or housewifery. This makes Appalachian women distinctive because a smaller margin of adjustment compared to other Northern women or Southern women may have lent itself to the extra time or overall ability women could devote to the letter writing or associations through which they were so essential.

Through letters sent back and forth from battlefield to home front, one can discern many of the soldiers' thoughts and feelings. These letters articulate political views, concerns, emotions, and daily life at camp. Besides Peace Democrats, most Southeastern Ohio males served in the war and fought alongside one another, so little written conversation between them was needed. However, connecting with home and the women in one's life required a soldier to write letters and await updates about life on the home front as he moved from battle to battle with his regiment. These letters gave the men an outlet for emotions they could not necessarily express with their fellow soldiers and for a relational connection with someone other than relatives that might be serving, as well. Writing provided a sort of foundation and comfort for soldiers, and soldiers often noted how much they appreciated letters. In Joseph Aplin Martin's case, he seemed to write about more of his emotions, personal achievements, and the well-being of him and his regiment when addressing his mother. With the few men he wrote to, he focused mainly upon business affairs or how well he was handling life in the Union Army. Perhaps Martin is not representative of all soldiers in the Civil War, but his discrepancy between genders with the topics of his letters may suggest that a well-rounded study of the individual soldier calls for a comparative examination of letters to both women and men, to the extent that such letters exist. Overall, written correspondence was one of few ways soldiers could feel connected to home, and for many it was a reminder of those for whom they fought.

When it comes to the women at home, they appear to possess ordinary or unvaried daily lives. Based on the contributions made to the war effort, however, these women become more prominent in the story of the war. In the Preface of Nancy



Woloch's book *Women and the American Experience*, she explains the state of history as a metaphor in which women are "behind the scenes," but states that when studied from the perspective of women's history, "the stage revolves." She extends the metaphor to incorporate "a new cast of characters," including "daughters and widows, housewives and midwives, congregants and missionaries, domestic servants and garment workers, clubwomen, settlement workers, and suffragists."<sup>55</sup> In other words, Woloch suggests that no matter how ordinary a woman might be, her first-hand perspective on historical events is still significant. Individual women played valuable roles in preserving the Union, and when those women joined together to form community alliances, they aided soldiers in mass numbers by making clothing, sending food and medication, and rallying support on the home front. While women across the Northern states performed similar feats, the women of Southeastern Ohio seem to lend a voice to the little-celebrated Appalachian women who helped thousands of volunteer soldiers stay healthy and motivated.

The combination of letters and community ties led the women of Southeastern Ohio to be crucial supporters on the Union home front, but it is imperative to consider that these women specifically noted they were not seeking advancement in their societal roles or promoting any cause before, during, or after the war. They came together for the sake of their communities alone and remained typical mothers and housewives for most of the day. Once the war broke out, though, they mobilized to aid the Union volunteers and write them frequently, to urge them on in their pursuit of victory and to be a constant in a situation where security was often fleeting. Ordinary women proved extremely helpful on the home front of the Civil War, and aided soldiers who went on to participate

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<sup>55</sup>Woloch, v.

in key victories for the Union, including fighting throughout Tennessee and eventually into Georgia. Practically, the implications of these women's actions are that "average" women, whether farmers' wives or simply middle-to-lower-class Ohioans, can leave an imprint. This might dispel the notion that women had to be extraordinary, famous, or act without femininity to be remembered in a narrative that primarily focuses on men's achievements, and that more research on women in areas like Appalachia could reveal other details of historical significance.

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