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Unpacking the Trunk: Producing Whiteness in Private Memory-Making within One Southern Family

Margaret Taylor Russell
Sarah Lawrence College, mrussell@gm.slc.edu

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Unpacking the Trunk:
Producing Whiteness in Private Memory-Making within One
Southern Family

Margaret Taylor Russell

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ABSTRACT

This thesis concerns constructions and reproductions of whiteness in familial memory-making in the South during Reconstruction, the late nineteenth century, and in the immediate decades following the Civil Rights Movement. The chapters discuss three generations of women in the Payne-Wooten-Russell family and their keepsaking and storytelling. Frances Payne’s (1832-1918) life as a wife of a Confederate veteran dictated the majority of her memory-making project, and she reconstructed the Southern white male as glorified and honorable. She took part in original reproductions of Lost Cause ideology. Through scrapbooking, Josephine Payne Wooten (1861-1937) looked beyond the Southern landscape to echo a national acceptance of Lost Cause narratives as well as a global interpretation of whiteness within the project of civilization. In the final chapter, Bryce Wooten Russell (1900-1996) returned to her grandmother’s project by re-telling stories to her children that contained Lost Cause ideology. These women show that private memory-making in the home mirrors the project of memory in the public landscape.
DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my Great Aunt, Helen Russell Crews.

“She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of kindness.”

Proverbs 31.10
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I thank Frances Payne, Josephine Wooten, and Bryce Russell for providing enriching material for this project. I thank Lyde Sizer, Priscilla Murolo, and Carol Zoref for their time, support, and passion. Many thanks to my cohort for their brilliance and for opening my eyes! I thank my family for their questions, feedback, and love. Also, I thank my Florida family for days of hilarity and for being the best cheerleaders. Much gratitude to Claire for her support and for helping me stay grounded. Lastly, I thank Aunt Helen and the entire Crews family for being so generous with their time and letting me rummage through the trunk.
INTRODUCTION

I keep an old shoebox in my apartment. Open it, and you’ll find items, ranging from old coins, and old picture frames, to old poker chips. My favorite thing in this box is a bracelet made of neon-colored plastic beads. To me it means more than anything in the world. When I pick it up, I remember the day I got it. My little sister made it for me when she visited me in the hospital. I was so surprised because for most of that weekend she hadn’t said much. Then, she quietly handed me this string of wildly colored beads and said, “I made this for you.” Now, whenever I touch it, it’s as if she’s sitting here with me rummaging through this old box. She would probably laugh and dismiss it as just some more old junk I should get rid of. This “old junk” reconstitutes fragments, shards, tatters, and pieces of my life history.

There is another box I know, one my family refers to as “the trunk.” It sits in a dusty living room in Lillington, North Carolina, beneath a stack of old newspapers. Open this trunk, and you’ll discover over one hundred years of collected items, including letters, maps, scrapbooks, pictures, and even a lock of hair. It stands as one family’s telling of its own story. It is a family that lived during a transformational time in American history. In the changing landscape of the later part of the nineteenth century, three generations of women, Frances Payne, Josephine Wooten, and Bryce Russell, decided to tell their own story through collecting and keeping. This is a story of white identity in the South after the Civil War. It is a story of how whiteness was constructed and reproduced through memory-making exercises. Furthermore, this story illustrates how a seemingly private experience of a family creates the public landscape around it.
This thesis deciphers how Southern white women constructed whiteness through familial memory-making during Reconstruction, in the late nineteenth century, and after the Civil Rights Movement. Glenda Gilmore posits that race, like gender, originates in the home. White supremacists in the South understood the connection, so they made miscegenation laws central to their legislative campaigns.1 Gilmore’s conclusion that race begins in the home points to the need for active scholarship on this process.

The study of memory can illuminate how history itself is made and how identity is shaped. Important to our understanding is research on the development of Civil War memory concerning race. This memory helped re-establish and justify white rule at the end of federal Reconstruction and allowed Jim Crow to spread and flourish.2 A foundational aspect to this memory in the white South was the concept of the Lost Cause, which swept popular culture in this period. Parties responsible for spreading the ideology included upper-class white women, who formed voluntary associations to commemorate the Confederate dead and memorialize a “lost” South. How these women navigated their role as stewards of a particular public memory is crucial to this project.3 The social and political landscape is also relevant if we are to

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3 Caroline Janney, Burying the Dead but not the Past: Ladies Memorial Associations and The Lost Cause (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008).
understand their urge to create a master narrative in times of social and political transformation.

This thesis addresses what David Blight terms reconciliatory memory. Blight identifies reconciliatory memory as an approach to the national re-telling of the Civil War that emphasized the casualties of the white population on both sides of the conflict. Focusing on the shared experiences of North and South helped change the subject for whites who were seeking to eradicate the accomplishments of Reconstruction. By ignoring the successes and rights of freedpeople, white Southerners were able to erase the legacy of emancipation from the story of the war. Suffering and sacrifice were now exclusively the territory of whites, and the miseries and injustices suffered by freedpeople were cast aside. The privileging of white suffering over black suffering allowed white politicians, writers, businessmen, historians, landowners, and other members of the white elite to end Reconstruction, reestablish white rule and ultimately enshrine segregation in Jim Crow law for another three generations.4

There were limits to reconciliatory memory. While David Blight writes of the success of reconciliatory memory in the national narrative, Caroline Janney disagrees. She argues that while the two sides reunited on the basis of American nationalism, deep-seated sectional remembrances of the war persisted. Ex-Confederates still believed that their cause was worthy and refused to agree that the “right” side had

4 Blight, Race and Reunion.
won. Janney adds that even the public salutes to reconciliation made by voluntary associations were tinged with sectional allegiances.5

The exclusion of black suffering from collective white memory succeeded largely under the ideology of the Lost Cause. Blight writes that Lost Cause ideology operated with the assumption that slavery was not the main cause of the war and that it was a system well fit for a putatively inferior black race. Within this context, white Southerners celebrated Confederate veterans who fought against attack from the North while celebrating and reproducing imagery of the loyal slave.6

White women’s organizations played a central role in this process. W. Fitzhugh Brundage seeks to answer why elite white women acted so fervently in this reproduction. One explanation is that these women found a sort of social refuge in the celebration of the Lost Cause. He asserts that rigid racial, class, and gender hierarchies present in the ideology provided an alternative to the “potential social chaos” that defined the postwar period.7 Lee Ann Whites discusses the social chaos both white and black women faced in the aftermath of the war. She argues that, with the coming of the New South, industrialization threatened to ease gender hierarchies among whites, as well as reduce the status of white men relative to that of black men. With this threat, came a new desire to remain fastened to gender hierarchies and keep

6 Blight, Race and Reunion, 255-299.
women “invisible.”

Gaines Foster offers an argument similar to Whites’s. Both propose that Lost Cause ideology, particularly in the performance of memorialization, was as a way for ruling-class Southern whites to hold onto a long-standing order in the midst of industrial transformation.

Voluntary associations were important vehicles for spreading Lost Cause ideology during the half-century that followed the Civil War. Upper-class white women assumed much of the task of public memory-making in the postwar period, and they saw themselves as the custodians of a certain memory of the white South. Caroline Janney centers upper-class white women’s role by arguing that these women first generated Lost Cause sentimentality by advocating for regional solidarity and exhibiting Confederate pride directly after the war through their work in Ladies Memorial Associations. These groups focused their memorializing efforts on establishing cemeteries and on performances in memorial days and parades.

The project of memory had a discrete chronology. Gaines Foster shows that later organizations, such as the United Daughters of the Confederacy, took action to build up popular sentiment in favor of the Lost Cause in the late nineteenth century. For Foster, these organizations ultimately helped the white South “cope” with the tragedy of loss. He concludes that the memorial organizations lost popularity after

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10 Janney, *Burying the Dead but not the Past*, 14.
the postwar period; once the project of the New South took hold of the social landscape of the region, these groups lost their “utility” because white Southerners no longer identified as a defeated people.\footnote{Foster, \textit{Ghosts of the Confederacy}, 198.}

Later scholarship on voluntary organizations’ influence on Lost Cause ideology diverges from Foster’s. James McPherson argues that the United Daughters of the Confederacy, specifically their official historian, Mildred Rutherford, successfully led a “crusade” that erased what they saw as a “false history” of the Confederacy (one that did not preach Lost Cause ideology) from children’s textbooks at the turn of the twentieth century.\footnote{James McPherson, “Long Legged Yankee Lies: The Southern Textbook Crusade”, in \textit{The Memory of the Civil War in American Culture}, ed. Alice Fahs and Joan Waugh (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 67.} David Blight also disagrees with Foster on the impact of these organizations, writing that their memory projects help explain “how and why the Lost Cause left such an enduring burden in national memory.”\footnote{Blight, \textit{Race and Reunion}, 299.}

Looking at efforts to indoctrinate Southern white children with white supremacist and reconciliatory versions of the war makes clear that Lost Cause ideology lived on after the advent of a New South.

Women’s memorial associations produced notions of civilization and the evolution of a “master” white race, which marked the social and political landscapes of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. W. Fitzhugh Brundage elaborates on historian Gail Bederman’s scholarship on civilization by writing that white women during this period subscribed to the ideology of civilization by creating a “useable
history” of the South to promote whites as the master race while also defining the Old South as a society that had practiced a natural racial hierarchy that furthered civilization. As Bederman explains, the project of civilization existed in conjunction with distinct gender roles and women’s deference to men as the mission’s torchbearers. According to Brundage, members of Southern white women’s associations found their place in the project by showing their “womanly nature” in a particular history of the South. It is within the familial setting that this “womanly nature” was most often performed and whiteness first constructed and reproduced.

Productions of whiteness within the family followed the Lost Cause template even after the Civil Rights Movement changed Southern society. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 brought a formal end to Jim Crow, but the white South resisted the change. Historian Timothy Tyson has written a stirring account of white supremacy in his hometown of Oxford, North Carolina, that revolves around the lynching of a black man in 1970. He argues that, rather than quelling racism, Jim Crow’s demise exacerbated racial animosity among Southern whites. Politically, many abandoned the Democratic Party in a racially charged move toward the Republicans. Culturally, they rallied around narratives of the Lost Cause.

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This thesis sheds light on how the memory of The Civil War and Reconstruction produced in the home and within the family furthered the idea and power of whiteness in the South. In the home, women took seriously their role as stewards of memory as they looked to influence the most important group responsible for carrying on Southern memory and Lost Cause ideology: their children. Exploring how this played out in one extended family, I analyze materials saved in a family trunk as well as stories commonly told by family members about their ancestors’ experience of the Civil War.

The concept of gathering oral histories came from the tradition of storytelling within the family. Most people can remember stories told to them as children by their parents, grandparents, or other relatives. These stories involve family lore, great tales passed down through generations. The re-telling of these long-lasting stories is a vital part of the project of memory-making in the South. One story from the Payne-Wooten-Russell family that I use comes from an interview of Bryce Russell, my great-great grandmother. It is about her grandmother and grandmother’s children during the Civil War. They owned a farm that the federal troops occupied. The story contains important pieces of Lost Cause ideology, including vicious federal soldiers raiding the home and leaving the family destitute, as well as a loyal female slave committed to staying with the Wooten family.¹⁶ Both the benign portrayal of slavery and the depiction of violent federal soldiers are consistent with public memory-making in the postwar white South.

The family trunk originated as the bridal trunk of Frances Mitchell Payne, my grandfather's grandmother, and was given to her in 1851. It is a large wooden trunk with an inside compartment. Along with over 600 letters spanning from 1848 to 1953, it contains various keepsakes in memory of people and events in the Payne-Wooten-Russell family’s history. The trunk has been passed down through women in the family, and most of its contents were collected and preserved by Payne. At first glance, the keepsakes present themselves as miscellany. However, they play a substantive role in illustrating and representing this family’s constructions of whiteness in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Items include diverse materials, such as hand-drawn maps of the Confederate retreat from Gettysburg, baby bonnets, certificates of membership in the United Daughters of the Confederacy, and a scrapbook containing reproductions of paintings of white women in classical tableaus, as well as one of a black male slave. The preservation of the trunk, as well as the refusal to submit it to an archive or museum, displays a family committed to being custodians of the project of white Southern memory.

The chapters of this thesis follow three generations of women of the Payne-Wooten-Russell family: Frances Payne (1832-1918), Josephine Payne Wooten (1861-1937), and Charlotte Bryce Wooten Russell (1900-1996). Each of these women reproduced a specific memory through keepsaking, story-telling, and saved letters. A common thread through these three generations of women is that the memory they


18 Frances Payne bridal trunk, 1851, Helen Russell Crews residence, private collection.
fostered and furthered defined the meanings they attached to whiteness and helped reproduce the racial landscape around them.

The thesis’s analysis of this process begins with Frances Mitchell Payne. The family trunk originally held her trousseau, and she was the first family member to actively keepsake and memorialize. As the wife of a Confederate veteran, she took on the role of steward of a specific memory that validated the Confederate cause as well as her role in it. She sought to shape how she would be remembered as a loyal Confederate wife and mother of seven children. Her postwar memory-making reflected the sectional effort to produce a memory of the war that legitimated the Confederate war effort and sought to reinstate the old racial hierarchy.

Next, the thesis moves to Frances’s daughter, Josephine Payne Wooten, whose memory-making exercises drew from the cultural landscape around her. She collected poems, pictures, and articles from popular national and local newspapers and magazines of the time. Josephine compiled all of this into a scrapbook that she maintained and added to for decades. Josephine’s memory-making is important because she broke sectional boundaries and took part in a larger project of civilization, which looked outward to produce whiteness as the global master race.

The project ends with a study of Charlotte Bryce Wooten Russell’s custodianship of the family memorializing. While she inherited the trunk from her grandmother, she preserved familial memory of the master narrative through storytelling. In a recording from 1989, she discusses and re-tells family legends from the Civil War. The stories she relates are congruent with Lost Cause ideology. They feature the figure of the loyal slave as well as instances of violent Yankee soldiers
terrorizing a white mother and her children. Through oral story-telling, Bryce reproduced whiteness through family reminiscing and memorializing.

On a particularly hot day in Lillington, North Carolina, during one trip to see the trunk, I paused over an old photo of a man on the mantle in my Great Aunt Helen’s living room. I knew the picture was too old to be of her husband, and I wondered who else would have taken up such important real estate in her home. When I asked, Aunt Helen replied, “That’s my great grandfather, Major William Payne. He is with us always.” To her, Major Payne, who died over one hundred years ago, was as present in the room as was I, her great niece, standing in front of her. Aunt Helen was keenly aware of her place as custodian of a particular memory. Confederate memorial days are now few and far between, but the peculiar project of white Southern memory persists in homes all across the region. The meanings of whiteness continue to revolve around narratives created and sustained both publically and privately.
CHAPTER ONE: FRANCES PAYNE, THE RECONSTRUCTED CONFEDERATE

A Richmond shipper described December 2, 1852, as a “tolerably fair” break from the unremitting succession of rain, winds, and snow that had characterized the preceding weeks. Thankfully, the storms passed just in time for Frances Mitchell’s wedding day.\(^\text{19}\) Skies cleared for the ceremony in the midst of the national political storm of the 1850s. Frances Mitchell became Mrs. William Mitchel Payne of Lynchburg, Virginia. By marrying into the Payne family, Frances obtained not only a new name, but also a new identity as an entrenched Southerner, firmly fixed in the traditions and allegiances of one of the first families of Virginia.\(^\text{20}\)

Historians describe Lynchburg, which sits thirty miles west of Richmond, as a contested landscape by the time of the Civil War.\(^\text{21}\) The same can be said of Frances Payne’s upbringing. Although she is remembered as a Southern lady and an energetic custodian of Confederate memory, she came from a family with Northern roots. Her father, Jacob Duche Mitchell, a Presbyterian minister, enjoyed local celebrity in Virginia by the time of his death. He hailed from Philadelphia, and met Frances’s mother, Harriet Morford Mitchell, while at seminary at Princeton in New Jersey. Reverend Mitchell relocated to Virginia from a

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congregation in Albany, New York, because health problems required him to reside in a warmer climate.\textsuperscript{22} By the time of Frances’s birth in 1828, the family had settled in Lynchburg.\textsuperscript{23} The city’s economy was based on tobacco, and, by 1852, the year of Frances’s wedding, it had become a center of the tobacco trade in Virginia. This was mainly due to its proximity to major railroad lines connecting Virginia to Kentucky and Tennessee as well as the Kanawha Canal built on the James River. While the tobacco economy rested on slavery, Lynchburg’s livelihood also depended on trade with Northern urban centers. By the outbreak of the Civil War, sentiment in Lynchburg was less in favor of secession than in favor of staying with the Union, which would better suit the city’s economic interests.\textsuperscript{24} The liveliness of its economy depended not only on trade with the North but also on an open channel between the tobacco farmers located in the surrounding countryside and the trading interests located in the city.

When Frances Mitchell became Frances Payne, she placed herself in a family that identified strongly as Virginian planters.\textsuperscript{25} William Payne came from an illustrious family whose roots purportedly stretched to the Governor’s Palace in Williamsburg and back to the original Jamestown settlement.\textsuperscript{26} Payne was born in 1828 and grew up in a planter family.

\footnotesize{
\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{24} Steve Tripp, “Lynchburg During the Civil War,” Encyclopedia Virginia, accessed February 18, 2015, \url{http://www.encyclopediavirginia.org/lynchburg_during_the_civil_war}.
  \item \textsuperscript{26} John B. Russell, “Lineage Line for John West,” 2014, John and Peggy Russell residence, in the author’s possession.
\end{itemize}
}
The 1830 census shows that his father, Alexander Spotswood Payne, owned forty slaves and 727 acres in Goochland County, Virginia, at a tobacco plantation that he called Ivy Creek. By the time of the 1840 census, he owned ten fewer slaves. It is not clear why, but he might have needed to sell the slaves in order to stay solvent. A land survey from 1856 kept in the trunk shows that by then William Payne owned only 257 acres of the land designated as Ivy Creek. Alexander Payne’s Last Will and Testament, read upon his death in 1859, names William as the executor of the estate and gives him five servants as well as all the livestock and cattle. An additional slave is bequeathed to his son Alexander S. Payne.

Unlike the Payne family, who were clear as to their place in the social and economic landscape of slaveholding Virginia, most of the Mitchell family remained in Philadelphia and surrounding areas, which were hotbeds of abolitionism during the 1850s. Letters in the trunk from the Mitchell family come almost completely from Pennsylvania. While they resided in a center of abolitionist thought, the authors’ feelings on the issue of slavery and the sectional crisis it generated do not come through in most of the letters.

The only mention of sectional divisions came from Frances’s sister, Louisa, in a letter to Frances in 1861. She writes, “That bad husband of yours must try to get you on here

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sometime. Tell him the people here don’t think much of him and after the Union is dissolved won’t let him come or any of his family.”³⁰ There is more than one way to interpret this letter. By referring to “the people here” Louisa may be making a distinction between the Mitchells and the Unionists in Philadelphia, as if the Mitchells do not consider themselves Philadelphians. The letter could also be read as humorous. Perhaps Louisa is trying to portray the Unionists in Philadelphia as over-zealous. She could be trying to soothe her sister, who was fearful that her husband would join the Confederate Army. Contrastingly, the letter might be read as a warning to Frances to urge her husband not to join the new Confederate cause. It is clear, though, that Louisa regards William Payne as a man with a firm sympathy for the Confederacy.

Frances had dealt with dissonant messages from her Northern family and her neighbors in Lynchburg in the 1850s, a decade that saw both the beginning of her marriage and the nation’s movement toward civil war. During the war, she firmly settled into her role as Confederate wife and mother as well as steward of familial memory-making. The impassioned project of Confederate memory overtook Frances’s life; the proof of this lies in the trunk she left behind. What we know of her comes mostly from the keepsakes she stored there, constructing her identity for posterity.

My exploration into her memory-making in no way encompasses her entire project. She added keepsakes to the trunk up until her death in 1918. By that time she had witnessed three wars and moved from Virginia to North Carolina. The focus of this chapter is her

³⁰ Louisa Mitchell to Frances Mitchell Payne, 1861, Frances Payne Bridal Trunk, Helen Russell Crews residence, private collection.
memory-making directly after the Civil War, when the South was negotiating new definitions of whiteness in the wake of emancipation.

At the center of Frances Payne’s memory-making project lay her glorification of the Confederacy following its defeat. Federal Reconstruction consumed the political, social, and economic landscape around her. Frances attempted to make sense of what was happening by undertaking a reconstruction of her own: exaltation of her husband’s image as a Confederate hero and reestablishment of the Payne family as part of an elite Southern caste firmly positioned atop a racial and class hierarchy.

Frances’s first task in her memory-making was to rehabilitate Confederate manhood. She accomplished this by constructing a heroic identity for her husband by virtue of his rank in the Confederate States Army (CSA). Among the most prized possessions in the trunk are William Payne’s commissions to the CSA. Frances saved his original commission, which dates from 1862 and identifies him as assistant quartermaster for Colonel Garland. The second document from the Department of War of the Confederacy cites William’s promotion in 1864 to brigade quartermaster in General Johnston’s Brigade.31 By establishing her husband’s status as a veteran and former officer, Frances ensured his place and “honor” as a soldier. Not only did she create a narrative of her husband during the war, but she also reconstructed the Confederate war effort as heroic.

William Payne’s reconstructed manhood was also built on Frances Payne’s preservation of official war documents that place him in important moments of the war. The trunk contains a map of the retreat from the Maryland Campaign of 1862 that shows Confederate troops receding into Virginia.32 The map helps produce the narrative of William Payne as a heroic and influential soldier, someone important enough to have a map of troop movements. It also underscores that he was an officer, which suggests class status as well as education.

Perhaps the most cherished military document in the trunk is a copy of General Lee’s Order no. 9, which informs Confederate troops of his intention to surrender at Appomattox. It commends the troops for “unsurpassed courage and fortitude,” praises them for “valor and devotion,” and wishes them “the satisfaction that proceeds from the consciousness of duty faithfully performed.”33 Family lore originating with Frances maintained for generations that this was one of the few handwritten copies of the address that Lee gave to his officers. It added to the glory of her husband’s memory that he would have received a document handwritten by Lee. By saving the document, she sealed William Payne’s importance by placing him as in direct contact with the most ardently mythologized hero of the South, Robert E. Lee.

The power of this document lasted for decades; it bolstered the Paynes’ status within a crumbling white Southern society. It was revered throughout the family, some members of

32 Retreat map, 1862, Frances Payne Bridal Trunk, Helen Russell Crews residence, private collection.

33 Robert E. Lee, General Order No. 9, 1865, Frances Payne bridal trunk, Helen Russell Crews residence, private collection.
the family even hanging it on their walls for visitors to their homes to admire. An investigation by Bryce Russell showed, however, that the document was probably not written by General Lee. Correspondence in the trunk reveals that in 1954 an archivist from the North Carolina State Archives concluded that the handwriting was not Lee’s, and that the document was probably a copy written by one of his officers. Bryce Russell, Frances’s granddaughter, never sought to correct the myth. This year, when the document was found again, most of the family still doubted the archivist’s conclusions. After 150 years of its being part of the family’s memory of a Confederate hero, the provenance of the document does not matter.

Intriguing to the historian’s eye is that Frances Payne’s construction of her husband’s memory was done mostly through official documentation. Letters, maps, and military orders combine to present a picture of a man who served valiantly in a just war. Contrastingly, Frances Payne constructed her own identity through keepsaking, relying on distinctly unofficial history. She saved household items that most would disregard in favor of “more important” items such as maps and military orders. To Frances, though, it was domestic memorabilia that created her identity as a mother and Southern lady of an elite class.

Frances Payne constructed a narrative of herself as a mother and attempted to secure a venerable place for her family in the memory of the Southern past. As Glenda Gilmore observes, “place” was a crucial concept in the postwar South. It undergirded a caste system that defined white as superior to black, elevated whites from the old elite above others, and


thus shored up the status of prominent families that had once measured their importance by wealth in slaves.\footnote{Glenda Gilmore, \textit{Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920} (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 3.}

Frances’s efforts to secure her family’s place required the important task of drawing attention to the Payne family’s illustrious past. In her autobiography published in 1946, Katherine Du Pre Lumpkin, daughter of Georgia’s elite, wrote that “regardless of present circumstances…‘old family’ still meant the good things of this world—land, houses, servants, everything on a luxurious scale. The difference was that one could only enjoy these things by turning one’s gaze backward. Only by a tenuous claim upon the past could old families establish their station in this all-important way.”\footnote{Katherine Du Pre Lumpkin, \textit{The Making of a Southerner} (Athens, Georgia: The University of Georgia Press, 1991), 106-107. Lumpkin wrote her memories growing up in a dispossessed slave holding family in Georgia and South Carolina.} Frances Payne understood the importance of her family being remembered as an “old family.” Certain items saved in the Payne trunk buttressed the family’s claims to that status.

One such item is an invitation “from the young men of Lynchburg” that requests the family’s presence at a cotillion, a ball at which young ladies would make their debut in society. The invitation is from 1879.\footnote{The Young Men of Lynchburg to Frances Payne, 1879. Frances Payne bridal trunk, Helen Russell Crews residence, private collection.} At this time, Frances had two teenage daughters, Idoline and Josephine, and perhaps they were invited to make their debuts at the cotillion. The invitation mentions Alexander Spotswood Payne, who passed away thirty years before...
the invitation was sent out.39 By referencing an ancestor, the group that sent out the
invitation acknowledged the Paynes’ right to be considered an old family. By saving the
invitation, Frances Payne bequeathed this right to subsequent generations.

In the upper drawer of the trunk one finds several pieces of lacework and finely
stitched baby clothes. They are tokens of Frances Payne’s status as an elite white mother.
As Thorstein Veblen observed in The Theory of the Leisure Class (1899), “conspicuous
leisure” furnished proof of membership in the elite.40 Frances’s lace pieces, tatting tools, and
fine sewing signify her membership in a class in which women have enough free time to
acquire skill at fancywork. The baby clothes underscore that she passed this status down to
her children.

We might also learn something from what Frances did not save. Nowhere in the
trunk does one find her bridal gown, hair ornaments, pieces of jewelry, or personal
recollections. The self-portrait she left behind is composed of items that draw attention to
other members of her household: documents about her husband’s service in the Civil War, an
invitation that identifies her daughters as debutantes, pieces of fancywork that her babies
wore. It seems clear that Frances Mitchell Payne wished to be remembered for service to
loved ones.

39 The Young Men of Lynchburg to Frances Payne, 1879. Frances Payne bridal trunk, Helen
Russell Crews residence, private collection.

CHAPTER TWO: JOSEPHINE PAYNE WOOTEN AND THE WHITE (WO)MAN'S BURDEN

Take up the White Man's Burden,
Ye dare not stoop to less—
Nor call too loud on Freedom
To cloak your weariness.
By all ye will or whisper,
By all ye leave or do,
The silent, sullen peoples
Shall weigh your God and you.  

The scrapbook sits in the trunk above manila envelopes containing letters. A label that reads “Josephine’s Scrapbook” announces its purpose. It is unclear what Josephine herself would have called this book. Large and leather-bound, its front and back covers are intact. The book is remarkably well preserved. Inside it contains more than fifty pages, covered by short articles and poems clipped from magazines and newspapers. Reproductions of paintings sometimes occupy whole pages. It is unclear what year Josephine started the book, but some of the poems chosen were published as early as 1882, when Josephine was twenty-one years old. The last contents of the book are from The Christian Observer, describing America’s involvement in World War I, which could date the final inclusion around 1918. In the scrapbook, Josephine sorted her world, choosing what intrigued her, moved her, and what she wished to save.

A new, global interpretation of whiteness emerges in Josephine’s project. She is inviting people to look beyond the contents of the trunk, while also looking beyond a singular Southern memory. Whiteness is now defined not only in contradistinction to blackness but

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also in relation to new others beyond the South and even beyond the United States. Whereas her mother constructed her identity through others, Josephine Payne Wooten’s memorabilia defined her as a woman involved in national and global events of her era. Ironically, she recorded her involvement in the public sphere within a very private space of a personal scrapbook, preserved in the timeless vessel of memory-making: Frances Payne’s bridal trunk.

Notably, the trunk was never under the stewardship of Josephine Payne Wooten. When Frances Payne died in 1918, the trunk went to Josephine’s daughter Bryce, in accordance with Frances’s bequest.42 Perhaps Frances did not entirely trust Josephine to continue the memory-making project her mother had begun. Indeed, Josephine’s scrapbook defines her as a new kind of woman.

Josephine Payne Wooten was born in 1861, and grew up in Lynchburg, Virginia, during the turbulence of war and Reconstruction. Her family as well as the city of Lynchburg went through massive changes during her childhood. It is clear in the letters she wrote as a teenager to her mother that she noticed the finer distinctions of class. In one letter from 1877, she expresses while on a visit to another family that at this family’s home there is “a greatest plenty of milk.”43 The fact that she is conscious of food supplies, and perhaps the need to conserve them, suggests an uncertain economic environment.

As the Payne family adjusted to life in postwar Virginia, Josephine’s father attempted to adjust to postwar life in Virginia. He left behind the family tradition of farming the land, and the trunk includes little about the family’s land ownership after the war. Her father


43 Josephine Payne Wooten to Frances Payne, 1877, Frances Payne bridal trunk, Helen Russell Crews residence, private collection.
became the head of a sawmill in Lynchburg and worked closely with the Norfolk and Western Railroad, which was headquartered there.\textsuperscript{44} It is not clear what happened to the considerable acreage he owned before the war.

Josephine was one of seven siblings. She spent a number of years as a school teacher and remained unmarried until she was thirty-seven. Nothing in the trunk speaks to this part of her life, and this absence is significant. By the time of her birth, her mother had already defined the trunk as a space in which a woman’s identity derived from service to her husband and children. That Josephine’s considerable time as a single woman is invisible in this context should come as no surprise.

At some point in her twenties, Josephine seems to have begun her teaching career in Lynchburg, and perhaps continued teaching in Kinston, North Carolina, to which the family moved in 1891, when her father took a job with another lumber company.\textsuperscript{45} The family prospered in North Carolina, settling into a substantial home in Kinston. Josephine was thirty-one then and still living with her family. Six years later, she married Richard Wooten, a widowed physician with two teenage daughters.

One similarity between the Josephine and Richard was that they both came from families that sought to define their status by virtue of “place.” The Wootens were a large planter family based in Kinston. Sherman’s troops had occupied their plantation home during the Bentonville campaign.\textsuperscript{46} The house survived the war and stayed in the family.

\textsuperscript{44} John S. Russell, interview by author, Raleigh, North Carolina, April 2015.

\textsuperscript{45} The year 1891 is from the earliest found letter originating in Kinston, NC from Frances Payne.

Josephine lived there until her husband’s death. During her marriage to Richard Wooten, they built a second house on the property, where Richard also had his medical practice.

If Frances’s keepsakes memorialize domestic life, Josephine’s scrapbook reflects her involvement in the world beyond the home. The scrapbook, however, indeed the whole trunk, is haunted by the Lost Cause. Lost Cause ideology developed directly after the Civil War, and elite white women, such as Josephine, were important to its spread. Growing up in Lynchburg, she would have undoubtedly seen memorial parades or been a part of Confederate decoration days, widespread throughout towns and cities in Southern Virginia from the late 1860s through the 1880s.\textsuperscript{47} Southern Virginia cities were often sites for the original production of Lost Cause ideology. In light of Frances Payne’s devotion to guiding and preserving a narrative of the glorious Confederacy, it is not surprising that Josephine scattered parts of this project throughout her scrapbook.

The great hero of the Lost Cause was General Robert E. Lee, and Josephine reproduced him as a man of honor and valor. She saved an article celebrating the statue of him titled “Recumbent Lee” at Lee Chapel in Lexington, Virginia in her scrapbook. The article is from 1875, when the statue was completed.\textsuperscript{48} It discusses Lee as the “Greatest Chieftain of Modern Times” and details the pomp and circumstance surrounding the statues

\textsuperscript{47} Caroline Janney, \textit{Burying the Dead but not the Past: Ladies Memorial Associations and the Lost Cause} (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 64-104. Caroline Janney argues that these women first propagated this ideology through their Ladies Memorial Associations, the forbearers to the United Daughters of the Confederacy.

\textsuperscript{48} “Recumbent Lee Statue,” Lee Chapel, Washington and Lee University, accessed March 21, 2015, \url{http://leechapel.academic.wlu.edu/gallery/recumbent-lee-statue/}. 

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unveiling. The reporter writes of “truthful remembrances to other Confederate leaders.” These “remembrances” describe an event of memorializing, at which people are looking back at the past in a way that venerates the Confederate cause. By memorializing an Old South, they celebrate a system of distinct racial hierarchy in order to craft a future that ensures that hierarchy stays in place.

This article reproduces the narrative of Robert E. Lee as the hero of the South. It calls Lee “the idol of the South” and a man who exemplified all the characteristics of Southern honor, a cultural term that describes a strict code of morals and behavior for white Southern men. Characteristics like restraint, etiquette, and readiness to defend white womanhood are signifiers of Southern honor, and displaying Southern honor is an indicator of elite white status. Even in defeat, Lee redeemed the South, mostly by displaying these essential characteristics, which in the age of national reconciliation were respected across sectional lines. The reporter stresses this point by writing that “there were not a few who during the days that tried men’s souls were arrayed in prominent positions against the cause for which Lee fought, anxious to testify their veneration of his character as gentlemen, soldier, and Christian.” In the nationwide acceptance of Lee as man of honor and courage, the project of the resurrection of the Confederate male is arguably complete. Importantly, it constructs the elite white male as the head of the Southern racial hierarchy. He is best fit to lead because of his honorable and paternalistic style of rule. Whereas during Reconstruction

49 “Robert E. Lee: Unveiling of Valentine’s Recumbent Figure at Lexington Yesterday”, The Christian Observer, 1875, Josephine Payne’s Scrapbook, Frances Payne’s bridal trunk, Helen Russell Crews residence, private collection.

50 Ibid.

51 Ibid.
the elite white Southern male was supposed to submit and surrender in humiliation, the national acceptance of Lee as a hero and leader shows the Southern white male is reconstructed as well.

While Josephine valorizes white manhood through Lee, she also reproduces images and figures that delegitimize the black male. She scrapbooks an iconic image of the degenerate male slave. The picture sits on its own page. The title reads “In Ole Virginia (Charles Scribner’s Sons.).” Above it, the man sits in a defeated position on the stoop of a shack. His clothes are those of a laborer, and they are worn out with holes. The man’s posture gives the impression that he took a break from work.52 The title “In Ole Virginia” makes clear that the illustration is of a slave sitting on the stoop of his cabin’s doorstep.

Looking closely, one sees that it is clipping of an illustration from Thomas Nelson Page’s collection of stories titled In Ole Virginia or Marse Chan and Other Stories (1887). These stories construct a narrative in which slavery suits the needs of the black race. Page did this through characters like the inferior black slave who enjoys his life in slavery. His stories described an antebellum and wartime Virginia of “happy slaves.” He depicted humble masters and elegant ladies alongside dutiful and satisfied slaves, most famously portrayed in mammy characters and loyal male slaves. He also propagated the “Negro

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52 “In Ole Virginia”, Josephine Payne Wooten scrapbook, Frances Payne bridal trunk, Helen Russell Crews residence, Lillington, NC. Note that the publisher’s inclusion makes it clear its from Pages stories. Information from Page Stories comes from Thomas Nelson Page, In Ole Virginia or Marse Chan and Other Stories (New York: Charles Scribner’ Sons, 1895; DocSouth, 2004), http://docsouth.unc.edu/southlit/pageolevir/page.html.
dialect” seen in most of the plantation literature of the time, such as Joel Chandler Harris’s *The Uncle Remus Tales.*

The power of the image of the degenerate black male that Josephine chose to put in her book should not be underestimated. Essential to Lost Cause ideology was the notion of innate inferiority of a freed black race, and this was expressed in gendered terms. Black men were depicted as effeminate, childlike laborers, fit only for a system of slavery in which a superior white male could oversee both their usefulness and their wellbeing. This image serves the purpose of delegitimating any upward movement of black communities. One of the victories of Lost Cause ideology was convincing white Southerners through these reproductions to push black legislators out of Southern state governments, as well as increase efforts towards black men’s disenfranchisement. Once political agency was gone, these images worked to eliminate a black middle class, which by the 1880’s had established itself in the upper South. The power and success of the cultural reproduction of these figures is

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53 Thomas Nelson Page (1853-1922) grew up on a plantation in Hanover, VA. Page believed in the project of the New South and thought that the region was crucified with the end of slavery and that the “New South is…simply The Old South with its energies directed in new lines.” This quotation and more information on Page and *The Uncle Remus Tales* can be found in David Blight, *Race and Reunion* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2001), Ch. 7.

54 For political and cultural campaigns on political delegitimization see Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow.*

55 In North Carolina, a black middle class existed and threatened the white supremacist takeover. For more see Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow,* Ch. 1.
seen in the reversion back to a formal racial hierarchy via Jim Crow laws in 1898.\footnote{This is the year when Jim Crow law passed in NC, where Josephine Payne Wooten lived after 1891. Gilmore, \textit{Gender and Jim Crow}, 2.}

Josephine’s private scrapbooking of this image reflected this cultural project.

Josephine Payne Wooten reproduced Lost Cause ideology by echoing the reconciliatory tone of the time that celebrated a coming peace between the white North and South. Frederick Douglass wrote in 1895 that “The cause lost in the [Civil] war is the cause regained in the peace, and the cause gained in the war is the cause lost in the peace.”\footnote{Frederick Douglass, 1895, quoted in Matthew Frye Jacobson, \textit{Barbarian Virtues: The United States Encounters Foreign Peoples at Home and Abroad, 1876-1917} (New York: Hill and Wang, 2000), 8.} This illuminates his fears about the newfound “peace” between white Southerners and Northerners. Nineteen years after the formal end to Reconstruction, the meaning and legacy of the war as a quest to emancipate a slave population and eliminate the slave economy in the Southern states dissipated in favor of a national reconciliation. Importantly, the compromise of reconciliatory memory included a picture of the white South that romanticized antebellum plantation life and celebrated white men’s chivalry and honor as a rationale for their return to state legislatures.\footnote{Blight, \textit{Race and Reunion}, 265.} Josephine’s participation in this project implicated her in a construction of whiteness that transcended the Mason-Dixon line.

A sense of global destiny was a vital part of this whiteness. As one writer put it, “For the voice of the unknown calls me; it calls me and I must go…To the lands beyond the ocean, e’en to Afric’s farthest shore, Where the millions sit in darkness; shall I take them light… List the message: ‘Go to all the world…’ The voice of the dying calls me; it calls and
I must go.”  

Josephine Payne Wooten never traveled to “Afric’s farther shore,” but the amount of literature in her scrapbook inviting the white race to “Go to all the world” and “take them light” firmly places her with a missionary impulse. This poem, “The Student Missionary Volunteer,” written by Earl. N. Bergerstock, describes the call that Josephine and others sought to answer in uplift and missionary work at the turn of the century. Like a lot of other white Christians, Josephine believed in racially motivated uplift work during this period, and her scrapbook reproduces a master narrative of an evolved white race leading a worldwide project of civilization.

In the act of saving clippings from magazines and newspapers, Josephine reproduced the narrative of elite white women as part of an intellectually and culturally superior race. She contributed to the project of civilization by showing that she, too, was educated and culturally adept, that she read and was an accomplished woman. Her quest to be viewed as cultured also shows up in her clippings of classical paintings scattered throughout the primary source. On several pages clustered between poems and stories, there are reproductions of paintings probably found in magazines she read. Most of the images display women without men. Either there is a single woman present in the painting or the woman is her own subject, not just on the arm of a male. Several images display women engaging in a hobby. One painting is of a woman sitting in what looks like riding or outdoor overcoat. She holds a hat and a riding crop. In another painting, a woman sits and sews at a table. Still another illustrates a woman playing a tambourine while a goat

dances beside her.\textsuperscript{60} The varied kinds of leisure present in these clippings show culturally and intellectually evolved women.

There is evidence in the trunk to suggest that Josephine thought of herself as a New Woman and identified with the movement. Many tenets of the New Woman ideal echoed the project of civilization and served to carve out a role for white women in the project. This ideal privileged education, poise, and uplift work, all which were constructions of a white master race in the project of civilization. From the presence of temperance articles and poems in the book, it can be gathered that she was either a supporter of temperance associations, or a member herself. The scrapbook’s construction of her identity as an educated, accomplished woman is also concurrent with the New Woman. The New Woman was described as educated and reform minded, all while still possessing the “graces” of a Southern Lady. A New Woman often showed up at reform or mission-driven voluntary associations, and expressed her independence through activity in these groups, which were respectable enough not to be considered radical by outsiders.\textsuperscript{61} Josephine’s scrapbooking peaked during the 1880s, when women’s voluntary associations membership was increasing. The only record of her membership in voluntary associations comes from 1925, with a certificate issued by the Daughters of the American Revolution.\textsuperscript{62} While there is no

\textsuperscript{60} Various images, Josephine Payne Wooten’s scrapbook, Frances Payne’s bridal trunk, Helen Russell Crews residence, private collection.

\textsuperscript{61} Anne Firor Scott, “‘The New Woman’ in the New South”, \textit{South Atlantic Quarterly} 61 (Autumn 1962): 215.

\textsuperscript{62} Membership certificate, The Daughters of the American Revolution, 1925, Frances Payne bridal trunk, Helen Russell Crews residence, private collection.
evidence that she joined a voluntary association in the late nineteenth century, her scrapbook memorialized the same narratives of cultural uplift, missionary projects, and reform work.

Historian Anne Firor Scott calls New Women “voracious” readers who were often trained in classics, and Josephine's scrapbook contains many clippings of famous poems.63 She saved poems from English and American poets, including Milton, Shakespeare, Tennyson, and Longfellow. The clipping “Christmas with the Poets” highlights passages from all four. The poems convey popular Christmas messages like peace on Earth or the birth of the Christian savior.64 By including these poems, she constructed herself as an intellectually capable New Woman.

In addition to defining herself and, by implication, the New Woman as exemplars of white femininity, Josephine collected keepsakes about the broader mission of the white race. Towards the back of her scrapbook, one finds a copy of “The White Man’s Burden” by Rudyard Kipling. The poem begins, “Take up the White Man's burden/ Send forth the best ye breed/ Go bind your sons to exile/ To serve your captives' need…”65 Kipling clearly lays out a broader mission for an entire white race to “serve” the “captive’s need” to be uplifted by a superior white race. Even the word “captive” can be interpreted as groups of people

63 Scott, “The New Woman’ in the New South,” 214.

64 “Christmas with the Poets,” Josephine Payne Wooten’s scrapbook, Frances Payne’s bridal trunk, Helen Russell Crews residence, private collection.

held prisoner by the inferiority of their race. This makes the project of civilization even more pressing and necessary.

This famous poem, written in 1899, celebrates U.S. annexation of the Philippines and the racial ideology that justified it. As President Theodore Roosevelt told the nation in his first annual address, intervention into the affairs of “barbarous and semi-barbarous peoples” was “a most regrettable but necessary international police duty which must be performed for the sake of the welfare of mankind.”

American expansion into Pacific and Caribbean territories promised to establish the same supposedly natural racial hierarchy that Jim Crow buttressed in the South.

In the tumultuous time of the late nineteenth century, Josephine Payne was acutely aware of the world around her. She was able to define herself outside of the traditional roles of a marriage as a child of the Confederacy committed to furthering the memory of a restored South in the larger story of an expanding America. Importantly, the New Woman movement made its way into her scrapbook through depictions of white women as accomplished and reform minded. Finally, her reproductions of whiteness gaze outwards to the imperial projects brewing overseas. She understood, even in the early stages of American empire, that conceptions of an inferior Other provided foundations for advancing “civilization.”

“It is like writing history with lightning—and my only regret is that it is all so terribly true,” said President Woodrow Wilson after viewing the 1915 film, The Birth of a Nation. One hundred years ago, in the winter of 1915, America’s first epic film premiered nationwide. The Birth of a Nation was a top-grossing film. The movie portrayed the putative horrors of Reconstruction and “Negro rule” and celebrated the return to white supremacy as a victory for chivalry and honor. The torchbearers for this victory were the Ku Klux Klan, depicted in this film as a band of knightly protectors of order and white womanhood.

Bryce Wooten Russell (1899-1996) was sixteen years old when the film premiered. At that time, she lived in Kinston, North Carolina, a mere four and a half hours away from the town of Shelby, where Thomas Dixon Jr. wrote The Clansman (1905), the play on which The Birth of a Nation was based. Even if she never saw the film, and it was likely that she did, Lost Cause ideology permeated her cultural surroundings. While her mother and grandmother experienced Reconstruction, which made room for competing narratives, Bryce came of age in an environment where white supremacy was firmly fixed and its narrative of the Civil War and Reconstruction unchallenged.

Bryce focused on memory-making through different avenues than those used by her mother and grandmother. She documented her family’s membership in memorial organizations, which secured her role in producing public memory. As the second steward of


\[68\] Ibid.
the Payne Bridal Trunk, she saw its importance to establishing the Payne-Wooten- Russell family as part of the white elite, and she was the first to see the trunk itself as a part of the memory-making project. Finally, through story-telling she reinforced important tenets of Lost Cause ideology at the end of her life. Bryce’s children recorded these stories a few years before her death and saved the tapes for future generations of the Russell family to hear.

Within her lifetime, Bryce witnessed immense social, political, and economic change in Kinston. She passed away at age ninety-seven. Even after the Civil Rights Movement changed the world around her, her memory-making project returned to the original Lost Cause narrative that Frances Payne started during Reconstruction. The vast scope of Bryce’s project requires us to consider not just her memory-making after 1965, but also her formative years in the early twentieth century, a time when elite white Southern women worked hard publicly to shape racial politics through public memory of the Civil War and Reconstruction. Bryce reproduced a narrative that echoed and mirrored the project of the Lost Cause by creating her own private, family archive in the Payne Bridal Trunk as well as by retelling family stories about the Wootens’ Civil War experience.

Bryce Wooten Russell grew up experiencing class in a different way than her mother. While Josephine was a child of war and grew up in a family adjusting to life in the postwar South, Bryce was born with the last name Wooten. This name gave her to access and

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70 The Wooten family identified fiercely with the Confederate cause and hung on tightly to their place as dispossessed planters. Her father, while considerably older than Josephine, was
instant recognition by the white elite in North Carolina. John Council Wooten, Bryce’s paternal grandfather was a successful planter and officer in the Confederate Army. After the Civil War, he retained most of his land, and the John Council Wooten plantation was so large that its tobacco barns numbered nineteen. The family employed sharecroppers to work the land. Josephine and Richard built their own house on the property and called it Homeplace. Bryce was raised at Homeplace and lived there until she married Elliot Russell.

Bryce Wooten became Bryce Wooten Russell in 1920. Her husband, Elliot Russell, owned a saw and grist mill, called Kelley Mill, with his father. Bryce and Elliot lived near the mill until it flooded and completely closed in the late 1920s. When they lost the mill, they also lost 150 acres of Russell tobacco land that was used as collateral for the mill investment. Soon after, the Great Depression hit Kinston, and tobacco prices collapsed. Bryce spent the next several years working with Elliot at a store he bought. They also had a small farm where they grew their own produce and raised chickens. Bryce’s decline in class status perhaps drove her to fervently take part in memory-making projects that venerated her family’s roots in the white elite.

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73 Ibid.
Evidence in the trunk suggests that Bryce was involved in elite memorial associations throughout her life. Even though there is no documentation that Bryce was in the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC) or the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR), the trunk contains a rather exhaustive application to the National Society of the Daughters of the American Colonists from 1954. It is several pages long and requires the applicant to list ancestors and their complete lines of descendants, including dates of birth and death as well as location.\(^\text{74}\) It requires the applicant be meticulous in detailing ancestral information and proving a direct lineage to an original colonist.

Bryce’s application and the emphasis on a direct line shows that blood and racial preservation were important to these associations. Toni Morrison elaborates on the importance of blood in the maintenance of whiteness and equates it with fetishization. “This is especially useful in evoking erotic fears or desires and establishing fixed or major difference where difference does not exist or is minimal. Blood, for example, is a pervasive fetish: black blood, white blood, the purity of blood; the purity of white female sexuality, the pollution of African blood and sex. Fetishization is a strategy often used to assert the categorical absolutism of civilization and savagery.”\(^\text{75}\) Morrison’s insight helps explain Bryce’s obsession with validating a “native claim” to land and establishing her family as part of an original American bloodline. Such projects were inherent to elite memorial

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\(^\text{74}\) Membership application, 1954, Frances Payne Bridal Trunk, Helen Crews residence, private collection.

associations during the early twentieth century and essential to their members’ claims as “daughters” and “sons.”

The formal end to Jim Crow came in 1965, and it is unclear how Bryce Russell responded, but the family stories she passed down in the final decades of her life follow the Lost Cause template. The stories about the war and the years following all surround the Wooten family. Even though her voice is frail and quiet on the tape, she speaks with passion and emotion when describing what her family experienced during the Civil War.

The first story speaks of atrocities by Yankee soldiers towards Bryce’s paternal grandmother and her children. Bryce says only that it “was in the early part of the war,” so it is unclear exactly when the story takes place. When Grandmother Wooten’s husband, John Council Wooten, was away during the war, Northern troops came to camp in her yard. In the story, Bryce notes that this was not the first time they had come onto Wooten land. She says “earlier, they had taken away all the horses that were worth anything to the army.” This time, they decided to stay on the property. Bryce describes that “they butchered [the] cow,” and this was especially traumatizing because she says, “the only thing she had to feed the little children with [after the troops came the first time] was the products from the cow.”

Importantly, the Union troops in the story have taken away any ability for Grandmother Wooten to provide for her children. They are attacking this woman and her ability to be a mother.

Next, Bryce continues the story to illustrate the cruelty of the Yankee troops towards the children: “…and they brought her a large roast of beef after they butchered her cow and

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she was grateful to them, and she cooked the roast and every now and then [the soldiers would] come peering in the window to see if it was ready. And when she took it out of the stove and put it up on the table there was all the little children just waiting to eat that some of that roast and the Yankees came in and took it over the table and carried it out and ate it themselves.” As Bryce gets to this part, her voice is impassioned and convincing. That grown men could deprive starving children of food is unforgivable and seems good reason to pledge allegiance to sectionalism over 120 years after the Civil War’s end.

The story concludes with a picture of a woman who had to leave her home and land in a desperate attempt to provide for her children and avoid further abuse: “There was just nothing left for her at home. She had nothing to work with and nothing to eat and there was one old broken down horse left. …She hitched up that horse to a cart and packed her little children in there with her and set out for Bladen County where her people lived. …They…refugeed there until the war was over.” Even in the last part of the tale, the focus remains on civilian abuse by Northern troops to the point where Grandmother Wooten had to leave her land and home to survive.

This story embodies important elements of Lost Cause ideology, especially its use of abused but unbeaten white women to symbolize the defeated South. The mistress of the Wooten plantation, the story’s setting, is threatened when Yankee men come to her property. They violate her rights by camping there, and, more important, they threaten her ability to provide adequate food for her family. The climax of the story depicts the Yankee soldiers tricking the woman into cooking a roast for them and depriving the “little children” of the


78 Ibid.
last food they have. Their mother then saves them by making a long and presumably
dangerous journey to her family’s hometown. If the Northern troops are nothing but vicious,
the woman is not simply a victim; she is also heroic.

On the same tape, Bryce tells another story about the “indignity that her grandmother
had to suffer at the hands of the Yankees” during the early years of Reconstruction. In the
story she tells, Northern troops were giving out flour to families, so Bryce’s grandmother
sent Bryce’s father to get the flour and come back. She mentions that he had to walk because
“that was the only way he could go.” Bryce continues to say that he was not allowed to
collect their portion of flour, and “[the Northern troops] said his mother had to come and get
it. That was just a further humiliation that they were going to make these Southern ladies
walk down there and ask for the flour but they were desperate for something to feed their
children on so she did, she went and got it.” Even in the act of giving out food, the
Northern troops are cruel occupiers.

Most important to this story is Bryce’s reference to “ladies.” As her indignation
suggests, her grandmother came from a class in which she should never have been made to
fetch flour, or take part in any other labor that had earlier been assigned to slaves. The figure
of the Southern lady was important to Lost Cause ideology, which romanticized her as a
woman beloved and protected by chivalrous Southern gentleman. The male presence in both
of these stories is the exact opposite of the Southern gentleman. Yankee soldiers are selfish,
rude, and not protective of women and children.

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79 Bryce Wooten Russell, interview.
One of the last stories that Bryce recorded concerns a conversation between her grandmother and a house slave named Sarah: “[M]y grandmother heard that General Lee had surrendered. She went to the kitchen and told Aunt Sarah, the cook, that she was free now, that General Lee had surrendered and she was free to go where, and leave, anytime she wanted to. And the cook’s reply was, ‘Marse General Lee ought to be tarred and feathered for having done dat!’” These few lines could just as well have come out of a story by Thomas Nelson Page. They use the “Negro dialect” common in plantation literature of the 1890s. Loyal slaves like Aunt Sarah are also stock features of this literature, as are beloved mistresses. Here, slavery is depicted as a benevolent system in which superior white people took care of black people incapable of fending for themselves. The Aunt Sarah figure in this story reflects childlike characteristics that support this retelling. The reference to Thomas Nelson Page in both Bryce’s story-telling and Josephine’s scrapbook show that the Marse Chan stories were probably handed down from mother to daughter and popular in their household. The resonance of these stories a century later shows that representations of black people as infantile and the white person as a parental figure survived and remained culturally acceptable, even late in Bryce’s life.

In her stories of the Civil War and Reconstruction, Bryce Wooten Russell carried on memory-making that her grandmother, Frances Payne, had begun than more than 100 years earlier. While she looked after the trunk containing her grandmother’s project, she preserved memory-making as on oral tradition through the powerful retelling of family lore bathed in Lost Cause ideology.

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80 Bryce Wooten Russell, interview.
CONCLUSION

As I drove down Highway 441 into Lillington, I passed tobacco fields and a run-down railroad stop. The outskirts of the town seemed very ghostly. Suburban sprawl has not claimed these lands yet. Taco Bells and Super Targets have not encroached upon the muted rolling hills and rows of crop.

I returned for what would be my last time visiting my Aunt Helen and a big old trunk. I got there and she greeted me at the door. She made sure I’d eaten something and said there was a ham sandwich for me if I wanted it. Her house was dark and cramped with boxes and furniture. By this visit, we both had grown accustomed to my working style. She said, “Well, I’ll leave you to it then.” I settled down on a fold-out card table and began shuffling through envelopes of letters. She had already gotten out the scrapbook that she observed I loved. Secretly, I hoped that one day someone would leave it to me in a will. From the living room, she interrupted and asked for help on a particularly tricky crossword puzzle question. We contemplated together, and she suddenly figured it out. This woman is sharp as a tack, I thought.

The day was filled with research and some small talk about cousins and weather. As I left, she gave me a hug and said to just call when I wanted to come by again. I agreed and mentioned it would probably be sometime in the spring. Walking back to my car, I was filled with astonishment that there were still gracious, brilliant people like Helen in the world.

Several months later, I was in her living room again. This time it was packed with extended family and my grandparents, all there for her wake. It was strange to see so many people fill a home I had always seen as full of books and papers. Looking over towards the
couch, I saw people looking in the trunk. I suddenly felt very protective and remembered how it had taken a few visits for Helen to let me get out materials from the trunk on my own. What was she thinking now, I wondered.

As I finished this project, I wondered what I would put in the trunk if I had a chance. Perhaps a debutante gown that I had no use for anymore (I’d probably toss in the gloves too). Frances would have appreciated that as some claim to a place in “society.” No, I think I’d include this thesis. It stands as a step in revising and rethinking the stories we choose to tell.

Some people might ask why do I spend time rummaging through an old trunk. Familial projects have wide social importance because the family is where we first distinguish difference, or who is “us” and who is “them.” For three generations of Payne-Wooten-Russell women, memory-making in the family mirrored the efforts of white supremacy to assert and maintain itself in the changing landscape of the South.
Figure 1.1: Frances Payne and Bryce Wooten Russell, circa 1900.
Figure 1.1: Lace pieces from Frances Payne. Found in Frances Payne’s Bridal Trunk.

Figure 1.2: Various items, including baby bonnets. Found in Frances Payne Bridal Trunk.

Figure 1.3: Lace Pieces found in Frances Payne’s Bridal Trunk.
Figure 2.1: Josephine Payne Wooten
Figure 2.2: Josephine Payne Wooten’s scrapbook back cover.
Figure 2.3: “In Ole Virginia,” found in Josephine Payne Wooten’s scrapbook.
Figures 2.4 and 2.5: Reproductions of paintings, found in Josephine’s scrapbook.
Figure 3.1: Bryce Wooten Russell (lower right) with mother, father, and half-sister.
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