

FROM HARVEST FIELD TO BATTLEFIELD:
RURAL PENNSYLVANIA WOMEN AND THE
U.S. CIVIL WAR

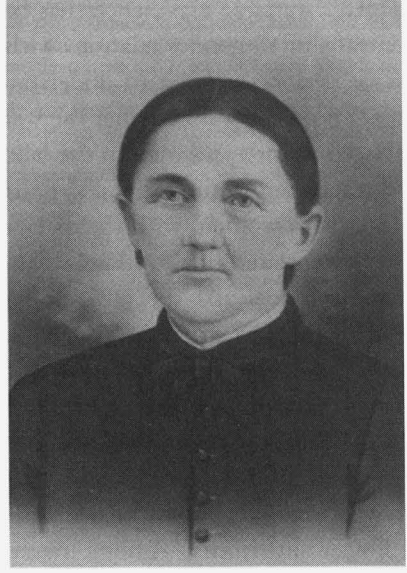
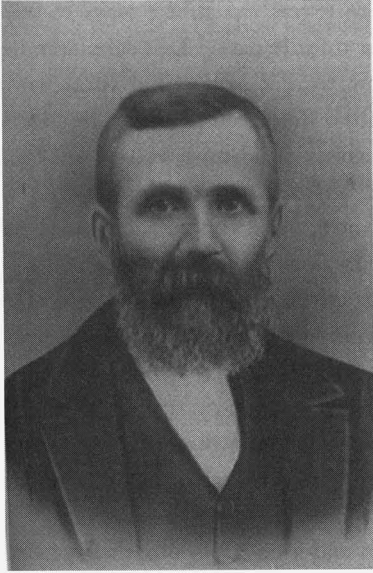
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“I have worked night and Day and ceep mi children together and I have touck sick and am on able to Do enething,” Esther Jane Campman of Clearfield County, Pennsylvania, began a letter addressed to Pennsylvania Governor Andrew Curtin late in April 1865. Facing a dire financial situation, Campman joined a chorus of wives of United States soldiers who addressed state officials requesting money to help support themselves and their families. Though the Campmans had anticipated that Esther’s husband’s U.S. army wages would sustain his family in his absence, she had “not received a sent yet to ceep mi family on and he never has had eney pay yet.” With Frederick Campman drafted and his labor abruptly withdrawn from the family’s rural home, Esther worked to make up the difference. In the winter of 1865, after Frederick had been absent for eight months, Esther became ill and was forced to ask for help. “I truly hope you will Do something four me,” she asked Governor Curtin.¹

Having no family or friends to turn to, Campman applied to the county for relief money offered to the families of soldiers. Perhaps because the application came so late in the war or because it came from the wife of a drafted man, Campman's application for aid was denied. "I went to the com-misherns and the[y] said the[y] woud not give me eney," Campman explained. To make matters worse, in April 1865, a time when many Americans were celebrating the end of the war and the imminent return of the soldiers, Esther Campman received a dated letter from her husband who was hospitalized at a military hospital at City Point, Virginia. With no recent word from Frederick, Esther feared the worst, "i have begun to think he is cilled but I dount {k}now." Having sustained herself and her children for eight months without her husband's labor or his wages, Esther could do so no longer. As long as she could work and her husband's return seemed imminent, Esther Campman had managed in Frederick's absence. But with his return home delayed indefinitely and with her own health failing, Campman became desperate.

When Elizabeth Schwalm penned a note to her husband, Samuel, describing her work on the family's farm in Schuylkill County, Pennsylvania, she expressed the wartime sentiments of many women on farms throughout the North. Schwalm interrupted a letter detailing a long list of her work planting corn, oats, wheat, and many other crops intended for the family's consumption and for sale, with a plea for her husband's safe return. "I hope dat god is with youse and kepe yous alife dat you can [re]torn onst home," Elizabeth exclaimed.² Both working and overseeing the work of her children on her family's seventy-five acre farm, Elizabeth Schwalm's situation was not as dire as Esther Campman's, for Schwalm never applied for poor relief or addressed herself to a state official. But even with good health, productive land, and a family to help on the farm, the war strained Elizabeth Schwalm's resolve and her ability to keep up the farm while raising four young children on her own.

Like many other rural women, Campman and Schwalm worked in place of their husbands and assumed the primary responsibility for their family's survival during the U.S. Civil War. Historians estimate that half of all soldiers in the U.S. army were farmers or farm laborers and an estimated thirty percent of all soldiers were married.³ A number of northern women experienced the war as a withdrawal of labor from their farms and from their rural communities. The enlistment or drafting of a husband necessitated rural soldier-wives to do more than offer support for a husband's decision to enlist or his



Samuel and Elizabeth Schwalm. Photographs courtesy of Johannes Schwalm Historical Association, Inc.

willingness to go when called up. When a husband left for war, women's work on the farm expanded to fill the void. And when soldier wages did not arrive, women found ways to get what they needed for themselves and for their children.

With the departure of so many men, northern women faced an altered set of domestic circumstances during the U.S. Civil War. The war opened up a space in which gender would be renegotiated and in which family relations reconstituted. The potency of the moment was not lost on one middle-class observer who saw women's farm labor as the beginning of the end of domesticity. Mary Livermore, chair of the Chicago Branch of the United States Sanitary Commission, decided that the women took up the "unusual" work of the harvest out of a profound sense of patriotism and concluded that "each brown, hard-handed, toiling woman was a heroine."⁴ Historians have shown how middle-class northern women, like Livermore, largely welcomed the war as an opportunity to expand their sphere and to seek new venues for their reform work. Chafing against the limitations imposed by domesticity, women sought ways to become engaged in the great political and social debates of the day. After the war, many middle-class northern women parlayed their wartime work as relief agents, nurses, and teachers of freedwomen and men into post-war careers in temperance, suffrage, and urban reform. Scholarship on

women's wartime experiences has begun to reveal the subtle ways in which the war shifted gender relations within the middle class.⁵ Less scholarly work has been done seeking to understand how working-class and rural women experienced the war, whether the war resulted in long-term shifts in relations between women and men in the laboring classes, and how women weathered and responded to the social and political changes ushered in by the war.⁶

Southern women, with the collapse of slavery and the withdrawal of men, also renegotiated lines of domestic authority during the war. Southern historians have analyzed the postwar reconstruction of rural family life. Drew Faust has argued that elite slaveholding women rose to the occasion brought on by the war and worked in place of white men and slaves on southern plantations – experiences that left more than a few women questioning the infallibility of men. But, whereas the war challenged assumptions about women's dependence, elite white women “came to regard the rehabilitation of patriarchy as a bargain they were compelled to accept” in order to retain their class and racial superiority.⁷ Among freedwomen and men in the Mississippi Delta, Nancy Bercaw notes “a wide range of flexible and fluid household structures” that allowed former slaves to respond to the exigencies of the war, the demise of plantation slavery, and the loss of male labor.⁸ To make ends meet, African-American women and men negotiated a variety of domestic relationships – some patriarchal, others not – based on a recognition of their mutual dependency.⁹ In the end, however, Bercaw finds that postwar labor contracts and pressure from southern and northern whites favored the male-headed nuclear family, eliminating alternative family structures that had empowered freedwomen. Having reached no consensus on how the war influenced gender relations in reconstructed families, studies of southern women have produced a scholarly tension that has proved fertile ground for further work. And these studies offer historians the opportunity to begin to draw parallels to the lives of rural women in the North.

This essay seeks to demonstrate how rural northern women with absentee husbands, fathers, and brothers took care of their families and managed farms; the strategies they deployed to make up for the temporary loss of farm labor; and the consequences to families of an extended or permanent loss of landowners and male labor. Whereas historians of southern women have uncovered the varied experiences of women engaged in a home-front war of survival, the history of northern women remains largely middle-class and urban and has failed to ask how women with limited means sustained themselves and their families. This essay takes cues from Drew Faust, Nancy

Bercaw, and other southern historians who have located the space of the post-war battle over rights and labor in the rural household. With farmers and farm laborers filling the ranks of the army, many northern women experienced the war from rural homes and within rural communities. The efforts of women like these form the basis of this study: Esther Jane Cashman whose husband's return was the only thing that would save the family from destitution; Elizabeth Schwalm who managed to plant, harvest, and send to market the family's crops in his absence; and other women in rural Pennsylvania communities who worked the nation's farms, kept their families together, and for whom the end of the war could not have come soon enough.

Traveling the countryside during the war, Mary Livermore, chair of the Chicago Branch of the United States Sanitary Commission, welcomed women's work in the nation's harvest fields as evidence of a transformation underway in the lives of her fellow countrywomen. The war had opened up opportunities for women to do great work for the soldiers and for their country. Livermore and other middle-class observers encouraged women to get involved in the war by sending supplies, attending fairs, and forming societies. In her travels across the Midwest, Livermore remarked on what she believed to be "a great increase of women engaged in outdoor work, and especially during the times of planting, cultivating, and harvesting."¹⁰ "Women were in the field everywhere, driving the reapers, binding and shocking, and loading grain," Livermore noted. Raised on Victorian virtues of domesticity, Livermore was shocked when she first saw women engaged in such strenuous work. Nonetheless, once she "observed how skillfully they drove the horses round and round the wheat-field," Livermore admitted that "[t]hey are worthy women, and deserve praise; their husbands are probably too poor to hire help, and, like the 'helpmeets' God designed them to be, they have girt themselves to this work." Intrigued by stout and sunburned Wisconsin farm women effortlessly guiding reapers as they cut swaths into the grain and stooping to gather the stock into sheaths, Livermore stopped to talk with them about their work. The women spoke of the men off fighting the war and those who had died. "It came very hard to us to let the boys go, but we felt we'd no right to hinder 'em," Livermore recalled them saying. When asked about the physical demands of the work, the women and young girls provided an answer that Livermore found most satisfactory. "As

long as the country can't get along without grain, nor the army fight without food" the women declared, with more than a little flourish, "we're serving the country just as much here in the harvest-field as our boys on the battle-field."¹¹

Livermore's celebration of the central place women's agricultural labor played in the union war effort was influenced by her own personal transformation underway. During the war, Livermore discovered her affinity for a life of public activism, began a long career of suffrage and labor activism, and learned that she could support herself and her family in the process. Livermore's story is parallel to the story of others of her middle-class contemporaries who found in the absence of men an opportunity to move into new areas of public life. Like Livermore, many found the experience to be invigorating and sought ways to turn their wartime work into a blueprint for women's greater independence and for a rethinking of women's political passivity and domestic seclusion.¹² Livermore recognized in the unusual image of women working on the large, commercial farms of the Midwest proof of the transformative moment of war and the potential for women's work. For Livermore, farm women were not just harvesting the crops necessary to feed the massive army in the field, they were planting the seeds of women's equality.

While not short on enthusiasm for a war to suppress rebellion, rural women and women living closer to the margins of antebellum society experienced the absence of male labor as a family crisis. Farm families hoped to leave one adult male at home to help with the heavy work of running the farm. Samuel Schwalm arranged to have his brother, Peter, help Elizabeth manage the farm. The U.S. Army allowed no occupational exemptions to the draft, and the lure of bounties and salaries worked against families trying to keep young men at home. Without the option of taking furloughs to coincide with harvests and other seasonally heavy work, soldiers left farm labor to their wives, children, extended family, and elderly parents. With news and money from their soldier-husbands not forthcoming, women worked, inquired about their husbands' bounty money, and applied for local relief to soldiers' families. Wherever possible, women sought help from family and friends while they awaited their husbands' wages or their return. When these sources of support failed them, women and families applied for outdoor relief or went in search of temporary shelter at a number of institutions – a fate that Esther Jane Campman feared and many other women experienced.

With family money and a husband's wages to rely on, Mary Livermore's wartime experiences were far removed from the women on whom she heaped

such praise and placed such high expectations. Nonetheless, Livermore's relief work put her in regular contact with women who struggled in their husbands' absence, for many of these women turned up at her Chicago relief society office with stories not unlike Campman's or Schwalm's. Despite the social distance that separated her from Esther Jane Campman and Elizabeth Schwalm, Livermore's observations raise several questions about rural women's wartime work. How were work allocations within rural families renegotiated when men enlisted or were drafted? Did women connect the work they did for their families and on their farms to the issues at stake in the war? What happened when the work became too much, the harvest too little, or when family and neighbors would not help? Were relations between rural women and men changed by the war? How were families reconstituted in the postwar era and what, if any, of these experiences cut across regional lines? Evidence documenting the lives of rural women during the Civil War is fragmentary, but these fragments can offer partial answers to the questions raised by Livermore's conversations with Wisconsin farm women.

Identifying source materials that document the wartime lives of rural women presented unique challenges, as women charged with caring for their families and their households without the benefit of husbands, sons, and other male laborers hardly had time to leave record of their efforts. Nonetheless they addressed themselves to Governor Andrew Curtin and various state officials seeking information, money, transfers, and furloughs and leaving faint traces in the official records of wartime Pennsylvania. In addition to more than one hundred letters of this sort, sources for this paper include a series of letters exchanged between one rural woman and her soldier husband; depositions given by women seeking damages for property lost, stolen, or destroyed during the Confederate invasion of Adams and York counties in 1863; the minutes of various relief agencies; and admissions data from rural almshouses. Whenever possible, soldiers named in letters and relief applications were cross-referenced to enlistment information and census data, allowing identification of the antebellum occupations and residences of soldiers.

The women included here lived in a variety of rural communities in Pennsylvania. Some lived on family-run farms located some distance from their closest neighbors; others lived in more densely settled communities, like the women living in and around Gettysburg; and others seem to have been newcomers in less settled communities in which they worked and rented land but had no close ties. It appears unlikely that many of these Pennsylvania correspondents lived on the large commercial farms that Mary

Livermore observed in the Midwest. With seventy-five acres of property, the Schwalm produced crops for consumption and for sale, but a farm of this size depended on a family's ability to hire seasonal laborers. With the U.S. Army promising bounty money and a regular salary, however, farmers had difficulty finding men to hire. Indeed, Elizabeth Schwalm was unable to find a man to help her work on the family's farm when Samuel enlisted and worried that she could not afford one in any case. Judging by remarks about back taxes and rents, some women lived on land that they rented and others were only nominal owners of their property and equipment. Some men were farm laborers who toiled on neighboring farms for wages, others worked as shoemakers, coal miners, in iron-making, and at other skilled, semi-skilled, and unskilled trades. Though census collectors made no effort to record the work of married women, wives of farmers and of tradesmen labored both in and outside their homes at a variety of paid and unpaid positions.

Pennsylvania women were part of families engaged in a variety of occupations. While Pennsylvania boasted strong manufacturing output – particularly strong was the state's textile, leather, iron, and coal manufacturing—the state was predominantly rural in 1860.¹³ Strong pockets of Irish immigrants lived and worked in the mining regions of central Pennsylvania—Carbon, Schuylkill, and Luzerne counties – and German, Scots-Irish, and free black farmers labored on land in southeastern counties such as Chester and Lancaster. Farm families produced goods for consumption and for transportation to Philadelphia and cities south of the Mason Dixon line, including a variety of grains, flax, and dairy products. Joan Jensen found in her study of dairying along the Northern Tier (Chester and Delaware counties) that women played a significant role in commercial butter production in the antebellum period, and Sally Ann McCurry showed that male-run factory dairying did not begin to replace home-based manufacturing until 1860.¹⁴ Women were extensively engaged in what historians refer to as “household commodity production,” in which they sold agricultural products for cash, allowing farm families to pay mortgages and taxes, invest in new farm tools, and purchase livestock.¹⁵ Because Pennsylvania farm women were not particularly bound by urban bourgeois notions of domesticity, it seems unlikely that they welcomed the war as an opportunity to transcend this ideology. More likely, the war threatened to upset a careful domestic balance that allowed rural women both to meet their families' needs and engage in commodity production.

During the Civil War, women's work took on great significance, as families came to rely on the sustenance and the income women's work

produced. What follows is a composite sketch of women's experiences supporting their families during the war. The conclusions offered here begin to answer questions about rural women's wartime lives and the households they would help to rebuild in the war's aftermath—when many men returned, and others did not, and when the faint traces of rural women's lives and labor fade.

"I am to[o] long from home": Working Farms without Men

Despite the withdrawal of a significant part of the agricultural labor force in the northern states, agricultural output remained high and employment in agriculture constant, suggesting that with men gone, women assumed more of the responsibility of running farms.¹⁶ The consistent productivity of American farms was noted by Isaac Newton, Lincoln's Commissioner of Agriculture, in his 1863 report. "Although the year just closed has been a year of war on the part of the republic over a wider field and on a grander scale than any recorded in history," Newton began his second annual report, "yet strange as it may appear, the great interests of agriculture have not materially suffered in the loyal States."¹⁷ Attributing this great feat to "machinery and maturing youth at home and the increased influx of immigration from abroad," Newton made no reference to the part women had played in increasing the annual output of wheat, oats, and other products for which the Lincoln administration gathered statistics.¹⁸ The report noted approvingly that some women had taken to raising bees—a work that Lincoln administration officials believed was particularly well suited for women and for disabled soldiers because the physical demands were light.¹⁹ Otherwise, Newton, Lincoln's expert on agricultural affairs, whose travels through the harvest fields surely covered the same ground as did Livermore's, remained silent about women's farm work.

Letters rural women exchanged with their husbands at the front paint a different picture of women's wartime agricultural labor. Women reported on the status of crops and the purchase and sale of farm animals and complained about the difficulty of finding and keeping adequate hired help. Women noted how they engaged in extensive and physically demanding work and, rather than finding the work rejuvenating or heroically linking it to the objectives of the war, their letters reveal the emotional and physical stress resulting from the prolonged absence of their soldier-husbands. Women sought advice from their husbands on planting and harvesting, but, with

responses misdirected and delayed, women often resorted to seeking approval for the decisions they had already made.

When her husband, Samuel, enlisted on August 19, 1861, Elizabeth Schwalm had four children at home under the age of five, and three weeks after Samuel left, Elizabeth gave birth to a third son. With four toddlers at home and a newborn to care for, surely Elizabeth was relieved when Samuel arranged to have his brother, Peter, come to stay with his wife and children. Peter's help was essential for Elizabeth in those first few months, for Samuel left home in the middle of the busy harvest. By January, in fact, several Schwalm relatives and friends were helping Elizabeth; Samuel addressed his planting instructions to all of them. "My dear wife and children and Brothers and Sisters," he began.²⁰ Well before the first spring planting season arrived, Samuel provided a list of instructions that assumed Elizabeth's past participation in spring planting and her running knowledge of many aspects of running the farm:

Further you ask me where you Shall put the Lime I want that field behind the Barn for potatoes and that field where we [illeg.] that Little Strip potatoes Last year for Corn and there I want the Lime and if you hall any more ten you Shall put it were we had Corn Last year and try to Sprt the Lime were yous put the Corn before you plough the field and if you can hal Lime after the potatoes is planted So you Shall put it on the potatoes.²¹

What looks like a jumbled list of instructions probably made perfect sense to Elizabeth, who had lived and worked the farm alongside Samuel for more than five years. By March of 1862, Samuel's arrangement with his brother was breaking down and in the summer, Peter left. Though Samuel's relatives living nearby surely continued to help out, Elizabeth largely assumed responsibility for running the farm. "I wasnt pleased when I have heard that youse juden agree," Samuel commented on his brother's departure, but he agreed with his wife when she assured him that she was better off on her own. "I hop you can take good care of it," he offered.²²

To manage the farm, Elizabeth relied on a number of different sources of labor, but chiefly her own and that of her children. In her husband's absence, the children helped their mother clean out the stables, care for the livestock, and bring in the grain harvest. Whereas Samuel expected that Elizabeth was capable of doing heavy work, Samuel did not approve of his children

engaging in this work. "Take good care of the Childrens and don't Let them do hard work," he chastened his wife, for "I Sooner like to hear that you sent them every day in school I don't like to have them Cripeld up by hard working."²³ On these occasions and on others, Elizabeth and Samuel disagreed over the family's finances. Elizabeth was very careful not to spend, and Samuel always encouraged her to hire a "girl" to take care of the children and to buy the children things. Whereas Samuel wanted Elizabeth to dress his children well and send them to school, Elizabeth insisted that she could not spare them on the farm and that there would be time for school later. It was difficult to hire a "farmer," a term that Elizabeth reserved for hired help, but when she could, she did. When Elizabeth managed to do so in August 1864, she was at pains to justify his pay of "14 Dolders fur a muntth." "I thinke noboty cant do it lore by dis time fur to worke on the state rote a man get 2 Dolders fur a day," Elizabeth explained to her husband fighting at the front.²⁴ With prices so high during the war, Elizabeth asked Samuel repeatedly for money, and on one occasion, Samuel became frustrated and replied, "I have Sant you all the money I posable can Spair I don't think that you want me to Sant my Clothsing and go naced."²⁵ Elizabeth stretched the family's budget to pay the taxes and to buy what was necessary for the family, but even with all her care, the sheriff came to the Schwalm home and threatened to sell off some of the family's property when she fell behind in her payments.²⁶

Nearly three years after Samuel's enlistment, Elizabeth asked fewer questions of her husband but continued to report dutifully to him about her work on the family's farm. In April 1864, Elizabeth reported that she had successfully planted oats, more corn than last year, and fewer potatoes, based on her experience the previous summer. In addition to completing the spring planting, Elizabeth weaned the couple's youngest child, Reilly, now twenty-eight months. "[H]e was to drublesom or els I hat live him drink til you hat bean at home," she explained.²⁷ Elizabeth offered her husband an explanation for her decision to wean their son, but she made the decision based on what she had determined served the best interests of both the household and the family farm. One of Mary Livermore's "brown-handed heroines" had proudly reported that she could reap as much as any man, even though she had a three-year-old son "toddling beside her, tumbling among the sheaves, getting into mischief every five minutes, and 'causing more plague than profit.'"²⁸ Weaning Reilly allowed Elizabeth Schwalm to leave him to the care of his older sisters and brothers and freed her to more easily complete the work on

the farm without a toddler getting under foot. And at the end of a long day of work, Elizabeth could look forward to a full night of sleep rather than one interrupted by breast-feeding.

Adjusting the outlay of the farm, planting and harvesting of crops, and the family's child-rearing expectations were all decisions Elizabeth made on her own. Elizabeth continued to seek her husband's advice and his approval, and Samuel responded in the only way he could—by deferring to her judgment. "You shall do as you think right," he wrote, often adding in the last months of his absence, "I cant say much I am to long from home."²⁹ In place of advice, Samuel encouraged Elizabeth to "Just do how you think." Before the war, work allocations in the Schwalm household were probably similar to those found in other rural homes, where there was no absolute division of labor and a considerable degree of flexibility. Historians such as Nancy Grey Osterud and Joan Jenson have argued that rural women, with greater flexibility in their roles, rejected domesticity and enjoyed more egalitarian marriages and greater autonomy.³⁰ Whereas men were largely responsible for plowing and planting the fields and women processed and preserved the products for the family's consumption and for sale, women's outdoor labor was essential during the seasonally heavy work required for harvesting the crops and preparing them for storage or for sale. Like most rural women, Elizabeth Schwalm was no stranger to field labor, but when her husband left, managing to plant and tend the fields, care for the livestock, and harvest the crops required that Elizabeth take considerable time away from her other tasks — such as childcare and commodity production—and here she could not turn to Samuel for advice. Early in the war, Elizabeth attempted to follow Samuel's advice on planting the next season's crops because she had worked those fields before and because she understood the plots of land that were best for planting potatoes, corn, and wheat. Occasionally, Elizabeth sought Samuel's advice on the use of oxen, horses, and cows, but she also seems to have relied on her own judgment about the care for and the disposal of farm animals. Three years into the war, Elizabeth sought very little advice and, having been absent from the farm for several years, Samuel was reluctant to offer her any — even abandoning his persistent pleading with Elizabeth about sending the children to school and sparing them of work.

In the absence of alternative sources of labor, women's flexibility allowed farms to remain productive during the war, but not all rural soldier-wives welcomed these reallocations of work. Perhaps Elizabeth sold milk, eggs, or butter to help pay for clothes for the children and household supplies, but

once Samuel – and then Peter – left, Elizabeth found less time for this commodity production, leaving her little money to buy shoes for the older children to attend school and to pay taxes and other bills. Despite adjusting to her husband's absence, the strains of the work and responsibility took their toll on Elizabeth. Schwalm accused her husband of failing to write and wrote with concern about unpaid tax bills and other financial matters. Schwalm never imagined she would be on her own this long, and she wanted her husband home. In August 1864, Elizabeth wrote to Samuel, "I never had saut dat we wot be so a lange launge time a parte form enoter."³¹ Samuel agreed, writing Elizabeth to assist him in seeking his discharge. "I don't Like to Stay any longer then I have to," he wrote Elizabeth.³²

While she understood that her husband was serving the country by putting down the rebellion, Elizabeth, unlike Livermore's Wisconsin farm women, never described her work in those terms. Though Elizabeth was privy to information about the Confederate invasions of south-central Pennsylvania in the fall of 1862 and the summer of 1863, she did not discuss these matters in her correspondence. She seems to have scanned her husband's descriptions of battles and of conditions in camp quickly, in search of information about his return. For Elizabeth Schwalm the war began when Samuel left the family farm, and she experienced the years of his absence in a deeply personal way. Raising her young children in rural Pennsylvania without her husband's company and without his help, Elizabeth managed the many demands placed on her time and her emotions. Women made adjustments within their families and on their farms when men enlisted, hoping that extended family would help with the work or that wages sent home from soldiers would allow them to hire replacement help. But informal agreements within families to make up for the loss of a soldier-husband's or son's labor broke down, leaving women to pick up where the men left off.³³ Like Esther Jane Campman, the war had meant greater work and worry for Elizabeth Schwalm, and the sooner the men returned and reassumed their share of the work, the better.

Samuel's departure did not necessitate that Elizabeth acquire new skills or new knowledge about the farm, but without him Elizabeth had more work than usual and she had to rethink how she allocated her time and energy. In rural families that depended on women's ability to produce goods for the market, the war disrupted the balance that women like Elizabeth Schwalm struck between commodity production, childcare, and fieldwork. Elizabeth clung to antebellum patterns of mutual dependency as long as she could,

until her husband's extended absence necessitated that she restructure the lines of authority and economy within the household. Whereas Pennsylvania law did not recognize women as capable of making decisions about the couple's property, for more than three years Elizabeth exercised uncontested decisions about which bills to pay and which to accumulate. But if Elizabeth's ability to move in and out of domesticity translated into greater autonomy in her marriage with Samuel, she did not relish his wartime absence as an opportunity to exercise it.

Women and Kinship Ties

We cannot know how much Elizabeth Schwalm continued to rely on her family for support in the three years after her brother-in-law left and before her husband's return. Schwalm's letters suggest that when the war took away male relatives, rural women relied heavily on kinship networks and on neighborly relations for help in the fields and with the livestock. Women living in close-knit rural communities were not entirely alone when their husbands enlisted. Anecdotal evidence gleaned from depositions taken after the Confederate Army's invasion of Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, in June-July 1863 confirms what historian Mary Grey Osterud found for the women of Nanticoke Valley, New York.³⁴ In stable rural communities like the Nanticoke Valley and south central Pennsylvania, women benefited from close connections to and intermarriage among neighbors. Women could rely on neighbors for help and for labor when husbands enlisted or were drafted because of the strong relationships of mutuality they developed with their neighbors. Kinship connections ran deep in south central Pennsylvania, with married children living close to their parents.³⁵ Overlapping community connections assured that women did not experience the absence of soldier-husbands as an immediate threat to their families' survival.

When the Confederate Army descended upon the rich York Valley of Pennsylvania in June 1863, they were overwhelmed by the lush pastures they saw and what seemed to be never-ending fields of ripe corn, wheat, and oats.³⁶ Hungry southern soldiers helped themselves to the bounty. A study of the diaries of middle-class women of Gettysburg found that many men fled town with livestock and other valuables in advance of the invading troops, leaving women with the responsibility of defending their homes and men open to charges of cowardice in the aftermath of the battle.³⁷ Among those who

suffered losses at the hands of the foraging soldiers were women tending to farms while their husbands and sons served in the army. With the withdrawal of male labor from the community, women of Gettysburg and the surrounding countryside looked to densely overlapping kinship networks and to neighborly cooperation to fill the void. In depositions gathered in Adams County documenting individual losses incurred during the invasion, women described the informal network of cooperation that had evolved during the war. Women fending off marauding soldiers called on the help of brothers, sisters, parents, and in-laws living nearby – family and friends who cared for their horses, looked over their livestock, and took an interest in the status of the crops in their fields. While John Musselman was off exercising the horses belonging to his neighbor, Elizabeth Musser, he was overtaken by rebel cavalry who intercepted him on the way to the mill and took Musser's horses. When Eliza Hill's cow turned up missing, James Bowling confirmed that Confederate soldiers were responsible. Bowling explained in support of her damage claim, "I went down twice a day to see after the cattle," but when he came to Hill's place on July 5th, the place was overrun by soldiers and the cow was gone.³⁸

Disaster struck these women twice: once when their husbands enlisted or were drafted, leaving them to manage farms and households; and again when Confederate soldiers trampled their crops, seized their cows, and forced them out of their homes. Whereas women relied on neighbors for help in managing the everyday work involved with caring for livestock and horses and perhaps helping with the harvest, recovering from an invasion of this magnitude placed unusual strains on those relations of reciprocity. Plowing and planting a trampled field, repairing damaged fences, and redigging a spoiled well was heavy work requiring a considerable commitment of time and the labor of experienced farm hands. Replacing lost livestock or missing farm tools necessitated a significant outlay of cash. With family nearby and friends to rely on, York Valley women continued to rely on kin and long-established networks of neighborly cooperation to sustain them until the extra work could be done. But they also sought damages from the state. On at least two occasions, in 1868 and again in 1870, Adams County widows filed claims against the property they lost – fields of grains trampled and livestock stolen. Unlike Elizabeth Schwalm, Pennsylvania's war widows were left with a number of postwar challenges to their livelihood.

Rural Women and Wartime Isolation

Not all women tending farms and living in rural communities could count on family, friends, or neighbors to help when the Civil War took away their husbands and left them to work small farms on their own. Rural women living more marginal existences and in less settled communities were particularly vulnerable to illness and deprivation when their husbands enlisted or were drafted. Like Esther Jane Campman, they worked hard to support their families and to keep them together, but without the safety net provided by a sizable and productive farm or neighborly cooperation, a husband's absence could have tragic consequences. Living lives marked by rural isolation, these women appear in the record of the war when they had exhausted all sources of work and when their health or their children's gave out. Then women applied to local wartime relief societies for small sums of money offered to the wives and mothers of soldiers.

State and local relief varied widely throughout the North during the war. States such as Massachusetts and New Hampshire encouraged enlistment by offering advance payments on bounties and aid to soldiers' families. In contrast, Pennsylvania left the sustenance of wives and families of soldiers to local relief agencies or to overseers of the poor. City and county relief societies offering support to families of soldiers were privately funded and run by middle-class relief board members. Not all local societies extended aid to the families of drafted soldiers. Women applying for relief had to provide proof of their marriage to a soldier and that the county in question had received credit for his service. In Bucks County, Pennsylvania, the Relief Board ruled on the applications of more than three hundred women each month who sought payments of \$.50 to \$2.50 per week to help support themselves and their children while their husbands and sons were away. To qualify for relief, women had to be residents and their husbands taxpayers.³⁹ In both Bucks and Mifflin counties, suspicious relief board members demanded that needy wives of Pennsylvania soldiers take an oath swearing that they had no other means of support before receiving aid, and members regularly denied relief to women who failed to live up to their standards of respectability.⁴⁰

Once a soldier's wife qualified for relief payments, her behavior was carefully scrutinized by the board. Women were summarily cut from the rolls when their husbands deserted, were discharged, or died; when they claimed more children than they had; or when, like Mary Kinsey, wife of William, and Elmira Pfrender, wife of Joseph, the Bucks County Relief Board found a

woman to be "not acting as a virtuous wife should do."⁴¹ Marginal women living a hardscrabble existence in rural Pennsylvania surely found it difficult to provide proof of their marriages and to live up to relief board members' standards of propriety. Arrangements made for a family's survival—hiring children out to work or taking in boarders—raised the suspicions of neighbors and middle-class relief board members. Like Nancy Bercaw found in the wartime Mississippi Delta, rural Pennsylvania women made use of fluid family structures in the absence of men—combining residences, living with kin, or hiring themselves and their children out to neighbors to make ends meet. While these households allowed women to maximize their meager financial resources, such practices clashed with the bourgeois expectations of relief board agents.

Rural women who relied on the wages provided by their husbands' seasonal farm labor lived off small plots of land and found whatever work there might be available in their communities. Women took in laundry, boarders, or sewing; collected debts and favors from friends and employers; and performed tasks for neighbors. Despite their efforts, rural women's letters and their applications for relief tell the stories of women whose meager resources were stretched to their limits in the absence of male support and whose efforts to support their families failed. When Maria Thomas's husband, Henry, was drafted, Maria's situation quickly deteriorated. As a coal miner living in East Freedom, Blair County, Pennsylvania, Henry's financial support of his family stopped abruptly upon the arrival of his draft notice in December 1864. Without Henry, Maria Thomas applied for relief from a local aid society, but she received only a few dollars to support herself and her children over the winter. When she wrote the governor in April 1865, she sought additional relief. "My little Children is naked and I am very near naked," Thomas explained.⁴² On January 3, 1865, Rebecca Snook applied for relief in Mifflin County after her husband was drafted.⁴³ With children aged fifteen, eleven, nine, seven, five, three, and one, Snook explained to relief board members that she would have to buy her own bread because, she admitted, the couple's "crops the past season were a failure." Lavina Rheam was awarded a pension from Mifflin County when her husband was drafted, leaving her with three children under the age of six living on a ten-acre farm that the couple did not own. For Rheam and for others, falling behind on rent could result in eviction.⁴⁴ Elizabeth Schwalm had failed to pay her taxes and suffered a humiliating visit from the sheriff, but she never expressed the worry that she and her

children would be turned out of their homes as a result of Samuel's enlistment. Mifflin County board members awarded pensions to Sarah Kile and Martha Ann Beacer when their husbands were drafted. Each woman had two small children to feed on a farm that relief agents described as "unproductive."⁴⁵

Unlike Schwalm, whose husband left her with an extensive and working farm and extended family to turn to if she needed them, women like Thomas, Snook, Rheam, Kile, and Beacer had few resources at their disposal when their husband's labor and his wages were abruptly withdrawn. Sometimes, adhering to the middle-class expectations of the relief boards came at a tragically high cost, as in the case of Rachel Darsak, wife of Moses. In the process of applying for aid in Bucks County, Rachel and the younger of her two small children died. In their mercy, the board voted to award the remaining Darsak child a weekly pension of \$.50.⁴⁶ Board members ordered Martha Murray, wife of Mahlor, struck from the rolls when her husband deserted. With no soldier salary to count on and no local relief forthcoming, Martha and her children checked themselves into the Bucks County Almshouse.⁴⁷

When women sought aid from state officials, they came in search of money that seemed rightly theirs. Despite their desperate situations, women understood relief as a debt that was owed to them when they were denied their husband's support. And when fickle relief local boards failed to pay the debt, rural soldier-wives took their grievances to the state. Nearly four years after her husband's enlistment, and one year after he was taken captive at Fort Wagner, Sarah Hufner of Norristown addressed a letter to Governor Curtin when town officials denied her the local pay offered to the wives of soldiers. "The captain come to my self in York market house and said I would draw that releaf every weak for me and my children," Hufner remembered the day her husband enlisted.⁴⁸ "All the other women is a [drawing money] for there husbands and suns," Hufner explained, "and I thing my husband is gone to fight for the union as well as the rest."⁴⁹ When she was denied relief from Huntington County officials, Mrs. M.H. Roberts directed a complaint to Governor Curtin. With five children to support and bad health, Roberts was angry when the county denied her relief. "If I have no wright to live of the goverment," Roberts directed at Curtin, then "plese sur to give my husbent his discharge."⁵⁰ Roberts' demanding aid money as a "wright" suggests that marginal women believed that, through their husbands' war service, they had proven their loyalty to and established a relationship with the state. As soldier-wives, Hufner and Roberts had assumed their share of the obligations required of citizens in wartime, and they believed they should be

extended certain rights in return – in this case, the right to the support of a husband, or if not, from the state.⁵¹

The departure of a husband or son helped fill a county's draft quota, but it left a gaping void in his own household. Women worked hard to make up the difference, but they were not always successful. In the winter of 1865, rural women, who had managed to do the work of husbands and sons for some time, addressed themselves to soldiers and to state officials when they faced another season without the men in their families. Early in March, Anne Sloan directed a letter to Governor Curtin from Somerset County, Pennsylvania, requesting a furlough for her only son, Joseph, to come home and help her see to the work around her house. As Sloan explained it, "I have no one to get a stick of wood or to feed or to take a bushel of grain to mill for me . . . and I hant able to doe any thing out in the wet with out geting prety sick." "It is actually necessary that I could get a furlough for him for 30 or 40 days to come home and help me to get a lot of wood," Sloan added.⁵² Less specific about the work that she was unable to do in her husband's absence but no less insistent with her request, H.B. Whiteman of New Columbus, Lucerne County, Pennsylvania, wrote to Curtin late in January 1865, after her husband reenlisted for a second three-year term, to request a furlough. "I humbly pray," Whiteman began, "that you will grant or cause to be granted him a furlow of twenty days to come north to provide proper means for his family for the rest of the winter."⁵³ Like Elizabeth Schwalm who reported on her planting and harvesting of crops, seeing to the livestock, and caring for her children, correspondents who requested aid from the county and furloughs and discharges for their husbands also registered the work they did for their families and for their communities. Women living marginal existences in rural communities worked to keep their children fed and clothed, their homes heated, and the rent paid. With irregular contributions from their husbands, women tried to keep their families together and out of the almshouse. They adjusted expectations and relationships within the family and sought work and help in the larger community. When these efforts failed, women expected the state to help make up the difference. Like the work rural women exchanged with their neighbors, a husband's war service created the expectation of a mutual exchange.

In addressing themselves to state officials, women carefully catalogued the work they did in their husbands' absence, and, unlike Elizabeth Schwalm who may never have addressed a relief agent or a state official, they were careful to characterize their work as patriotic. Supporting their families in the

absence of their soldier-husbands was – like military service – war work and deserved to be recognized and compensated as such. While perhaps not all women articulated a sense of entitlement as directly as did Mrs. Roberts, the war politicized women, encouraging them to frame their work within the larger political contest underway, distinguish their own loyalties from those of their neighbors, and to seek support from agents of the state. In the letters they addressed to Governor Curtin and others, Pennsylvania women acted from a set of expectations similar to those that historian Stephanie McCurry describes among southern soldier wives. “In commanding their loyalty, their allegiance, and their support,” McCurry argues, the “individual state and Confederate governments had acquired a new and undesired constituency.”⁵⁴ Marginal rural wives saw their husbands’ soldiering as a household’s collective service to the state – service that guaranteed wives certain rights and that they could withdraw when these rights were disregarded.

Postwar Family Structures

After more than three years of service, Samuel Schwalm returned home in September 1864 and Frederick Campman was mustered out late in June 1865, two months after his wife, Esther, wrote to Governor Curtin asking for help supporting herself and her children. Elizabeth Schwalm’s war ended several months before the fighting was over; Esther Campman’s ended a couple months afterward. The absence of additional source material prevents our knowing whether Schwalm and Campman – preoccupied with sustaining their families in their husbands’ absence – sensed that their work had helped win the war and that it had transformed them in the process. Surely both women were relieved to have their husbands home again and both, assuming that the injuries that Frederick Campman sustained did not leave him permanently disabled, anticipated the men’s return would bring financial security. Though she had proved herself capable of running the farm in her husband’s absence, Elizabeth had struggled to negotiate the needs of her children and the demands of her husband’s family while assuming much of the work Samuel had done before he enlisted. Keeping the family’s farm operational and her children contented had required most of her time, leaving her little energy to prepare and sell goods to help pay the family’s bills or to write to her husband about her thoughts on the war and the larger significance of the work she did every day. Samuel Schwalm returned to a working farm, and in

the postwar years, he added considerably to its size and its output. We can only speculate how power between the two had been subtly adjusted by Elizabeth's wartime experience of running the farm and raising the children on her own. After Samuel returned, perhaps Elizabeth asserted herself more often into daily decision-making about the purchase and sale of property or the use of farm animals. With no evidence to the contrary, we might suppose that Elizabeth Schwalm was willing to once again share the responsibilities of farm management and family sustenance with her veteran-husband and that she was relieved to have him organize the labor on the family's farm.

The war required inventiveness and a lot of work from women living in rural communities – work to keep their farms running, to help their neighbors, and to feed and clothe their children. Through no fault of his own, a husband's absence could have catastrophic consequences for his wife and children; when his wages were delayed or when they failed to reach home at all, no amount of resourcefulness could keep a woman living a marginal rural existence from indigence. With Esther Campman's health compromised and the family nearly destitute, the Campmans' postwar recovery perhaps was more extended than was the Schwalm's. If Frederick Campman was able to collect the remainder of his bounty money and his back pay in a timely manner, Frederick, Esther, and their two young children might have found the relief in Frederick's return that Esther had sought in his absence. Again, we can only speculate about the long-term consequences of Frederick's absence from his family's rural home. As hard as Esther had worked, she had been unable to support herself and her children without Frederick. And, when she had turned to her community for help, she was refused. Neither Frederick nor Esther Campman appear in either the 1860 or 1870 census for Clearfield County, suggesting that the family was new to the county when Frederick was drafted and that they moved again when the war was over. Perhaps the family's postwar relocation reflected an attempt to improve their financial situation or perhaps Esther's desire to distance herself from a community that had failed her and her children in Frederick's absence.

As Campman's experience suggests, the war exposed deep political and social divisions in Pennsylvania's rural communities and women negotiated an explosive terrain of class prejudice and divided loyalties. In some Pennsylvania communities, the wives of soldiers who had enlisted were treated with more empathy than wives of draftees. In others, women whose husbands enlisted became lightning rods for criticism of Lincoln and Curtin. In January 1865, a group of women from Gallitzin, Cambria County, Pennsylvania, addressed

Governor Curtin requesting money to support themselves and their families. Speaking for the group, Sedesa Cochran explained that their husbands were fighting in "generl Sherman army" and had not been paid for some time, leaving "there familys [in] g[r]ate nead of sum a sist enc we have neither food ner fu[e]l ner the means to get it." With families to feed and without the benefit of their husbands' wages, the women sought relief money from the county. Sedesa Cochran explained how county officials rejected the women's plea, adding that "we cold not be more a bused in richmon among the rebles then we are her with the copperheads and conscripts."⁵⁵ Unable to rely on the political loyalties of their neighbors, Sedesa Cochran and her friends appealed to the state they were serving by lending their husbands to the cause. Cochran insisted that as wives of enlisted men the women had a legitimate claim to the state's support – a right that came with their husbands' enlistments. Making their case to Governor Curtin, it was no accident that Cochran and the others drew parallels between their own condition—Union loyalists among "copperheads and conscripts"—to the condition of soldiers held prisoner of war in Richmond, "among the rebles." Sedesa Cochran counted on the Governor to sympathize and to agree that abandoning soldier-wives to the whims of a community of copperheads was no way to repay their wartime loyalty.

Rural women living rather marginal existences relied on neighborly cooperation and reciprocity, but in many cases, the war brought disillusionment. The meager financial support offered by local aid societies could stand in for neighborly reciprocity and kinship ties or the administration of this relief could accentuate a woman's wartime isolation from adequate means of support. The war years stretched the resources of these families to their limits, enlisted women as heads of households, and pitted the wives of soldiers against neighbors who might have provided support. Though we do not know what their thoughts were about the war and the administration, Campman, Cochran, and Purelle became conscripts—and their communities held them responsible for their husbands' war service. In the postwar years, these families struggled with difficult decisions about the future, and women's wartime experiences – facing down starvation, exposure, incarceration, and hostile neighbors – figured into these postwar plans. Whereas women like Mrs. Roberts, Sarah Hufner, and Sedesa Cochran claimed their husbands' support as a right, their letters to state officials stopped when the war ended, making it difficult to know how this attitude shaped postwar ideas about work and family. When husbands returned, perhaps women were content to give up their claim of recognition by the state. When

veteran-husbands were unable – because of illness or injury – to contribute adequately to the support of their families, this situation compounded the economic fragility and perhaps strained the emotions between women who had become politicized in the process of providing for their families and soliciting the state for support and men who continued to believe that they should provide it. And, for rural women whose husbands did not return, the system of pensions – initiated in 1862 and expanded several times during the war and in the decades that followed – indicates the federal government's growing assumption of responsibility for this "undesired constituency," perhaps in part in response to the outpouring of letters demanding support as a "wright."⁵⁶

Rural Widows and Property Ownership

Although it is difficult to know the subtle ways that relations between women and men—Elizabeth, Samuel, Esther, and Frederick—were renegotiated and whether wartime shifts of responsibilities and of power lingered into the postwar years, the death of male property owners turned soldier-wives into widows and resulted in a decisive reordering of family relations. The war left women permanently in charge of farms they had worked with their husbands. Thirty percent of the Adams County women who filed claims for damaged property in 1868, for example, had become property owners since the war began, indicating that the war had precipitated a transfer of property to the county's female population.⁵⁷ Unlike Elizabeth Schwalm, war widows who had assumed responsibility for running their farms—and, in the case of Adams county, protected their property from invading troops—now faced a number of postwar challenges alone. Whereas extended family members and neighbors might have helped women make up the labor shortage temporarily, more permanent arrangements became necessary when farmer-husbands died on the battlefield or returned home disabled. By the time they filed claims in 1868, some Adams county women would have adjusted to what had become a permanent change in their rural homes and in the rhythm of their lives and devised long-term strategies for family survival.

Women inheriting property during the war had to navigate confusing and contradictory state legislation that treated female property owners as anomalies and that was designed to keep women dependent. In 1848 Pennsylvania—like most states—guaranteed married women control over

the property they brought into marriage, and in 1851 the state granted widows whose husbands died without a will \$300 of their husband's estate.⁵⁸ However, an 1865 amendment to the 1851 law restricted Pennsylvania widows' claims to intestate inheritances that exceeded \$300. In the amendment, widows inheriting estates assessed at more than \$300 were expected to turn over their rights to the excess.⁵⁹ The significance of an amendment restricting widows' claims to property could not have been lost on women whose husbands' premature death had left them with an excess of property. In her claim for the loss of nearly three hundred dollars worth of damaged real estate and stolen farm animals and blacksmith tools, Louisa Wistler was keenly aware of state laws limiting her access to her husband's property. Ephraim Wistler died in 1863, presumably without a will, and Louisa filed her 1868 claim in the joint interests of herself and her children, but carefully noted on her deposition that much of the property in question was hers not her husband's, suggesting that Louisa was bracing herself for a contest over possession of the family's Adams County property. Similarly, Lydia McElroy was concerned about what agents would make of her claim for lost property when her husband, John, who died in the U.S. Army in 1863, left neither a will nor instructions for administering his estate. As McElroy explained, when John died, "he was not possessed of more property than is allowed to widows by the laws of Pennsylvania." When rebel soldiers entered Gettysburg in July 1863, Lydia and her daughter, Julia, left their home, and in their absence soldiers entered and seized their personal items.⁶⁰ When she filed her claim, McElroy – like Wistler and other women in her predicament—was unexpectedly a property owner and left to herself to defend her claim to that property, which exceeded the state limit for intestate widow inheritance.

Though the war had demanded that women act independently and collaboratively to work their farms and to protect their property, once the immediate crisis of the war was over, state laws worked powerfully to reinscribe their dependence.⁶¹ As long as her sons were unmarried and not yet acceded to the property, a widow might continue to act as head of the household, as she had while her husband had been away fighting the war. But her claims to that property became tenuous when sons matured, within an overall postwar climate that sought to limit women's property rights. Nonetheless, a number of Adams County women inheriting property through the premature death of their soldier-husbands continued to head their own households or to live alone, sometimes even with grown male children living nearby.⁶² Whereas

Nancy Osterud found that rural widows rarely lived independently once their children were grown, the experiences of women who lost property in the Confederate invasion of south-central Pennsylvania suggests that the war created an unusual situation for inheriting widows. The median age of the Adams County women was sixty years old when they filed their postwar claims for lost property, suggesting that they may have counted on the occasional labor of grown children living nearby. Nonetheless, middle-aged Adams County women seem to have preferred to live independently, on the land they had worked with their husbands and which they were not ready to turn over to their children. Rural women had resented the war that took their husbands and left them landowners, but they were not willing to trade the independency of landownership for the dependency of widowhood.

Here too the experiences of rural Pennsylvania women offer us an opportunity to draw parallels to the postwar South. In her work on Petersburg, Virginia, historian Suzanne Lebsock has argued that despite conservative legislators' lack of interest in women's rights, southern women stood to gain a measure of independence from antebellum and postwar measures taken to protect married women's property.⁶³ Whereas the war opened opportunities for women to exercise control over their and their husbands' property – a right that northern women enjoyed before it was granted to their southern counterparts – it remains unclear how women's control over their property weathered the postwar era when states sought to replace married women's property protections with generous guarantees to lenders and business interests. Further work on postwar landownership will help us understand if the experiences of the war generation of women who inherited property were anomalous or whether they represented an adjustment to antebellum expectations of landownership.

Mary Livermore, the Sanitary Commission agent who toured Midwestern harvest fields, was correct when she assumed that the war devolved greater responsibility on the shoulders of farm women. Women took the place of male farmers and farm laborers during the war – either temporarily or permanently, and either alone or alongside family, friends, and neighbors. Yet in scores of postwar collections celebrating women's wartime contributions, women who worked on farms were consistently overlooked. Postwar accounts celebrate the daring nurses, aid society members, and freedmen's teachers

whose largely middle-class status relieved them of the worries brought on by a temporary loss of household income and for whom the war offered relief from domesticity and the opportunity to pursue exciting careers in public activism. After the war, middle-class women like Livermore became part of a revitalized suffrage movement and sought to claim their share of the credit for saving the nation. It is appropriate, then, that Livermore included a colorful description of Wisconsin farm women in her postwar memoirs, entitled *My Story of the War*. The sight of women harvesting grain proved useful grist for Livermore's mill – hearty farm women became part of her story of feminist awakening and farm women's thoughts about the war were filtered through Livermore's own. But whereas Livermore underestimated the extent to which it disrupted life in rural households, she sensed the war had blurred the line separating harvest-field from battle-field and destabilized gendered notions of service to the nation.

President Lincoln's Secretary of War, Edwin Stanton, credited the North's victory in the Civil War to farmers' keeping the soldiers supplied with bread. Like Commissioner of Agriculture, Isaac Newton, Stanton was convinced that machines had made U.S. victory possible by releasing young men from the fields and insuring that the crops were harvested despite fewer available hands.⁶⁴ Conspicuously absent from Stanton's account was a recognition that women drove reapers and gathered up the sheaths of wheat, thus allowing men to serve in the U.S. Army. Seeking to celebrate the war as a triumph of northern free labor over southern slavery, Stanton reiterated Newton's assessment of wartime farm labor as consisting of "machinery and maturing youth at home." Stanton's gendered picture of the victory gave credit to man-made machines and young boys and was consistent with the Lincoln administration's determination to deliver on one of the promises of free labor – independent yeoman farmers working the land, unencumbered by debt and free of unfair competition from un-free labor. As the ideological corollary to free labor, the Lincoln administration's embrace of domesticity allowed Stanton and others to ignore the extent to which yeoman farmers depended on the work of women and other household dependents. Like Livermore who saw women's farm work as heroic and an appropriate alternative to domesticity, then, Stanton's reflections on the war were based on a limited understanding of the antebellum rural household, in which women (and children) moved in and out of field labor and brought essential income to the family through commodity production. Unlike Livermore, Stanton failed to recognize how women's visible and essential work for their families,

rural communities, and their nation challenged the gendered prescriptions of free labor.

Fitting uncomfortably into postwar eulogies on domesticity or paeans to male independence, rural women living on the periphery of northern society were written out of the history of the war with the same alacrity in which they were at times overlooked by their communities and shunned by their neighbors. Pennsylvania women compensated for the loss of labor by marshalling all the resources available to them in their communities: calling in favors from their neighbors, taking their husbands' place in the fields, finding work in the community, and applying for local aid. Their experiences challenge us to consider how women's work insured the continuance of family farms and maintained antebellum agricultural productivity. In farms and in rural communities, women's work freed men to fight, put bread in the hands of U.S. army soldiers, and sustained families and rural communities.

Pennsylvania women's letters reveal that the absence of alternatives to male labor strained communities and stretched women to their limits. In rural communities that relied on the productive labor of all members of the household, the war had taken a heavy toll. Women and families paid dearly when a husband's U.S. army service left them without adequate resources or when it raised the resentment and hostility of neighbors. Political and ethnic identities fractured northern communities in ways that we are only beginning to understand, and we have not yet explored the gendered consequences of these wartime tensions. For women living in rural communities with no kinship ties and with little institutional support, the war brought great hardship, accentuated their marginality, and isolated them further from their communities. Letters describing homefront hardships caused soldiers to question their continued commitment to serve. Samuel Schwalm must have had some doubts, for in January 1862 he explained to Elizabeth, in a tone that was meant to convince himself, perhaps, as much as his wife, "I know that you need me at home but I must say for my part it is right for to go and destroy the rebellion and fight for union."⁶⁵ That as stalwart a unionist as Samuel Schwalm questioned his continued service to the U.S. army in response to his wife's concerns reminds us that we cannot take women's loyalty for granted. Women began to question a war that took away men and threw their families onto the goodwill of their communities. As Sarah Hufner explained in a letter requesting her husband's discharge, "i think it is very hard wen a sholder goes to fight for his country and then put his family out on the street."⁶⁶ Historian Drew Faust has argued that southern women

played an important role in the Confederate military defeat when they withdrew support for the war and began insisting that their husbands return home.⁶⁷ In the absence of defeat, women living in rural communities in the North cannot be given that kind of credit – or blame. But perhaps the women described here can offer us another way of measuring the significance of rural women's war service.

Rural women, it would seem, did not draw upon bottomless wells of feminine patriotism or filial loyalty when they sent their husbands and sons to fight. Women drew limits on their own war service. From Grahamton Township, Pennsylvania, Hannah C. Main fed, clothed, and provided shelter for her two small children and her husband's aged parents "bed fast with the rhumitism," until May 1865 when she addressed Governor Curtin with a letter that marked the outer limits of her tolerance for a war that had gone on far too long. "O now for god sake send them home as sune as you get this," explained Main, "fore years is long a nought to live a widow."⁶⁸ Hundreds of Pennsylvania women wrote state officials requesting money, furloughs, and discharges. Like Main, most sought no formal recognition for their work but they withdrew their support for the war when the integrity of their families was threatened by their husbands' continued service. Others came to believe that working in place of soldier-husbands had earned them special recognition from the state; Mrs. M.H. Roberts believed it was her "wright" to address the governor. Some Pennsylvania widows refused to accept dependence as postwar pay-off for defending their farms and sacrificing their husbands to the nation. Seeking to hold on to land they had worked with soldier-husbands, rural women attempted to give their own meanings to the defense of free labor that had exacted such a heavy price on their households. Holding on to their farms worked against powerful postwar trends that eroded women's control over their property.

Searching for evidence that women's war work propelled them into postwar suffrage activism speaks to our contemporary needs, but it may not help historians understand how the war challenged women and men to rethink relations within rural households. Whether in politicized language directed to state officials, damage claims filed at county courthouses, or in the subtle renegotiations that occurred in postwar households, rural women accepted that war had precipitated changes in themselves and in their households – changes that had allowed them to see when their interests corresponded to or differed from the state's. In what was surely her first contact with an official of the state, Esther Jane Campman, wife of a drafted Pennsylvania soldier,

addressed the governor as she might have an old friend. "Hit is with the graitst of pleasher I have seatied mi self to Drop aline to you to in fourm you i have had a leter from mi husbund," Campman began. Though broken down from work and worry and in bad health, Campman anticipated a response from Curtin, whom she referred to as "our gouverner."⁶⁹ Whereas the gap was considerable between the wartime experiences of a marginal rural woman like Esther Jane Campman who worked to feed her family and a middle-class urban woman like Mary Livermore who imagined the implications of that work, perhaps the difference in their responses is less apparent. For Livermore the war opened up the opportunity for women to demand political rights. For Campman the war demanded that she act as if she already had them.

NOTES

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1. Esther Jane Campman to Governor Curtin, April 28, 1865, Records of the Adjutant General, Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission (PHMC), Record Group (RG) 19.29, Box 25.
2. Elizabeth Schwalm to Samuel Schwalm, April 24, 1864, in *Johannes Schwalm, the Hessian* (Lyndhurst, Ohio: Johannes Schwalm Historical Association, 1976), 272.
3. Data collected by Bell Wiley showed that 47.8% were farmers, whereas the data of the United States Sanitary Commission (USSC) indicated that the number was slightly lower at 47.5%. Wiley data quoted in James McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 387. James McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).
4. Mary Livermore, "Western Scenes, No. 2: Women in the Harvest Fields," *The USSC Bulletin*, April 15, 1864, vol. I, no. 12. This story is also reprinted in Livermore's *My Story of the War* (Hartford, CT: Worthington and Company, 1889), 145-49.
5. The historiography includes, among others, the following: Jeannie Attie, *Patriotic Toil: Northern Women and the American Civil War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998); Judith Ann Giesberg, *Civil War Sisterhood: The United States Sanitary Commission and Women's Reform in Transition* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2000); Lori Ginzberg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics, and Class in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990); Elizabeth Leonard, *Yankee Women: Gender Battles in the Civil War* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1994); Nina Silber, *The Romance of Reunion: Northerners and Southerners, 1865-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993); Lyde Cullen Sizer, *The Political Work of Northern*

- Women Writers and the Civil War, 1850-1872* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); and Wendy Hamand Venet, *Neither Ballots nor Bullets: Women Abolitionists and the Civil War*, (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1991).
6. Historians of southern women are recovering the lives of freedwomen and poor white women in the South in a number of exciting studies. See Victoria E. Bynum, *Unruly Women: The Politics of Social and Sexual Control in the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992); Laura Edwards, *Scarlett Doesn't Live Here Anymore: Southern Women in the Civil War Era* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000); and Tera W. Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors After the Civil War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).
 7. Drew Gilpin Faust, *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War* (New York: Vintage, 1996), 247.
 8. Nancy Bercaw, *Gendered Freedoms: Race, Rights, and Politics of Household in the Delta, 1861-1875* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2003), 115.
 9. *Ibid.*, 112.
 10. Livermore, "Women in the Harvest Fields."
 11. *Ibid.*
 12. Giesberg, *Civil War Sisterhood*, 164-68.
 13. Philip S. Klein and Ari Hoogenboom, *A History of Pennsylvania* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1973), 193.
 14. Joan Jensen, *Loosening the Bonds: Mid-Atlantic Farm Women, 1750-1850* (New Haven, CT : Yale University Press, 1986); Sally Ann McCurry, *Transforming Rural Life: Dairying Families and Agricultural Change, 1820-1885* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995).
 15. Marli Weiner, "Rural Women," *A Companion to American Women's History*, ed. Nancy Hewitt, (New York: Blackwell, 2002), 153-54.
 16. Northern farmers experienced unprecedented prosperity during the war, in part due to what one historian has characterized as the Union army's "voracious appetite for food and animal feed." Women and other family members continued to produce the food crops they had produced before the war, only now these staples commanded higher prices. Roger L. Ransom, *Conflict and Compromise: The Political Economy of Slavery, Emancipation, and the American Civil War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 261-62.
 17. Isaac Newton, Commissioner of Agriculture, *Report of the Commissioner of Agriculture* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1863), 3.
 18. *Ibid.*, 4.
 19. *Ibid.*, 546.
 20. Samuel Schwalm to "My dear wife and children and brothers and sisters and Israel Klinger and Mariah Klinger and all my friends," Beaufort, SC, January 30, 1862, in *Schwalm*, 262.
 21. *Ibid.*, 262.
 22. Samuel Schwalm to Elizabeth Schwalm, June 13, 1863, in *Schwalm*, 269.
 23. Samuel Schwalm to Elizabeth Schwalm, n.d., Kentucky, in *Schwalm*, 272.
 24. Elizabeth Schwalm to Samuel Schwalm, August 7, 1864, in *Schwalm*, 274.
 25. Samuel Schwalm to Elizabeth Schwalm June 13, 1863, in *Schwalm*, 270.
 26. Samuel Schwalm to Elizabeth Schwalm, June 5, 1862, in *Schwalm*, 266.

27. Elizabeth Schwalm to Samuel Schwalm, April 24, 1864, in *Schwalm*, 272.
28. Livermore, "Women in the Harvest Fields."
29. Samuel Schwalm to Elizabeth Schwalm, June 13, 1863, December 25, 1863, in *Schwalm*, 269, 271.
30. Mary Gray Osterud, *Bonds of Community: The Lives of Farm Women in Nineteenth-Century New York* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991). Julie Roy Jeffrey and Glenda Riley, on the other hand, differ from Jensen and Osterud about how well rural women escaped the gendered limitations of domesticity. Julie Roy Jeffrey, *Frontier Women: The Trans-Mississippi West, 1840-1880* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1979). Glenda Riley, *Women and Indians on the Frontier, 1825-1915* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1984).
31. Elizabeth Schwalm to Samuel Schwalm, August 7, 1864, in *Schwalm*, 275.
32. Samuel Schwalm to Elizabeth Schwalm, June 20, 1864, in *Schwalm*, 275.
33. This issue seems to have plagued many farm families. Levi Perry, a soldier serving in a Maine regiment, for instance, wrote home to his mother when he found out that his brother had enlisted. "I think [Chandler] has done wrong for he promised me when I left home that he would stay and take care of things at home," Perry worried, "[n]ow there is no one to look to things but you." Levi Perry to "Mother," July 26, 1862, *Yankee Correspondence: Civil War Letters between New England Soldiers and the Home Front*, ed. Nina Silber and Mary Beth Sievens (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1996), 138.
34. Damage Claim Applications, 1868-1872, PHMC, RG 2.69; Osterud, *Bonds of Community*, 11-12.
35. Surnames recorded in the 1860 census for Adams and surrounding counties suggest that, when the war came, many families had multiple generations living in the region.
36. Steven E. Woodworth, *Beneath a Northern Sky: A Short History of the Gettysburg Campaign* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources Inc., 2003), 21-34.
37. Christina Ericson, "'The World Will Little Note nor Long Remember': Gender Analysis of Civilian Responses to the Battle of Gettysburg," in *Making and Remaking Pennsylvania's Civil War*, ed. William Blair and William Pencak (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001), 82-101.
38. Musser, Musselman, Hill, Deardorff, and Bowling Affidavits, Damage Claim Applications, PHMC, RG 2.69.
39. Bucks County Board of County Commissioners, Minutes of the Board of Relief, PHMC, Manuscript Group (MG) 4.
40. Mifflin County Relief to Families of Civil War Soldiers, PHMC, MG 4.
41. Minutes for December 1863 and June 1864, Bucks County Board of County Commissioners, PHMC, MG 4.
42. Maria Thomas to Governor Curtin, April 29, 1865, PHMC, RG 19.29, Box 25.
43. Rebecca Snook, Application for Relief, January 3, 1865, Mifflin County Relief to Families of Civil War Soldiers, PHMC, MG 4.
44. Lavina Rheam, Relief Record, Mifflin County Relief to Families of Civil War Soldiers, PHMC, MG 4.
45. Sarah Kile and Martha Ann Beacer, Relief Record, Mifflin County Relief to Families of Civil War Soldiers, PHMC, MG 4.
46. Minutes for July 1864, Bucks County Board of County Commissioners, PHMC, MG 4.
47. Minutes for February 1865, Bucks County Board of County Commissioners, PHMC, MG 4.

48. Sarah Hufner to Governor Curtin, April 11, 1865, PHMC, RG 19.29, Box 25.
49. Ibid.
50. Mrs. M.H. Roberts to Governor Curtin, January 10, 1865, PHMC, RG 19.29, Box 24.
51. Here I am borrowing from Linda Kerber's analysis of how women's obligations have been discounted on a number of occasions, allowing the state consistently to deny women's rights. Linda Kerber, *No Constitutional Right to be Ladies: Women and the Obligations of Citizenship* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1998).
52. Anne Sloan to Governor Curtin, March 9, 1865, PHMC, RG 19.29, Box 24.
53. H.B. Whiteman to Governor Curtin, January 30, 1865, PHMC, RG 19.29, Box 24.
54. Stephanie McCurry, "Citizens, Soldiers' Wives, and 'Hiley Hope Up' Slaves: The Problem of Political Obligation in the Civil War South," in *Gender and the Southern Body Politic*, ed. Nancy Bercau (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2000), 112.
55. Mrs. Sedesa Cochran to Governor Curtin, January 7, 1865, PHMC, RG 19.29, Box 24.
56. In order to qualify for pensions, dependents had to maneuver a confusing bureaucracy and keep track of changing laws of eligibility. Whereas the 1862 pension law assumed that wives were dependent on their husbands, for example, widows had to produce proof of their marriage, and their pensions were not adjusted for family size. Mothers, sisters, and children of dead or injured soldiers were eligible for pensions after 1862, but they had to prove they were dependents. Dependent fathers and brothers became eligible in 1866. And, until 1873, only one dependent was eligible at a time. After 1873, widows received extra money for each dependent child. Applicants for federal soldiers' pensions were hindered by limited language skills or their inability to produce proof of marriages, citizenship, or residency. In 1864, an amendment was added to the 1862 pension legislation extending pension benefits to widowed former slaves—and to their children—who were unable to provide proof of marriage. This change did not apply, however, to women who were slaves at the time of their marriage, immigrant women, or others for whom providing proof of legal marriage was either impossible or difficult. Widows and other dependents of dead or disabled soldiers who managed to meet the various requirements became eligible for \$8 per month from the federal government, but if they remarried or if their dependency status changed, they were in danger of losing this benefit. The rate varied based on the rank of the soldier, with privates receiving \$8 and lieutenant colonels receiving \$30 a month. Indeed, the low "take-up rate" for pensions must in part be a result of confusion about eligibility, for Theda Skocpol has estimated that only about 25 percent of the eligible dependents of dead soldiers were receiving pensions in 1875. Theda Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mother: The Political Origins of Social Policy in the United States* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1992), 106–8; Roy P. Basler, "And for His Widow and His Orphan," *The Quarterly Journal of the Library of Congress* 27 (1970): 291–94. Megan McClintock's work on pension applications, however, suggests that trading in the scrutiny of local relief agents for the surveillance of the Bureau of Pensions was a right many widows were willing to forego. McClintock explained how the Bureau of Pensions intruded on the lives of widows by policing marriage practices and acting as moral guardians. Megan McClintock, "Civil War Pensions and the Reconstruction of Union Families," *Journal of American History* 83 (1996): 471–79.
57. Claims applications were checked against the 1860 and 1870 census. Thirty percent of female petitioners owned property before the war. Damage Claim Applications, PHMC, RG 2.69.

58. *Laws of Pennsylvania of the Session of 1848*, No. 372, Section 6, 536-37; *Laws of Pennsylvania of the Session of 1851*, No. 331, Section 5, 613.
59. *Laws of Pennsylvania of the Session of 1865*, No. 1118, Section 1, 1227.
60. Wistler and McElroy Affidavits, Damage Claim Applications, PHMC, RG 2.69.
61. Suzanne Lebsack showed that married women's property acts in the postwar South emerged not out of concern for women's rights but out of men's attempts to protect their property from debt. Suzanne Lebsack, "Radical Reconstruction and the Property Rights of Southern Women," *Journal of Southern History* 43 (1977):195-216. Stacy Lorraine Braukman and Michael Ross trace the trajectory of ante-bellum married women's property laws into the postwar era when state courts energetically dismantled state laws intended to protect women's property in an effort to create friendly environments for lenders and businessmen. Braukman and Ross, "Married Women's Property and Male Coercion: United States' Courts and the Privy Examination, 1864-1887," *Journal of Women's History*, 12 (2000): 57-80.
62. Osterud, *Bonds of Community*, 134-35.
63. Suzanne Lebsack, *The Free Women of Petersburg: Status and Culture in a Southern Town, 1784-1860* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1985), 15-53.
64. H.W. Brands, *Masters of Enterprises: Giants of American Business from John Jacob Astor and J.P. Morgan to Bill Gates and Oprah Winfrey* (New York: The Free Press, 1999), 35.
65. Samuel Schwalm to Elizabeth Schwalm, January 30, 1862, in *Schwalm*, 263.
66. Sarah Hufner to Governor Curtin, April 11, 1865, PHMC, RG 19.29, Box 25.
67. Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 243.
68. Mrs. Hannah C. Maine, Grahamton, Clearfield County, PA to Governor Curtin, May 23, 1865, PHMC, RG 19.29, Box 25.
69. Campman to Curtin, April 28, 1865, PHMC, RG 19.29, Box 25.

