

The Journal of Elizabeth Maxwell Alsop Wynne, 1862-1878

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Thesis Topic

On Tuesday, March 4, 1862, sixteen-year-old Lizzie Alsop, a student at the Southern Female Institute in Richmond, Virginia, took pencil in hand and aptly inscribed the title page of her new blank book. “Lizzie M Alsop / Southern Female Institute / Richmond / Va. / March 4th 1862. Journal / ‘A man’s enemies are the men of his own house.’”¹ With varying frequency over the next seventy years, Lizzie filled the pages of nine such books. During her most intense period of writing from 1862 to 1866, Lizzie recorded the effects of the Civil War on her extensive network of friends and family from both inside the Confederate capital and from Union-occupied territory. Largely overlooked by historians for nearly fifty years, the transcription and annotation of Lizzie’s journal will offer valuable insight into the wartime politicization of adolescent women, the changing relationships between enslaved African Americans and their white owners, Southerners in the midst of Union occupation, and the social ties among family and friends during the war. The availability of Lizzie’s journals will finally add her voice to the small number of records left by female adolescents describing the dramatic experiences at the epicenter of civil war and their efforts to become women in a society being remade.

Elizabeth (“Lizzie”) Maxwell Alsop Wynne was born into a world of privilege on March 17, 1846. Her parents, Joseph M. and Sarah Ann Alsop, were among the wealthiest residents of Fredericksburg, Virginia, and by 1860, the fifty-four-year-old Joseph owned \$130,000 in real and

¹ Elizabeth Maxwell Alsop Wynne. Journal of Elizabeth Maxwell Alsop Wynne, 1862 – 1926. Wynne Family Papers, 1809-1967. MssI W9927 a. Virginia Historical Society. Richmond, VA.

personal property—including at least forty-eight enslaved men, women, and children.² Joseph was the only son of Samuel Alsop, a wealthy and influential resident of Spotsylvania County, and from an early age he showed an interest in his father’s various enterprises. Joseph became active in business, owned several farms, and served as a justice of the Spotsylvania court by 1833.³ Joseph lived at his parents’ residence, known as “Fairview,” until his marriage to twenty-year-old Sarah Ann French about 1836. Sarah, also a native of Spotsylvania County, had grown up on an estate adjacent to “Fairview.”

By 1860, Sarah, Joseph, and their five surviving children resided in the substantial brick home at 1201 Princess Anne Street in Fredericksburg. Lizzie’s oldest brother, twenty-two-year-old William, studied law, while twenty-year-old George was a student of medicine.⁴ The education of his daughters was equally important to Joseph, and fourteen-year-old Lizzie and her sixteen-year-old sister Nannie attended the Southern Female Institute in Richmond, Virginia. The family’s youngest daughter, eight-year-old Emily, remained with her parents in Fredericksburg. The Alsop family looked forward to a future of wealth and privilege in a society based on slavery. Virginia’s secession in April 1861 threatened that prosperity, the importance of Spotsylvania County and Fredericksburg in the resulting war assaulted it, and Confederate defeat in 1865 unhinged it.

² Ancestry.com. *1860 U.S. Federal Census - Slave Schedules* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations Inc, 2010. Original data: United States of America, Bureau of the Census. *Eighth Census of the United States, 1860*. Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1860. M653, 1,438 rolls.

³ Jerry D. Alsop, *Alsop’s Tables: Volume III, Part I* (Bloomington: iUniverse, 2012), 381.

⁴ George Edward Alsop served as an Assistant Surgeon at Richmond’s Chimborazo Hospital, Division I (Tent Wards), from 1862 to November 26, 1863, when he was relieved. He was then assigned to Chimborazo Hospital, Division 3, reporting for duty on September 21, 1864. He was frequently reported absent for service with the city’s Local Defense Forces.

The three years of war recorded in Lizzie's journal follow the emotional ups-and-downs of the Confederacy. In May 1862, she patriotically wrote from Union-occupied Fredericksburg that, "we Confederates are, generally speaking, the most cheerful people imaginable, and treat the Yankees with silent contempt Ah! They little know the hatred in our hearts towards them—the Great scorn we entertain for Yankees. I never hear or see a Federal riding down the street that I don't wish his neck may be broken before he crosses the bridge."⁵ Following the December 1862, Battle of Fredericksburg, Lizzie, then at school in Richmond, anxiously reported her family's flight into the countryside. "For several days before I left Richmond I was kept in a constant state of anxiety—not knowing what to do about coming home—no message or letter came from home telling me to come, still I felt that they wished & expected me to spend Xmas with them all."⁶ Although the Confederate forces had been victorious, she reported the following New Year's Day, that she had "been over the house and find destruction less than I had anticipated, true almost every room has a ball through it & the garden is much torn to pieces."⁷ After two more years of bloodshed, Lizzie reported the April 1865 surrender of Confederate general Robert E. Lee. "I pray God," she wrote, "that I may yet live to see his vengeance exercised against our enemies; that I may live to see our brave, our noble army rise up from the ashes of our burning homes, and yet avenge the death of our heroes slain. If they could chose, how few would come back to this life, for what is life compared with honour."⁸

⁵ Elizabeth M. Alsop, Journal, Volume I, May 23, 1862.

⁶ Elizabeth M. Alsop, Journal, Volume I, December 29, 1862.

⁷ Elizabeth M. Alsop, Journal, Volume I, January 1, 1863.

⁸ Elizabeth M. Alsop, Journal, Volume I, April 12, 1865.

Lizzie's reporting of wartime events are juxtaposed with her everyday concerns over education, courtship, marriage, entertainment, and her frequently stormy relationship with her mother. Although living in turbulent times, her diary is largely concerned with these timeless and ordinary events. "I had resolved to commence such a different life on yesterday," she wrote in January 1863, "but alas the weakness of humans, and their inability to do anything without seeking aid from a higher power."⁹ In the decade that followed Appomattox we find a young woman struggling to assume the traditional role of a Southern belle in a revolutionized world. In September 1865, Lizzie reported a "great change" had come over her since her last journal entry. Having become a Christian, she remarked that, "by his grace I trust to lead a better life hereafter."¹⁰ Although her subsequent writing reveals the power of her nascent evangelical faith, she continued to struggle with the insecurities of becoming a young woman in a postwar South and the reduction of her family's wealth and status.

Sources

Lizzie's journals are among the Wynne Family Papers at the Virginia Historical Society (MssI W9927 a) and recorded in nine blank books of varying appearance and length. Written in both pencil and pen, the 281 pages of Volume I (MssI W9927 a31) are contained in an 8-inch by 7-inch blank book. This volume contains the most frequent concentration of entries representing the period from March 4, 1862 to July 19, 1864. Each of the other volumes (MssI W9927a 33-39) is a blank book with ruled pages and pasteboard covers—usually with a marbled or faux leather finish. These are typically 7.5-inches high by 6.5-inches wide and

⁹ Elizabeth M. Alsop, Journal, Volume I, January 2, 1863.

¹⁰ Elizabeth M. Alsop, Journal, Volume III, September 15, 1865.

contain between sixty and seventy leaves. Volume II (Mss I W9927 a32), covering the period from July 1864 through October 9, 1864, is the only volume not in a standard blank book, but instead is a 3-inch by 4-inch pocket ledger with sixty leaves. The nine volumes of Lizzie's journal encompass the period from March 1862 to February 1926 and is largely continuous until December 12, 1873.

The Wynne Family Papers also contain manuscripts from several members of the Wynne family as well as the correspondence (1841-1885) between Lizzie's mother and father. Letters written to Lizzie by her mother concerning life in Fredericksburg during Union occupation in May 1863, a letter from Confederate major general Pierce Manning Butler Young regarding his gratitude for gifts presented to him and his staff by Lizzie's mother and other Fredericksburg area women can also be found in the collection. Correspondence between Lizzie and her father concerning her education in Richmond, family news, and an agricultural fair in Fredericksburg, correspondence with her sister, Nannie, and letters from former Confederate general Wade Hampton regarding Lizzie's postwar work with the Ladies Memorial Association of Fredericksburg are extant as well.

Methodology

The editors of *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation* noted that "transcribing a handwritten document into a standardized, more accessible form inevitably sacrifices some of their evocative power." Reading the words of men and women who do not know how their own particular lives will play out, however, helps avoid the sense of inevitability found in many

history books.¹¹ This thesis will consist of the transcription, annotation, and interpretation of the journal of Elizabeth Maxwell Alsop Wynne from March 4, 1862, through March 20, 1878. This period represents the substantial portion of her journals and ends with her marriage to Richard Henry Wynne.

A typescript “excerpt” of Lizzie’s journals in the collection of the Virginia Historical Society was produced in November 1963 by her son, Francis Edmund Wynne, for distribution to family members and friends.¹² Although “it took much effort to prepare the text for typing, retaining the peculiarities of punctuation, spelling and expression,” numerous journal entries were omitted and, although the transcript retained original spellings, there are obvious errors in both typography and translation.¹³ Nevertheless, the typescript provides an important overview of the journal’s contents as well as a valuable reference in translating Lizzie’s sometimes careless handwriting. For this project, the 1963 typescript was scanned using optical character recognition software to produce the first digital generation of the journal. This digital document will be checked against the original documents to produce a complete typescript of Lizzie’s journals during the period outlined above. In order to ensure that the final transcription is accurate—and to allow work to be accomplished outside the archives—digital photographs will be taken by the author and serve as the basis from which the transcription will be created. The nine volumes of Lizzie’s journal include nearly 1,100 pages, of which this project will transcribe approximately 1,000. The 1963 typescript is 162 pages long and single spaced on 8.5-

¹¹ Michael E. Stevens and Steven B. Burg, *Editing Historical Documents: A Handbook of Practice* (Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 1997), 17, 92.

¹² Francis Edmund Wynne (1880-1972) was the oldest of four children of Richard Henry Wynne and Elizabeth M. Alsop.

¹³ Francis Edmund Wynne, “Foreword - Journal of Lizzie Maxwell Alsop, Fredericksburg, Virginia,” dated November 1963, Wynne Family Papers, 1809-1967. MssI W9927 a. Virginia Historical Society. Richmond, VA.

inch by 11-inch paper. The portions of the journals which serve as the focus of this project comprise 136 of those pages.

In addition to introductory and concluding essays, the thesis will be divided into nine chapters corresponding to the various volumes of the diary. Each chapter will begin with a brief description of national and local events as a means to place the events described in Lizzie's journal in a larger context. These passages will also explore the larger themes (i.e. Confederate patriotism, courtship, adolescence in the mid-nineteenth century, death, education, etc.) that emerge in each chapter. As such, this thesis aspires to reveal the material and psychological effects of the American Civil War on a Southern family as well as the changing relationship of the Alsops to their community, the South, and the nation. The thesis also features one young woman's intellectual, religious, and personal development during this critical period in American history.

Although making Lizzie's journal readable is an important goal of this project, extensive editorial intervention will be avoided so as to maintain the value of the journal as a historical document. As Lizzie was well educated, the few discrepancies between modern spellings and her own should not significantly affect the reading of the text. As such, the text of each document in this thesis will be reproduced—to the extent permitted by modern typography and with a few exceptions—as it appears in the original manuscript. All peculiarities of syntax, spelling, capitalization, and punctuation will appear as in the original manuscript. The same is true of paragraph breaks, missing or incomplete words, words run together, quotation marks or parenthesis that are not closed, characters raised above the line, contractions, and abbreviations. Where these require explanation, one will be added to the footnotes. In

instances where correct reading of a character is ambiguous, modern practice will be followed. Words underlined once in the manuscript will be underscored, and those underlined more than once in the manuscript will be double underscored. Internally quoted documents which are set off in the manuscript (i.e. poetry and biblical verses) will be reproduced as closely to the original as current technology will allow. Although the location of dates and place lines vary in the manuscript, the placement of these in the transcript will be standardized in order to help readers locate this information. Canceled matter will be struck out and followed by the inserted text.

Annotation will consist largely of contextual and informational notes to allow readers to more fully understand and appreciate the content of the journal. This will include historical background, biographical data, fuller descriptions of mentioned events, clarification of ambiguous passages or words, unstated outcomes, and corrections of erroneous information in the text. The preparation of the annotations assumes knowledge of the major characters and events of the American Civil War era and will limit biographical information to individuals who would not be familiar to those with such expertise.

Preliminary Chapter Outline

Introductory Essay

Chapter 1: March 4, 1862 – July 19, 1864

Chapter 2: July 2, 1864 – October 9, 1864

Chapter 3: January 4, 1865 – January 11, 1866

Chapter 4: March 13, 1866 – March 28, 1867

Chapter 5: June 17, 1867 – August 4, 1869
Chapter 7: August 14, 1869 – January 5, 1871
Chapter 8: January 20, 1871 – December 26, 1872
Chapter 9: February 1, 1873 – March 20, 1878
Concluding Essay
Appendix

Historiography

The earliest works featuring the experiences of Southern women during the war are represented by the publication of their journals, diaries, and memoirs. The earliest example may be Rose O'Neal Greehow's *My Imprisonment and the First Year of Abolition Rule at Washington* (1863). In the twenty-five years after Appomattox, other diaries appeared in print: Judith McGuire's *Diary of a Southern Refugee during the War* (1867), Fannie A. Beers's *Memories: A Record of Personal Experience and Adventure during Four Years of War* (1888), and Parthenia Antoinette Hague's *A Blockaded Family: Life in Southern Alabama During the Civil War* (1888).

Arguably the most influential Civil War diary to be published is that of Mary Boykin Chesnut under the title, *A Diary from Dixie*, and published in 1905, nineteen years after her death. Chesnut spent many years revising and editing her diaries during the 1880s in preparation for publication. Chesnut created her "diary" out of a combination of an actual diary written during the war and her memories of the past. Following a renaissance of publishing women's journals that occurred in the 1970s, a more exacting copy appeared under the title *The Private Mary Chesnut: The Unpublished Civil War Diaries* (1984). Chesnut's diary captures the sweep and chaos of a society at war, but the more recent edition also allowed an intimate

picture of the woman as writer of her own story of that society. For a century, though, these women's autobiographies and diaries were read simply as primary sources documenting historical or cultural developments.

The past twenty years has also witnessed the appearance of numerous studies focusing on the effects of the war on Southern women. Notable are Drew Gilpin Faust's *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War*, George Rable's *Civil Wars: Women and the Crisis of Southern Nationalism*, and Victoria Ott's *Confederate Daughters: Coming of Age during the Civil War*. The wartime experiences of elite women have, necessarily, been the focus of many of these historical studies. Although this is frequently considered to be a weakness in that it ignores the poor and middle-class, these sources prove eminently useful in considering the wartime and postwar experiences of Lizzie Alsop. In reading this recent scholarship, two competing interpretations emerge. Rable, Whites, and Faust each contributed to a school of thought that centers on gender relationships as contingent on the fulfillment of certain expectations—among which were men's roles in the protection of dependent women. As the war progressed and Southern women were faced with poverty, social insecurity, and domestic instability, they rejected previous ideologies of sacrifice in favor of more private concerns. By withdrawing their support of the war, elite Southern women contributed significantly to Confederate military failure.¹⁴

In *The Confederate War*, however, Gary Gallagher resurrected a more traditional view of the Confederate home front. Although conceding that class tension, unhappiness, desertion, and war weariness existed, he rejected the argument that Confederates lacked sufficient will to

¹⁴ George Rable, *Civil Wars: Women and the Crisis of Southern Nationalism* (Chicago: University of Illinois, 1989), 221.

win the war. Gallagher pointed instead to a widespread expectation of Confederate victory and a tenacious popular will closely attuned to military events.¹⁵ He asserted that although the Confederacy absorbed as much punishment as its people could tolerate by spring 1865, many expressed continued devotion to the Southern nation.¹⁶ A reading of Lizzie's private journal certainly supports Gallagher's assertion, but how typical was her experience?

Victoria Ott's *Confederate Daughters: Coming of Age During the Civil War* offers important insight to the psychology of Lizzie's generation of young women by studying the letters, diaries, and memoirs of eighty-five young women between the ages of twelve and eighteen at the outbreak of the war. Although Ott includes seventeen manuscript collections from the collections of the Virginia Historical Society in her bibliography, Alsop's journal was inexplicably overlooked.¹⁷ Nevertheless, Ott argued that elite white women who came of age during the conflict remained dedicated to the gender ideals and racial order of southern hierarchy, particularly domesticity, patriarchy, and white supremacy. Lizzie reflects Ott's assertion that, "as youths attempting to form their own identity, they often clashed with parents who sought to enforce the standards of respectable behavior. Yet they perceived their entrance into bellehood as a time of freedom and viewed their eventual marriage with much enthusiasm."¹⁸ Ott suggested that Confederate womanhood paved the way for young women to enter a new realm of political and civic participation and transformed their courtships, familial roles, and social activities into patriotic support for the cause that would ensure the survival of their social

¹⁵ Gary W. Gallagher, *The Confederate War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 3.

¹⁶ Gallagher, *The Confederate War*, 24.

¹⁷ Victoria Ott, *Confederate Daughters: Coming of Age during the Civil War* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2008), 198-199.

¹⁸ Ott, *Confederate Daughters*, 5.

order and protect their status as elite slaveholding women.¹⁹ In a wartime environment, young women found a greater level of freedom in their courtship, but never questioned that one day they would marry, create a family, and assume the place of wife, mother, and slave mistress. Ott suggested that the defeat of the Confederacy ended young women's hopes of preserving the antebellum past. They then searched for ways to give meaning to their wartime experiences while reconciling themselves to the political, social, and economic changes that lay ahead.

Although Lizzie is a contemporary of the women in Ott's study, the young women that appear in *Confederate Daughters* "nearly all resided on plantations in rural areas. Only a small number lived in urban centers, namely New Orleans, Atlanta, Charleston, and Columbia, when the war commenced." As such, Lizzie's experience as an urban teenager in central Virginia is underrepresented in the study.²⁰ Lizzie's proximity to occupied Fredericksburg as well as her time in the Confederate capital allowed her to witness some of the most intense activity experienced by any region during the war. Unlike a rural plantation resident, the Alsops were repeatedly in the direct paths of the armies. Lizzie, like the women in Ott's study, expressed a strong cultural identification with the South and the Confederacy. Also, like many of the women in Ott's study, Lizzie shared the privileges and material comforts of women from wealthy families. Her parents had the financial means to provide her with formal education; she attended similar social functions where she mingled with other members of her economic class, and she enjoyed vacations and extended visitations from family and friends.

Lizzie Alsop's journal records her growth from adolescent to adult but also offers insights into the effect of the Civil War on a feminine ideal that emphasized beauty, gentleness,

¹⁹ Ott, *Confederate Daughters*, 6.

²⁰ Ott, *Confederate Daughters*, 9.

submissiveness, and piety. The women of Lizzie's race and class were integral to the tradition of honor that marked the South's regional distinctiveness. According to historian Bertram Wyatt-Brown, Lizzie's role in that tradition would have been to "raise sons who would be brave protectors able to meet the intruding world."²¹ In *Honor and Violence in the Old South*, Wyatt-Brown describes how Southern whites, living chiefly in small, rural, agrarian communities, established a hierarchy of kin and neighbors according to individual and familial reputations. By claiming honor and dreading shame, they controlled enslaved African Americans, managed their households, and established the social rankings. As such, Southern conceptions of honor were largely dependent on the opinions of others. Although her journal was intended as a record of private thoughts, Lizzie gives significant weight to the opinion of others about her actions while simultaneously recording her opinions regarding her contemporaries. These opinions not only determined rank in society but also affected the way men and women thought.²² Wyatt-Brown also noted the importance of women's sexual powers in that their ability to damage or destroy the male reputation by publicly commenting on a man's failings as a provider, lover, or family leader. Lizzie was keenly aware of the relationship between her sexuality and honor and frequently mentions concern about the effect her flirtation has on the reputations of her various suitors. Although honor applied to all white classes, Wyatt-Brown identified three characteristics of Southern gentility (sociability, learning, and piety) and Lizzie's journal offers numerous opportunities to compare her thoughts and actions during the ideology's greatest challenge and its aftermath.²³

²¹ Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Honor and Violence in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 27.

²² Wyatt-Brown, *Honor in the Old South*, 35.

²³ Wyatt-Brown, *Honor in the Old South*, 40-41.

Historian John Hennessy noted that there are but four known civilian diaries recording daily life in Fredericksburg during the Civil War.²⁴ The best known is that of Jane Beale, a teacher whose diary is well known because of her oft-quoted account of being under fire during the battle of December 11, 1862. It was published in 2011, by the Historic Fredericksburg Foundation, Inc., as *A Woman in a War-Torn Town: The Journal of Jane Howison Beale, 1850–1862*. The daughter of Matthew Fontaine Maury, Betty Herndon Maury, was an astute observer, and an eloquent Yankee-hater. Her diary was also re-published in *Fredericksburg History and Biography*, the annual journal of the Central Virginia Battlefields Trust. Like Beale’s journal, Maury’s diary ends in late 1862, and neither were adolescents at the time of the war. A recently discovered diary begun in 1863 by seventeen-year-old Mary Caldwell offers a fourth view of wartime Fredericksburg and, like Lizzie’s, continues beyond the end of the conflict.

“By the late eighteenth century, the diary had become a literary genre” and that “prominence” of the genre “encouraged young ladies to keep more journals.”²⁵ Mothers encouraged daughters to keep a diary as a way to practice writing skills; many young women did so for a few years. That Lizzie maintained her journal with some regularity from 1862 through 1878, offers the opportunity to observe her metamorphosis from a sixteen-year-old Confederate patriot to a mature thirty-two-year-old woman on the eve of her own marriage. As such, Lizzie’s journal serves as a valuable primary source—providing a window into the everyday life of an adolescent in the midst of the Civil War and Reconstruction.

²⁴ John Hennessy The mystery of Mary Caldwell’s “Aspen Cottage,” *Fredericksburg Remembered*, January 14, 2011, <http://fredericksburghistory.wordpress.com/2011/01/14/the-mystery-of-mary-caldwells-aspen-cottage/>.

²⁵ Michael O’Brien, “An Evening When Alone: Four Journals of Single Women in the South” (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993), 2.

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