

ESSENTIAL CIVIL WAR CURRICULUM

The Civil War Era in Southern Appalachia

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Colonel Lawrence M. Allen was near the end of his rope in early January 1863. His 64th North Carolina Infantry Regiment had marched into their native western North Carolina to help quash bands of pro-Union citizens along the North Carolina and Tennessee border. One such group of “disloyal” men had recently raided Marshall, the county seat of Madison County. Ostensibly in search of salt, the raiders stole a variety of items from people’s homes—including the blankets warming Colonel Allen’s dangerously-ill children. Weeks of bushwhacking and sniping, plus the fresh emotional wounds inflicted by the death of their colonel’s children, heightened the gray-clad infantrymen’s exasperation. Rounding up a number of suspects, the Confederate soldiers marched toward the Tennessee border. A few miles outside of town, however, the soldiers halted and lined their civilian prisoners along the road. Forcing them to kneel, the regular Confederate troops shot their defenseless prisoners. Their thirteen victims ranged from thirteen to sixty years old.¹

The Shelton Laurel Massacre, as it came to be known, captures many of the salient experiences of Southern Appalachians during the Civil War. First, governmental power constituted a distant entity for most southern Appalachians. Although politically active, Appalachians rarely felt the direct application of state power. As a result, wartime conscription officials, tax collectors, and regular military organizations represented an “invasion” against mountaineers accustomed to a more localized power structure. Second, the Civil War divided the Southern Appalachian population. Unionism in the highland South has often been exaggerated (only East Tennessee can claim a Unionist majority within the Appalachian portion of the Confederacy), but strong pockets of dissent formed in the mountains. Distant government and divided loyalties contributed to a third major component of the Civil War in Appalachia: guerrilla warfare. Colonel Allen’s regiment represented an exception rather than the norm. For the most part, the Civil War combat in Appalachia pitted smaller regular commands against each other or state militia against guerrillas. With notable exceptions such as the battles in West Virginia, the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia, and East Tennessee, smaller forces fought for largely local objectives across the mountain South.

Defining Appalachia

In 1862, James W. Taylor published *Alleghania: A Geographical and Statistical Memoir. Exhibiting the Strength of the Union, and the Weakness of Slavery, in the Mountain Districts of*

¹ Phillip Shaw Paludan, *Victims: A True Story of the Civil War* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1981), 85, 89, 91-98.

the South. The author introduced his northern readers to the Appalachian South, a mountainous region of high peaks, valleys, and plateaus adverse to staple crops, with limited transportation routes, and an overwhelmingly white population. Then and now, this region did not fit many northern readers' imagined version of the South because antebellum political disputes regarding the basis of legislative representation and taxes exposed fault lines within the broader region. Taylor expanded that analysis—though it might more rightly be judged a prediction of Appalachian Unionism—by arguing that the higher the proportion of free whites in a county compared to its enslaved population was a near ironclad predictor of Unionist sentiment. The argument was so simple that Taylor even adopted a name for it: the “Slaveometer.” Where whites greatly outnumbered people of color in a given county, “the Rebellion has no firm foundation,” Taylor wrote. “On the contrary,” he continued, “they are ripe and ready to follow the instructive precedent established in West Virginia.”²

Taylor referred to the mountain South as “Alleghania” in 1862; the name Appalachia would not come into common usage until the latter part of the 19th century. Scholars hold that geography, while important, did not create a distinctive culture. Though Appalachia often lacked the infrastructure that other parts of the region enjoyed, its people were never fully isolated from the rest of the country. Some scholars argue that Appalachia itself is a social and historical construct. Summarizing this view, historian John Alexander Williams called Appalachia “a territory only of the mind... a place that has been invented, not discovered, an ‘alternative America’ projected onto the mountains and mountain people...”³ Politics amplified the cultural and geographical factors. For example, the Shenandoah Valley, while geographically near the heart of Appalachia, is often separated from the region. This distinction has historical reasons. First, the Shenandoah Valley and the Trans-Allegheny sections of Virginia drifted apart following reforms to the state’s constitution in 1830. More recently, Congressman Richard Poff had his Shenandoah Valley district cut out of the Appalachian Regional Commission and “official Appalachia” in protest of governmental activism in the 1960s.⁴ Still, historians John Inscoe and Gordon McKinney suggested that we view Appalachia as “several substate sections that were inextricably bound (if to varying degrees) to the allegiances and identities of different states, which in all but one instance

² James W. Taylor, *Alleghania: A Geographical and Statistical Memoir* (St. Paul, James Davenport, 1862), v-vii. Taylor’s Alleghania included thirteen North Carolina counties, three South Carolina, twenty Georgia, fifteen Alabama, and twenty-six Tennessee counties. See Taylor, *Alleghenia*, 1, 6-15.

³ John Alexander Williams, *Appalachia: A History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 9-16 (quote appears on page 9). For more on the debates over definition, see Henry D. Shapiro, *Appalachia on Our Mind: The Southern Mountains and Mountaineers in the American Consciousness, 1870-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1978); Allen Batteau, *The Invention of Appalachia* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1990); Richard B. Drake, “Southern Appalachia: A Region Within a Section, in” *Journal of the Appalachian Studies Association* 3, (1991): 18-27; Gene Wilhelm, Jr., “Appalachian Isolation: Fact or Fiction?” in J. W. Williamson, ed., *An Appalachian Symposium* (Boone: Appalachian State University Press, 1977).

⁴ Randall Gooden, *The Governor’s Pawns: Hostages and Hostage Taking in Civil War West Virginia* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2023), 6; Williams, *Appalachia*, 341.

[West Virginia] was more nonmountainous than mountainous in character.”⁵ What Inscoe and McKinney meant by identity was the self-perception mountain southerners had of themselves linking the physical, cultural, and political relationships of place, state, and region. Boundaries, both geographical and cultural, are shaped by identity and are fluid in Appalachia.

A generation of scholars have refuted the pernicious stereotypes about the region, recovered the significance of mountain slavery, complicated our understanding of wartime loyalties, and helped advance our understanding of guerrilla warfare. Rather than see Appalachia as an exceptional “Switzerland of the South,” they set it squarely within the South. In fact, there is not even one “Appalachia.” John Alexander Williams again helps us clarify the region. While the “official” definition follows that of the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) and includes parts of Ohio, Pennsylvania, New York, New England, and Mississippi, few people during the Civil War Era would have used such a definition. Taylor’s *Alleghenia* tried to give this region a name, but historian Williams offers a more appropriate variation that he dubs “core” Appalachia. Within the larger ARC definition of Appalachia, Williams’s “core” includes West Virginia, Southwest Virginia, Eastern Kentucky, western North Carolina, East Tennessee, and north Georgia. The “core” centers upon the southern portion of Appalachia including that part bordering the United States during the war, sections of states that remained in the United States as well as Virginia, Tennessee, North Carolina, and Georgia. Divided in their loyalties, this core roughly parallels Taylor’s *Alleghenia*.⁶

Perceptions of poor and isolated mountaineers, scholars have shown, miss the mark in explaining Appalachia’s political, military, and economic experiences during the Civil War era. In recapturing the full scope of this period in Appalachian history, these scholars remind us to be cautious about using “Southern” and “Confederate” synonymously. The Civil War era in Appalachia challenges us to see the war in a broad range of settings, including those where there were fewer enslaved people, less transportation access, and power vacuums. Appalachia’s Civil War shows the malleability of communities and the reflexiveness of policymakers while shifting our focus away from conventional battlefields and an idyllic home front toward the war’s messiness and destructiveness.

Mountain Slavery, Antebellum Politics, and Divided Loyalties

Taylor’s “Slaveometer” erroneously divides Southern Appalachia from the southern states that joined the Confederacy by dismissing mountain slavery. As the South’s slave system matured and the Cotton Belt expanded during the first half of the 19th century, demographic differences became more pronounced. Deep South states became more dependent on enslaved African Americans, who constituted roughly fifty percent of those states’ population. Meanwhile, African Americans made up roughly ten percent of the Appalachian South. Due to climate and soil differences, Southern Appalachia never became dependent on pre-Civil War staple crops (cotton,

⁵ John C. Inscoe and Gordon B. McKinney, *The Heart of Confederate Appalachia: Western North Carolina in the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 10.

⁶ Williams, *Appalachia*, 12-14.

tobacco, rice, and hemp) that led to the proliferation of slavery in other sections of the South. Without staple crops and a large Black population, many Civil War era observers—like Taylor—concluded that southern mountaineers were less invested in the peculiar institution and thus on the margins of the southern social and economic system.⁷

Because it was different (soils, climate, crops, and transportation access), people misinterpret Appalachia's sometimes tenuous connection to slavery as opposition to the peculiar institution and portray Appalachia as exceptional within the South. Appalachia did have issues of landlessness and white labor that differentiated the region somewhat. Across Southern Appalachia, landlessness ranked higher than in other parts of the South. In Southwest Virginia, perhaps as much as half of the section's agricultural workers were tenants and sharecropping was already a common labor arrangement before the war. In Knoxville, Tennessee, slightly less than half of its white labor force—including those in trades—worked for someone else. A full 44% of Knox County's farm households did not own their own land, and the top five percent of its population controlled 49% of the wealth. In northeastern Georgia's Fannin County, only 36% of the population owned land in 1860. Meanwhile, the wealthiest 6.4% of residents commanded more than half the county's wealth.⁸

What defined mountain slavery was its adaptability, which underscores the flexibility of the mature slave system of the mid-nineteenth century. Corn, wheat, and free-range hogs tied mountain farmers into the larger southern economy as their produce often fed enslaved people on lowland plantations. At home, the absence of staple crops led mountain enslavers to engage in land speculation, mercantile pursuits, mining, manufacturing, and other economic pursuits. Enslaved Appalachians may not have worked in cotton fields, but they labored in a wide range of settings from agriculture to salt manufacture that created towns and forged economic ties to the larger southern economy. In mountain tourism destinations like Asheville, North Carolina, slaves often worked as cooks, baggage handlers, stable hands, and tour guides. Their smaller number also gave mountain slaves greater mobility within the region due to a reduced fear of slave revolts. To be sure, slavery in the mountains possessed all the abuses and struggles of slavery elsewhere in the South, but torture centered more upon social control than productivity in the mountains.⁹

Like their Deep South counterparts, mountain enslavers exercised hegemonic power in their communities. In Eastern Kentucky, the absence of a railroad rendered the 1850s a less-than-prosperous decade. Still, a group of determined land speculators and slaveholders petitioned

⁷ Williams, *Appalachia*, 111.

⁸ Kenneth W. Noe, *Southwest Virginia's Railroad: Modernization and the Sectional Crisis in the Civil War Era* (Urbana: The University of Illinois Press, 1994), 45-48; Robert Tracy McKenzie, *Lincolmites and Rebels: A Divided Town in the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 40-42; Jonathan Dean Sarris, *A Separate Civil War: Communities in Conflict in the Mountain South* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2006), 38.

⁹ John C. Inscoe, *Mountain Masters: Slavery and the Sectional Crisis in Western North Carolina* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1989), 19, 62, 68-70, 72, 76-77, 88-90, 104-7; Noe, *Southwest Virginia's Railroad*, 70-73, 78-83; Wilma A. Dunaway, *Slavery in the American Mountain South* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 245; Sarris, *A Separate Civil War*, 23-24.

successfully for the creation of Breathitt County in 1839, which became one such pocket of Confederate support. Soon, those county founders—only six percent of white residents enslaved people—dominated the county government.¹⁰ Although western North Carolinians’ railroad dreams were unfulfilled before the war, enslavers controlled 59.1% of their section’s wealth despite comprising roughly 10% of the population. North Carolina’s mountain slaveholders also dominated state and national politics. Between 1840 and 1860, seventy-nine of the ninety-two legislators (or 87.1 percent) from western North Carolina were slaveowners.¹¹ Interestingly, the divergence between these two regions—Eastern Kentucky became a strongly pro-Union section with distinct Confederate pockets and western North Carolina became a pro-Confederate region with Unionist pockets—demonstrates both the diversity within Appalachia and the danger of translating a smaller slave population as Unionism.

Support for slavery did not necessarily translate into support for secession. Many Appalachian opponents of disunion, including William Gannaway “Parson” Brownlow, did so because they feared the removal of the US Constitution’s protections for slavery. During the secession crisis, Brownlow expressed a rather common sentiment among mountaineers when he asserted, “The Union men of the border slave states are loyal to their Government and do not regard the election of [Abraham] Lincoln as any just cause for dissolving the Union...But, if we were once convinced that the Administration in Washington and the people of the North contemplated the subjugation of the South or the abolishing of slavery, there would not be a Union man among us in twenty-four hours.” So-called “conditional Unionists” dominated the political landscape during the secession crisis of 1860-61. Broadly speaking, conditional Unionists were white southerners who espoused loyalty to the United States government so long as the federal government made no aggressive act against the seceded states. Early attempts at secession proved such Unionists’ strength. Western North Carolina voters defeated a call for a secession convention by the slim margin of 50.3 to 49.7 percent on February 28, 1861. Conversely, Southwest Virginia demonstrated the binding power of the internal improvements of the 1850s. During the decade before the war, the construction of the Virginia & Tennessee Railroad created closer economic connections between the southwestern counties and eastern Virginia that led to an expansion of and greater commitment to slavery. Most southwestern Virginians adhered to a conditional Unionist course, blaming extremists on both sides for the country’s predicament before backing states’ rights Democrat John Cabell Breckinridge in the 1860 presidential election. Their support for Breckinridge revealed just how close the southwestern corner had come to eastern Virginia.¹²

¹⁰ Brian D. McKnight, *Contested Borderland: The Civil War in Appalachian Kentucky and Virginia* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2006), 15, 26; T.R.C. Hutton, *Bloody Breathitt: Politics and Violence in the Appalachian South* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2013), 30-31, 34-35, 40-52.

¹¹ Inscoc, *Mountain Masters*, 117, 121-2, 125; Inscoc and McKinney, *Heart of Confederate Appalachia*, 18.

¹² Inscoc, *Race, War, and Remembrance in the Appalachian South* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2009), 27-28 (quote appears on page 28); Inscoc and McKinney, *The Heart of Confederate Appalachia*, 52; Noe, *Southwest Virginia’s Railroad*, 3-8, 26-28, 91-92, 94, 99-100, 102-4, 106. The East Tennessee boom stemmed from the creation of the East Tennessee & Virginia Railroad, which connected to the Virginia & Tennessee at Bristol, and the East Tennessee & Georgia Railroad. See McKenzie, *Lincolnites and Rebels*, 21-22.

Class divisions forced secessionists to court their mountain compatriots to embrace disunion. During Virginia’s state convention, US Senator Waitman Thomas Willey’s resolution calling for taxation on enslaved property prompted a vigorous debate that led to a compromise aimed at appeasing northwestern Virginians.¹³ In East Tennessee, longtime rivals like William Brownlow, the acerbic editor of the *Knoxville Whig*, and longtime Democratic leader, Andrew Johnson, spearheaded the campaign for the Union. Speaking to the laboring and landless whites in and around Knoxville, Brownlow chastised secessionists as willing to sacrifice the rights of free white men for an elite slaveholding minority. North Georgia native and Governor of that state, Joseph Emerson Brown, struck a similar chord in the secession campaign in his state. Like Brownlow, he connected secession to slavery, but urged his followers to recognize that “every white laborer is interested in sustaining...slavery” because it would “keep up the price of [white] labor.” Calls for secession conventions failed in East Tennessee, western North Carolina, and elsewhere thanks in part to the strength of mountaineers’ opposition.¹⁴

In the end, conditional Unionism failed to hold in most of the Upper South—including Appalachia. In large towns and along railroad lines, pro-secession sentiment grew stronger. In Knoxville, the issue of slavery’s survival took center stage—despite Brownlow’s proslavery populism. Secessionists pleaded with their neighbors to stand up for the South and all that it held dear. When Unionist speakers went to towns like Jonesborough in northeastern Tennessee, they faced angry crowds and death threats. At a second regional convention in Greeneville in June 1861, conservative Unionists took a more cautious stance and divided their ranks. Arguing that secessionists threatened their status as free white men, East Tennessee Unionists reignited old antagonisms regarding the makeup of the state legislature. Although 60% of East Tennesseans rejected secession, the story played out differently elsewhere.¹⁵ Across the border in western North Carolina, people looked to conditional Unionists like Zebulon Baird Vance, then a Congressman, and US Senator Thomas Lanier Clingman. Both men from Buncombe County represented converging paths toward disunion. A one-time Whig, Clingman transformed into a fierce defender of slavery and potential secession following a rare antebellum political defeat. A devoted Whig, Vance clung to the Union until the firing on Fort Sumter ushered in war and what conditional Unionists deemed “coercion” of the seceded southern states back toward the Union. Similar shifts

¹³ William W. Freehling and Craig M. Simpson, *Showdown in Virginia: The 1861 Convention and the Fate of the Union* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2010), 136-44.

¹⁴ Fisher, *War at Every Door: Partisan Politics and Guerilla Violence in East Tennessee, 1860-1869* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 26-27, 29-31; McKenzie, *Lincolmites and Rebels*, 44; Sarris, *A Separate Civil War*, 47.

¹⁵ Fisher, *War at Every Door*, 26-40; McKenzie, *Lincolmites and Rebels*, 44, 55-60.

toward secession occurred in Southwest Virginia and northeast Georgia, thus forming a base of Confederate support in Southern Appalachia.¹⁶

The Civil War in Appalachia

Secession did not erase divisions in Appalachia. Military commanders like Brigadier General Felix Kirk Zollicoffer attempted to ameliorate Unionists' fears by promising to allow dissent in sentiment but not deed. Zollicoffer promised East Tennessee Unionists that he would not threaten their freedom or property if they took no overt action against his government. Still, Zollicoffer could not ignore the growing numbers of highlanders traveling north to Union lines. It was a problem that proved difficult to manage. Appalachians were often mobile, and the war was no exception. After secession, people fled north to join United States forces in Kentucky; others moved south to volunteer their services to the Confederacy in Virginia. Accommodation collapsed in November 1861 when northeast Tennessee Unionists rebelled just months after secession, burning five railroad bridges, and attempting to destroy four more. The Confederacy cracked down, executing some of the perpetrators. They would arrest others. In fact, East Tennesseans constituted the majority of civilians arrested for disloyalty by the Confederacy during the war.¹⁷ The Alien Enemies Act of 1861 targeted men like Parson Brownlow.¹⁸ Such volatility transformed people's homes into battlefields plagued by shifting power between the two combatants and destabilizing communities.¹⁹

The situation was messier in West Virginia. Positioned at the border of the North, South, East, and West, the new border state struggled through the war with competing governmental authorities. Virginia never acknowledged the separation of the northwest, and a restored state government including all of the 1860 counties of the state vied with a new West Virginia state government for control. On the edge of these competing entities, the residents shifted from one side to the other rather fluidly. Confederate authorities seized hostages as a means to assert their authority, and the new West Virginia state government followed suit. They seized their first hostage, George Western Thompson, a longtime politician and judge who opposed secession but resisted separation from Virginia. The result was a mess that splintered communities and often pitted West Virginia Governor Arthur Ingraham Boreman against U.S. authorities.²⁰

¹⁶ Inscoc and McKinney, *Heart of Confederate Appalachia*, 30-32, 44, 48-49; Inscoc, *Mountain Masters*, 177, 181, 188-207.

¹⁷ Mark E. Neely, Jr., *Southern Rights: Political Prisoners and the Myth of Confederate Constitutionalism* (Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1999), 103, 106-7, 111-12, 115. East Tennesseans constituted 16.2% of all identified civilians arrested by the Confederate government.

¹⁸ McKenzie, *Lincolnites and Rebels*, 84, 93; Fisher, *War at Every Door*, 45, 50.

¹⁹ McKnight, *Contested Borderlands*, 34-36, 39.

²⁰ Randall Gooden, *The Governor's Pawns*, xiii, 52-53.

Governors Joseph Brown of Georgia and Zebulon Vance of North Carolina sought to suppress dissent without exciting further rebellion. Longstanding political goals for a white basis of legislative representation and ad valorem taxation on slave property animated resistance to central Confederate policies like conscription, impressment, and tax-in-kind across Appalachia. In northern Georgia, the Conscription Act of 1862 incited widespread class disaffection, especially in Fannin County. Anger at the draft fed into the rising guerrilla conflict in the region as the tension between local and national needs increased. Brown proved sympathetic. He suspended the draft in nine Georgia counties, including some in Appalachia to alleviate pressure. But that did not mean Brown turned against the Confederacy. He also denounced Unionists and encouraged Georgians to treat dissenters like a separate class unprotected by law. A Confederate cavalry officer sent to quell Unionists in the region, Andrew Young, interpreted Brown's anti-Unionist rhetoric to include summary execution of "deserters, persons absent without leave, [and] persons aiding deserters" who shot at his men. Within his first month as governor, Zebulon Vance issued the first of a dozen proclamations aimed at curtailing draft resistance. He wrote, "Information has reached me that certain persons, unmindful of the calls of patriotism & forgetful of the duties of good citizens, are using their influence...to prevent obedience to the Conscription Law, and that others are attempting to organize an open resistance to its execution." The new governor quickly made it known that he would enforce conscription and other Confederate policies.²¹

Unionism and dissent grew stronger and became more organized across Appalachia during the war's final years, but it never constituted a majority outside West Virginia and northeast Tennessee. In states with significant Appalachian sections, however, a two-party structure remained remarkably intact and helped channel dissent. The Heroes of America, an underground pro-Union organization, entered southwest Virginia from North Carolina in 1863. Its members aided U.S. soldiers, including those escaping Confederate prisons, and worked to undermine Confederate authority, capitalizing on war weariness. In Floyd County, Virginia, the Heroes or Red Strings as they were called, elected a sheriff and appointed a constable. A Confederate investigation revealed that the organization had expanded into regular Confederate military units as well as political support grew across seven counties. After the summer defeats in 1863, a peace movement in North Carolina grew stronger. Nine peace meetings occurred between July and August 1863, protesting tax and conscription policies. One meeting in Governor Vance's native Reems Creek community of Buncombe County endorsed abandoning Confederate independence completely. This grassroots resistance led to the election to the Confederate Congress of a peace candidate, George Washington Logan, in 1864. Still, it appears that this remained something of a party struggle as Vance tackled the opposition head-on, launching his reelection campaign in

²¹ Gordon B. McKinney, *Zeb Vance: North Carolina's Civil War Governor and Gilded Age Political Leader* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 115, 117, 141-3 (Quote appears on page 117); Sarris, *A Separate Civil War*, 67-70, 123-4, 182-3. Even in disputes with his state's Supreme Court, Vance tried to walk the line between state responsibility and national needs. Rather than oppose the national administration, he advocated for political delay to allow the full state Supreme Court to resolve the issue—which they did in June 1863.

heavily divided Wilkes County in 1864. Appealing to Confederate nationalism and portraying the war as an affair of honor, Vance won over 75% of the western vote.²²

Divided loyalties shaped the conflict in the mountain South as did the logistical concerns caused by the mountain geography, the need to defend transportation, and resource control. The rugged topography amplified the strategic significance of existing roads and mountain gaps. Confederate General Humphrey Marshall summarized the challenges facing armies in Appalachian in a letter to his superior officer in January 1862. Operating in the mountains of Virginia and Kentucky, Humphrey rued that his men faced an “enemy greater than the Lincolnites—starvation.” Furthermore, Marshall complained that “this country will not furnish subsistence for even the troops I have now.” Marshall’s soldiers had to gather, shell, mill, and grind the corn themselves due to the fact that “there is scarcely a friend between that [Paintsville] and the mouth of the Sandy.” As Brian McKnight observed, Marshall understood the challenges facing armies in the Appalachians: difficult geography, limited resources, and a paranoid population trapped between two hostile forces rendered military operations difficult at best.²³

Much of the conventional war, as it was, in Appalachia centered upon logistics. Transportation routes and resource control loomed large in United States and Confederate operations across the region. In late 1861, East Tennessee Unionists attempted to coordinate with the U.S. Army to damage the Confederacy’s logistical ability to maneuver through the heart of its territory by burning key bridges along the East Tennessee & Virginia and East Tennessee & Georgia Railroads. Further north, conventional armies clashed six times between June and September in West Virginia. On June 3, 1861, a U.S. victory at the Battle of Philippi deprived the Confederacy access to the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad and secured the Second Wheeling Convention that would declare statehood.²⁴ Other conventional engagements followed. Once again reclaiming the Shenandoah Valley brings Lieutenant General Stonewall Jackson’s Valley campaign—and the maneuverability it displayed through mountain gaps and local roads—into an Appalachian context. On September 19, 1862, Shepherdstown closed the Antietam Campaign. In 1863, the Army of Northern Virginia moved down the Valley into Pennsylvania. U.S. Major General Ambrose Everts Burnside captured Knoxville, Tennessee in September 1863, opening the door for further operations in southern Appalachia (such as Major General George Stoneman Jr.’s raid in 1864-1865). In 1864, U.S. forces defeated the Army of Tennessee at Chattanooga (including the Battle Above the Clouds on Lookout Mountain). General Philip Henry Sheridan’s burning of the Valley placed the hard hand of war on the region’s most agriculturally productive section.

²² Noe, *Southwest Virginia’s Railroad*, 134-137; Inscoc and McKinney, *The Heart of Confederate Appalachia*, 152-64; Steven E. Nash, *Reconstruction’s Ragged Edge: The Politics of Postwar Life in the Southern Mountains* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016), 21-22.

²³ McKnight, *Contested Borderland*, 67.

²⁴ Mark A. Snell, *West Virginia and the Civil War: Mountaineers are Always Free* (Cheltenham UK: The History Press, 2011), locations 373-527.

Fear and paranoia, hallmark characteristics of the war in the southern mountains, intensified as communities grew suspicious of national and local authorities. State-organized Home Guards further destabilized matters as pro-Union and pro-Confederate guerrillas escalated the level of violence in Appalachian communities. In newly minted West Virginia, state soldiers known as the State Line troops grew out of the Confederacy's efforts to destabilize and regain the Trans-Allegheny counties. Often, these irregular wars happened in border areas where no one state could exercise authority and operatives could weave in and out of mountain passes. For example, the Tug River valley separating Kentucky and West Virginia was home to many Confederate sympathizers. Perhaps one of the most notable, Captain William Anderson "Anse" Hatfield patriarch in the Hatfield-McCoy feud, deserted the Confederate army at Saltville, and returned home to try and secure his local independence through irregular warfare.²⁵ Similarly, the Confederate, Samuel "Champ" Ferguson, fought the war for largely personal rather than ideological reasons. A product of the paranoia that gripped many Southern Appalachians, Ferguson waged his own war across sections of Kentucky, East Tennessee, and Southwest Virginia. Antebellum loyalties mattered little as communities fractured during the war. Some of Ferguson's oldest friends ranked among his fifty-three victims, as even his own brother became a Union partisan during the war. Ruthless and deadly, Ferguson employed a kill or be killed approach that saw him murder opponents in cold blood—including one Union soldier who was literally lying in bed too sick to resist.²⁶

Roiling anxiety and anger between mountain residents and Confederate authorities took more than a few tragic turns. U.S. Cavalry leader, George Stoneman, received orders to raid western and central North Carolina and to destroy property without getting drawn into a major engagement. With an eye on liberating prisoners in the Salisbury prison camp, Stoneman's forces crossed into North Carolina on March 28, 1865. Among Stoneman's men were the 2nd and 3rd North Carolina Mounted Infantry led by Colonel George Washington Kirk, an East Tennessean whose U.S. forces included many Confederate deserters and whose frequent tangles with the Thomas Legion's Cherokee troops embodied the reciprocal nature of irregular war in Appalachia. While Stoneman's raid achieved mixed results, it did bring the full scope of war to the county seats of several western North Carolina counties and also moved into southwestern Virginia.²⁷

²⁵ Altina Waller, *Feud: Hatfields, McCoys, and Social Change in Appalachia, 1860-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 29-33.

²⁶ McKnight, *Confederate Outlaw: Champ Ferguson and the Civil War in Appalachia* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2011), 2, 9-11, 40-42; Daniel Sutherland, *A Savage Conflict: The Decisive Role of Guerrillas in the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 82. Ferguson is a good example, but not the only one. For other examples of guerrilla warfare in Appalachia, see Sarris, *A Separate War*, 123-124; Snell, *West Virginia and the Civil War* on the Moccasin Rangers and Snake Hunters; Noe, *Southwest Virginia's Railroad*, 118; McKnight, *Contested Borderland*, 156-7; Insoe and McKinney, *The Heart of Confederate Appalachia*, 106-9, 133; Gooden, *Governor's Pawns*, 100.

²⁷ McKnight, *Confederate Outlaw*, 147-55; Insoe and McKinney, *The Heart of Confederate Appalachia*, 243-58; Hardy, *Kirk's Raiders*, 72. While a detailed list does not exist of the Confederate deserters that joined Kirk's 2nd and 3rd North Carolina Mounted Infantry, a good start is comparing the western North Carolina soldier lists in Terrell

The violence—escalating in scale and intensity—even permeated so-called regular military engagements during the war’s final two years. During Stoneman’s 1864-1865 raid from northeast Tennessee through southwestern Virginia and western North Carolina, Champ Ferguson joined the regular Confederate forces in resisting federal advances. At the Battle of Saltville, Union Brigadier General Stephen Gano Burbridge’s forces clashed with Brigadier General John Echols’s troops. Among Burbridge’s command of mostly white Kentuckians was the 5th U.S. Colored Cavalry, who would see their first combat in the coming engagement. After pushing his way through well-defended gaps, Burbridge struck Echols’s recently reinforced command on October 2, 1864. Nearly out of ammunition, the U.S. assault came to a close near night and Burbridge’s men withdrew. The next day, Confederates surveyed the field and discovered ghastly casualties. Confederate soldiers on the right end of their line scoured over the battlefield and executed wounded African American soldiers. One Confederate cavalryman wrote of the massacre that “very many of the negroes standing about in groups were only slightly wounded, but they soon went down before the unerring pistols and rifles of the enraged Tennesseans.” Despite Confederate General John C. Breckinridge’s efforts to halt the executions, the Confederates continued their deadly work of murdering 45-50 Black Union soldiers in cold blood.²⁸

Southern Appalachia’s nascent industries were vital to the Confederate war effort, which made Saltville a target of numerous campaigns. For much of the early 19th century, Southern Appalachia led the nation in salt production. Enslaved people were essential to the salt industry in western and southwestern Virginia. In 1835, the saltworks in the Kanawha Valley utilized roughly 3,000 workers, a majority of whom were enslaved. The region’s development as a source for the vital preservative highlighted the need for internal improvements—namely turnpikes and railroads—to carry that natural wealth to markets. Salt manufacturers ranked among the most outspoken internal improvement boosters. One such project, the Virginia & Tennessee Railroad, connected Knoxville to Lynchburg during the late antebellum period. By the 1850s, the discovery of new salt deposits in the West and expanding market production in New York caused Saltville’s prominence to decline.²⁹

Secession separated the Confederacy from sources of salt in the North and West, which reinvigorated the Saltville works. As the dominant 19th century preservative for meat, the mineral was in heavy demand from soldiers and civilians. The Kanawha Valley saltworks were lost quickly to the Confederacy when Major General George Brinton McClellan’s forces entered western Virginia from Ohio in 1861, and West Virginia statehood cemented the loss. Confederate officials knew the delicate situation confronting them. Knoxville, Tennessee was a central hub for hogs

Garren’s *Mountain Myth: Unionism in Western North Carolina* (Spartanburg: The Reprint Company, Publishers, 2006), the 2nd and 3rd North Carolina Mounted Infantry rosters in Matt Bumgarner’s *Kirk’s Raiders: A Notorious Band of Scoundrels and Thieves* (Hickory, NC: Tarheel Press, 2000) with Judkin Browning’s “Tar Heel Troops” database of deserters. <https://www.tarheeltroops.org/>, accessed May 1, 2025.

²⁸ McKnight, *Contested Borderland*, 207-13. Quote appears on page 210.

²⁹ Noe, *Southwest Virginia’s Railroad*, 60-63; Drew A. Swanson, *Beyond the Mountains: Commodifying Appalachian Environments* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2018), 77, 81.

then driven into Virginia and the Carolinas. Still, that was insufficient, and some Confederate officials knew it. A commissary of subsistence, Colonel Francis Gildart “Frank” Ruffin, estimated that the United States packed and salted three million hogs in 1860, but less than 20,000 of those were processed in Confederate states. Supply issues and price volatility stoked fears of shortages. Rebel war clerk, John Beauchamp Jones, noted that over a two-week period in November 1862, the price for salt jumped from seventy cents to a dollar thirty in Richmond.³⁰

Shortages exacerbated political tensions within the Confederacy. Several Confederate states negotiated with Virginia to establish their own operations at Saltville. North Carolina utilized enslaved workers at two hundred kettles capable of producing as much as 300,000 bushels of salt each year.³¹ Governor Zebulon Vance complained bitterly to his Virginia counterpart whose state impressed North Carolina’s enslaved workers to build defensive works around the saltworks in the fall of 1864. Vance had legitimate concerns. His state had failed to create its own saltworks, and his constituents, including some from the mountain counties, informed him that they had hogs ready for the slaughter that would go to waste without salt. Valid though his concerns were, they paled in comparison to the potential damage that would follow Saltville’s destruction by the U.S. North Carolina’s enslaved salt workers were not the first to be impressed. Confederate Major General Samuel Jones impressed enslaved people from the area around Saltville to bolster its defenses in the summer of 1863. The Battle of Saltville confirmed these concerns when more than 4,000 U.S. soldiers attacked the town on October 2, 1864. Still, Saltville and its valuable resources remained active and in Confederate hands—materially sustaining the Confederate war effort—until George Stoneman’s cavalry damaged the works as well as part of the Virginia & Tennessee Railroad during his raid from northeast Tennessee through Southwest Virginia and western North Carolina in late 1864 and early 1865. Still, desperately clinging to the saltworks, Confederates worked to repair and resumed production in the final months of the war.³²

Reconstruction

The Civil War may have ended with Confederate defeat, but peace proved elusive in its wake. In areas like Appalachia with divided loyalties, some viewed the war’s end as a time for revenge. A decidedly pro-Confederate young woman, Ellen Renshaw House, recounted an incident soon after Confederate veterans returned home to Knoxville. A Unionist identified as Foster entered a local store where he encountered a Confederate named Cox in August 1865. They shook hands, and then, when Cox turned away, Foster shot him in the back and then three more times killing him. “There certainly is a dreadful state of things,” House declared, as she blamed the event on “Brownlow’s teaching.” Peace had done nothing to resolve divisions within Appalachian communities. Furthermore, transportation and supply issues remained, if not

³⁰ Swanson, *Beyond the Mountains*, 82; Judkin Browning and Timothy Silver, *An Environmental History of the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2020), 122-123. In 1860, Midwestern stock raisers exported 1.3 million hogs to the South. Browning and Silver, 123.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 74, 83.

³² *Ibid.*, 83-87, 90-91.

worsened by the war. Families struggled through economic hardships. As if that was not enough, Reconstruction then added the challenges of emancipation and the restoration of the Union on top of those problems. For as House frequently noted in the postwar portion of her diary, the Confederates residents of Knoxville had to obey a United States occupation force. And at least one regiment of those soldiers in blue were formerly enslaved Black men.³³

The aspirations of Black mountaineers differed little from those of their counterparts elsewhere. They desired to reunite their families, receive an education, enjoy the financial benefits of their labor including land ownership, and move freely. Like elsewhere in the Confederate South, slavery unraveled in Appalachia during the war. Emancipation, of course, was not immediate; it was a process that swept across the country like a wave. It reached rural Appalachia unevenly and gradually. These aspirations were given voice by a formerly enslaved woman named Sarah Gudger. More than one hundred years old at the time of her interview, Gudger spoke freely of the long days of work, torturous whippings, and other horrors of slavery in Buncombe County, North Carolina. She spoke of being “whipped like a mule” and having received “a thousand lashins in my day,” but the most emotionally wrenching part of her interview is her description of being denied the ability to attend her mother’s funeral. Family was important to Gudger, and though she would never reunite with her siblings, she did move to live with her father after nearly a year living with her former enslavers after emancipation. She also recalled an older enslaved woman who told her freedom would be meaningless without education. When freedom came, the woman chided her fellow formerly enslaved people. “I tole yo’ all, now yo’ got no larnin’, yo’ got no nuthin’, got no home; whut yo’ gwine do? Didn’ I tell yo’?”³⁴

Perhaps the greatest force in the mountain South’s reconstruction—besides the formerly enslaved people themselves—was the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands or Freedmen’s Bureau. At first glance, the presence of a federal entity aimed at helping the South transition from slavery to free labor might seem out of place in overwhelmingly white Appalachia. However, it proved to be the most tangible form of federal power in many mountain counties. For example, in north Georgia and western North Carolina, Bureau agents provided food, supplies, and medicine to economically struggling whites at the same time that they aided African Americans’ efforts to secure work and wages, civil rights, and education. Outside of towns like Knoxville with a strong occupation force, Bureau agents found themselves operating on something of an island. The same logistical issues that limited wartime operations (poor or limited roads and railroads as well as irregular mail and communication) plagued postwar efforts. Once the

³³ Daniel E. Sutherland, *A Very Violent Rebel: The Civil War Diary of Ellen Renshaw House* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1996), 176, 181. Quote appears on page 181.

³⁴ Federal Writers Project, *Slave Narratives: A Folk History of Slavery in the United States from Interviews with Former Slaves, Vol. XI, North Carolina Narratives, Part 1 Adams-Hunter, Sarah Gudger* (Washington D.C.: Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, 1941), 353-8, 362, quote appears on image 262, see <https://www.loc.gov/item/mesn111/>, accessed May 1, 2025.

government established agents across the region, they administered multiple counties over rough terrain with tenuous transportation.³⁵

From West Virginia to north Georgia, African Americans pursued education passionately. In Montgomery County, Virginia, Bureau agent Charles Schaeffer helped local African Americans' open schools in six communities by 1869. Despite white opposition, Schaeffer helped secure external funding from groups like the Friends' Freedmen's Association and facilitated partnerships with the African Episcopal Methodist Church to advance educational efforts in his southwestern Virginia district. Education was certainly a priority of African Americans in northern Georgia as well. Black residents raised money, hired teachers, and purchased land for schools like the Dahlonga School in north Georgia with 80-100 regular attendees during 1867-1868. There is perhaps no better testament to the educational efforts of Black Appalachian communities than eleven-year-old Hart Wayland's letter to a New York publication in February 1869. "When Ms. Lucy [Eastman, his teacher] came here I did not know anything," he wrote, "but now don't you think I write pretty well?"³⁶

Emancipation also shaped labor in the region, although not in the same ways that it did in the plantation South. As noted earlier, Appalachia had a sizable white landless and laboring population. The availability of white labor shaped the response to slavery's end. In western North Carolina, Confederate veteran and emerging land speculator, Walter Waightstill Lenoir, advised his family to dismiss African American laborers. While he offered to keep his former enslaved people on the same terms as slavery, Lenoir deemed those circumstances losing ones for himself and was relieved when his former slaves left. Such changes reflected decades of Lenoir family practice as the family had employed white sharecroppers in Caldwell and Haywood counties in western North Carolina since the 1840s. Such experience and the number of whites facing hard economic realities after the war shaped both Lenoir's approach to emancipation and also helped former mountain masters shift to sharecropping. Due to land speculation and prevalent white laborers, Lenoir and other elite whites were able to smoothly navigate the transition from labor lords to landlords, as Gavin Wright dubbed it, because many of them had always been landlords to a large extent.³⁷

Historian Daniel Thorp gives us perhaps the clearest view of the changing labor situation through his study of Montgomery County, Virginia, where Freedmen's Bureau agents compiled detailed censuses in 1865 and 1867. From those sources, it seems clear that African Americans steadily—if gradually—improved their lot in the face of various obstacles. At least eighty-five

³⁵ Sarris, *A Separate Civil War*, 144-7; Nash, *Reconstruction's Ragged Edge*, 42, 90-91, 103-6.

³⁶ Gudger, *Federal Writers' Project*, 358; Daniel Thorp, *Facing Freedom: An African American Community in Virginia from Reconstruction to Jim Crow* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2017), 118-19, 121-2, 129-32 (quote appears on page 118); Stephen D. Engle, "Mountaineer Reconstruction: Blacks in the Political Reconstruction of West Virginia, in" *The Journal of Negro History* 78, no. 3 (Summer 1993): 146; Sarris, *A Separate Civil War*, 148-9.

³⁷ Nash, *Reconstruction's Ragged Edge*, 37-42. See also Gavin Wright, *Old South, New South: Revolutions in the Southern Economy since the Civil War* (New York: Basic Books, 1986).

percent of Black residents continued to work for their former enslavers for “board and clothes” in 1865. Without U.S. troops or Freedmen’s Bureau agents to assist them, the vast majority did what Sarah Gudger did: stayed put. Through the strong support of Charles Schaeffer, the Bureau helped African Americans change their lot after mid-1866. Although ninety percent of men were farmers, servants, or laborers and almost ninety-eight percent of women were servants, seamstresses, or washwomen, more than eighty percent of all African American workers received wages by 1867. Vulnerability in the face of overwhelming white power never disappeared, but still Black families found it increasingly possible to secure land in the county. In 1871, more than double the African Americans bought land than in any previous year and roughly twenty-one percent of Black male farmers worked their own land by 1880.³⁸

Many mountain whites accepted slavery’s end while rejecting any form of equality. White West Virginians, divided as they were between local efforts at self-sufficiency and free labor advocates, joined in opposition to including the state’s five percent Black residents in politics.³⁹ During the state election under Andrew Johnson’s restoration plan in 1865, two anti-Confederates ran against each other in western North Carolina. A Confederate deserter who later enlisted in Kirk’s 3rd North Carolina Mounted Infantry, William Wallace Rollins proclaimed, “it would be dangerous to the white race and the country, to elevate the freedman to be his political equal.” His opponent, Leander Sams Gash, a Henderson County Unionist, followed suit by sharing a petition from Henderson and Transylvania counties calling for African Americans’ colonization to Liberia or strong laws restricting their freedom. It was a position that he and Rollins agreed upon.⁴⁰

Political setbacks led to the creation of a strong Republican Party in Southern Appalachia. Composed of Unionists, anti-Confederates, and opportunists, the Republicans wrested control from the antebellum political elite. In West Virginia and East Tennessee, as Stephen Engle suggests, the Republicans proved “more radical against rebels, than in enfranchising black voters.” Both West Virginia and Tennessee passed powerful voter restrictions that disfranchised many former Confederates through the use of prescriptive loyalty oaths.⁴¹ In western North Carolina, Republicans built a biracial coalition around support for Congress and the Freedmen’s Bureau. On May 18, 1867, a meeting of Black Republicans at the Sulphur Springs Academy outside Asheville brought Sandy Erwin, a man formerly enslaved by Zebulon Vance’s family, to the chair. The assembled men resolved to stand against white intimidation to vote their beliefs while thanking Congress for passing a bill supporting their political rights. In a statement both remarkable and typical, the assembled Black Republicans vowed “that while we are ready to forgive, we have not forgotten; while we are ready to help rebuild the State government of our old masters and the prosperity of the South, we are resolved not to become in liberty what we were in bondage, the

³⁸ Thorp, *Facing Freedom*, 72, 75-85, 88-91, 99. It should be noted that “servant” constituted a rather broad category of employment with various meanings.

³⁹ Engle, “Mountaineer Reconstruction,” 138.

⁴⁰ Nash, *Reconstruction’s Ragged Edge*, 35.

⁴¹ Engle, “Mountaineer Reconstruction,” 139.

unresisting instrument of the Southern land holders, but having the right to vote, we will exercise the right to think.”⁴² Voters like Sandy Erwin proved critical to Republicans’ success in North Carolina. As their party swept the elections of 1868, Black voters constituted an invaluable swing vote between divided whites that constituted the margin of victory for the Republican. Even in the northwestern North Carolina county of Watauga with only thirty-six registered Black voters, the Republican carried the county by only five votes.⁴³

The Ku Klux Klan organized and initiated violence just as African American violence became apparent in 1868. Republican political success prompted a violent backlash in Appalachia as the Klan targeted white and Black Republicans. In Eastern Kentucky, African Americans represented less than five percent of most counties’ population, yet they were disproportionately attacked by the Klan. Roughly twenty percent of the state’s lynchings between 1866 and 1870 happened in eastern Kentucky. Likewise in West Virginia, the Klan reflected fears of an empowered Black electorate at the same time that as many as 85% of white voters were disfranchised by proscriptive measures in some counties. West Virginia Klan members targeted voter registrar boards.⁴⁴ Given its status as a slaveholding state in the Union, Kentucky provided more cover to the illegal activities of the Klan and their Democratic allies than in places like western North Carolina or north Georgia. Both those sections saw a sharp increase in Klan violence in response to Republican electoral victories and federal taxes on distilled spirits. Following the Republican candidate’s successful bid for the North Carolina governorship in 1868, the Freedmen’s Bureau agent in Asheville received copies of Klan threats posted on the door of a Black carpenter and a white internal revenue collector in Haywood County. Violence continued in waves over the following years, climaxing in a raid on Rutherfordton, the county seat of Rutherford County, North Carolina, on June 12, 1871. Following perhaps as many as sixty to eighty attacks on Republicans through the first part of that year, the Klan staged a massive raid against the town. Although the Klan leader was later convicted and sentenced to prison, the result of the violence was the impeachment of a Republican governor and the capture of the legislature by the Democrats.⁴⁵

A key aspect of that resistance in Appalachia centered on federal taxes on whiskey. While moonshining is part of the modern Appalachian stereotype, it was a common and relatively respected practice before the war. Appalachians distilled surplus corn and fruit because it was easier to get to market and fetched higher prices. During the Civil War, sentiment turned against distilling because it consumed increasingly scarce foodstuffs. Such shortages continued after the war but appeals to local sovereignty against expansive federal power amplified resistance to the new tax. In White County, Georgia, the Mossy Creek Ku Klux Klan murdered a federal marshal

⁴² *Raleigh Standard* (Raleigh NC), June 1, 1867, 3.

⁴³ Nash, *Reconstruction’s Ragged Edge*, 112-113.

⁴⁴ Engle, “Mountaineer Reconstruction,” 145.

⁴⁵ Hutton, *Bloody Breathitt*, 74, 77-78; Sarris, *A Separate Civil War*, 156-60; Nash, *Reconstruction’s Ragged Edge*, 110, 138, 140-5.

on November 9, 1870. This incident was part of a growing moonshine war that had something of a corollary in western North Carolina. Political resistance to the tax became a hallmark of Conservative resistance to Republican rule in North Carolina, and the Klan began targeting Internal Revenue collectors in 1868. Multiple attacks followed, peaking in the early 1870s, against revenue agents, Republican politicians, and informants against the distillers.⁴⁶

Economically devastated by the war, Appalachians needed a path to recovery. Areas like East Tennessee and Southwest Virginia had the benefits of the railroad, and western North Carolinians made railroads a centerpiece of their plan. It was a bumpy road. A massive scandal embroiled the Republican governor and state legislature after a northern Republican, Milton Smith Littlefield, and a native North Carolina Conservative, George William Swepson, defrauded the state of millions of dollars related to the Western North Carolina Railroad's construction. Others in western North Carolina advocated a different path forward. Walter Lenoir promoted the region's agricultural promise, seeking to bring northern improvement agriculture to the western counties. While Lenoir's efforts looked to a future blending sustainable agriculture and livestock production, the agricultural vision that fostered an economic boom—and political reconciliation of whites tied to boosterism—was tobacco. A bright leaf tobacco boom in the mountain counties of Buncombe, Haywood, and Madison started in the mid-1870s and carried through to the 1890s. Ironically, it was likely the rapid growth of one of the South's oldest staples that facilitated the completion of two railroads to Asheville by 1880. Such boosterism spoke of a New South, but the combination of political intimidation and renewed calls for internal improvements reunited whites and helped bring back vestiges of the old elite.⁴⁷

The 1870s were a decade of economic planning and boosterism that paved the way for later industrial development of the region's natural resources. Local elites, some of whom had long speculated in lands around the region, fostered connections to outside investors including coal, mineral, timber, and railroad companies. Perhaps no one was as important to this effort as former Confederate officer Jedidiah Hotchkiss who gained an intimate knowledge of the Shenandoah Valley as topographical engineer to Stonewall Jackson and Robert E. Lee. Hotchkiss convinced Philadelphia investors and others to build railroads critical to his investment in coal in the Flat Top district of West Virginia. Another former Confederate, Brigadier General John Daniel Imboden, invested heavily in coal deposits in areas of southwestern Virginia such as Wise County. As early as 1872, Imboden hailed resource extraction as a means to help Virginia recover from the war's destructiveness. Appalachian Virginia, Imboden reported, possessed mineral wealth "almost unknown to the outer world, and not fully appreciated by their owners..." If Virginia could make these untapped deposits accessible, Imboden believe it would "attract hither millions of money,

⁴⁶ Keith S. Hebert, "Reconstruction-Era Violence in North Georgia: The Mossy Creek Ku Klux Klan's Quest for Local Autonomy, in" Andrew L. Slap, ed., *Reconstructing Appalachia: The Civil War's Aftermath* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2011), 49-56; Bruce E. Stewart, *Moonshiners and Prohibitionists: The Battle over Alcohol in Southern Appalachia* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2011), 64-69, 71-73, 81, 92-94, 102-5.

⁴⁷ Nash, *Reconstruction's Ragged Edge*, 151-3, 164-77.

and enterprising thousands of people to aid in the restoration of the ‘Old Dominion’ to a foremost rank amongst the states of the Union.”⁴⁸

Conclusion

More than geography shaped Appalachia during the Civil War Era. Antebellum political rivalries and hierarchical social structures groaned under the weight of Confederate conscription and tax policies. Civilians were arrested; soldiers volunteered and some later deserted; guerrillas filled the power vacuum created by the chaos. Denouncing neighbors as enemies outside the rule of law created animosities that led Unionists and disaffected Confederates into the Republican Party during Reconstruction. There they found allies in formerly enslaved people who, while not the powerful political bloc they would be in the plantation belt, formed a swing vote capable of putting Republicans in power. Freedmen’s Bureau agents, revenue collectors, and military occupiers replaced conscription officers and tax collectors, giving these anti-Confederates a strong federal ally. Questions of legitimacy and class tensions sparked the rise of the Ku Klux Klan across much of the Appalachian South. It was the combination of these factors that shaped the war in Appalachia and then demonstrated the diversity and division within the South. If nothing else, Appalachia during the Civil War Era reminds us of the brutal messiness of war at the grassroots. It cautions us against casually equating “Confederate” and “southern.”

It also shows us what the Civil War Era meant to Appalachian history, which brings us back to Taylor’s *Alleghenia*. Based on events in West Virginia and census data, Taylor argued that the relative dearth of slavery in the Appalachian South would translate to widespread Unionism. He was wrong about that, but the idea lived on. After the war, local boosters, fiction writers, and outside reformers, used this notion of widespread Appalachian Unionism to lure northern and foreign capital to the region. Guerrilla warfare, local divisions, African Americans, and Confederate sentiment vanished under a façade of a blighted region, isolated from the South, and populated by the purest Anglo-Saxon stock left in America. President of Berea College, David Goodell Frost, famously referred to Appalachians as “our contemporary ancestors” in 1899. Frost hoped to bring outside missionaries and capital to the region, and local elites were all too happy to go along if it meant railroads and industrial development of their landholdings. So, if the Civil War era in Appalachia highlights the diversity and tensions within the South and the Confederacy, then the Civil War era also demonstrates the importance of that period in terms of creating the imagined version of Appalachia referred to by John Alexander Williams and others. In a sense, the Civil War era cemented Taylor’s simplified “Alleghenia” in Americans’ imagination as “Appalachia.”⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Ronald D Eller, *Miners, Millhands, and Mountaineers: Industrialization of the Appalachian South, 1880-1930* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1978), 48-52. Quote appears on page 49.

⁴⁹ On Frost and local color writers who helped shape the image of Appalachia in the American mind (with a significance placed on the Civil War Era), see Kenneth W. Noe, “‘Deadened Color and Colder Horror:’ Rebecca Harding Davis and the Myth of Unionist Appalachia,” in Dwight B. Billings, Gurney Norman, and Katherine Ledford, eds., *Back Talk from Appalachia: Confronting Stereotypes* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1999), 67-84.