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## **“A Debt of Honor”: The Hegemonic Benevolence of Richmond’s Female Elites at the “Last Confederate Christmas” of 1864**

### **Abstract**

In poignant remembrance of the last Christmas in the Confederate White House, Varina Davis, First Lady of the Confederacy, reflected upon that special event in an extended article for the *New York Sunday World*, some thirty-two years after the Confederacy’s final Christmas. Davis recounted the event fondly and praised the transformation of her female peers into perfect models of Confederate endurance under the extreme duress of civil war. In re-creating the dramaturgy of the three-part event, which was organized and hosted in large part by the Confederacy’s First Lady, Davis opened a critical window into southern sensibilities and the cultural rituals which helped to sustain the Confederacy through four long years of civil war. Though Davis’s article was clearly a reflective and nostalgic piece concerning an event which occurred thirtytwo years prior, it was not written merely as a glorification of southern society, but rather to demonstrate the perpetuation of cherished southern ideals and rituals during the closing months of the war. [excerpt]

### **Keywords**

Civil War, Richmond, Virginia, Confederacy, Christmas 1864, female elites

# **“A Debt of Honor”: The Hegemonic Benevolence of Richmond’s Female Elites at the “Last Confederate Christmas” of 1864**

**Ashley M. Whitehead**

- “That Christmas season was ushered in under the thickest clouds; every one felt the cataclysm which impended, but the rosy, expectant faces of our little children were a constant reminder that self-sacrifice must be the personal offering of each mother of the family. How to satisfy the children that nothing better could be done than the little makeshifts attainable in the Confederacy was the problem of the older members of each household...A debt of honor due from them to the season’s exactions. These young people are gray-haired now, but the lessons of self-denial, industry and frugality to which they became past mistresses then, made of them the most dignified, self-reliant and tender women I have ever known—all honor to them. So, in the interchanges of the courtesies and charities of life, to which we could not add its comforts and pleasure, passed the last Christmas in the Confederate mansion.”

-Varina Davis, 1896<sup>1</sup>

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1. Varina Davis, “Christmas in the Confederate White House,” *New York Sunday World*, December 13, 1896. Vertical files, Eleanor S. Brockenbrough Library, Museum of the Confederacy, Richmond, VA.

■ In poignant remembrance of the last Christmas in the Confederate White House, Varina Davis, First Lady of the Confederacy, reflected upon that special event in an extended article for the *New York Sunday World*, some thirty-two years after the Confederacy's final Christmas. Davis recounted the event fondly and praised the transformation of her female peers into perfect models of Confederate endurance under the extreme duress of civil war. In re-creating the dramaturgy of the three-part event, which was organized and hosted in large part by the Confederacy's First Lady, Davis opened a critical window into southern sensibilities and the cultural rituals which helped to sustain the Confederacy through four long years of civil war. Though Davis's article was clearly a reflective and nostalgic piece concerning an event which occurred thirty-two years prior, it was not written merely as a glorification of southern society, but rather to demonstrate the perpetuation of cherished southern ideals and rituals during the closing months of the war.

With Richmond cut off to the South and West by Union forces and with the Union army firmly in control of the deep South and the West—Richmond's only sources of supplies—the Confederate capital found itself in dire straits by December of 1864. The Confederate armies desperately needed food, clothing, and other vital supplies to sustain them during the long winter ahead. However, Richmond civilians, starved, anxious, and weary from years of seemingly relentless combat upon their doorsteps, also

found themselves struggling for survival. Despite the inevitable despondency inherent in any war-beleaguered society, and despite the military and material strains placed on both soldiers and civilians in the Richmond area during the fourth winter of the war, holiday morale within the Confederate capital was surprisingly high that Christmas. Richmond's elites strove to perpetuate their southern Christmas traditions in spite of, and indeed, in light of, the otherwise "solemn and despondent" mood of the starved-out city.<sup>2</sup> Essential elements of southern culture—elite paternalism, benevolence and charity, honor, Christian ideals, communal sensibilities, and, most important, a hierarchical structure—continued to hold the Confederacy together, albeit through war-induced creative adaptation of many of those cultural practices.<sup>3</sup> This order was maintained through fluid power negotiations between the elites and the lower classes that helped to protect class interests through dramaturgical displays of elite force that garnered the lower classes' consent of the elites' "right" to rule.

The South crafted a unique system of societal benevolence which was based largely on maintaining the socio-economic system of a slave-holding republic.<sup>4</sup> This system, whose foundations lay in the paternalistic structure of the master-slave relationship, encouraged and, indeed, obligated southern elites to support and "protect" their subordinates, in return for the subordinates' approval of the elites to rule politically, economically,

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2. Phoebe Yates Pember, *A Southern Woman's Story* (G.W. Carleton & Company, 1879; reprint, Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2002), 77; Mary Tabb Johnston and Elizabeth Lipscomb Johnston, *Amelia Gayle Gorgas: A Biography* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1978), 65; see also, William Blair, *Virginia's Private War: Feeding Body and Soul in the Confederacy, 1861-1865* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 9.
  3. Eugene Genovese, "Yeomen Farmers in a Slaveholders' Democracy," *Agricultural History* 49, no. 2 (April 1975): 340; Stephanie McCurry, "The Two Faces of Republicanism: Gender and Proslavery Politics in Antebellum South Carolina," *Journal of American History* 78, no. 4 (March 1992): 1263; see also, Eugene Genovese, *The Slaveholders' Dilemma: Freedom and Progress in Conservative Thought, 1820-1860* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1992); Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Honor and Violence in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 12.
  4. Wyatt-Brown, *Honor and Violence*, 19, 21.

and socially.<sup>5</sup> While American war-time benevolence and charitable acts by the socially-elite have occurred, with pride, since the Revolutionary era, the South paired its own worldview with political and socio-economic necessity during the Civil War in unique ways which enabled elite domination to endure, come what may.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, Christianity-based unity, communalism, and social responsibility, as well as the projection of the southern family onto southern society as a whole, strengthened the bonds between elites and the lower classes which otherwise might have been strained to the breaking point during the most trying periods of the war.<sup>7</sup> When the war inevitably placed pressure upon the South's socio-political structure, the Confederate nation was able to combat that pressure through its appeals to traditional cultural practices and communal obligations which comprised the core of "southern honor."<sup>8</sup>

The fluidity and circumstantial adaptability of southern culture to the spontaneous demands of civil war are illustrated in Varina Davis's article on the Confederate Christmas celebration of 1864 in Richmond. In her article, Davis revealed how Richmond's female elites, the wives of the Confederacy's leading politicians and generals, adopted the traditional paternalistic and religiously-infused discourse of the elite ruling class to reinvigorate the spirit of the Confederacy, and reinforce the power of the elites, through a charitable Christmas celebration in the Confederate capital. Davis noted that the three-part celebration included a

Christmas Eve "decoration party" at the Confederate White House, to which Davis invited numerous politically-elite women to prepare Christmas decorations, gifts, and a holiday feast for a group of orphans from Richmond's St. Paul's Episcopal Church Home for Orphans. Many of the supplies for the dinner and gifts were donated out of the personal assets of the elites, including preserved fruits, eggs, candles, and old toys which were fixed up for the orphans. Many of the elites spent precious remaining money on luxury items for the dinner, such as seasoning brandy "at one hundred dollars a bottle" and "suet at a dollar a pound." Varina Davis herself also made an extra effort to procure egg-nog for the household slaves—a Christmas tradition which allowed domestic slaves to engage directly in holiday celebrations with their masters.<sup>9</sup>

The elites' dramatic sacrifice of personal Christmas luxuries is an example of the ways in which the upper class displayed an image of dedication to the lower classes. This display seemingly was intended, at least partially, to help maintain the elites' ruling status by demonstrating their ability and right to rule and, in doing so, to gain the consent of their social inferiors to do so. The sharing of egg-nog with the household slaves also served to strengthen and promote the paternalistic bond between master and slave within the presidential household. At the decoration party, Davis assembled various foodstuffs, including "rice, flour, molasses and tiny pieces of meat, most of them sent to the President's wife anonymously to be dispensed to the poor."<sup>10</sup> While their "sacrifices" may

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5. Eugene Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Vintage Books, 1976), 27-76.
  6. Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790* (1982; reprint, Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 244, 286-7.
  7. St. Paul's Church Record of the Vestry, volume 3, 34. St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Richmond, VA; McCurry, 125-128; T.J. Jackson Lears, "The Concept of Cultural Hegemony: Problems and Possibilities," *The American Historical Review* 90, no. 3 (June 1985): 571.
  8. Blair, *Virginia's Private War*, 130-132; Wyatt-Brown, *Honor and Violence*, 28, 30-31.
  9. Varina Davis, "Christmas in the Confederate White House."
  10. *Ibid.*

seem trivial to the modern historian, or may have been perceived as “hypocritical” by some members of the lower classes, most of the elites—and many members of the lower classes—still recognized the “appropriate” self-deprivation to which the upper class were consciously subjecting themselves. Lower-class Richmonders revealed their continued reliance upon a traditional southern social order to ensure survival in the most difficult of times by granting the elites the power to dispense of their foodstuffs to the needier members of Richmond’s society.<sup>11</sup> Admittedly, the recipients of those donations were desperate and had little choice but to depend upon the elites for their survival. However, by choosing to send donations to be dispersed more broadly to the needy, instead of hoarding such goods for themselves or relying strictly on a person-to-person charity system, lower classes showed some acceptance of the elites’ leadership abilities and right to rule. Without proper documentation from the lower classes that their actions were, in fact, true reflections of the consent that they granted to the elites to rule over them, this interpretation can never be verified absolutely. However, by relying on hegemonic theory and reading this interaction between the elites and the lower classes as a “performance” of such hegemony, it can be inferred that such is indeed the case.

The following afternoon, after a Christmas service at St. Paul’s which preached “Christian love” and reinforced the sacred nature of the day’s benevolence, Davis and her peers invited the orphans to the basement of the church where they were greeted by a beautifully-decorated

Christmas tree, homemade gifts, and a surprisingly luxurious Christmas dinner. The First Family received numerous small makeshift gifts from poorer families throughout the Virginia countryside and capital, in thanks for Davis’s services. These struggling families were certainly not forced to send gifts to the First Family. Their decision to do so suggests evidence of the lower classes’ commitment to inter-class reciprocal paternalism and a general consent to perpetuate a southern hegemonic social order.

Davis’s article reflects symbolic appeals to Confederate nationalism made by the elite women who helped to organize the Confederate Christmas celebration. These women, the so-called “Mothers of Invention,” contributed increasingly to the “re-gendering” of the discourse and the cultural dramaturgy of the Confederacy during the last few months of the war by making themselves indispensable to the morale and sustenance of the Confederate nation and southern honor.<sup>12</sup> Though they had been a public force all throughout the war, these women, as illustrated through their Christmas celebration, played an increasingly significant role in perpetuating southern cultural rituals. As Davis noted, the Christmas celebration was a “debt of honor due from them to the season’s exactions.”<sup>13</sup>

It is true that numerous war-induced tensions on the Confederate home-front existed throughout the life of the Confederacy, as the lower classes negotiated with their superiors for greater protection of their interests.<sup>14</sup> Such tensions were famously illustrated by the numerous petitions for food, supplies, and pardons

11. Ibid.

12. Drew Gilpin Faust, *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 7, 28, 52.

13. Varina Davis, “Christmas in the Confederate White House.”

14. Genovese, “Yeomen Farmers in a Slaveholders’ Democracy,” 335; Lears, 568; William C. Davis, *Look Away!: A History of the Confederate States of America* (New York: The Free Press, 2002), 292.

for their soldier-husbands that southern women sent to Jefferson Davis during the war. These tensions were also illustrated by the notorious Bread Riots which swept through several prominent southern cities, Richmond perhaps the most famous, in 1863.<sup>15</sup> However, true to their ideology, both the Confederate government and the Confederate upper class responded to the needs of the lower classes by adjusting Confederate impressments and consignment laws, as well as by creating formal and informal charities and networks which helped to support the outlying poor.<sup>16</sup> Protests from the poor, as well as critiques from the press, soldiers, and the husbands of Richmond's female elites, forced Richmond's ladies to adapt their practices of "maternalism" to meet the needs of the poor. However, poor Richmonders' contributions towards Christmas gifts for the First Family in 1864 suggest that paternalistic rituals maintained and adapted by the ladies reinforced the traditional bond that they shared with the lower classes.<sup>17</sup>

The third and final chapter of the 1864 Christmas celebration speaks most directly to the perpetuation of cultural hegemony. Modeled after traditional southern social rituals, this final component of the celebration reflected the war-time adaptation of those rituals into uniquely Confederate cultural practices. On Christmas night, the upper crust attended a "starvation party" at the residence of one of the Davis neighbors. Like previous starvation parties, no food or drink (other than water) was served at the Christmas night party and amateur musicians provided the entertainment of the evening. Despite

the obvious privations of the evening, due to the donation of their Christmas dinners to the orphans, the attendees arrived in exquisite dress. Officers who had ridden in to Richmond from the trenches donned their dress uniforms for the occasion, and danced the night away with local belles. Davis described the belles as "bright-eyed girls, many of them fragile as fairies, but [who] worked like peasants for their home and country."<sup>18</sup> In doing so, Davis emphasized the belles' role as "proper" southern "ladies" whose honorable and patriotic sacrifices for the Confederate nation made them simultaneously "partners in suffering" with, and yet rightfully distinct from and superior to, their lower class "sisters." The fact that the attendees—who sacrificed daily use of their finest clothing long ago and had adopted the "absurdly simple" homespun dress of the under-classes—put forth a conscious effort to dress up for the starvation party reveals a critical piece of symbolism.<sup>19</sup> Such "elite performance" was intended to promote a sense of solidarity among Richmond's upper classes. LaSalle Corbell Pickett, Constance Cary Harrison, Sallie Putnam, and others spoke about the necessity of social gatherings and parties in sustaining the morale of the Confederacy. However, the donning of elite dress was undoubtedly intended to help reinforce the status of the southern elite, despite the drastic toll which the war had taken on their material lives.

The conscious decision to dress up for the occasion reflects the upper classes' perpetuation of what Clifford Geertz has referred to as a "dramaturgical display" of elite cultural ritual. This "performance" helped to strengthen traditional southern

15. William C. Davis, *Look Away!*, 215.

16. *Ibid.*, 280-316, 301; Blair, *Virginia's Private War*, 5-7.

17. McCurry, "The Two Faces of Republicanism," 1262-1263.

18. Varina Davis, "Christmas in the Confederate White House."

19. Sallie Brock Putnam, *Richmond During the War: Four Years of Personal Observations* (1876; reprint, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 315-316.

social hierarchy and hegemonic control.<sup>20</sup> Such displays conformed to what Karen Haltunnen calls the “sentimental” culture of nineteenth-century America, in which the donning of class-specific dress enabled one to reveal his or her true social identity. In this instance, the elites wore their finest outfits to the starvation party to “demonstrate their gentility” and to reaffirm (for themselves and others) that they were, indeed, “true ladies and gentlemen deserving of the higher social place” granted to them by the lower classes. Additionally, by dressing up, they distinguished themselves from the plain citizens of the Confederacy for whom they had sacrificed so much of their other remaining upper-class materiel that Christmas. In other words, though they took pride and pleasure in caring for and affiliating with the lower classes during the special Christmas celebration, they used the evening’s starvation party as a display through which they could reaffirm, among themselves, their distinction from them.<sup>21</sup>

In the nature and form of the 1864 Christmas gaiety, elements of social control possibly derived from previous episodes of under-class “rowdiness,” both on Christmas and throughout the year, were clearly visible. The Bread Riots of 1863 haunted the Richmond elite by late 1864, when starvation, poverty, general despondency, and war-weariness reached an all-time high and the poor struggled for their mere survival. Sallie Putnam noted the “worn and dilapidated” look of Richmond’s streets and those who roamed them by the end of 1864. The infamous “Cary Street

women”—beggars, burglars, and prostitutes who roamed the city streets in desperate search of food and shelter—provided a daily reminder of the war’s tragic impact on the city’s poor population who might rise again and riot if not attended to by the upper classes.<sup>22</sup> Additionally, the upper class was well aware of the lower classes’ traditions of excessive Christmas rowdiness. As Susan Davis and Ruth Coski have noted, Christmas revelry in the nineteenth century frequently had the tendency of disrupting public order and inciting violence, debauchery, and general acts of public resistance to authority, especially in impoverished urban environments.<sup>23</sup> By providing a ritualized and ordered Christmas ceremony for a small sector of the poor community, elites helped to placate discontented or frustrated members of the lower classes, as well as set an example for how to “properly” celebrate the holiday with a balance of gaiety and solemn restraint.

Additionally, in conjoining their own Christmas celebrations with those of the orphans, and by willingly sacrificing so much of their own for the benefit of the orphans, the elites demonstrated that they understood the needs and sufferings of the lower classes. Such inter-class engagement in a “sensitivity of suffering” allowed for the upper and lower classes to share, albeit spontaneously and fluidly, what Antonio Gramsci and T.J. Jackson Lears have referred to as an “historical bloc.” This shared understanding of, and participation in, a culture of sacrifice allowed members of different classes to interact relatively

20. Peter Burke, *What is Cultural History?* 2nd ed. (2004; reprint, Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2008), 93-96.

21. Karen Haltunnen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-Class Culture in America, 1830-1870* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), xvii, 194.

22. Putnam, 315-317; Judith W. McGuire, *Diary of a Southern Refugee During the War, by a Lady of Virginia* (New York: E.J. Hale & Son, 1867; reprint, Lincoln: The University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 322.

23. Susan G. Davis, “‘Making Night Hideous’: Christmas Revelry and Public Order in Nineteenth-Century Philadelphia,” *American Quarterly* 34, no. 2 (summer 1982): 185; Vertical files, Christmas collection, Eleanor S. Brockenbrough Library, The Museum of the Confederacy, Richmond, VA.

peacefully with each other through a structured and reciprocal relationship.<sup>24</sup> It is quite possible that many members of the lower classes were not entirely “pleased” with the rule of the elites, but that they may not have had the means to express their displeasure.

The exact perceptions of elites by the lower class will never be fully known. This is not to say that the elites’ participation in the 1864 Christmas celebration was entirely or merely a conscious and premeditated attempt to control or coerce the lower classes into maintaining their allegiance to the Confederacy and their trust in the Confederate leaders. Nor is this analysis meant to imply that the under-classes were “duped” by such rituals into placation or complete submission. However, because elites made an effort to understand and respond to the plight of the lower classes, they were able to tap into what Daniel Wickberg has called a “shared sensibility” of traditional southern rituals and familiar paternalistic relationships. This enabled them to willingly and successfully enjoy the last Confederate Christmas on outwardly acceptable and relatively peaceful terms.<sup>25</sup> Both the elites and the lower classes helped, consciously and subconsciously, to sustain cherished and fundamental tenets of southern culture. Many historians—and even some Civil War contemporaries—heretofore have been unable to see this, and thus have dismissed these cultural tenets as having perished at the hands of loss of faith in, or even undermining of, the Confederate cause.

Drew Gilpin Faust, George Rable, and other Civil War scholars of Confederate women have argued that the actions of southern women in the final year of the war did more to undermine the Confederacy than they did to support it.<sup>26</sup> Such historians cite as evidence for such claims the journals of Richmond women such as Judith McGuire and Phoebe Yates Pember, whose caustic words about “elite extravagance” directly linked the “selfish” behavior of Richmond’s elite with the Confederacy’s ultimate failure.<sup>27</sup> These scholars argue that such actions by elite Confederate women, combined with the letters from southern women to their husbands on the front line who beseeched their men to “give up the fight” and come home to their helpless and needy families, “prove” that Confederate morale, especially among women, was virtually nonexistent by the fourth winter of the war. Furthermore, these historians write that low morale resulted in women actively seeking to undermine the war effort through selfish extravagance and refusal to sacrifice for the Confederate nation.<sup>28</sup>

Richmond’s Confederate Christmas celebration of 1864 shows that southern morale and the Confederate “cultural spirit” was indeed very much still alive at this late phase of the war, and that rituals such as the Christmas celebration served to reinforce, rather than undermine, the tenets of Confederate nationalism. Professor Gary Gallagher wrote that, although the morale of the Confederate home-front was inevitably weakened by four years of brutal warfare, the fall of the Confederacy resulted from the military

24. Lears, “The Concept of Cultural Hegemony,” 571.

25. Daniel Wickberg, “What is the History of Sensibilities?” *American Historical Review* 112, no. 3 (June 2007): 661-684, 262-264.

26. George C. Rable, *Civil Wars: Women and the Crisis of Southern Nationalism* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 71, 89, 116, 136-137, 143; Drew Gilpin Faust, “Altars of Sacrifice: Confederate Women and the Narratives of War,” *The Journal of American History* 76, no. 4 (March 1990): 1228.

27. Pember, 77; McGuire, 118.

28. Rable, 71, 89, 116, 136-137, 143; Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 244-247.

defeat of Lee's army and the Union army's physical decimation of civilian materiel and support, rather than from a complete loss of civilian faith in the Confederacy and resignation to failure.<sup>29</sup> The approach to studying the late-war Confederacy in this paper, which is based largely upon the 1864 Confederate Christmas celebration, allows for an enriched understanding of Confederate culture. By analyzing this event through the lens of hegemony, as reinforced by paternalism, benevolence, and dramaturgical ritual, the cultural history and larger meaning of this event reveals itself. Through a broader cultural history-based interpretation of the final Christmas of the Confederacy, one can see that what previous more methodologically-traditional scholars, such as Faust and Rable, view as the death of the Confederacy. To these scholars the death of the Confederacy appears to be, rather, a remarkably affirmative Confederate spirit in spite of the Confederacy's military and material condition.

Admittedly, few primary documents, and even fewer pieces of secondary scholarship, exist on the "Last Christmas in the Confederate White House." To the knowledge of this writer, the event was never publicized in any major newspaper in December of 1864 or January of 1865. The lack of public comment about the event during the holiday season in which it was held might strike contemporary historians as odd, in light of the larger significance and power relationships which the event embodies. Some historians might argue that this "silence" in sources may have been an intentional oversight on behalf of members of the southern press who may have become disillusioned with elite women's continued "indulgence"

in social gatherings during this desperate time. After all, elite women certainly had their critics who routinely scorned the ladies' social habits. However, one has to remember that newspaper coverage of even major military events was uneven during this extremely difficult time in Richmond's history. Furthermore, although the Christmas celebration served to uphold the traditional social hierarchy, dramaturgical displays of paternalism and benevolence which stood at the core of southerners' cherished culture, were not entirely premeditated, nor designed to "dupe" the under-classes into submission and loyalty through widespread advertisement of the event. In a society steeped in communal sensibilities, it is quite possible—and indeed probable—that such reinforcement of southern values and rituals was best illustrated and shared through spontaneous dramaturgical, rather than premeditated, forms. Through such dramaturgy, the Confederate elite and the under-classes were able to reaffirm their relationship with each other and the Confederate nation in positive and successful ways which helped to sustain the Confederacy through its final Christmas. Varina Davis's re-creation of this microcosm of late-war Confederate culture serves to highlight the survival of the Confederate "spirit" and to praise southern elites for their sacrifices and benevolence.

For young girls like Alice West Allen, an eleven year-old refugee from the Shenandoah Valley who spent Christmas of 1864 with the First Family, and for young lower-class females such as Richmonder Clara Lynn Minor, the elite ladies who organized the elaborate Christmas celebration had "come to the rescue, as they had often done before."<sup>30</sup> On January 1, 1865, Reverend Charles Minnegerode

29. Gary Gallagher, *The Confederate War: How Popular Will, Nationalism and Military Strategy Could Not Stave off Defeat* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 17, 157.

30. Clara Lynn Minor, "A Novel Christmas Tree," 1900. Vertical files, Christmas file, Eleanor S. Brockenbrough Library, Museum of the Confederacy, Richmond, VA.

preached a poignant and inspirational sermon to the congregation at St. Paul's Church that encapsulated the mindset that had prevailed throughout the 1864 Christmas celebration. Minnegerode spoke proudly of the elites' noble, patriotic work and charitable benevolence, and praised Richmonders' continued dedication to sustaining the Confederacy against all odds:

Reverses have followed the Confederacy in many parts of our country, and the sky opens with dark and threatening clouds. But if we fall, let us fall with our faces upward, our hearts turned to God, our hands in the work, our wounds in the breast, with blessing—not curses—upon our lips; and all is not lost! We have retained our honor; we have done our duty to the last.<sup>31</sup>

As Minnegerode implies, the Virginia elite class had guided Richmond through its final Confederate Christmas in true southern style. Its debt of honor—to the lower classes, to peers, and to the Confederacy—had been fulfilled.

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31. Harold B. Gill, Jr., "Christmas Trees, the Confederacy and Colonial Williamsburg," *Colonial Williamsburg* (Christmas 2005): 73-74. Vertical files, Eleanor S. Brockenbrough Library, Museum of the Confederacy, Richmond, VA.