

THE ISOLATION FACTOR: DIFFERING LOYALTIES IN THE MOUNTAIN
COUNTIES OF WATAUGA AND BUNCOMBE DURING THE CIVIL WAR

A Thesis
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Abstract

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This work closely examined the Civil War in Watauga County and Buncombe County while comparing their situations to the each other and the rest of Appalachia. The main primary sources included letters and books written by those living in both counties, the stories of escaped Union soldiers passing through, Southern Claims Commissions files, and soldier enlistments in conjunction with the U. S. Census. After making a geographical profile of Union and Confederate enlistees, it became clear that the higher in the mountains people lived, the more likely they were to support the Union due to their isolation. Those living in the more connected towns and bottomlands were more likely to support the Confederacy, and the larger the town or city was, the stronger its support. Nearly all of Buncombe County minus its fringes showed strong Confederate support, but Unionists in Watauga County held the majority outside of a few small towns. Before the war, Buncombe County emerged as an economic and political force in the mountains, while Watauga County remained well behind up through the Civil War. As the war started, Buncombe County quickly united behind the Confederate cause and remained so throughout the war, while it became clear that Watauga County remained much more in support of the Union. Although there was no open revolt against the Confederacy, local Unionists quietly waited for the right

time to take action. As the war progressed, Watauga County Unionists increasingly fought back against local Confederates and eventually took control of most of the county. By focusing on two very different counties, this work helped to explain the intricacies of the Civil War in Western North Carolina.

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Introduction

In Appalachian North Carolina, Buncombe and Watauga counties experienced the war very differently. Buncombe County had Asheville, the economic hub and largest city in the region, but Watauga had the lowest white and slave populations in the state in 1860, increased isolation, a more mountainous environment, and shared a border with Unionist East Tennessee.¹ Leading up to the war, Confederate supporters achieved a great deal of white solidarity within Buncombe County, but Watauga County remained much more divided due to its more rural and isolated population. Still, most did not openly object to the war in the early stages in either county.

There was a great amount of diversity within the region with people living in the broad river valleys generally being more prosperous than those living farther up the more isolated hollows and ridges. In these two areas, the local culture formed differently to some degree. The people in the valleys found themselves more connected to the outside and more in line with the rest of the South as well as having a better economy. Higher in the mountains, people were more likely to see things in local terms. This caused many people's support for the Confederacy to be conditional at best. These people were somewhat hostile towards any form of central government and had not yet developed a true Southern identity due to their isolation. Additionally, many of the more isolated residents also did not have local men leading the charge to war and did not always see how secession benefited them.

Most of Buncombe County was covered by broad river valleys and had been well connected to other parts of the state and to South Carolina and Georgia through trade along

¹ Michael C. Hardy, *A Short History of Old Watauga County* (Boone: Parkway Publishers, Inc., 2005), 46.

the turnpike. Along with that, numerous families from the Deep South would spend their summers in Buncombe County and bring their slaves with them, which often doubled the slave population in the county which was already above 15 percent.² Therefore, residents there were more likely to identify with the Confederate cause. Buncombe also had the advantage of numerous regular troops stationed in the county to keep order due to the armory in Asheville.

Watauga County had many more people living farther up the mountains. Even Boone at that time was in many ways a backwoods and somewhat a frontier town.³ Watauga also bordered Tennessee, where violence and ideology crossed over. Although parts of Watauga remained loyal to the Confederacy for quite some time, many of the more isolated areas especially with the escalating violence from guerrillas and Confederate officials went their own way, and those who disagreed with secession but hoped to quietly wait the war out became active. Watauga County had Camp Mast, which was made up of local Home Guard units and helped to keep some parts of the county relatively secure. However, it had far less control over the region than did troops in Buncombe.

Several recent studies shed light on the conditions of the Civil War in Appalachia. In *Southwest Virginia's Railroad*, Kenneth Noe argued that Southwest Virginia was the most pro-Confederate part of Appalachia. This was mainly because as the railroad connected the region intrinsically with the rest of Virginia, many people embraced the larger markets throughout the South, the people there came to see themselves as truly Southern, and more

² William R. Trotter, *Bushwhackers! The Civil War in North Carolina The Mountains* (Winston-Salem: John F. Blair Publisher, 1988), 26; John Inscoe and Gordon McKinney, *The Heart of Confederate Appalachia: Western North Carolina in the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: The University Press of North Carolina, 2000), 25.

³ Inscoe and McKinney, 25.

slaves were brought in.⁴ Increased connections caused loyalty to the Confederacy in Virginia just as it did in the more connected sections of Buncombe and Watauga counties.

In Eastern Kentucky, Brian McKnight in *Contested Borderland* argued that the region often tried to stay neutral and as a whole was in favor of the Union, but that allegiance varied significantly throughout the region with many pockets of Confederate support especially early in the war. In the most contested parts of the region, men generally tried to stay home from the war in order to protect their families from bushwhackers. Local concerns drove the conflict there in many ways, and the region did not have good connections to outside markets.⁵

According to John W. Shaffer in *Clash of Loyalties*, in the region that became West Virginia, the northeastern counties were pretty solidly Unionist, but that many of the western and southern counties like Barbour County were much more divided or even pro-Confederate due to their links with Virginia. Eastern Tennessee was another largely Unionist area according to Todd Groce in *Mountain Rebels* and had the most Unionists in the South, but there was a strong minority that supported the Confederacy. When the vote for secession came, many towns located on or near the newly finished railroad favored secession. Conversely, the more isolated counties relied more on subsistence agriculture and generally opposed secession as seen in their vote on the issue. Although not one of Groce's fundamental arguments, such evidence just over the border from Watauga and Buncombe

⁴ Kenneth Noe, *Southwest Virginia's Railroad: Modernization and the Sectional Crisis* (Urbana: University Press of Illinois, 1994); Gordon McKinney, *Southern Mountain Republicans, 1865-1900: Politics and the Appalachian Community* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1998).

⁵ Brian McKnight, *Contested Borderland: The Civil War in Appalachian Kentucky and Virginia* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2006).

should not be ignored. Watauga shared a border with Carter and Johnson counties in Tennessee, and in both less than one fourth of the residents voted in favor of secession.⁶

In *A Separate Civil War*, Jonathan Sarris looked at Lumpkin and Fannin Counties in Georgia and argued that throughout the war, most people's decisions were driven by local concerns. Lumpkin County had a larger population both white and slave and became more connected to the Southern economy during the antebellum period and came to support the Confederacy with ease. Fannin County remained more isolated and contained more Unionists especially as the war progressed.⁷

John Inscoe and Gordon McKinney in *The Heart of Confederate Appalachia* argued that after Lincoln's call for troops, the region came to strongly support the Confederacy due to their perceived Southern identity, the influence of local slave-owning elites, and their ultra-Southern Congressman Thomas Clingman among other factors. By mid 1863, Confederate support was eroding throughout the region for several reasons. Many people were bitterly opposed to the draft and the Confederate officials who entered the region after it to enforce the law, and Federal occupation of Eastern Tennessee in September of 1863 proved problematic for the Confederates.

As Noel Fisher accurately pointed out, Inscoe and McKinney claimed that Unionism did not grow from long-seated political divisions but from actions of the Confederate government. Additionally, Fisher argued that Western North Carolina did not necessarily

⁶ Todd Groce, *Mountain Rebels: East Tennessee Confederates and the Civil War, 1860-1870* (Knoxville: The University Press of Tennessee, 1999); John Shaffer, *Clash of Loyalties: A Border County in the Civil War* (Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 2003).

⁷ Jonathan Sarris, *A Separate Civil War: Communities in Conflict in the Mountain South* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2006).

consider itself Southern.⁸ Another opposing opinion came from William Trotter in *Bushwhackers!* where he argued that allegiance to the Confederacy in the region was largely based upon class. Although class may have been a factor, people's relative isolation often determined how good their land was and thus what class one would be in and not the other way around.

In Martin Crawford's *Ashe County's Civil War*, he claimed that economic factors played a big role on which side people chose, where Inscoe and McKinney found it to be negligible. Additionally, Crawford thought that politics were an indicator of how people would behave and said the Whigs were more likely to become Unionists. Within Ashe County, Unionism grew mostly within the North Fork area because the people were poor, isolated, near the Tennessee border, almost none owned slaves, and their local elites did not take a strong stance. As for the rest of the county, most remained loyal to the Confederacy because they had already invested so much in its success and most had a family member or neighbor fighting in the war. Since the North Fork and the South Fork of the New River both have their headwaters in Watauga County, Unionism and resistance to Confederate control likely spread across the county line.⁹

Some authors focused specifically on Buncombe and Watauga Counties. For Watauga County, Michael C. Hardy in *A Short History of Old Watauga County* argued that the county was largely supportive on the Confederacy after Lincoln's call for troops because of their view on Constitutional powers, which agreed well with Inscoe and McKinney's take on the entire region. He did not comment on any decline in support later on. In contrast,

⁸ Noel Fisher, "Feelin' Mighty Southern: Recent Scholarship on Southern Appalachia in the Civil War," *Civil War History* 47, no. 4 (December 2001): 334-346.

⁹ Martin Crawford, *Ashe County's Civil War: Community and Society in the Appalachian South* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 93.

William Trotter in *Bushwhackers!* claimed that Watauga was a hotbed of Unionism throughout the war due to its lack of slaves. In general, Trotter argued the old ideas of isolation and Unionism that grew out of class warfare pitting yeomen farmers against wealthy slave owners. He believed that mountain people were driven by their desire for independence and that two thirds of the residents of Western North Carolina supported the Union. In *A History of Buncombe County*, F. A. Sondley did not give a clear argument on the loyalties of Buncombe citizens but implied that they were rather supportive of the Confederacy.¹⁰

The recent trend in Appalachian history has been to debunk many of the older myths and stereotypes on the topic. Various authors have looked at every section of Appalachia south of the Mason-Dixon Line and have showed how these regions were far different from the way William Frost and others have described them. However, historians had a much different view of the region decades earlier.

Like the local color artists and northern visitors that came before him, William Frost made the isolation model of Appalachia popular in the early 1900s through the 1950s being replaced by the culture of poverty model and then other models thereafter. He argued that due to the strong national feelings that remained and the lack of slaves in Appalachia, loyalty in Western North Carolina, Eastern Kentucky, Eastern Tennessee, and Western Virginia remained strong even though the latter two were best known for their Unionism. He also said that the region was a unique frontier in that it did not have a portion of educated men with ties to big cities, and having more descendants of the Revolution than anywhere, “Appalachian Americans clave to the old flag.” Frost argued that geographic isolation made the people of Appalachia our contemporary ancestors because many still used the barter

¹⁰ F. A. Sondley, *A History of Buncombe County North Carolina* (Asheville: The Advocate Printing Co., 1930).

system and subsistence agriculture. Along with that, their culture was retarded and trapped in time by their isolation. When commenting on the Civil War, Frost reasoned that because of these differences and the lack of slaves in the mountains, Appalachia remained staunchly Unionist throughout the war.¹¹

Other authors had a similar view. Horace Kephart believed that Appalachia remained Unionist throughout mainly because most lived isolated on small farms outside of the few bottomlands, which gave them self reliance and made them strong and independent. Samuel T. Wilson diverged slightly. Although he argued that the region remained in support of the Union, he argued that West Virginia, Eastern Kentucky, and Eastern Tennessee were the most Unionist and that Western North Carolina, Northern Georgia, Northern Alabama, and especially Southwest Virginia had more Confederate support although still not a majority in most areas. John C. Campbell held similar views by equating West Virginia, Eastern Kentucky, and Eastern Tennessee as the most Unionist while stating that the highlands of North Carolina were split fifty-fifty, which was the highest level of Confederate support given to the region by early authors. In addition, he stated that most slaves in the region were in the rich valleys and towns making slavery not an issue for those living further up the mountains who often sided with the North on the slavery issue. It was many decades later before anyone challenged these notions.¹²

¹¹ For one of Frost's best examples, see William G. Frost, "Our Southern Highlanders," *Independent* 72 (April 4, 1912).

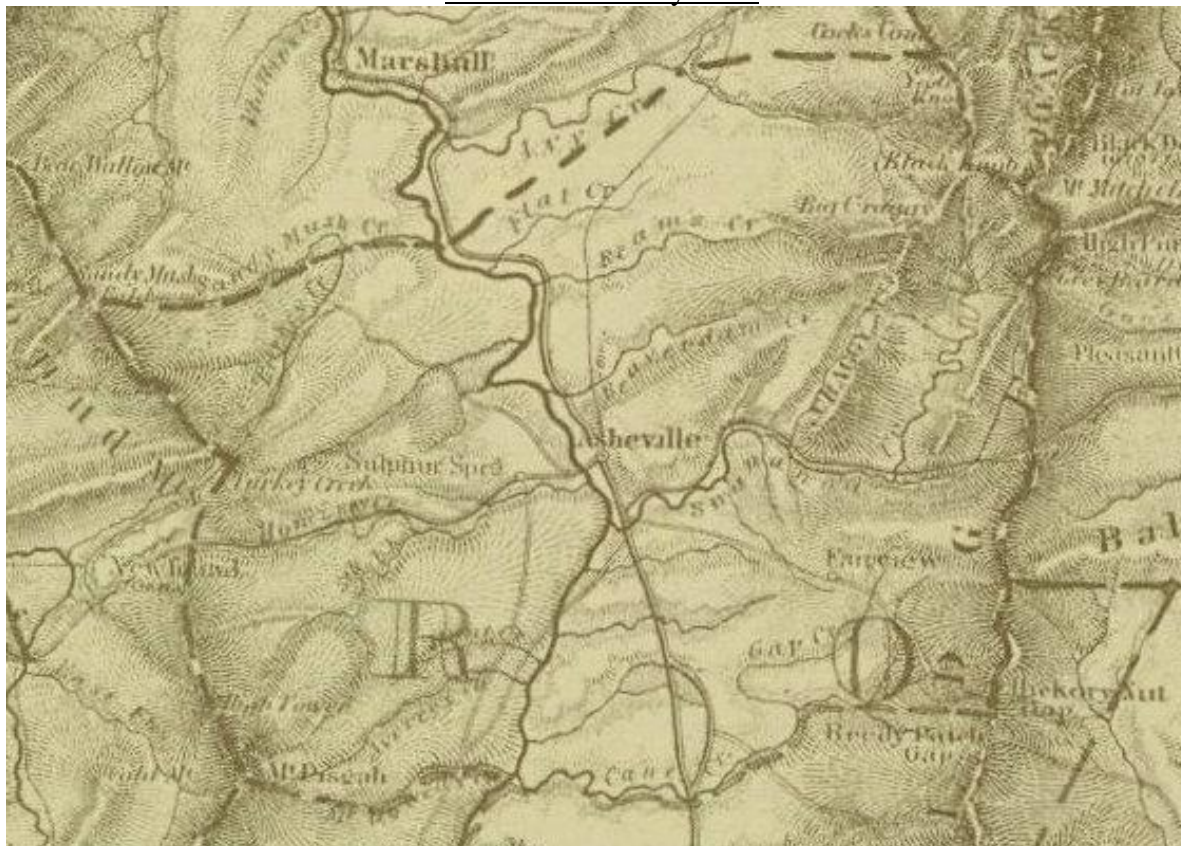
¹² William G. Frost, "Our Contemporary Ancestors in the Southern Mountains," *Atlantic Monthly* (March 1899): 3-4, 8-9; William G. Frost, "The Southern Mountaineer: Our Kindred of the Boone and Lincoln Type," *American Review of Reviews* 21 (1900): 304-305; Horace Kephart, *Our Southern Highlanders* (New York: Outing Publishing Company, 1913), 380, 448-449; Samuel T. Wilson, *The Southern Mountaineers* (New York: Presbyterian Home Missions, 1914), 36; John C. Campbell, *The Southern Highlander and His Homeland* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1921), 95-96.

Several common themes ran throughout the older works. They all depicted Appalachia as supporting the Union with some making distinctions between different areas. Along with that, the authors agreed that the spirit of the Revolution passed down along with the lack of slaves and the isolation of subsistence farmers caused much of this support. However, distinctions were made from those in the few towns and bottomlands. In Western North Carolina, most of Watauga County clearly fit their description of a Unionist region, but most of Buncombe County did not. Although some men there were subsistence farmers who lived further up the mountains and owned no slaves, the French Broad River and Swannanoa Creek created a wide valley covering most of the county and its population. Buncombe largely lacked the conditions that made other areas Unionist, and John Inscoe and Gordon McKinney accurately described Asheville as the Confederate stronghold in the mountains.

During the Civil War, certain areas of the country were quite divided in their loyalties, and historians have often debated the cause of these loyalties. In seeking to answer this question by studying Watauga and Buncombe counties, it became clear that the higher elevation people lived at, the more likely they were to be Unionist. This trend persisted for a variety of reasons. These people lived in a state of relative isolation both physical and perceived, so as the Civil War began, they saw little reason to change the status quo and secede from the Union that they had belonged to for all their lives. Slavery had little impact on their lives, so many saw little reason to support the Southern secession movement centered on the protection of this institution. Although many townspeople in mountain counties supported the Confederacy, those living at higher elevations saw little reason to follow the townspeople in their quest for secession. Class conflict had existed throughout the

antebellum period between highland subsistence farmers and townspeople, and at the start of the Civil War, it strongly influenced people's loyalties.

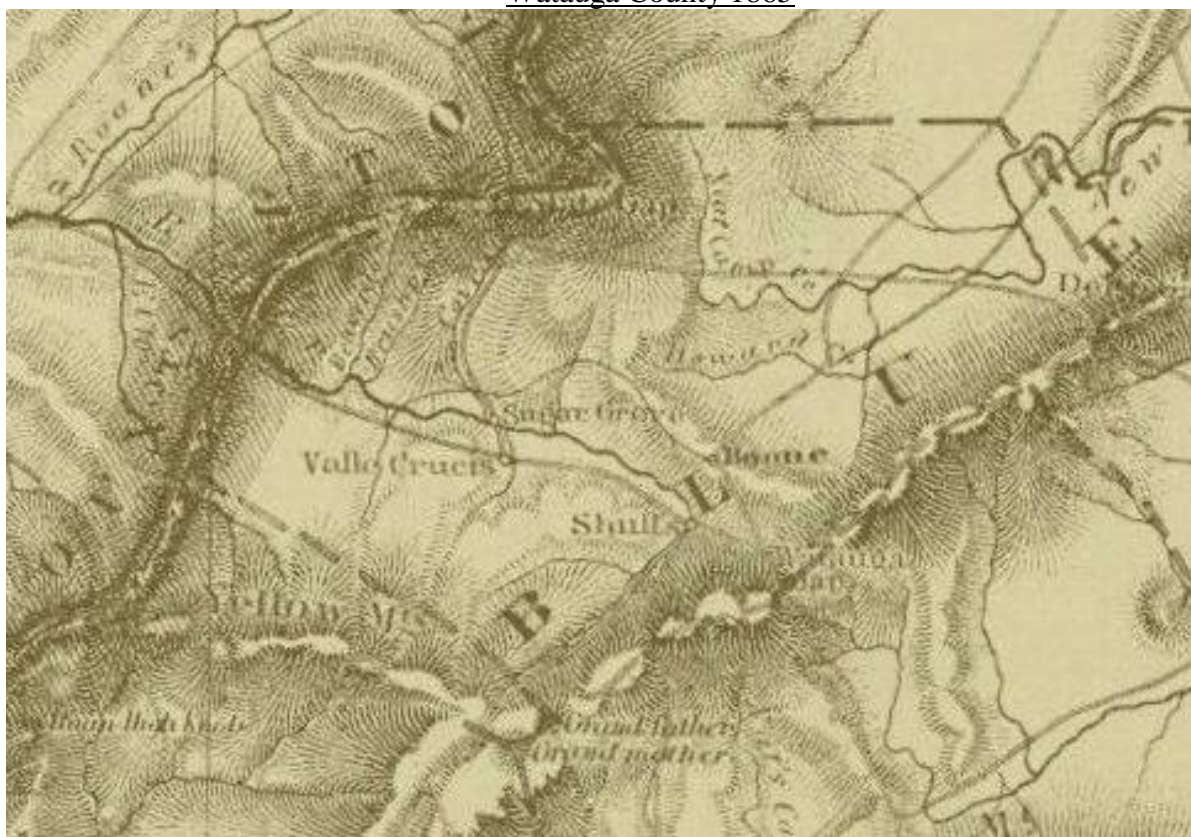
Buncombe County 1865



¹³

¹³ A. Lindenkohl, *U.S. Coast Survey, 1865*, W. L. Eury Appalachian Collection, Appalachian State University.

Watauga County 1865



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¹⁴ A. Lindenkohl, *U.S. Coast Survey*.

Chapter 1: Antebellum Years in Watauga and Buncombe Counties

According to a man named William J. Brown who lived in the northern fringe of Buncombe County, civil war would be the result of the Deep South and “their hot headed arrogance & fool harshness & premeditated wickedness.” He blamed “the vile Northern fanatical abolitionists” as well.¹⁵ After South Carolina troops fired upon Ft. Sumter on April 12, 1861, President Abraham Lincoln called for 75,000 volunteer troops three days later including two regiments from North Carolina to put down the rebellion. After hearing this news, William Brown said that Lincoln and his “black Republican” cabinet had “a greater love for office...than patriotic devotion to their county.”¹⁶ People across the region disliked Lincoln’s actions as well as the quick secession of the Deep South, but once the war began they had a tough decision to make and those in the bottomlands and towns reacted very differently from those higher up the mountains.

Throughout the antebellum period, Watauga and Buncombe counties developed differently despite both being in the mountains largely due to their geography. Settlers arrived in Buncombe County earlier and in much greater numbers than in Watauga. Farming dominated the economy of Buncombe with a healthy livestock trade, but by the time of the Civil War, residents there were able to greatly expand industrial and commercial activity mostly within Asheville with numerous elite families emerging. Slavery was a basic part of the economy throughout most of the county and slave ownership continued to grow, and Buncombe County became a popular place for Deep South planters to spend their summers

¹⁵ “William John Brown to John Evans Brown,” March 21, 1861, Theodore Davidson Morrison Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina.

¹⁶ “William J. Brown to John Evans Brown,” April 15, 1861, Theodore Davidson Morrison Papers, SHC.

after 1800. In Watauga County, a smaller number of settlers chose to settle the more rugged land. In the county seat of Boone, limited commercial and industrial activity emerged by the Civil War, but the town paled in comparison to Asheville and developed much later. Slavery was also much less important and less prevalent with few slaves living outside of the larger town and the number of slaves living in the county declining from 129 in 1850 to 104 in 1860.¹⁷ Politically, both counties solidly supported the Whig party before Watauga was formed in 1849. In the 1850s, Buncombe County began to trend more Democratic by the mid 1850s, yet Watauga County proved to be strongly Whig. In the early months of 1861, both counties supported the Union, although there was a stronger secession sentiment in Buncombe County not found in Watauga. By the time North Carolina seceded a few months later, the vast majority of Buncombe County supported secession with but a few weak pockets of Unionism on the mountain fringes of the county, but Watauga County remained very divided on the question of secession.

Europeans began to settle the mountains of Western North Carolina in the years before the American Revolution. Most of the earliest settlers were Scots-Irish who began to enter the region around 1730 and also Scottish Highlanders after 1745, and they gave the region its dominant culture. Later on, some Huguenots, Germans, Dutch, and Swedes also came.¹⁸

When the American Revolution began, the region solidly supported independence from Britain. The Presbyterians in the region, being largely Scots-Irish, virtually all supported America. Few locals chose to remain loyal to the British government, and most

¹⁷ Michael C. Hardy, *A Short History of Old Watauga County* (Boone: Parkway Publishers, Inc., 2005), 47.

¹⁸ John P. Arthur, *A History of Watauga County, North Carolina, with Sketches of Prominent Families* (Richmond: Everett Wadley Co., 1915), 3-5; James Webb, *Born Fighting: How the Scots-Irish Shaped America* (NY: Broadway Books, 2004), 87, 94, 116, 211.

mountaineers disliked them and saw them as traitors. As an early precursor to later divisions, many in the eastern section of North Carolina remained loyal to the crown because of their wealth and connectedness with those in England, which created tension with those in the mountains. As the war progressed, the British began to gain a significant advantage over the Continental Army with strategic victories at Camden and Charleston in 1780. A force with many loyalists mostly from New York and South Carolina under Major Patrick Ferguson numbering around 1,100 marched west across North Carolina and threatened to hang men and burn their homes due to the strong disloyalty in the western region. As a result, mountaineers across southern Appalachia formed an army of about 2,000 and attacked the British fortification at King's Mountain and soundly defeated them inflicting heavy casualties including Major Ferguson with the rest being captured after surrendering. Mountaineers passed down this sense of patriotism and resulting national loyalty to future generations and helped to create a common bond among them.¹⁹ The importance of the Revolution to those in the mountains remained through the start of the Civil War with the *Asheville News* in 1860 running a story praising Andrew Jackson for his bravery in fighting off a band of Tories as a young man in 1781 by tricking them.²⁰

After the end of the war, Buncombe County was formed in 1791 from Burke and Rutherford Counties and named after Colonel Edward Buncombe of the Revolutionary War. After losing territory to form parts of other counties, it consisted of the same land from 1851 into the 1900s. Buncombe County itself had the widest valleys and flattest land of any

¹⁹ Arthur, 6; *Watauga County Handbook*, League of Women Voters of Watauga County, 1993, 5; Shepherd M. Dugger, *The War Trials of the Blue Ridge* (Banner Elk: Shepherd M. Dugger, 1932), 8; Noel C. Fisher, *War at Every Door: Partisan Politics & Guerrilla Warfare in Eastern Tennessee, 1860-1869* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 6-7; Bob Terrell, *Historical Asheville* (Alexander, NC: Worldcomm, 1997), 25-26.

²⁰ "Gen. Jackson—His Valor When a Boy," *Asheville News*, Jan. 5, 1860.

county in North Carolina west of the Blue Ridge. Near the middle of the county where the Swannanoa Creek and French Broad River met, the city of Asheville was founded at 2,134 feet above sea level. By the mid 1800s, Asheville dominated political, economic, and social life in the region and had much trade with Deep South cities like Charleston, South Carolina, Charlotte, North Carolina, and Savannah, Georgia among others. In 1860, Asheville had roughly 1,200 residents, which made it the largest city in the region. Although much of Buncombe County had gentle grades along its very wide river valleys, locals considered the northeastern corner of the region to be very rough terrain as was the northwestern corner of the county.²¹

Watauga County was created in 1849 from parts of Ashe, Wilkes, Caldwell, and Yancey Counties and was named after the Watauga River. In January 1861, a sizable part of Watauga County became Mitchell County just before the Civil War with some historians claiming that its formation was the result of divisions over the secession crisis with those in Yancey County.²² Before the creation of Avery County in 1911, Watauga County had the highest average elevation in the state with the valleys ranging from 3,000 to 3,700 feet and having numerous peaks and ridges above 5,000 feet. Much of the county contained rugged terrain consisting of fairly small valleys containing fast moving streams among the much taller mountains. Boone became the county seat in 1849 and was located in the largest valley in the county, although many considered it an emerging frontier or backwoods town. At

²¹ Inscoe and McKinney, 24; John Inscoe, *Mountain Masters: Slavery and the Sectional Crisis in Western North Carolina* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1989), 34; Bruce Stewart, "Select Men of Sober and Industrious Habits: Alcohol Reform and Social Conflict in Antebellum Appalachia," *The Journal of Southern History* 73 no. 2 (May 2007), 295-296; Wilma Dykeman, *The French Broad* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1955); Phillip S. Paludan, *Victims: A True Story of the Civil War* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1981), 28; "To David L. Swain," July 6, 1857, *The Papers of Zebulon Baird Vance, Volume One, 1843-1862*, Frontis W. Johnston ed. (Raleigh: State Department of Archives and History, 1963).

²² David Biddix and Chris Hollifield, *Spruce Pine* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2009), 9.

3,333 feet, Boone was the highest county seat east of the Mississippi River at that time.

Being in the second largest valley in the county, Valle Crucis was another town that emerged early in the 1800s. The third main town in the county, Blowing Rock, grew as some Lenoir merchants began to take an interest in the area.²³

From the earliest settlement of the mountains of North Carolina, Asheville quickly emerged as the economic center of the region since it was the largest town in the mountains and was situated along the broadest river valley in the region. Most early residents entered the region with little money but some eventually became wealthy. In 1792, William Davidson, a prominent man of Buncombe County, built a grist mill on the Swannanoa Creek and in 1793 built another one along the French Broad in what would become Asheville. These mills mostly made ground meal from corn or wheat using water, which was preferred by residents and served as the main food supply for many people. North Carolina officially incorporated Asheville as a town and the county seat in 1797 and was named after North Carolina Governor Samuel Ashe. In 1800, two forges were built in the county with one along Hominy Creek and another along Reems Creek, and by that time, there was also a general store, a tailor shop, and a school. Asheville had its first post office in 1801. In the early 1820s, the prominent merchant James W. Patton founded the three-story Eagle Hotel, which was the first luxury hotel in the city. By 1840, Patton also established a large store, blacksmith shop, tailor shop, harness and horseshoe shop, and a large tannery in town. Another merchant, Enoch Cunningham, had a public house, butcher shop, and a harness and saddle shop in town. As Asheville grew, many other people opened up stores in town and general stores seemed to be dominant with few specialty stores. Many men left a life of

²³ *Watauga County Handbook*; Barry M. Buxton, *A Village Tapestry: The History of Blowing Rock* (Boone: Appalachian Consortium Press, 1989), 2; Inscoc and McKinney, 25.

farming to become merchants. Numerous industries sprung up in the antebellum period, and Asheville became somewhat of a boomtown.²⁴

Over 1,100 feet higher in elevation at 3,333 feet, Boone developed much later than Asheville and even at the start of the Civil War was quite primitive. The earliest settlers to Watauga County settled the valleys that would become Boone and Valle Crucis around 1730. Afterwards, more people entered the county, but the population remained sparse and nearly everyone in the county was a small farmer well into the 1800s. In the early 1800s, a prominent man in the county named Jordan Council set up a store in what would become Boone. In 1823, a post office was established near his store. In 1850, his son, Jordan Council Jr., took over the store and ran it. In the late antebellum period, Jordan Council Jr. bought a saw mill on the East Prong of the New River from David Sands and ran it. Around the same time, William Elrod built a mill on the Boone Fork of the New River. Before the Civil War, a mill was also built in Meat Camp, and the Taylor and Moore families jointly operated a store in Valle Crucis.²⁵

Both being mountain counties, they had many similar crops and livestock. In the 1700s, the economy of both counties was dominated by subsistence farming, but in the 1800s they began to diverge. Buncombe County developed a much larger trade in livestock and cash crops than did Watauga. Corn gradually became the dominant crops in both counties due to the fact that it could be grown around deadened trees and on hillsides and could be fed to farm animals when necessary. Farmers also grew buckwheat, rye, oats, and other small

²⁴ Dykeman, 56-59; *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography*, William S. Powell ed. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1979), 39; Bob Terrell, *Historic Asheville* (Alexander, NC: Worldcomm, 1997), 85-87; Nan K. Chase, *Asheville: A History* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., Inc., 2007), 14-15.

²⁵ Arthur, 19, 78, 142, 149; Daniel J. Whitener, *History of Watauga County, North Carolina, 1849-1949, and History of Appalachian State Teachers College* (Boone: Daniel J. Whitener, 1949), 36; I. Harding Hughes, Jr., *Valle Crucis: A History of an Uncommon Place* (Valle Crucis: Bookcrafters Inc., 1995), 63.

grains in abundance. In Watauga County, most residents grew root crops and tobacco in gardens only for their own use, but in Buncombe County these were often cash crops.²⁶

The trade in livestock that came to dominate Buncombe County and Watauga to a lesser degree became more profitable as new and better roads emerged in the antebellum period. Buncombe County had more roads in the antebellum period than any county west of the Blue Ridge and started building quality roads much earlier than most in the region. Due to its geography, the Asheville region and its surrounding valleys were the most accessible region in the mountains of North Carolina with a few low and traversable gaps leading to the piedmont. It also had one of the best, although still rough, links geographically to the Tennessee Valley along the French Broad River. Local residents planned and built the early roads in the county without pay from the state government, but that changed as time progressed. In 1824, the North Carolina Legislature authorized the construction of the Buncombe Turnpike. Completed in 1827, it followed the French Broad River downstream to reach Greenville, Tennessee. Its southern terminus linked with a road leading to Greenville, South Carolina and the rest of the Deep South. However, the trip into Tennessee was much more difficult. The French Broad River dropped fast through tall mountains, causing that section of the road to be much narrower, harder to travel, and prone to flooding. With the turnpike completed, the already thriving summer homes business greatly expanded in the cooler Buncombe County climate. Earlier vacationers mostly came from northern Georgia and Charleston, but soon many started coming from as far away as New Orleans.²⁷

In Buncombe County, residents built many more roads after the Buncombe Turnpike, and commerce and industry centered around Asheville continued to expand because of them.

²⁶ Arthur, 138-139; Whitener, 40-41; Chase, 24.

²⁷ Sondley, 617; Inscoc and McKinney, 25; Robert H. B. Brazier, *A New Map of the State of North Carolina*, 1833, W. L. Eury Appalachian Collection, Appalachian State University; Chase, 19.

The New Stock Road was built parallel to the Buncombe Turnpike due to the heavy traffic on it. Several stagecoaches emerged as well taking various routes to different towns. One of the earliest stage coaches ran from Asheville to Greenville, Tennessee everyday and carried both mail and travelers. Shortly after that, another stage coach started going from Asheville through the Hickory Nut Gap to Lincolnton with a link to Salisbury. A third ran from Greenville, South Carolina through the Saluda Gap to Asheville, and a fourth began in Morganton and went through the Swannanoa Gap to Asheville. The stage coaches used relay horses every eight to ten miles, and most went about 60 miles per day. Many of the stage coaches that went through Buncombe County were considered to be very nice by locals and their Deep South vacationers, and they made living in the mountains a lot more suitable. In the 1850s, the Buncombe Turnpike section going from Asheville to Hendersonville and partly into South Carolina was upgraded by making it a wooden plank road, and several other roads were built in the county as well.²⁸

With all of these new and improved roads in Buncombe County, the livestock trade dominated the market economy, and the sale of cash crops rose as well. Driving horses, cattle, mules, sheep, ducks, turkey, and hogs especially along the turnpike into Georgia, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Kentucky became quite profitable. Farmers drove a few hundred thousand hogs through Asheville every year usually taking one or two months' round trip. Because of this, many farmers set up stands along the turnpike to feed travelers and to sell corn for their hogs. Farmers often traded with the closer cities such as Greenville, South Carolina and Augusta, Georgia, but others drove to coastal cities such as Charleston, South Carolina where they could get higher prices for their goods. Many times, entire families went on such trips and treated them as somewhat of a vacation. In Buncombe

²⁸ Sondley, 621-623; Robert H. B. Brazier, *A New Map of the State of North Carolina*.

County, farmers often grew root crops, apples, corn, and tobacco to sell as cash crops along with chestnuts, chinquapins, terrapins, honey, beeswax, and other such products to a lesser degree. Some Watauga residents loaded covered wagons with apples, potatoes, cabbage, chestnuts, and others to sell to the piedmont as well.²⁹

Watauga County developed a turnpike and improved roads during the antebellum period although it still lagged far behind Buncombe County as did its economy. In the 1840s, a New York Botanist visiting Valle Crucis described it as an “isolated and forgotten...mountain wilderness” with only a few signs of civilization and narrow roads which were barely traversable on wheels. In 1851, the North Carolina Legislature created the Watauga and Caldwell Turnpike Company to build a road from Lenoir to Blowing Rock, then down the Watauga River which runs through Valle Crucis. They completed the turnpike in 1852 with locals required to work on sections of the road near them without pay. Most people used the turnpike to walk or ride a horse since few in the county had wagons or buggies. Although the road was a significant improvement and Lenoir merchants began to build summer homes in Blowing Rock, traveling was still difficult and long especially with crops. Starting in 1855, a man named Dunn from Abington, Virginia, ran a stage coach daily from his hometown through Watauga County to Lincolnton and ran it through 1861. In 1860, Boone had six stores, three sawmills, two tanneries, two hotels, several boarding houses, one blacksmith shop, one saloon, a brick jail, and a brick courthouse. Still, one visitor from the piedmont called Boone “nothing but a few dwellings centered around the Court-house,” and another said it was “a bad place abounding in grog shops, street fights, and bad weather.” Although trade increased in the 1850s, subsistence farming still dominated the

²⁹ Sondley, 619; Chase, 16-18, 24; Terrell, 87; Inscoc and McKinney, 25; Whitner, 42.

economy of Watauga County, and even in 1860, most of Watauga County including Valle Crucis felt isolated.³⁰

The importance of slavery varied greatly between Watauga and Buncombe counties in 1860. In Watauga County, there were 31 slave owners and 104 slaves, meaning slaves were only two percent of the population. However, most slaves were clustered in the three largest towns in the county, with the more isolated regions having no more than two families owning slaves per district. There were 56 of the county's slaves living in Boone along with the only two slave owners having more than 10 slaves in the county. Both Jordan Councill and John J. Wittington owned 11 slaves. There were 14 slaves in Valle Crucis, and 8 slaves in Blowing Rock with another 5 living in the Blue Ridge District. Out in the more isolated northern and western sections of the county, there were 9 slaves in Beaver Dam, 2 in Cove Creek, 2 in Laurel Creek, 2 in Meat Camp, and 6 owned by Unionist Lewis Banner in Banner Elk of the Mountain Home District. Outside of the towns, few families had any reliance on slaves if any even lived near them. Another sign of slavery's limited importance in Watauga County was the decline of the institution after 1850, when there were 39 slave owners and 129 slaves translating to 3.4 percent of the population. Still, the few slave owners did have cause for concern. In 1849, a slave killed her master William F. Mast and his wife in Valle Crucis poisoning them.³¹

The situation in Buncombe County was much different. Starting in 1794, the county court hired men to patrol the county for slaves wandering around at night, as did many Southern counties. The county expanded its patrols in the early 1800s, and slaves came to fear them. In 1860, the county had 1,923 slaves consisting of 15.3 percent of the population,

³⁰ Arthur, 78; Hughes, 54-55, 63; Quoted in Inscoe, *Mountain Masters*, 36; Hardy, 37.

³¹ Bureau of the Census, *Eighth Census of the United States*, 1860; Inscoe, *Mountain Masters*, 60-61, Hardy, 36.

which was the highest percentage and actual number of slaves of any county in North Carolina west of the Blue Ridge. There were 309 slave owners. Just over half of Asheville's population in 1860 were slaves, meaning approximately 600 lived in the city. More than 1,300 lived scattered throughout the county. This showed slavery's importance to Buncombe County as a whole, compared to the 48 that lived outside of Boone in Watauga. Also, there were 40 slave owners that owned at least 10 slaves, the most of any county in Western North Carolina, and 15 slave owners that owned more than 20. Unlike Watauga County, the number of slaves and slave owners in Buncombe increased throughout the 1850s from 248 slave owners and 1,717 slaves in 1850. Along with that, the importance of slaves to the county's economy was even more evident in the summer time when the slave population reached around 4,000 due to the Deep South residents who brought their slaves with them while vacationing for the summer. Buncombe County also had the two largest slave owners in North Carolina west of the Blue Ridge. In 1860, N. W. Woodfin owned 122 slaves, and James W. Patton, the wealthiest man in Western North Carolina, owned 78. The importance of slavery in Buncombe County made it an anomaly within the region, and when the Civil War came, greatly influenced its decision to support the South.³²

According to John Inscoe in *Mountain Masters*, slavery was a small but basic component of society throughout Western North Carolina and was more important than historians once thought. Although large plantations were not the norm in Western North Carolina given the mountainous terrain, residents still used slaves for farming but also in other endeavors. Owners employed their slaves in industry and sometimes rented them as hired labor to others in their region. Slavery helped elites to emerge in the mountains

³² *Eighth Census of the United States*, 1860; Inscoe, *Mountain Masters*, 60-61, 84-85, 265; Trotter, 26; Chase, 26; Sondley, 481.

because of the additional wealth they provided for those individuals and allowed them to become leaders in their community. Few farmers had contempt towards slavery or slave owners, and people in the mountains were more connected to the Deep South and more in support of the South when secession came than historians once thought. However, nearly all of the primary sources Inscoe used to argue against the old line of historiography were written by wealthy individuals often living in the region's larger towns with many of them owning slaves. Granted they were most of the letters that survived, but the voices of those in the more isolated areas were highly underrepresented in the book. Inscoe made many valid assertions about the townspeople and bottom land farmers as the mountain masters of Watauga and Buncombe had much greater power because they owned slaves, but people in the backwoods regions, like the fringes of Buncombe County and most of Watauga County, had a very different view on slavery.³³

Frederick Law Olmsted, one of the few outside observers to write on Appalachia in the 1850s and one that went into the more remote parts of the region, found that a very different view of slavery existed in the mountains than many modern historians have. Olmsted traveled throughout the South in 1853 and 1854. In Eastern Tennessee, a squire commented how slavery in some areas forced people into the militia for every 60 acres of land in order to guard them and that if free from such a duty those white men could have been employed in various other jobs. He also said that gradual emancipation would not harm poor whites. In the same area, an old white woman said that she found blacks to be mean and did not like them to be around her. Later in his journeys, Olmsted stayed in a backcountry cabin in Eastern Tennessee. The owner of the cabin used to live in the lowlands of North Carolina and once owned slaves, but then sold them and moved to the mountains.

³³ Inscoe, *Mountain Masters*, 6-10.

The region had few slaves, but the people there still did not like them and called them lazy. However, the cabin owner was not an abolitionist because he believed that slaves were property and supported property rights.³⁴

After crossing into North Carolina, Olmsted stayed with a family living in a mountain valley. This family owned a large acreage of land renting out two farms and a gristmill, although they were mostly illiterate. Still, the woman living there said that “slavery is the greatest cuss though, I think the greatest there is in the United States...people out here hates the eastern peoples.” She illustrated how slavery was the cause of sectional tensions because lowlanders voted based on slavery. At the same time, lowlanders had much more power in the legislature than a mountain county with twice as many white voters.³⁵

Shortly thereafter, Olmsted journeyed from Asheville through Yancey and Watauga counties to the Elizabethtown, Tennessee area, which was just across the Watauga County border. While there, he noticed the differences in the way slave owners and non slave owners treated him. Homes without slaves were generally neater and better kept, and it was a common thought throughout the region that people who did not own slaves took better care of travelers. While there, he talked with a Methodist man who was a mild abolitionist and believed that the church should work to end slavery. Along with that, the man proclaimed that he wished there were no slaves there and that about three fourths of the Methodists in the larger region would join with the Northern Church if it was opportune. The man finished by stating that few in the area owned slaves but that most thought it was wrong. Even though most men Olmsted came across were not abolitionists like this one near Elizabethtown, he

³⁴ Frederick Law Olmsted, *A Journey in the Backcountry* (NY: Mason Brothers, 1860), 124, 207, 238-239.

³⁵ Olmsted, 258-260.

came across very few that openly championed the cause of slavery in the mountains of North Carolina and Tennessee.³⁶

Olmsted stayed with another family in the North Carolina mountains the following week, and they had many similar views on slavery. The man he stayed with worked for the government and had many books at his home unlike most locals. The man said that slavery was not very profitable in the mountains other than to trade them, and although many could afford slaves, few chose to buy them. If he had his way, all slaves would have been sent back to Africa with their owners compensated for their loss. The man also believed that owning slaves could jeopardize one's salvation since owning slaves made men passionate and prideful, and those lowlanders who did not own slaves often became jealous and mean. He summed up people's attitudes by saying that regardless of how favorable people were towards slavery, most agreed that it was a curse for the county and would support the idea of a free state. While staying there, Olmsted talked with a few other locals. Another man expressed his contempt for slave owners believing that he faced unfair competition from them economically. According to another local man, it would have been better if there were no slaves in America and they were all in Africa.³⁷

In the backcountry, strong support for America and its history existed. In one backcountry cabin that Olmsted visited, a large painting of George Washington on a white horse hung for everyone to see in the one main room. At a copper mine, strong sentiments supporting America as a nation were evident. Men from New York and London owned the mine, but most of the workers lived in North Carolina and they built a flagpole where the American flag hung every day. After awhile, the company brought over Cornish Englishmen

³⁶ Olmsted, 268-272.

³⁷ Olmsted, 263-264.

to work in the mines as well, and for the 4th of July, the Englishmen planned to raise the English flag and call out the queen's name. After hearing about the plot on July 3, many men that lived in the area became very upset and came to the mine with rifles in hand. This event ended without a fight, but foreshadowed events to come in the next decade. Additionally, it was not uncommon for parents to name their children after our Founding Fathers due to the patriotic spirit still prevalent in Appalachia.³⁸

Some scholars have disagreed with Olmsted's agenda. For example, John Inscoe claimed that Olmsted had a point to prove and therefore his interviews were not representative, but such could be said of any historian. Inscoe's main criticism centered around the fact that Olmsted did not interview any politicians or wealthy merchants in the region's largest towns such as Asheville or Henderson, and that those living east of the Blue Ridge were far more representative of the region than the few isolated farmers he interviewed. Although Olmsted would likely have found far different answers from those living in the piedmont or the few larger towns in Western North Carolina, he chose to focus on those in the more isolated areas and found a distinctness between them and the town and bottomland farmers. Isolated mountaineers rarely ever had any dependence on slavery, and saw little cause to defend the institution.³⁹

Throughout the antebellum period, residents built numerous churches in Watauga and Buncombe counties. Most settlers in the region were originally Presbyterian and Calvinistic, but the frontier environment with its democratic spirit could not support them especially with their importance on clergy. As a result, many became Methodists or Baptists largely due to their emotional appeal. Early on, the church was the main social institution for good in a

³⁸ Olmsted, 238, 243-244, 262.

³⁹ Inscoe, *Mountain Masters*, 111-112.

community in the frontier stage of development, and remained important as the region grew. In Watauga County, the three Forks Baptist Church became the first in 1790 followed by the Cove Creek Baptist Church in 1799, and both were primitive log structures. After 1809, they built a Methodist church in Meat Camp and Elk Cross Roads (present day Todd) as well. In the 1830s, German Lutherans led by John Moretz left the piedmont and settled the Plum Tree Creek area in the Meat Camp district, and Germans in Valle Crucis built a Lutheran Church in 1842. In Buncombe County, churches sprung up earlier than in Watauga. In 1841, James W. Patton donated the land for the Trinity Episcopal Church in Asheville, even though he was a practicing Presbyterian. By the time of the Civil War there was a greater number of churches with a wider range of denominations in Buncombe County.⁴⁰

In the antebellum period, court days in both Watauga and Buncombe counties were usually the biggest social events. Men from around the counties would come in to Asheville or Boone either on foot or by horseback or wagon when court was in session to see justice served but also to socialize and talk about politics. Many people came into town to trade things like horses, and in Boone drunkenness was known often to be a problem. Generally, these meetings were the largest in the county, and residents would often discuss cases for a few weeks afterwards. Such events helped to unite counties to some degree, but those living farther up the mountains still generally did not think of themselves as part of the same community as those in the county seat or even smaller towns near them, and not everyone attended on court days.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Arthur, 71, 74, 97, 101, 102, 106, 107, 111, 112; Whitener, 46; *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography*, 39; Terrell, 63; Insoe, *Mountain Masters*, 54.

⁴¹ Whitener, 44; From J. C. L. Gudger, Jan. 27, 1861, *The Papers of Zebulon Baird Vance*, 90; Hughes, 63; Arthur, 114; Hardy, 40.

Antebellum society in Watauga and Buncombe counties developed in other ways too. The first white settlers of Western North Carolina generally settled in the largest river valleys of the region. As more of this land became cultivated, many people began to move further up the mountains into the more isolated coves and ridges especially in the 1830s and 1840s. As this occurred, historian David Hsiung argued that three distinct regions emerged: urban, valley farmers, and branch water mountaineers. With that came a growing divide between residents in the more isolated branch water areas and those in the bottomlands which became increasingly urbanized and accommodated larger farms. In the bottomlands aided by better soil and flatter land, elites emerged and many of them owned slaves. However, the majority of the population was small subsistence farmers who lived in relative isolation by the time of the Civil War. Isolation and connectedness could both exist at the same time according to Hsiung, especially given the poor quality of many of the roads that existed, which helped to create a sense of isolation among rural residents as well. Over time, individual wealth decreased as there was less good land available for future generations as the population grew.⁴²

Out in the more rugged and isolated areas, which included most of Watauga County and some fringes of Buncombe County, a different way of life developed from the mainstream South. By the very nature of subsistence farming and living in a more isolated area, rural mountaineers were more independent than their urban and eastern counterparts. They were less connected to the rest of the state and often saw things more in local terms. Many of these people had migrated from the North, and in some cases, residents left the

⁴² William R. Trotter, *Bushwhackers! The Civil War in North Carolina, Volume II The Mountains* (Winston-Salem: John F. Blair Publisher, 1988), 17-18; John Inscoe, *Mountain Masters*, 7, 11; Paludan, 60; David Hsiung, *Two Worlds in the Tennessee Mountains: Exploring the Origins of Appalachian Stereotypes* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1997), 10-19.

piedmont to escape the slave system. The growing tensions between the North and South were not that relevant to them since they owned no slaves and many still had family ties to Northern states. Most had not formed significant ties to the South due to their relative isolation.⁴³

Town and bottomland residents increasingly found distinctions between themselves and their more remote neighbors, who they began to see as backwards based on their way of life and positions on certain issues. For instance, many mountaineers did not support the building of railroads into their region, which caused many local urbanites to see them as ignorant and backwards. Many rural folks were content with subsistence farming, and as families grew, many children after reaching adulthood simply moved further up the ridges and hollows rather than moving away. These people became the stereotypical mountaineers, and local writers before the Civil War first gave them negative labels such as backwards and ignorant.⁴⁴

The temperance movement was one specific issue that put rural mountaineers at odds with middle class residents living in mountain towns. Starting in the 1830s, many in the middle class began to embrace Northern ideas on capitalism, family, education, and temperance among other things. The Asheville Auxiliary Temperance Society formed as did a few others mainly in county seats or along the French Broad River. However, rural mountaineers did not want any sort of temperance. They felt their rights were being threatened, and tensions between the two groups grew. Not only did farmers want to be able to drink while they worked or afterwards if they pleased, but many also turned their crops into alcohol to be sold to the lowlands since poor roads and tall mountains made it much

⁴³ Paludan, 60; Sean M. O'Brian, *Mountain Partisans: Guerrilla Warfare in the Southern Appalachians, 1861-1865* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1999), xiii; Kephart, 380; Trotter, 17-18.

⁴⁴ Hsiung, 128-129.

more expensive to transport crops in much of Western North Carolina. Rural Methodists and Baptists joined in the fight against temperance as well, and they were some of the last groups to take a temperance stance well after the Civil War. By the late 1850s, the middle class united in defense of slavery along with other southerners, but the damage was already done when it came to relations with their rural neighbors.⁴⁵

In the more connected towns and bottomlands of Watauga and Buncombe counties, a much different attitude on state and national affairs as well as slavery emerged in the 1850s leading up to the Civil War compared to those living in more isolated areas. After the Nat Turner Rebellion in 1831, there continued to be apprehension among the residents of Western North Carolina that northern abolitionists would incite a slave uprising across the South. The main newspaper for Western North Carolina in the antebellum period was the *Asheville News*, and although the subscription for this newspaper was not that high, historical records and frequent postings suggest that there was a much larger number of residents than just those that subscribed to the paper, and that the paper's articles were discussed often in everyday life. Throughout the time period, readers continually were updated on events both local and national that dealt with slavery and the need to defend the institution. Due to their connectedness, many mountain residents especially in Buncombe County and the few towns in Watauga were in line with the rest of the South when secession came.⁴⁶

Throughout the 1850s, numerous events from outside the region concerning slavery and abolition were reported by the *Asheville News* showing concern for the topic within Buncombe County. After the rise in prominence of northern abolitionists by the 1850s, a

⁴⁵ Stewart, 290-303; "To Cousin Kate," Sept. 6, 1854, *The Papers of Zebulon Baird Vance*, 24. In Cherokee County, Allen Davidson, the cousin of Zebulon Baird Vance, ran for the House of Commons in 1854 and lost because of his support and involvement in the temperance movement.

⁴⁶ Inscoe, *Mountain Masters*, 129.

local resident wrote a letter to the editor in the *Asheville News* claiming that southerners were good people saying “what moral evils prevail among us of the South, as a consequence of the existence of slavery, that do not exist without it in the North?” In June of 1854, the paper reported on an abolitionist riot in Boston and the subjugation of the Fugitive Slave Law by those in the North. That same month, a slave in Jefferson County, Tennessee, murdered his master, and in September of 1854, a similar event was reported to have occurred down in Alabama. The following week, a slave riding with her master on a train was freed by Northern passengers. From 1854 on, the *Asheville News* frequently reported on the violence initiated by abolitionists and political events in Kansas following the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act and focused on the violence and harm cause by abolitionists. Whether or not all the numbers were accurate, perception was more important than reality, and the perception that hundreds of abolitionists were taking up arms against slave owners and murdering innocent people served to increase sectional tensions with the North in the more connected areas of Western North Carolina.⁴⁷

Throughout the antebellum period, residents of Western North Carolina often had different interests than those of the planter classes to the east who controlled the state government, and tensions arose on certain issues. Mountaineers did not like the way the state created its districts, which they felt robbed them of their fair share of representation. Slaves were counted as three-fifths of a person for representation and taxation, and with many

⁴⁷“Statistics North and South,” *Asheville News*, March 2, 1854; “Awful Abolition Riot in Boston! Deputy Marshal Shot,” *Asheville News*, June 8, 1854; “Fugitive Slave Law,” *Asheville News*, June 22, 1854; “Horrible Murder, and a Speedy and Just Punishment of the Murderer,” *Asheville News*, June 29, 1854; “Awful Affair in Alabama,” *Asheville News*, Sept. 14, 1854; “An Abolition Outrage,” *Asheville News*, Sept. 21, 1854; “Things in Kansas,” *Asheville News*, July 27, 1854; “War Declared,” *Asheville News*, Sept. 21, 1854; “From Kansas,” *Asheville News*, June 21, 1855; “The Cause of Kansas is the Cause of the South,” *Asheville News*, Nov. 1, 1855; “Startling Developments—Treason in Kansas,” *Asheville News*, November 22, 1855; “Important From Kansas,” *Asheville News*, December 13, 1855; “Exciting News from Kansas,” *Asheville News*, June 26, 1856; “Troubles in Kansas,” *Asheville News*, Aug. 28, 1856.

eastern counties being roughly have slave if not much more, those counties got significantly greater representation than did those in Western North Carolina and more money for education. Although 15.3 percent of Buncombe County's population was slaves in 1860, it was still a much smaller percentage than most eastern counties. Yeoman farmers were hurt by the extra burden put on land taxes because slave owners wrote into the state constitution in 1835 that slaves could not be taxed other than as a poll tax. By 1850, most Whigs supported representation based solely on white population, and also wanted to remove property requirements for elected representatives. In Buncombe and Watauga counties, local Whig leaders called for a convention on the issue, and after it was denied, called for one again in 1852 even more strongly. However, a convention never took place, and the state Whig Party nominated the easterner John Kerr, who opposed the idea of such a convention. As a result, local Democrats used this argument against him, and won more counties than usual in the region.⁴⁸

Another issue that dominated politics in Western North Carolina was internal improvements. Mountain residents had long wanted more internal improvements and especially a railroad to better their economic connections with the rest of the state, but easterners generally protested because they did not want to pay higher taxes to fund such projects. In 1854, Democrat Thomas Bragg ran for governor on a platform that included a railroad across the entire state and in turn won many more mountain voters than Democrats previously had. However, the legislature did not fund the project well and it advanced west slowly. Because of this, one citizen of Buncombe County in February of 1857 expressed his

⁴⁸ Daniel W. Crofts, *Reluctant Confederates: Upper South Unionists in the Secession Crisis* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 44; To the Editor of the Raleigh Register, Dec 15, 1854, *The Papers of Zebulon Baird Vance*, 25-27; From Robert B. Vance, April 16, 1860, *The Papers of Zebulon Baird Vance*, 67-68; Inscoe, *Mountain Masters*, 142-144.

irritation at being taxed more for having fewer slaves locally to pay for railroads in Eastern North Carolina and to improve their waterways. Many others in Western North Carolina agreed with him as they saw little improvements to transportation in the region and the railroad progressing much slower than they had hoped.⁴⁹

Over the next couple of years, the railroad continued to head west across the state but a much desired link into the mountains was not a given. In early 1859, the House of Commons and the Senate voted down a bill that would have guaranteed that the Western North Carolina Railroad then being built would extend from Morganton to Asheville, which upset many people in Buncombe County. In an effort to still get a railroad into the region, the city of Asheville voted for and bought \$125,000 in stock for a South Carolina company that hoped to build a railroad north from Greenville into the mountains, and many residents living in counties surrounding Buncombe also bought stock. However, tension on the issue began to ease as the railroad got closer to Morganton and prospects for a link with Asheville continued to look better. In August of 1859, Congressman Zebulon Vance believed that “the prospects of our French Broad Road are infinitely better than ever.” The railroad did reach Morganton by 1861, but before a link to Asheville could be made, the Civil War had begun. In Watauga County, Reuben Mast, who served as their state representative for awhile, hoped to get a railroad through the county along the Watauga River into Tennessee, but it never had a realistic chance in the antebellum period.⁵⁰

Throughout the 1850s, Buncombe County remained relatively divided between the Whigs and the Democrats, but Watauga County was solidly Whig. Before that, Buncombe

⁴⁹ Inscoe and McKinney, 27; Crofts, 44; Inscoe, *Mountain Masters*, 144-146; *Asheville News*, Feb. 12, 1857; To “My Dear John,” Aug. 22, 1859, *The Papers of Zebulon Baird Vance*, 53-57.

⁵⁰ Inscoe, *Mountain Masters*, 173-174; To “My Dear John,” Aug. 22, 1859, *The Papers of Zebulon Baird Vance*, 57; Arthur, 114.

County was solidly Democrat from about 1810 to the mid 1830s and then became decidedly Whig until the 1850s. After strongly supporting Andrew Jackson two elections in a row, Buncombe County gave the Whig candidate for President 67 to 80 percent from 1836 through 1848. In 1852, the Whig won the county with 60 percent, but in 1856 the Democrat won with 52 percent. In the 1850s, Whigs won 61, 58, and 58 percent in the 1850, 1852, and 1854 elections respectively, and Democrats won 55, 58, and just over 50 percent respectively in 1856, 1858, and 1860. Clearly, Buncombe County was divided in the 1850s between the two parties favoring Whigs earlier in the decade and Democrats later. Watauga was much more one sided with only one Democrat candidate for governor winning the county in 1852 with extremely low turnout. In the following gubernatorial races, the Whig candidate won 73, 60, 61, and 63 percent in 1854, 1856, 1858, and 1860 respectively. In 1856, the only Presidential race recorded in Watauga County in the 1850s, the Know-Nothing (a splinter party from the Whigs) won with 71 percent. Only Wilkes and perhaps Macon counties supported Whigs more heavily than Watauga did in the region.⁵¹

In the antebellum period, two Asheville politicians rose to statewide and later national prominence. Thomas Lanier Clingman started his political career in the North Carolina House of Commons in 1836 at the age of 25, and soon won a seat in the State Senate in 1840. In 1843, he was elected as a Whig to the United States House of Representatives, but he lost his bid for reelection in 1845. He won the seat again in 1847, and held it until 1858 when he was selected to be a United States Senator, and remained one until the start of the Civil War. Before he ran for the 33rd Congress in 1853, Clingman became a Democrat and remained one for the rest of the antebellum period. Throughout most of his career, Clingman put the

⁵¹ *North Carolina Government, 1585-1974, A Narrative and Statistical History*, John L. Cheney Jr. ed. (Raleigh: Department of the Secretary of State, 1975), 671-690, 1320-1323, 1384-1389.

defense of Southern rights and slavery at the forefront of his policies while still supporting internal improvements. He often gave speeches against northern aggressions and was also in line with Southern Democrats in supporting lower tariffs.⁵²

Zebulon Baird Vance was the other main politician to come out of Buncombe County and was a lawyer in Asheville before that starting in 1852. For much of his political career, he made internal improvements and representation and taxation based solely on white population his most pressing issues. He was a moderate and a Unionist, and won a seat in the House of Commons in 1854 as a Whig. Vance like most Whigs believed that the Compromise of 1850 was the solution for slavery and in a tough election won 688-579. In 1856, he ran for State Senate against incumbent David Coleman in a heavily Democratic district, and although he lost, he cut Coleman's lead significantly. In 1857, Vance ran against Clingman for his house seat, but lost by over 5,000 votes. The house district included all of Appalachian North Carolina minus Ashe and Alleghany counties after 1852. When Clingman was appointed to the Senate, Vance again ran for the House seat with great intensity, and made many speeches for the Union disapproving of the secessionist tendencies of the Democrats. He won the election by 2,049 votes. The following year, he defeated soon to be ardent secessionist David Coleman by 1,695 votes to keep his seat. Vance went on to become Governor of North Carolina in 1862. Watauga County had no prominent politicians rise to power statewide in North Carolina. Future events came to alter politics in the region and the nation.⁵³

⁵² Inscoe and McKinney, 32; *North Carolina Government*, 687; Thomas L. Clingman, *Selections from the speeches and writings of Hon. Thomas L. Clingman, of North Carolina* (Raleigh: J. Nicholas, printer, 1877), 268, 275, 288, 354, 432.

⁵³ *The Papers of Zebulon Baird Vance*, xxix-xxxviii; *North Carolina Government*, 684, 690.

After inciting much violence and killing many people in Kansas, John Brown led an attack on the federal armory at Harpers Ferry, Virginia in October of 1859. The U. S. marines captured John Brown, and the state of Virginia hung him and the other surviving abolitionists. This attack showed people what the northern abolitionists were capable of and put fear of a slave uprising in the forefront of people's minds in the towns and bottomlands especially in Asheville given the large number of slaves that lived there. Asheville held a public meeting to discuss the matter, and as a result, the city passed a resolution that action would be taken against any abolitionists entering the region. Buncombe County also formed a local military company shortly after Brown's raid just in case. Watauga County held no such meetings about the raid, showing that it did not affect them the way it did Buncombe County.⁵⁴

Throughout the antebellum period, Watauga and Buncombe counties developed very differently. Buncombe developed commercial and industrial activity much earlier, and by the time of the Civil War was the economic focal point for much of the region and a major tourist destination. On the other hand, yeoman farmers still dominated Watauga County, and although Boone was growing, in 1860 it had roughly as much business as Asheville did in the first decade of the 1800s. Buncombe trended much more Democratic as the 1850s ensued, but Watauga remained strongly Whig. As sectional tensions increased with the North, slavery gave these two counties their most diverging qualities. Slavery was very important to Buncombe County as a whole and gave them cause to strongly unite behind the Confederacy when the Civil War started. Because of its lack of slaves and significant isolation, Watauga County remained much more in support for the Union.

⁵⁴ Inscoe, *Mountain Masters*, 212-213; "Insurrection In Virginia," *Asheville News*, October 27, 1859; "The Harper's Ferry Affair—No Insurrection," *Asheville News*, Nov. 3, 1859; "The Morale of the Harper's Ferry Affair," *Asheville News*, Nov. 10, 1859.

Chapter 2: Secession and the Diverging Paths of Buncombe and Watauga Counties

Leading up to the Presidential election of 1860, Southern unity continued to grow throughout much of Buncombe County and the more connected towns of Watauga County. Asheville had a significant amount of trade with larger Southern cities such as Charleston, South Carolina, and some people hoped to be economically independent of the North and opposed the tariffs which hurt their ability to trade. Due to the large local slave population, people feared abolition. The violence in Kansas continued to be of concern, and Senator Thomas Clingman proclaimed abolition to be unconstitutional. He echoed such strong defenses of slavery throughout and after the coming election. However, such concerns were largely absent from most residents in Watauga and they saw things differently.⁵⁵

Watauga County diverged greatly from Buncombe County leading up to the Civil War. In the election of 1860, Watauga supported Constitutional Unionist John Bell much stronger than Buncombe. When the state legislature called for a secession convention in February of 1861, Buncombe County strongly supported it with the help of numerous conditional Unionists, but Watauga County rejected it ever more strongly. After Lincoln called for 75,000 volunteer troops in April, 1861, to put down the Southern rebellion, Buncombe County in reaction sent three mostly full companies into Confederate service in little over a month with many more to come. In contrast, Watauga County formed its first company later than Buncombe with just under a half of a company's worth of men from the county and only formed two more half sized companies before the conscription act

⁵⁵ "Sufferings in Kansas," *Asheville News*, Nov. 1, 1860; "The Merchants of the South & Southwest," *Asheville News*, Jan. 19, 1860; "Speech of Hon. Thos. L. Clingman of North Carolina against the Revolutionary Movement of the Anti-Slavery Party," *Asheville News*, Feb 16, 1860; Inscoe and McKinney, 22, 30.

compelled men to serve. Most of Buncombe County strongly supported the Confederacy, while much of Watauga County remained Unionist with only a couple districts showing strong Confederate support. Most men of Watauga County were small subsistence farmers living in relative isolation scattered throughout the mountainous terrain of the county with no dependence on the slave economy. They were not connected outside of the county and did not form a strong Southern identity rooted in slavery. In contrast, Buncombe County, minus the fringes and northern corners of the county, was well connected to the Deep South and had a significant dependence on slavery. People living there had a stake in seeing the Confederacy succeed and lined up behind the Confederacy. However, those in the more isolated areas held on to the Union of their forefathers and supported it in various ways.

During the Presidential election of 1860, the Southern Democrat John Breckinridge and Constitutional Union Candidate John Bell each had a strong base of support in Western North Carolina. John Breckinridge was the strongest supporter of slavery in the contest and quickly supported the Deep South when those states seceded after the election. John Bell was a former Whig who called for moderation on the issue of slavery and supported keeping the Union intact. He formed the Constitutional Union Party as a reaction against the extremes both North and South. Within the mountains of North Carolina, most counties went for Bell but a few went for Breckinridge. Overall Bell won 55.3 percent of voters in Appalachian counties in North Carolina, but narrowly lost the state to Breckinridge. Buncombe County narrowly went to Bell with 49.5 percent of the vote, but of the counties west of the Blue Ridge, Buncombe gave Breckinridge the third largest percentage of votes only behind Yancey and Jackson, which were traditionally strong Democratic counties. Watauga County was at the other end of the spectrum with 69 percent of voters supporting Bell, which gave

him the third highest percentage behind only Wilkes and Ashe/Alleghany at 78 and 76 percent respectively. In many ways, how people voted in this election foreshadowed which side they would support during the war. In the end, Lincoln won the election, and seven states of the Deep South seceded shortly afterwards, while the Upper South including North Carolina reacted more slowly.⁵⁶

After a few months of deliberation, the North Carolina Legislature called for a popular vote for a secession convention on February 28, 1861. The issue went to the voters, and they rejected it narrowly with 50.3 percent opposed. As seen in the Presidential election a few months earlier, Watauga and Buncombe Counties continued to view things differently as they both headed in opposite directions. Buncombe County supported the convention with 76 percent support, which was the second highest west of the Blue Ridge. On the other end, Watauga opposed the convention by 88 percent second only behind neighboring Wilkes at 97 percent. With significantly higher voter turnout in both counties, Buncombe County trended significantly more towards secession than it did in the Presidential election and Watauga County trended much more Unionist. Voters also elected delegates for the convention in the event that it was approved. Of delegates statewide, 42 supported secession, 50 supported the Union unconditionally, and 28 supported the Union conditionally with the majority of the secessionists in areas with high slave populations. Watauga's delegate was an unconditional Unionist, but Buncombe's two delegates were considered more conditional in their Unionism. Many supported the convention while voting for Union delegates making it hard to determine exactly how many in Western North Carolina supported secession at that time, but virtually all who voted against the convention were Unionists. Interestingly, Carter

⁵⁶ Inscoe and McKinney, 40; Inscoe, *Mountain Masters*, 221.

County in Tennessee, which bordered on Watauga County, similarly voted 95 percent against a secession convention and would later vote 94 percent against secession on June 8.⁵⁷

Although there was no widespread violence reported in Watauga or Buncombe Counties, throughout the region men who planned to vote against the convention or for Union delegates were often threatened, which kept many people from voting. Along with that, many determined voters came to the polls armed just in case. The Democrat-turned-staunch-secessionist from Buncombe County named David Coleman gave a speech for secession in Madison County near the Ivy section of Buncombe County, but locals there drove him back home and nearly tarred and feathered him. Men in Watauga and Buncombe Counties attempted to influence the vote one way or another.⁵⁸

The regions more connected and isolated areas continued to diverge as seen in the February convention votes. J. C. L. Gudger, a lawyer from Buncombe County, attended court in many counties that winter and commented that most people supported the Union for now. At that time, S. O. Deaver of Madison County commented that “Madison County is three fourths Union but Still they will have a good Union of it Yancey is Union by More than Three fourths.” J. P. Eller, born in Flat Creek, Buncombe County, summed up the region in late January by saying “all the countys west of the Blue Ridge is Union By a large majority.” In the more isolated parts of the region, many people were unconditional Unionists, and in

⁵⁷ Inscoe and McKinney, 52; Inscoe, *Mountain Masters*, 242, 245; Joseph Sitterson, *The Secession Movement in North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1939), 223-224; Frank Merritt, *Early History of Carter County, 1760-1861* (Kingsport, Tennessee: Kingsport Press, 1950), 165-167; Jackson County voted 84 percent for a convention in February, which was the highest in the mountains of North Carolina (see Inscoe and McKinney).

⁵⁸ Inscoe and McKinney, 51; Paludan, 57; “From S.O. Deaver,” Jan. 28, 1861, *The Papers of Zebulon Baird Vance*, 91-92.

the more connected areas Unionism was often conditional on what the Lincoln administration did.⁵⁹

Many mountaineers were men of moderation. They had very little reliance on slavery, and had deep ties to the Union along with long standing political differences with the eastern planter classes that dated back to the American Revolution. Many living in the more isolated parts of the region despised the radicals on both sides. William J. Brown, who lived on the northern fringe of Buncombe County, disliked the way that “Lincoln & . . . the Black Republicans” were running the government, but also believed that the Deep South should “be made to suffer for their hot headed arrogance & fool harshness & premeditated wickedness.” Many worried about the economic hardships that a war would bring, and although most mountaineers had little reliance on slavery, few supported abolition. Also, a much sought after railroad, which was progressing towards the mountains, stopped advancing as the war started just as many residents feared it would.⁶⁰

Over the next two months, national events served to change the course of history for the Upper South. On March 4, 1861, Lincoln issued his inaugural address in which he made it clear that the Deep South had no right to secede from the Union and that any use of arms against the government would be considered a rebellion and met with force. On April 12, Confederate forces attacked Ft. Sumter at Charleston Harbor, and President Lincoln in response issued a call for 75,000 volunteers three days later to put down the rebellion. Many in the Upper South were conditional Unionists early in the year, but once Lincoln called them to fight against their fellow Southerners, they instead chose to fight with them against the

⁵⁹ Inscoc, *Mountain Masters*, 245; “From JCL Gudger,” Jan. 27, 1861, *The Papers of Zebulon Baird Vance*, 90-91; “From SO Deaver,” Jan. 28, 1861, *The Papers of Zebulon Baird Vance*, 91-92; “From JP Eller,” Jan. 28, 1861, *The Papers of Zebulon Baird Vance*, 93.

⁶⁰ “William J. Brown to John Evans Brown,” March 21, 1861, Theodore Davidson Morrison Papers, SHC.

Union. Many people who were conditional Unionists in Western North Carolina thereafter supported the South, but a large portion of the region clung to the old flag.⁶¹

North Carolina officially started the secession process in May of 1861, but this time delegates for the convention were chosen without a separate vote to approve the convention. The legislature voted for secession without giving the people a popular vote on the matter like the neighboring state of Tennessee did. The lowland secessionists had already tried that February and did not receive the desired result, so they were not about to make that mistake again. Delegates were elected on May 13, 1861, with few choices on the ballot, and on May 20, the convention delegates met and unanimously voted for secession causing North Carolina to officially leave the Union.⁶²

Statewide, there were only two Unionist candidates on the ballot. Tod R. Caldwell from Burke County and Alexander H. Jones from Henderson County, but they were both soundly defeated. In Henderson County, secessionists threatened Alexander Jones and said they would hang or shoot anyone voting for him, and of the few that still tried to, many were beaten up by secessionist mobs. In Madison County, one local farmer cheered for George Washington and the Union before he voted, and the sheriff pointed his gun at him briefly. Shortly after this, the sheriff found another Union voter carrying a pistol and started a gun battle with the man in which the Unionist's son was killed, and the man wounded the sheriff in the gunfight. Although the sheriff was detained, the Unionist man feared the sheriff would get off for his crime so he crept up behind him and shot him in the head before escaping into the mountains.⁶³

⁶¹ Inscoe and McKinney, 56; Maj. George W. F. Harper Diary, May 20, George W. F. Harper Papers, SHC.

⁶² Inscoe and McKinney, 57.

⁶³ Paludan, 57-58; Inscoe and McKinney, 57, 76.

As seen in these events, openly supporting the Union cause was a dangerous thing to do. The lack of Unionist candidates in North Carolina did not mean Unionism in North Carolina did not exist, but simply that Confederates retained enough power in each county to scare them away and keep them off the ballot. These elections did not accurately reflect the will of the people, and even though the secessionists likely held a majority statewide, they were nowhere near unanimous in the mountains of North Carolina. In Caldwell County, although unopposed with little outward Unionism, the secessionist candidate only won 434 votes even though 737 voters cast ballots in the recent Presidential Election and 801 voters for the February convention. If unanimity and excitement for secession existed throughout the mountains as some scholars suggested, then presumably more people would have voted in the election.⁶⁴

Throughout Appalachian history, the acquiesce of the masses has been a complicated subject, and John Gaventa's dimensions of power in *Power and Powerlessness* can help to explain the results of the Secession Convention in May of 1861 in North Carolina. The first dimension of power states that multiple levels of government exist in which citizens can affect change on an issue such as voting for representatives and forming interest groups. In February of 1861, this model was evident leading up to and during the vote for the convention, which failed in many mountain counties as men were free to form groups and vote as they pleased. Although many Appalachian revisionists would like us to believe that this model should be used for the next convention, the events in May were more complicated than that.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Inscoe, *Mountain Masters*, 737, 801; May 13, 1861 entry, Maj. George W.F. Harper Diary, George W. F. Harper Papers, SHC.

⁶⁵ John Gaventa, *Power and Powerlessness: Quiescence and Rebellion in an Appalachian Valley* (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1979), 11-14, 21; Inscoe and McKinney, 57.

According to Gaventa's second dimension of power, whoever got to decide what that agenda was determined what policies went into effect and could construct barriers against participation. North Carolina clearly defined the agenda when it refused to put the question of secession to a popular vote and instead told its citizens to simply elect delegates to a convention, and they also determined who would be allowed on the ballot. By doing so, they assured themselves a much greater level of acquiescence from those who otherwise would disagree with secession. This was especially powerful in the mountains where nearly all of the political leaders owned slaves. In Tennessee, the legislature did not use this level of power against its mountain citizens. It allowed individuals to vote for or against secession in June, 1861, instead of simply for convention delegates, and the result was much more of a popular uprising.⁶⁶

In Gaventa's third dimension of power, those in control could influence what people think through various actions or myths and misinformation, and government leaders did so in a few ways after Lincoln's call for troops on April 15, 1861. The North Carolina Legislature called for volunteer troops in May well before the state actually seceded, and many of its members went back to their home districts to form military companies. This insured that troops would be in every county seat, and when voters came to the polls strong Union sentiment would be deterred by force with violence breaking out in some counties like Madison and Henderson. For the convention vote on May 13, 1861, North Carolina citizens generally had one choice to vote for dictated by the local and state government, and any who hoped to cause an uproar against secession would have to deal with the military company in their county seat. In North Carolina, Unionists had little hope of success given the situation before them, and feeling powerless, most acquiesced and hoped to quietly wait out the war

⁶⁶ Gaventa, 14-15, 21; Inscoe, *Mountain Masters*, 252; Fisher, *War at Every Door*, 29.

regardless of the numbers they had. In Tennessee, military companies formed later than those in North Carolina, and Unionists going to the polls there in June had an actual vote to cast against secession. They only had to worry about Deep South troops harassing them from passing trains instead of local soldiers holding the towns. As a result, Unionism in Eastern Tennessee became active much earlier despite the similarities with Western North Carolina because Union men there did not feel powerless.⁶⁷

In Western North Carolina, a dichotomy existed in which those in the connected towns and valleys largely supported the Confederacy and those living in isolation higher in the mountains largely supported the Union with shades of gray in between. Buncombe County had the best bottomland valleys west of the Blue Ridge in North Carolina along with many economic and social connections to Deep South cities. It also voted in favor of the convention with 76 percent support before Lincoln called for troops, so it was no surprise that pro-secession candidates for the convention did well there especially since Asheville became the center of Confederate support in the mountains. Additionally, the Confederate Congress selected Asheville to house one of its four armories, which showed Deep South planters had faith in the Confederate support in Buncombe County.⁶⁸

In the more rugged fringes of the county, some remained Unionist due to their isolation, but they were a minority in the county. A Presbyterian named William J. Brown who lived on the fringes of Buncombe County near the Madison County line commented that “the once happy & prosperous, but now broken Union” was to be dissolved and that “they tore up the flag of the US & made a new one with seven stars.” He continued by saying they “dropt the glorious old Eagle. It makes the heart sad to see & dwell on it.” In the remote

⁶⁷ Gaventa, 15-21; Inscoe and McKinney, 62; Fisher, *War at Every Door*, 34.

⁶⁸ Inscoe, *Mountain Masters*, 245.

regions of Appalachian North Carolina, there existed a much stronger attachment to the nation of their forefathers and one they did not want to give up over the slavery issue. Their independence and isolation prevented them from forming a Southern identity based on slavery, and they did not want to see the Union dissolved.⁶⁹

Much of Watauga County reacted similarly to Brown in contrast to the majority in Buncombe County. As William Trotter accurately asserted, Watauga County had strong Unionism throughout the war, which made sense given its relative isolation and lack of slaves. Even with conditional Unionists becoming secessionists, a county that less than three months earlier voted 88 percent against the Secession convention was bound to have a large number of people remain Unionist. On May 11, George N. Folk, a lawyer in Boone and state representative, gave a passionate speech for secession, and by the time of the delegate vote, 51 volunteers had already assembled in Boone. On May 13, James W. Councill, a slave owner living in Boone, was elected as Watauga's delegate and then voted for secession. He was able to get elected because of the power his family had, and he ran unopposed due to the power secessionists held over the masses through the three dimensions of power. The Councils were the wealthiest family in the county owning many slaves and James's father, Jordan Council, was one of the earliest men to settle the region. Jordan Council was the county's largest slave owner and also owned several stores in Boone.⁷⁰

When no one was able to run as a Unionist in Watauga County, the issue was settled. Although long lasting divisions with the east that started during the Revolution remained,

⁶⁹ William J. Brown to John Evans Brown, April 15, 1861, Theodore Davidson Morrison Papers, SHC; William J. Brown to John Evans Brown, May 1861, Theodore Davidson Morrison Papers, SHC.

⁷⁰ Hardy, 46-48; Inscoc, *Mountain Masters*, 252; Merritt, 165-167. Interestingly, Union sentiment in neighboring Carter County, Tennessee, lost only one percent in the polls from February to June.

mountaineers had little recourse.⁷¹ Most Unionists lived scattered throughout the rugged county and had less money than those in the towns and the few bottomlands. They could not take on the Councils and expect to win, especially with a military company led by the wealthy Virginia born and raised lawyer and slave owner named George N. Folk already camping out near the polls in Boone. Unionists likely held a numbers advantage in Watauga County despite what the modern revisionists claimed.⁷² According to Edward Culler of Boone, the county was “about fifty-fifty because it was split durin’ that Civil War.” When talking of the war, John R. Jackson of Boone said “of course, during the Civil War, there was a lot of Union sentiment in this county. I guess the region was about equally divided or maybe more pro-Union than Confederate.”⁷³

Until the last few decades of Appalachian revisionism, historians had a much different view of Western North Carolina during the Civil War. James W. Taylor wrote *Alleghania* in the midst of the Civil War in 1862, and argued that all of Appalachia from Alabama to Virginia was largely supportive of the Union. He described Western North Carolina as a region that was loyal at heart and often equated “the loyal regions of East Tennessee and Western North Carolina.” Taylor twice singled out Watauga County by saying that “there are numerous volunteers from Watauga and other adjacent counties over the border” speaking of the large number of Union soldiers coming from the region by 1862, and he accurately predicted that the Federals would march through the county into the

⁷¹ For the last several decades, the eastern counties had long dominated the North Carolina Legislature and had significantly more voting power per white person since their slaves counted for representation, angering many in the mountains on a host of issues from taxes to the railroad.

⁷² John Inscoe, Gordon McKinney, and Michael Hardy all claimed that Confederates held a solid advantage in numbers in Watauga County in their respective works.

⁷³ Roy E. Thomas, *Southern Appalachia, 1885-1915* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 1991), 185; Leland R. Cooper and Mary Lee Cooper, *The People of the New River: Oral Histories from Ashe, Alleghany, and Watauga Counties* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2001), 268; *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography*, 215-216; *Eighth Census of the United States*, 1860; Inscoe, *Mountain Masters*, 252; Hardy, 48-49.

piedmont like mountaineers did during the Revolutionary War. By singling out Watauga twice, he suggested the strength of Unionism in the county.⁷⁴

The tales of Union soldiers that escaped through the mountains of North Carolina gave a similar depiction of the region as many older authors did in stark contrast to the modern day revisionists. The escaped soldier James W. Savage declared that Unionism in the mountains of North Carolina was stronger than anywhere in the South and that it was “to the full as loyal as West Virginia.” Savage discovered that “most of the loyalists of North Carolina would have been contented after the breaking out of hostilities to remain quite on their plantations or patches and take service in neither army.”⁷⁵

Several escaped soldiers passed through Watauga County and showed the strength of the Unionists there. Once near the Blue Ridge, a New Jersey soldier commented that “from this time forward we experienced little trouble in finding ‘friends,’ for they were everywhere.”⁷⁶ Junius H. Browne commented that after crossing into Watauga County the night before, he “made the first march by day, having been assured that it was perfectly safe.”⁷⁷ After passing through the county, Albert D. Richardson said that “among the mountains of every southern state, a vast majority of the people were loyal. Hilly regions, unadapted to cotton-culture, contained few negroes: and where there was no slavery, there

⁷⁴ James W. Taylor, *Alleghania: The Strength of the Union and the Weakness of Slavery in the Highlands of the South* (St. Paul: James Davenport, 1862), 14-17; John C. Inscoe, *Race, War, and Remembrance in the Appalachian South* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2008), 103-123. Watauga was the county that James W. Taylor pointed out as an example when discussing Unionism in Western North Carolina.

⁷⁵ James W. Savage, “The Loyal Element of North Carolina During the Civil War,” a pamphlet (Omaha, Nebraska: privately published, 1886), 1-4.

⁷⁶ J. Madison Drake, *Fast and Loose in Dixie* (New York: J. Madison Drake, 1880), 177-178, 184, 203, 230.

⁷⁷ Junius H. Brown, *Four Years in Secessia* (Hartford, Connecticut: O. D. Case and Company, 1865), 390-393, 436.

was no Rebellion.” Along with that, “they were very bitter in their denunciations of the heavy slaveholders.”⁷⁸

William Burson had one of the more interesting journeys through Watauga County. After the Watauga home guard captured him, Burson commented that “I was aware I had as many friends in that part of the country as he had, and if they know of my situation, would release me before morning.” Once taken to the home guard’s camp, he noticed when “looking around, I discovered that I had more friends in camp than the men who had took me there. Here I found Union men doing duty as home guards to keep from being sent to the front lines.” The home guard then marched him through Boone when he commented that “this town was almost entirely deserted—not more than half a dozen houses were occupied in the whole town...I was told that the village had once been inhabited by Union loving people, who, not liking the Jeff. Davis rule, had stampeded for Tennessee.” Although the center of Confederate support in Watauga County, Boone was clearly no Asheville. Burson and his party soon escaped with the help of a home guardsman. As Burson showed, many in Watauga pretended to be Confederates only to avoid the Confederates’ wrath, but they held Union sympathies to the core.⁷⁹

Conversely, the narratives of escaped Union soldiers who traveled through or near Buncombe County showed the strength of Confederate support there. Charles O. Hunt and Charles Mattocks originally planned to go down the French Broad River through Asheville, but after getting closer they quickly abandoned that idea as being too dangerous. As they traversed neighboring counties, one local man said that “all that mountainous region of

⁷⁸ Albert D. Richardson, *The Secret Service, the Field, The Dungeon, and the Escape* (Hartford, Connecticut: American Publishing Company, 1865), 451, 458-459.

⁷⁹ William Burson, *A Race For Liberty; or, My Capture, My Imprisonment, and Escape* (Wellsville, Ohio: W. G. Foster, 1867), 85, 91, 95, 98-110.

western North Carolina, like the eastern part of Tennessee, was largely inhabited by a race of mountaineers who cultivated their small farms in the narrow valleys. They had never owned slaves and were bitterly opposed to secession. The rebel element was found in the towns and among the richer planters. There was no love loss between these two classes.”⁸⁰ John V. Hadley, W. H. Perkins, and many others worried about going too close to Asheville as well due to the strength of the Confederates there. A similar scene existed in the county as the war began.⁸¹

Even before the secession convention took place in May, 1861, Buncombe County had already formed multiple military companies with more on the way. After Lincoln’s call for troops, conditional Unionism fell apart in the region’s more connected areas, and headed up by local leaders, several companies formed in the mountains. On April 18, 1861, just three days after Lincoln’s call for troops, Buncombe County sent its local militia that had formed in 1859 into service as the “Buncombe Riflemen.” After reaching Raleigh, they joined with men from Burke County to form Company E of the 1st North Carolina Regiment. Thomas Clingman soon became Colonel of the 25th North Carolina Regiment, and Zebulon Vance became captain of the “Rough and Ready Guards,” Company F of the 14th NC Regiment, which organized in Asheville on May 3, 1861. Two more companies formed in Asheville that month, and they were Company F of the 16th North Carolina Regiment on May 7 and the “Buncombe Rangers,” Company G of the 1st North Carolina Cavalry, on May

⁸⁰ Charles O. Hunt, “Our Escape from Camp Sorghum,” *War Papers Read before the Commandery of the State of Maine, Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States* (Portland, Maine: Thurston Press, 1898), 1:107-115, 123. “Unspoiled Heart,” *The Journals of Charles Mattocks of Maine*, Phillip N. Racine ed. (Knoxville: University Press of Tennessee, 1994), 236, 240-241, 252.

⁸¹ John V. Hadley, *Seven Months a Prisoner* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1898), 149-150, 183, 194, 226, 237-242; W. H. Perkins, *How I Escaped* (New York: Home Publishing Company, 1889), 110, 113, 115, 117.

20. Within the first month of hostilities, Buncombe County sent over 300 men into Confederate service from a county with 10,564 whites.⁸²

Over the next several months, six more companies formed in the county with a seventh formed alongside Henderson County before the Confederate Congress instituted the draft. Company H of the 25th North Carolina Regiment formed in Buncombe and Henderson counties on July 15, 1861 as the “Cane Creek Rifles.” One week later, the “Pisgah Guards” mustered in as Company I of the 25th North Carolina Regiment on July 21. Two days later, Company K of the 25th North Carolina Regiment formed in the town of Democrat on July 23 as the “Black Mountain Guards.” The following month, Buncombe men established Company C of the 29th North Carolina Regiment, the “Bold Mountain Tigers,” on August 6, 1861. Then on September 11, 1861, Company H of the 29th North Carolina Regiment mustered into service in Buncombe County. The next month, the “Highland Greys” formed in Asheville and became Company D of the 39th North Carolina Regiment on October 28, 1861. Several months later, Company K of the 11th North Carolina Regiment mustered into service in Swannanoa on March 1, 1862. Buncombe County sent ten mostly full companies worth of men equaling well over one thousand. In total, Buncombe County had around 1,976 men aged 17-44. As of October of 1861, Western North Carolina sent 4,400 men into service out of a total population of 68,000. With Buncombe County sending nine companies by that time equaling over one thousand men, that equated to just under one fourth of the total troops sent from the mountains. Undoubtedly, Buncombe County was the heart of Confederate Appalachia.⁸³

⁸² Inscoe and McKinney, 63-64; Louis Manarin and Weymouth T. Jordan, Jr., comps, *North Carolina Troops, 1861-1865, A Roster* (Raleigh: State Department of Archives and History, 1968), 2:61, 5:44, 6:56.

⁸³ Manarin and Jordan, 5:96, 7:426 and 367 and 446, 8:255 and 292, 10:140; Inscoe and McKinney, 73-74; *Eighth Census of the United States*, 1860.

Sampling of Buncombe County Confederate Enlistments

	May 1861 enlistments	Summer 1861- Spring 1862 enlistments	Total county enlistments	Percentage of district free population
Asheville	16	21	37	2.1
Sulfur Springs	5	10	15	3.8
Swannanoa	14	28	42	2.6
Avery Creek	2	7	9	2.8
Fairview	2	9	11	1.5
Hominy Creek	8	10	18	1.5
Leicester	12	16	28	2.0
French Broad	1	5	6	1.9
Reems Creek	5	6	11	1.0
Ivy + Flat Creek	5	20	25	1.6
Sandy Mush	1	6	7	1.7
Buncombe County Total ⁸⁴	71	138	211	2.0

Source: Computed from Manarin and Jordan; and *The Eighth Census of the United States, 1860*.

⁸⁴ This is a total only of the sampling of troops. Over 1,000 total troops enlisted from Buncombe County and 211 of them were used in this sampling.

BUNCOMBE COUNTY 1860

DISTRICT MAP



In looking at a sampling of Confederate soldiers enlisting before April of 1862, the more connected areas of Buncombe County had a higher number of troops in the early enlistment and continued to that trend through the beginning of 1862. Many living in the more rugged districts waited until later in the year to enlist, but a great disparity in enlistments did not exist in the county. When looking at the total sampling of Confederate troops from the county, Confederate enlistments were ultimately close to the county average in most areas. Sulfur Springs, Avery Creek, and Swannanoa, which all surrounded Asheville, stood out the most in their Confederate support. Although several districts fell just below the mean, Reems Creek was the only one to stand out for its lack of enlistments at one half of the county average, which should be no surprise since the rugged eastern section of the district bordered with Yancey County near Mt. Mitchell.⁸⁵

Buncombe County had the largest number of sons from one family enlist in the Confederate Army in all of North Carolina. Henry Stevens, who lived five miles south of Asheville along the road to Hendersonville and owned two slaves, had eight sons enlist. Another family in the county also had eight men enlist in the Confederate Army. Mr. Black and his seven sons, who lived six miles north of Asheville, enlisted together early in the war. The fact that two families in Buncombe supplied more Confederate troops than any other county in the state helped to illustrate the strength of Confederate support there.⁸⁶

As the war progressed, several men from Buncombe County also joined the Union Army. Although the earliest enlistees often joined various Northern companies making it

⁸⁵ In looking at the sampling of troops from Buncombe County, the total number of troops and percentages in this sampling told very little by themselves. The important thing was their relation to each other and especially to the county average. Districts with enlistment rates above the mean indicated stronger Confederate sentiment there, and those with percentages below the county average supported the Confederacy less.

⁸⁶ "Robert M. Stevens," *Confederate Veteran* xxxiii (1925): 144; J. E. Ray, "Sixteen Soldiers of Two Families," *Confederate Veteran* xvi (1908): 151.

very hard for historians to find them all, the 1890 Veterans Census sheds some light on the matter. Of those whose enlistment dates were given, most enlisted after Federal troops took control of Knoxville, Tennessee in September 1863. In the Veterans Census, only one man enlisted beforehand and did so in November 1862. In the last three years of the war, roughly the same number enlisted in 1863 and 1864 with slightly less in 1865 but still a significant number. In Buncombe County, many Unionists appeared to take more of a wait and see approach early in the war as opposed to making the journey to Federal lines in Kentucky.⁸⁷

Sampling of Union Soldiers from Buncombe County

	Union Soldiers	Percentage of district free population	Percentage of Union enlistments	Percentage of Confederate enlistments
Asheville	2	0.12	3.6	17.5
Sulfur Springs	2	0.51	3.6	7.1
Swannanoa	3	0.19	5.5	19.9
Avery Creek	0	0	0	4.3
Fairview	0	0	0	5.2
Hominy Creek	6	0.51	10.9	8.5
Leicester	1	.072	1.8	13.3
French Broad	2	0.62	3.6	2.8
Reems Creek	11	1.0	20.0	5.2
Ivy + Flat Creek	23	1.4	41.8	11.8
Sandy Mush	5	1.2	9.1	3.3
Buncombe County total	55	0.51	100%	100%

Source: Sampling of Union soldiers taken from Almasy, 29-37; Eric Emory, *The Civil War Dead From Buncombe County, 1861-1865* (Asheville: s.n., 2000), 35-38; Computed using *The Eighth Census of the United States, 1860*.

The above sampling of Union soldiers in Buncombe County showed the uneven distribution around the county. Over 60 percent came from the Ivy and Flat Creek and the Reems Creek section of the county. The two districts bordered each other in the northeast corner of the county in the region near the border of Yancey County and were probably the

⁸⁷ Sandra L. Almasy, *North Carolina, 1890 Civil War Veterans census: A Census of Veterans of the Union Armed Forces and their Widows, Containing also Information of other U. S. Veterans and Many Confederate Veterans* (Joliet, Illinois: Kensington Glen Pub., 1990), 29-37.

most isolated in the county due to its high mountains and rugged terrain. Just to the east, the French Broad district and then the Sandy Mush district also had a larger percentage of Union soldiers than the county average. Although having a lower population, Sandy Mush had the second largest percentage of Union soldiers behind only Ivy and Flat Creek. All four districts were the farthest from the piedmont in the county, and as a group completed the border with Madison County. No other districts in the county exceeded the mean, with Fairview and Avery Creek having no Union soldiers in this sampling. This corresponded to the high rates of Confederate enlistments in Avery Creek. Although Asheville had two soldiers from its surrounding district, only one of them was white. Unfortunately, local histories give no estimate on the exact number of Union troops from the county.

Another way to examine districts within the county was to look at Confederate and Union troops side by side as a percentage of their respective totals. Once matched up, the side with the larger percentage showed a district's loyalty. In Buncombe County, Ivy and Flat Creek, Reems Creek, French Broad, and Sandy Mush continued to show strong Unionism, and Hominy Creek showed to have a larger percentage of Union enlistments than Confederate enlistments as well although its Union enlistments were only average. Interestingly, Fairview, although clearly supporting the Confederacy, had below average enlistments in both armies.

In Buncombe County, some Unionists could also be located using the files of the Southern Claims Commissions, and their files showed the lack of Unionism in Buncombe County compared to the region as a whole. The commissioners approved four claims, and each had few Unionist witnesses to give on their behalf, which would be needed if one hoped to have his claim approved. Adolphus Gudger lived in Leicester near the county line, and

both of his witnesses lived in Madison County. Another claimant, Isaac Garrison, was a former slave, making him an instant Unionist who had four witnesses on his behalf with only one who was not a former slave or a fellow approved claimant. Jeremiah Cole lived in Ivy and Flat Creek, and provided two witnesses who lived outside of his house. William J. Brown, who was quoted earlier, received the final approved claim but only provided two witnesses. All of the Unionists found in these files lived either in Leicester, Reems Creek, or Ivy and Flat Creek even though the Union Army sacked much of Asheville and its surrounding territory after its capture in April, 1865. The absence of approved claims in and around Asheville indicated that commissioners did not find any claimants from this area to be loyal to the Union.⁸⁸

In Watauga County, enlistment data and the approved files of the Southern Claims Commissions gave a much different picture than in Buncombe County. It showed Union strength throughout most of the county. After George N. Folk gave a passionate speech in Boone on the need to defend Southern rights, Watauga County formed its first company on May 11, 1861, two days before the convention vote in Boone. He got 51 recruits initially, and the group of men became Company D of the 1st Regiment of North Carolina Cavalry. Before the threat of conscription in April of 1862, 71 men from Watauga County joined the company. Four months later, the remaining two companies of enlistees before conscription mustered into service. The “Watauga Marksmen” formed in Boone as Company B of the 37th North Carolina Regiment on September 14, 1861 with mostly men from Boone and the Blue Ridge with a total of 63 men enlisting from Watauga before April 1862. At Sugar

⁸⁸ *Eighth Census of the United States*, 1860; Approved Claims for Buncombe County, Southern Claims Commission Case Files, National Archives, Washington D.C. Only approved case files were used to ensure that men used in the sampling were strong Unionists even though many if not most of the residents filing disallowed claims were probably Unionists given the time and cost it took to file a claim; Sondley, 697.

Grove, the “Watauga Minute Men,” Company E of the 37th North Carolina Regiment, formed on September 18, 1861, and consisted of men mostly from Valle Crucis, Beaver Dam, and Cove Creek. By April of 1862, 75 men from the county enlisted in the company. No other units formed in Watauga County until after the threat of conscription with a total of 211 enlisting before then. In the county, there were roughly 877 men aged 17-44.⁸⁹

Many scholars used the total number of Confederate soldiers to serve throughout the war to show Confederate strength in the region. However, comparing such numbers to the number of Union enlistees leaves out much of the story. The vast majority of those who enlisted in April 1862 or afterwards only did so to avoid conscription and allowed them to get paid a living wage and vote for their officers. If conscripted, such privileges did not exist. Although they did have two other options, join the Union Army or hide out in the mountains, both put great strain on one’s family economically and risked death for them and their loved ones at the hands of local Confederates. The journey to Federal lines in Kentucky was quite difficult as well. Even Dan Ellis, the famous pilot from Carter County, Tennessee, told of the great hardships it took to get there, and those in Watauga had an even longer distance to travel. Oftentimes, many Unionists had no desire to fight for either side on distant battlefields and wanted to remain in the mountains they called home. They had a strong sense of independence through their Scots-Irish heritage and from running their small subsistence farms often preferring to fight it out in the mountains against the local Confederates.⁹⁰

⁸⁹ Manarin and Jordan, 2:35-44, 9:485-497, 523-537; Francis B. Dedmond, “Harvey Davis’s Unpublished Civil War ‘Diary’ and The Story of Company D of the First North Carolina Cavalry,” *Appalachian Journal* (Summer 1986): 379; Hardy, 48-51; Arthur, 135; *Eighth Census of the United States*, 1860.

⁹⁰ Inscoe and McKinney, 7-9; Hardy, 51; Crawford, 91-94; Daniel Ellis, *The Thrilling Adventures of Daniel Ellis, the Great Union Guide of East Tennessee, for a period of nearly four years during the great southern rebellion* (NY: Harper & Brothers, 1867), 53, 81-84.

Total Number of Confederate Soldiers Enlisting in Watauga County

	Co D, 1 th NC Cavalry, May 1861	Co B & E, 37 th NC Reg., Sept. 1861	Total Watauga enlistments	District free population	Percentage of district free population
Boone	16	30	46	533	8.6
Blue Ridge	19	35	55	1,018	5.4
Meat Camp	23	7	30	547	5.5
Valle Crucis	5	16	21	474	4.4
Cove Creek	5	20	26	787	3.3
Beaver Dam	1	20	21	396	5.3
Laurel Creek	1	7	9	469	1.9
Mountain Home	1	0	1	632	0.16
Watauga County total	71	138	211	4,856	4.3

Source: Computed from Manarin and Jordan; and *The Eighth Census of the United States, 1860*.

WATAUGA COUNTY 1861 DISTRICT MAP





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As seen in Buncombe County, the earliest enlistments favored areas with the most bottomlands and connections, but Buncombe had much broader support throughout the county than did Watauga. In two of the three companies, the founding captains were born and raised in the lowland South. George N. Folk, captain of Company D, 1st Regiment North Carolina Cavalry, grew up in Isle of Wight County Virginia, studied at William and Mary, and passed the bar in Charlotte in 1851 before moving to Boone. He also owned slaves. The captain of Company E, 37th North Carolina Regiment, William Y. Farthing, originally lived

⁹¹ Arthur Keith, *Cranberry folio, North Carolina-Tennessee* (Washington, D. C.: The Survey, 1903), 5.

in Orange County, North Carolina. The third captain, Jonathan Horton of Company B, 37th North Carolina Regiment, was the only one born and raised in the county, and he also owned slaves. The men leading the charge for war in Watauga County were not its average citizens.⁹²

Most importantly in showing the weakness of the Confederate support in Watauga County, only 211 troops enlisted from Watauga County in the three companies formed there before conscription making the percentages in the table above the full percentage of men enlisting in those districts. Interestingly, 266 were listed as enlisting from Watauga County in Manarin's roster before conscription, but a cross reference with the census showed many of them actually lived in the John's River section of Caldwell County, the Upper Division of Wilkes County, and the Oilfields of Ashe County among others. A few others were listed as living in Watauga County in the 1850 census but not in 1860, so perhaps outside influences from the eastern part of the state motivated them to fight for the Confederacy. Given the close proximity of these districts in neighboring counties to Boone, many probably chose the shortest distance to travel to enlist, and living high in the mountains, were less connected with the rest of their respective counties than other districts anyway. Undoubtedly, a few men from Watauga could have enlisted in neighboring counties' regiments as well. Still, having only about 211 men equaling only 4.3 percent of the county enlisting was very low and showed a lack of Confederate support within the county and illustrated the strength of Unionism there.⁹³

⁹² Manarin and Jordan, 2:35-36, 9:485-486, 523-524; *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography*, William S. Powell ed. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1979), 215-216.

⁹³ Manarin and Jordan, 2:35-44, 9:485-497, 523-537; *The Seventh Census of The United States, 1850; The Eighth Census of the United States, Slave Schedules, 1860*.

In examining enlistments by district, certain areas stood out with some districts having enlistments well above the county average and others having barely any. Boone stood out well ahead of the other districts with double the percentage of the county average for enlistments. Meat Camp followed with its wide stretches of bottomlands along the New River and then Blue Ridge with its links to the piedmont. On the other end, the Mountain Home district clearly lacked in Confederate support with only one man from the district enlisting, and the adjacent Laurel Creek district also lacked recruits.⁹⁴ In Cove Creek, enlistments were moderately below the county average as well. Although Valle Crucis was known to be a Confederate town, the surrounding countryside was much more Unionist causing its district to have only average enlistment rates. Significantly, four of nine in Laurel Creek and nine of twenty-one enlistees in Beaver Dam came from the piedmont in the antebellum period. Eight of them were of the Farthing extended family, who all came to Watauga County from Orange County and settled the bottomlands along the Watauga River and Beaver Dam Creek. The Farthing patriarchs Reuben, William Y., John, Thomas, Dudley, and their parents came between the 1820s and the 1840s with all having several children. Many wealthy families from Virginia also settled along the Watauga River which flowed through the Beaver Dam district. Without them and the others, Beaver Dam would have had much lower enlistments than the county average and Laurel Creek would have been even lower. Throughout the county, most districts showed a lack of Confederate support.⁹⁵

Early in the war, men from Watauga County began to make their way towards Federal lines in Kentucky. The earliest known Union enlistees assembled from the families

⁹⁴ In early 1861, much of the Mountain Home district became part of Mitchell County. Soldiers both Union and Confederate were only taken from the section that remained part of Watauga in this study.

⁹⁵ Dugger, 237; Whitener, 43; Hughes, 64; *The Eighth Census of the United States, 1860*; *The Sixth Census of the United States, 1840*; *The Fifth Census of the United States, 1830*; *The Fourth Census of the United States, 1820*.

living around Banner Elk in August of 1861. One night that month, young Shepherd M. Dugger reported that eight young men met at his cabin shortly before making the difficult journey to Kentucky. They were his adopted brother John Lineback, Martin Banner's sons Columbus, Oliver, and Newton; Lewis Banner's sons Samuel and Wilson, Anthony Banner's son Tatum, and Joel Eggers, Jr. Several other Banners and other young men living around Banner Elk joined the Federal Army as the war progressed. The Banner patriarchs were some of the leading men around Banner Elk and for much of the Mountain Home district. In looking at the 1890 Veterans Census, several other young men enlisted in the county before the Union Army came to Eastern Tennessee unlike Buncombe County which had only one Union enlistee during that time period. Also differing from Buncombe, all but one Union soldier in the Veterans Census enlisted before 1865. In total, both historians Michael Hardy and Jonathan Arthur estimated around 100 men in Watauga county enlisted in the Union Army, but due to the randomness of early enlistments and the use of aliases, the true number was probably much higher.⁹⁶

⁹⁶ Dugger, 203-205; Almas, 224-230.

Sampling of Watauga County Unionists

	Unionists via Southern Claims Commission	Percentage of district free population	Watauga Union Soldiers	Percentage of district free population	Percentage of Union enlistments	Percentage of Confed. Enlistments
Boone	7	1.3	1	0.19	1.8	21.8
Blue Ridge	13	1.3	15	1.5	27.3	26.0
Meat Camp	3	0.55	2	0.37	3.6	14.2
Valle Crucis	4	0.84	6	1.3	10.9	10.0
Cove Creek	10	1.3	13	1.7	23.6	12.3
Beaver Dam	2	0.51	4	1.0	7.3	10.0
Laurel Creek	3	0.64	2	0.43	3.6	4.3
Mountain Home	2	0.32	12	1.9	21.8	0.47
Watauga County	44	0.91	55	1.1	100%	100%

Source: Sampling of Union Soldiers taken from Almasy, 224-230; Hardy, 79-80; Dugger, 203-205; Approved Claims for Watauga County, Southern Claims Commission Case Files, National Archives, Washington D.C.; Computed using *The Eighth Census of the United States, 1860*.

The breakdown of Union soldiers from Watauga County showed a wide distribution of them in most districts. The Mountain Home district had the largest percentage of recruits with the Cove Creek and Blue Ridge districts also having a strong showing. On the low end, Boone and Meat Camp had the lowest enlistment rates, which correlated to the high Confederate enlistment rates they had. Valle Crucis had an above average showing and Beaver Dam was just below average. Interestingly, Laurel Creek had one of the lowest enlistment rates in both the Union and Confederate armies. Perhaps many felt like the local bear hunter and Union man Harrison Aldrich who “never joined either army, preferring to roam his native mountains ‘at his own sweet will and pleasure.’”⁹⁷ On the other end, the

⁹⁷ Drake, 200.

Blue Ridge district had high enlistment rates in both armies because of the dichotomy that affected the entire county. Parts of Blue Ridge were well connected along the main roads through the gaps to Lenoir or Wilkesboro, but other parts had some of the most rugged terrain in the county having Grandfather Mountain, the highest peak in Watauga County, and the crest of the Blue Ridge running through the district. When comparing the percentage of troop enlistments side by side, similar results were found. The Mountain Home and Cove Creek districts had a much larger percentage of Union Soldiers with Valle Crucis and Blue Ridge having slightly higher Union troop percentages. Beaver Dam and Laurel Creek had a slightly higher percentage of Confederate troops due to the Farthings and other lowland born enlistees, and Boone and Meat Camp Confederates far outpaced the Union enlistees. Overall, Watauga County Union Soldiers were dispersed throughout the county much more evenly than in Buncombe County and more evenly than its own Confederates showing the breadth of Union support.

The Southern Claims Commission approved files for Watauga County helped to show the strength of Unionism throughout the county. The approved claimants lived spread out around the county with two in Boone, two in the Blue Ridge, one in Laurel Creek, and one in Valle Crucis. More importantly, they each had several Unionist witnesses testify on their behalf and gave the names of numerous other Unionists in the county with little overlap showing their wide distribution across the county. In breaking down where these Unionists lived, the largest percentages lived in Boone, Blue Ridge, or Cove Creek. Still, each district in the county showed a healthy percentage. The Mountain Home District had the lowest percentage of Unionist in these files due to its isolation from the action since claims could only be awarded to those who had property taken by the Union Army. Although having low

numbers of Union troops enlist from Boone, Union sentiment clearly still existed in the district. The Southern Claims Commission files showed a great contrast between Watauga County and Buncombe County in their support for the Union. In Watauga County, these files showed that many Unionists lived throughout the county including in Boone, but in Buncombe County, they remained on the northern fringe of the county.⁹⁸

When secession finally came to North Carolina, Watauga and Buncombe counties continued to go in different directions with Buncombe supporting the Confederacy more than most if not all mountain counties and Watauga supporting the Union more than most mountain counties. Isolation or connectedness greatly influenced which side one would choose with shades of gray in the middle. As the war continued, Watauga and Buncombe counties continued to experience the war differently. The initial excitement for the war in the connected parts of the region began to fade, and the Conscription Law that passed in April, 1862, greatly altered the environment in the mountains and ushered in a violent guerrilla war that took hold for control of the region.

⁹⁸ *Eighth Census of the United States*, 1860; Approved Claims for Watauga County, Southern Claims Commission Case Files, National Archives, Washington D.C.

Chapter 3: Violence on the Home Front and the Struggle for Control

On April 16, 1862, the Confederate Congress passed its first Conscription Act which required all men ages 18-35 to serve in the Confederate Army unless they paid for a substitute. Later in the war, the Confederacy expanded the draft to those 17-50 and eliminated the substitution clause. Many Confederates despised the draft, and the large number of Union men living in the mountains of North Carolina could no longer hope to quietly wait out the war. Fearing for the lives their families, many men initially joined a local Confederate unit, but others instead chose to hide out in the mountains near their homes. Friends and family members often fed them when they could, but local Confederates increasingly harassed and stole from local Unionists making it harder for them to feed the men hiding in the mountains. Others, mostly young men and boys, made the difficult trip to Union lines and joined the Union Army. On July 7, 1863, an act of the North Carolina state legislature ordered home guard units to form in every county west of the Blue Ridge. These home guards hunted for deserters and men hiding out in the mountains, and increasingly stole from deserters' families. They forced many Union men into the Confederate Army and executed others. As time went on, Union men, wearied from being hunted, increasingly fought back against the Confederates. Lacking the organization and weapons early on that home guard units had, they formed small bands and bushwhacked local Rebels, and much revenge killing then ensued on both sides.⁹⁹

Western North Carolina experienced this violence in different phases. In most of Buncombe County, Confederates continued to hold power throughout the rest of the war and

⁹⁹ Inscoe and McKinney, 111

Union bushwhackers generally feared going into the county due to the military presence along with the large number of Confederate supporters in the county. Many times, Confederate troops in Asheville went into neighboring counties to confront Union guerrilla bands. The county remained in Confederate control throughout the war and did not surrender until after the armies of Robert E. Lee and Joseph E. Johnston did in April, 1865. Still, support for the Confederacy decreased even in the more connected areas of the mountains as the war increasingly put strains on families and communities with little hope of victory. In general, guerrilla violence was more prevalent where there was greater Union support, which allowed Buncombe County to remain relatively safe from bushwhacking due to its lack of Unionism. In Watauga County, where Unionists had the numbers advantage but were under the control of Confederate home guard companies, Union bushwhackers waged war on the local Confederates until eventually defeating them in battle by the fall of 1864 and capturing the home guard's camp in February of 1865. The draft forced Unionists to choose a side, and many chose to fight for Union control of their native mountains.

Starting in April, 1862, the draft forced numerous men in Watauga and Buncombe counties into the Confederate Army. Most men who chose not to hide out in the mountains actually enlisted in order to have a vote for their officers, choose what unit they joined, and receive better pay. In Watauga County, Company D and I of the 58th North Carolina Regiment mustered into service in the summer of 1862, and in September, 1862, Company M of the 58th North Carolina Regiment formed from men in Watauga and Ashe counties. About twenty-five men in the county also joined a Virginia regiment around that time. By the end of 1862, conscription caused 400 men from Watauga County to enlist in the Confederate Army. In Buncombe County, the 60th North Carolina Regiment formed in the

spring and summer of 1862 mostly from men in the county but with many from surrounding counties as well. The soldiers joining this regiment were much older, had less wealth, and had more family responsibilities compared to earlier recruits with one half being the head of the household. Although ideologically opposed to the Confederacy, many men joined these regiments.¹⁰⁰

Later in 1862 after resentment of the draft was building, Confederate soldiers began to desert their units. Desertion levels remained minimal until later in 1863, and although the majority would desert for ideological reasons, many Confederate supporters would do so only to go home for a little while, get work done on the farm, and then return to their unit. Since the mountains had fewer slaves, conscription caused a substantial lack of labor. Early in the war, most soldiers frowned upon desertion and condoned the severe punishments that went along with it, often death by firing squad. In December, 1862, Thomas Patton commented that executing deserters was “necessary for the good of the service.” Later on, many grew to have sympathy towards such men.¹⁰¹

The 60th North Carolina Regiment had a high desertion rate with 33.3 percent deserting by the end of the war, although most early deserters lived in the more isolated counties neighboring Buncombe. Those that deserted from Buncombe County usually did so near the end of the war. A similar situation existed in Ashe County, bordering Watauga on the north, where those who entered the army in 1862 were more likely to desert if they came from the isolated North Fork region. The less connected one was, the less likely they were to support the Confederacy.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ Hardy, 51; Arthur, 135; James C. Taylor, 109-112.

¹⁰¹ Inscoe and McKinney, 111; “Thomas W. Patton to Aunt G.” Dec. 28, 1862, James W. Patton Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina.

¹⁰² James C. Taylor, 110, 123. Crawford 129.

Although most Confederate soldiers did not desert early in 1863, after August large numbers of soldiers from Appalachia began to do so. Soldiers from Western North Carolina were four times more likely to desert than soldiers from the rest of the state suggesting stronger Unionism in the region. Historian Peter S. Bearman argued that the loss of Southern identity along with local issues caused desertion. The struggle between the North and the South leading up to the Civil War had caused people living in the mountains to see themselves as Southerners for the first time. This image remained strong early in the war in the more connected areas, but as the war dragged on and became at odds with local desires, people went back to viewing themselves in their previous localisms and therefore no longer had a reason to support the Confederacy. In the more isolated areas, a Southern identity based on slavery never developed. In September, 1863, 64 soldiers deserted from the 60th North Carolina Regiment, which equaled nearly one-fifth of the 351 men that would desert the 60th.¹⁰³

As desertion increased, the conditions for a guerrilla war began to emerge in Western North Carolina although it affected the region differently. Many deserters from around the South came to Appalachia to hide out, and many local residents who had previously supported the Confederacy began to disapprove of the strong enforcement of the draft. Along with that, the army often impressed goods from locals, which put increased strain on the already poor economy of the mountains. As home guard units formed, many old men and young boys in each county served. In the ensuing battles between Union bushwhackers and

¹⁰³ Peter S. Bearman, "Desertion as Localism: Army Unit Solidarity and Group Norm in the U. S. Civil War," *Social Forces* 70 no. 2 (December 1991): 323, 335; James C. Taylor, *The 60th North Carolina Regiment: A Case Study of Enlistment and Desertion in Western North Carolina during the Civil War* (master's thesis, Western Carolina University, 1998), 131.

Confederate home guards, guerrilla warfare increasingly engulfed much of Western North Carolina for the duration of the Civil War in a bitter struggle for control of the region.¹⁰⁴

In Buncombe County, although little violence took place, many soldiers who strongly advocated for the Confederacy in the earlier years of the war had a change of heart as the war progressed. Thomas W. Patton, son of the region's wealthiest man, lived in Asheville and later became captain of Company C of the 60th North Carolina Regiment. While in the service in January of 1862, he wrote to his mother and was appalled by his friend Charlie who planned to hide in the hills or leave the area once he was discharged so that he could not be forced back into service. In describing Charlie, Patton said that he was "sorry to see such sentiments in him—he is not more than half Southern, + boasts of being in the militia." Charlie did not like the fact that he signed up for the local militia, but then the government sent him off to fight battles far from home. Throughout the rest of 1862 and into 1863, Patton continued to strongly support the war effort.¹⁰⁵

On May 10, 1863, Patton sent in his letter of resignation as captain of his company. He stated that he did so because he felt that his family greatly needed him given the recent death of his father and brother. In his mind, his first duty was to his family. He also said that after two years of service he was in poor health and no longer fit to be the company's captain. However, his Confederate military commander did not want to give him a discharge and he had much difficulty getting his resignation approved. In writing to his mother a few days after his attempted resignation, Patton said that he might be able to get a break before Christmas but that it was uncertain. His resignation was still pending after a few months.

¹⁰⁴ Trotter, 41; Hardy, 53, 162.

¹⁰⁵ "Thomas W. Patton to his mother," Jan. 26, 1862, James W. Patton Papers, SHC.

Conditions at home concerned Patton greatly, but as it turned out, Patton remained with his company through 1865 despite such concerns.¹⁰⁶

Military losses in the summer of 1863 had a great impact not only on troop morale but also on Confederate support back home. Many soldiers from the region fought in either the Gettysburg Campaign or in the defense of Vicksburg. For many soldiers, especially those from the mountains of North Carolina and assigned to the Army of Tennessee, the fall of Vicksburg was a fatal blow to morale. Leading up to the fall, many soldiers worried that the fall of Jackson, Mississippi, put Vicksburg in danger and that holding it was crucial. Still, they remained optimistic for a time, but that optimism was crushed when the Federal Army captured Vicksburg on July 4, 1863. When writing on the matter, Thomas Patton while stationed in Mississippi said, “Vicksburg is fallen! This is the terrible thought that I cannot get rid of—and it is assuredly the heaviest blow that has been struck us yet—in my opinion far worse than would have been the fall of Richmond or Charleston or both!” He continued by saying: “I had almost made up my mind that if we lost Vicksburg our cause was lost.” In the first several months of 1864, Southern armies continued to hold the Union Army at bay, giving Confederate supporters in Buncombe County hope. Throughout 1864 and even in January of 1865, Thomas W. Patton expressed to his mother back home in Asheville that he still had hope for a Confederate victory. Local concerns remained important to Patton, but this desire for the Confederacy to succeed caused him to remain in the army throughout the

¹⁰⁶ “Thomas W. Patton to General S. Cooper,” May 10, 1863, James W. Patton Papers, SHC; “Thomas W. Patton to his mother,” May 12, 1863, James W. Patton Papers, SHC.

war. Although the guerrilla war raged in much of Appalachian North Carolina, those who still supported the Confederacy had reason to be hopeful for some time.¹⁰⁷

Throughout the war, race continued to be a unifying factor in most of Buncombe County. It was believed that not only would blacks be equal if the North won, but that the Republican Party advocated intermarriage between whites and blacks in a new phase of abolition. The ideology was even preached during church: “rapidly and alarmingly the infamous and disgusting practice is spreading in the North.” Even the *New York Times*, a solidly Republican paper, condemned such a move in an editorial warning that young people who did not intermarry with blacks would not be allowed in the Republican Party. Additionally, the paper expressed regret in ever giving the Republicans support given the outcomes that abolitionists advocated. The *New York Times* also praised the Democratic Party for standing firm on an issue that was very important. In Buncombe County, such reports gave new life to Confederates who wearied of war by making the alternative look that much worse.¹⁰⁸

In many ways, the situation in Buncombe County could be compared to that in Southwestern Virginia. By 1864, many parts of Appalachia and even the more connected bottomlands and towns that once had strong support for the Confederacy had increased disaffection. Southwest Virginia was not at odds with the rest of the state when the Civil War began and did not seek to separate from the state as the northwestern counties did. Both Buncombe and Southwest Virginia were much less isolated than most of Appalachia, and both were valuable enough to fortify with a significant number of troops. Buncombe had the

¹⁰⁷ Thomas W. Patton to his mother,” May 17, 1863, James W. Patton Papers, SHC; “Thomas W. Patton to his mother,” July 8, 1863, James W. Patton Papers, SHC; “The News,” *Asheville News*, April 21, 1864; “Thomas W. Patton to his mother,” January 6th, 1865, James W. Patton Papers, SHC.

¹⁰⁸ “Miscegenation—What It Means—Remarkable Confession of a Republican Journal,” *Asheville News*, April 21, 1864; “What Are We Coming to?” *Asheville News*, April 21, 1864.

armory in Asheville and several turnpikes leading to other towns, and Southwest Virginia had the saltworks and a long established railroad link with the rest of the state. The presence of troops brought a greater sense of stability to local Confederates in both regions.

Southwest Virginia actually had many Confederate bushwhackers that attacked Federal forces attempting to raid the area. Both Buncombe County and Southwest Virginia had more slaves than most other parts of Appalachia as well.¹⁰⁹

Although less substantial in Buncombe County, class conflict emerged throughout Appalachia to varying degrees. As historian William Trotter suggested, there was a growing divide within the region centered around economic status, which was greatly affected by the level of one's isolation. Still, many poor people in Buncombe County continued to fight in a Confederate uniform. By mid 1863, John Reece, a miller from Buncombe County living the Reems Creek district with only \$95 in wealth and no land, worried greatly about conditions at home. He expressed to his wife that he considered coming home and hiding out there but decided not to after reasoning that he could help the family more by staying in the army and sending his pay home. Still, he said that he would desert if she thought they would be able to get by, but he remained in the army until he died of disease in the summer of 1864.¹¹⁰

Little violence had reached Buncombe County in the later years of the war, although many residents worried that it would. In responding to a recent letter from his wife, John Reece expressed how people in Buncombe had no idea of the destruction that he saw on the battlefield and from government destruction of crops. Still, he warned his wife to keep his gun out and well oiled just in case bushwhackers came through. Thomas W. Patton of

¹⁰⁹ For a detailed look at Southwest Virginia, see Kenneth Noe, *Southwest Virginia's Railroad*, Brian McKnight, *Contested Borderland*, Gordon McKinney, *Southern Mountain Republicans*.

¹¹⁰ Trotter, 24; "John W. Reece to Christena Reece, March 1, 1863, John Reece Papers, Duke; James C. Taylor, 60.

Asheville initially worried that the Federal troops from Eastern Tennessee would attack Asheville in the fall of 1863 but remained confident that enough men in the city would come together and stop any such attacks. After such attacks did not occur, Patton no longer seemed to worry about the safety of Buncombe County throughout 1864. After the fall of East Tennessee, General Robert Vance, commander of the Western District of North Carolina, had the area for miles around Asheville well guarded with both infantry and cavalry helping to keep the area safe for Confederates.¹¹¹

In the fall of 1863, Union bushwhackers increasingly raided Confederates in Western North Carolina with the help of Federal forces stationed in Knoxville, Tennessee. Numerous men from both North Carolina and Tennessee took part on the side of the Union. This gave cause for alarm within Buncombe County, but most of the fighting remained closer to the state line or in surrounding counties. In mid October 1863, a large band of Union guerrillas entered Madison County and while there came as close to Buncombe as Warm Springs. While there, the guerrillas shot 70 year-old Mr. Garrett, looted his house, and took his livestock and raided others before local home guards including many from Buncombe County attacked and chased them into Tennessee. Within Buncombe, many residents were alarmed at this seemingly brutal event and worried that violence could occur closer to them. In another incident, someone tried to burn down Captain Al Summey's house, where General Polk's family was living at the time. However, the home guard discovered them and put out

¹¹¹ "John W. Reece to Christena Reece," Mar. 31, 1864, John Reece Papers, Special Collections, W. R. Perkins Library, Duke University; "John W. Reece to Christena Reece," May 1, 1864, John Reece Papers, Duke; "Thomas W. Patton to his mother," September 28, 1863, James W. Patton Papers, SHC; "Thomas W. Patton to his wife," January 27, 1864, James W. Patton Papers, SHC; "Thomas W. Patton to his mother," September 21, 1864, James W. Patton Papers, SHC.

the fire after the Union bushwhackers fled. This incident showed how Confederates needed to remain vigilant and had reason to fear neighbors of differing loyalties.¹¹²

Also in the fall of 1863, Union Colonel George W. Kirk raided Confederates along the Pigeon River and entered Jackson County. On hearing the news, Confederate troops stationed in Asheville, with the help of several locals, tracked down Kirk's forces, and ambushed them. After several Union soldiers fell in the skirmish, Kirk retreated into Tennessee with the remainder of his forces. The fact that numerous locals were willing to aid Rebel soldiers in Buncombe County showed the remaining strength of the Confederacy there. In addition, many Confederate families from Eastern Tennessee came to Buncombe County to live in safety that fall.¹¹³

In Buncombe County throughout 1864, Union bushwhackers continued to be more of an outside threat that never got too close, although their attacks in nearby areas intensified. In January of 1864, Buncombe home guards pursued deserters in Cocke County, Tennessee, where a skirmish broke out with Union bushwhackers. No Confederates were hurt, but they killed and wounded a few of the bushwhackers in battle and took others prisoners.¹¹⁴ In mid April of 1864, about 100 Unionists took over Burnsville, the county seat of Yancey County. Shortly afterwards, Col. John Palmer led some men of the 16th North Carolina Regiment to fight them. On April 19th, Col. Palmer attacked the Union partisans in Burnsville and took 15 prisoners. The fear of a Federal invasion and local bushwhackers persisted in the region as raids continued to increase.¹¹⁵

¹¹² *Fear in North Carolina: the Civil War Journals and Letter of the Henry Family*, Kara L. Clinard and Richard Russell eds. (Asheville: Reminiscing Books, 2008), 167-169; "The Recent Raid," *Asheville News*, October 22, 1863; "A Daring Attempt," *Asheville News*, October 22, 1863.

¹¹³ Terrell, 100-101; *Fear in North Carolina*, 158.

¹¹⁴ *Fear in North Carolina*, 185.

¹¹⁵ "The News," *Asheville News*, April 21, 1864; "Postscript," *Asheville News*, April 21, 1864.

Unionists continued to gain ground in counties surrounding Buncombe County in the summer of 1864, but Buncombe County remained mostly under Confederate control except on its fringes. In May, 1864, Confederates killed a Union man in the western part of the county who had been hiding out for over a year to avoid conscription. In June, Unionists killed a Confederate man in Henderson County. Many in Asheville continually expected a raid from such bushwhackers, and it was a common thought in town that Unionists had taken over much of Transylvania County by that point in time.¹¹⁶

In the fall of 1864, violence continued to erupt nearby. In September, Union bushwhackers killed Major Roberts, who was stationed in the area, while on patrol, and members of the home guard pursued the attackers and killed three of them. Over in Henderson County, Union men approached the house of Col. Joseph Y. Bryson one evening and wounded the colonel's two daughters before killing him and his wife. They killed Bryson because he was a strong Southern man, and local Confederates were shocked to hear of this incident. Over in Madison County, two men named Ray in Keith Blalock's band of Unionists from Watauga County killed two Confederates in their own homes.¹¹⁷

In 1865, many in Buncombe County continued to support the Confederacy to the end even as the war began to make them weary. Because they were less isolated and still had a fairly large number of Confederate soldiers in the county, local residents were much more likely to remain loyal to the Confederacy. Many residents and soldiers from the county still believed the war would be won as Lee's army continued to hold in Virginia. In January 1865, Thomas W. Patton in discussing his feelings on winning the war said that "I still have strong hope." Kirk continued to raid the surrounding area often, and the Buncombe home

¹¹⁶ *Fear in North Carolina*, 218, 226, 233.

¹¹⁷ "Horrible Affair," *Asheville News*, October 27, 1864; *Fear in North Carolina*, 242, 244.

guard engaged in skirmishes throughout the region with both bushwhackers and soldiers. Many neighboring counties seemed to be unmanageable for the Confederates by this point, but Buncombe County remained under firm Rebel control.¹¹⁸

On April 3, 1865, Union Colonel Isaac M. Kirby along with 900 soldiers and 200 partisans entered Buncombe County with the intentions of taking Asheville, but the Confederates there put up a formidable defense. Asheville had long been fortified from attack with breastworks since it had an armory there along with several camps surrounding the city and at least two cannons. Kirby entered up the French Broad River and burned bridges along the way. On April 6, his forces stopped seven miles north of Asheville and stole the widow H. E. Sondley's horses, but one of her slaves escaped into town and warned everyone according to historian F. A. Sondley.¹¹⁹

Colonel George W. Clayton of the 62nd North Carolina Regiment was in town, and including his own forces he rounded up all of the men that he could for the defense of the city, which totaled around 300 including several soldiers home on furlough. The Federals advanced towards the city, and after coming within 600 yards of Confederate lines, a battle ensued. Starting at 3:00 pm, shots rang out until dark at 8:00 pm. During that period, the Federals made no advance any closer to the Confederates, who were content to hold their position. After failing to take the city that day, Colonel Kirby's forces retreated back into Tennessee through the night. He later claimed that he did so because he feared Confederate reinforcements would overwhelm them, and he inaccurately believed that the Confederates had over 1,000 soldiers in Asheville instead of a few hundred. Kirby also said that his commanders ordered him not to take heavy casualties, although William Trotter suggested

¹¹⁸ "Thomas W. Patton to his mother," Jan. 6, 1865, James W. Patton Papers, SHC; *Fear in North Carolina*, 255-263.

¹¹⁹ Sondley, 693-694; Trotter, 291.

that fighting in the mountains made him nervous. Later that month on April 26, 1865, after the war ended, Federal soldiers entered Buncombe County along the Swannanoa Creek and took Asheville without a fight. Throughout the final years of the war, Buncombe County largely remained loyal to the Confederacy, but the situation in Watauga County differed greatly.¹²⁰

Many people, especially those more isolated, saw the Confederate government as a threat and became increasingly willing to fight back, but at the same time, many people, especially those within the more accessible parts of the region, continued to support the Confederacy and backed the home guards. Watauga County, being quite isolated, had strong Union sentiment within the county causing much violence against Confederate rule. Watauga County's proximity to Eastern Tennessee, which came under control of the Union Army in September of 1863, gave local Unionists a base of support and supply of arms into the region. Numerous men hiding in the mountains joined the Federal Army, and many of them returned home as scouts and recruiters. They often raided goods from local Confederates, and at times confronted or bushwhacked members of the home guard.

In Watauga, one of the most isolated counties with few slaves, increased class conflict could be seen as the war progressed and many who initially supported the war no longer did. In the summer of 1864, J. W. Horton, a Confederate soldier from Watauga who had no wealth of his own, expressed that he did not expect anything to come of the fighting and that sometimes they beat the Yankees and sometimes not. He doubted the merits of continuing the war and hoped that it would end soon. William Horton of Boone, who had

¹²⁰ J. B. Hicklin, "Unusual Battle Is fought In Asheville 65 Years Ago," newspaper clipping, Theodore Davidson Morrison Papers, SHC; Sondley, 694-695; Trotter, 293-294; *Supplement to the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, Janet B. Hewett ed., part II vol. 54 (Wilmington, North Carolina: Broadfoot Publishing Company, 1997), 538.

\$1,070 in total wealth, took the notion much further. In the fall of 1864, he said he hoped that poor privates like him would be as free as the rich officers someday and that “this Cruel war is a rich mans war and a poor man’s fight but I hope it won’t always be so,” and that “this Cruel war Commenced with lies and it will end with lies.” He went on to say that he would not fight in the war forever.¹²¹

In 1863, the Confederates established Camp Mast a few miles from Boone near Sugar Grove in Watauga County, and it served as a base for the home guard there and for many in neighboring Ashe County. Two companies of home guards formed with one under Captain George McGuire and the other under Captain Jordan Cook, and Major Harvey Bingham commanded both companies. Bingham and Cook previously served in the 37th North Carolina Regiment from Watauga County. Roughly 250 men from the county served in the home guard in the last few years of the war. One Federal prisoner taken to Camp Mast while trying to reach Tennessee described it by saying, “the camp had but one street and a row of cabins on either side. There were but fifteen cabins in all,—twelve of which were for the privates, one for officers, and two for horses.” For the rest of the war, the home guard’s main purpose was to capture deserters, sometimes executing them by firing squad, and at times they shot at any man who ran away from them. Often, they offered amnesty to those willing to come forward. For capturing so many deserters in the county, the state legislature commended Major Harvey Bingham in 1865.¹²²

Additionally, the home guard often raided Union men in the county and took their property. On one raid, they stole livestock, food supplies, household goods, blankets, and

¹²¹ “J. W. Horton to his uncle,” July 20, 1864, Mary A. Councill Papers, Duke; “William Horton to Mary A. Councill,” Nov. 30, 1864, Mary A. Councill Papers, Duke; “William Horton to Mary A. Councill,” Oct. 18, 1864, Mary A. Councill Papers, Duke; *The Eighth Census of the United States*, 1860.

¹²² Hardy, 55-56; Arthur, 114; Burson, 103-104; Dugger, 110.

alcohol in 1863 from the Union man John Horton of Boone and often threatened to arrest him for aiding escaped prisoners and those hiding out to avoid conscription, although apparently they lacked the proof to do so. Joshua Winkler, also of Boone, had many items taken by the home guard. Elsewhere in the county, local Confederates threatened John Jones of Laurel Creek and his wife before taking guns, bed sheets, clothes, and provisions for their horses from his house in several different raids. The home guard often took cattle and hay from Unionist Rittenhouse Baird of the Valle Crucis district and nearly burned down his house in 1864. Many other Union-loving mountaineers were harassed and tracked down in their mountain hideouts as the war progressed, and not liking to be hunted, many increasingly banded together and fought back with many giving aid to fellow Unionists and escaped soldiers.¹²³

One of the earliest recorded skirmishes in Watauga County occurred in August of 1863 at the home of the Confederate supporter Paul Farthing in Beaver Dam. A band of Union bushwhackers including the three Guy brothers Canada, Enoch, and David, who were known Unionists in the region living near the Tennessee border, attacked his house. Farthing set off his horn, which was used to alert likeminded neighbors of an attack so they could help each other out. After that, he and the women in his house shot at the intruders. Hearing the horn, Thomas Farthing went towards Paul's home to help him when he was shot twice by a Union man waiting along the road. He died shortly afterwards. The Farthings eventually repulsed the attack, and several people were wounded. The home guard believed that Canada Guy led the attack, and shortly after the attack on Farthing, they hanged Guy for his actions as well as his Unionist friend, Jacob May of Roan Creek, Tennessee. Sometime in 1864, the

¹²³ Approved Claims for Watauga County, Southern Claims Commission Case Files, National Archives, Washington D.C.; *The Eighth Census of the United States*, 1860.

Johnson County, Tennessee, home guard hanged Guy's 70 year old father, Levi Guy, on the charge of supporting Unionists in the area. Levi protested claiming that he was merely giving his son food and shelter, but they killed him anyway. Afterwards, the Johnson home guard also killed Levi's two sons, Enoch Guy and David Guy, who were both Federal soldiers.¹²⁴

The violence continued nearby shortly thereafter. Along the North Fork of Cove Creek, local Unionist bushwhackers including some Potters and Stouts, who were active Union families in the area, came upon Isaac Wilson, a Confederate supporter, while he was plowing his field and killed him. Shortly after that, Paul Farthing's house was attacked again by Union men, but after he shot one of the attackers, they all fled. Sometime after that in response to both of these attacks, the home guard captured Thomas Stout, an old man living near the Ashe County line whose sons were charged with the murder of Isaac Wilson. They took him to Hiram Wilson's on Cove Creek, a district with strong Union enlistments, where his boys had killed Isaac, and handed him over to "Big" Isaac Wilson, the deceased Isaac's cousin. Once there, Big Isaac executed Stout. The next day, Jay Howington and Gilbert Norris hung the body on Rich Mountain near the middle of the Cove Creek district, where James H. Presnell of Boone found it two months later while cow hunting on the mountain.¹²⁵

Much of the guerrilla warfare in Watauga County centered on Unionists living in the more isolated parts of the county. The Guy family lived along a branch of the Watauga River near its falls close to the Tennessee border. The Potters and Thomas Stout along with his three sons Abram, Daniel, and John lived near the head of the North Fork of the New River, which was not far from the Guys. This section of the county became exceptional, and it did

¹²⁴ Arthur, 170; Hardy, 53; Ellis, 291-294.

¹²⁵ Arthur, 170-171.

so because of its geographic isolation. The North Fork of the New River had its head at Snake Mountain as did the North Fork of Cove Creek, and the region surrounding it was quite rugged and isolated with a few high peaks. Farther down the North Fork of the New River in Ashe County, strong Unionism existed as well, as Martin Crawford labeled it as one of the strongest hotbeds of Unionism in the county. Additionally, this region contained many poor yeoman or landless farmers who owned no slaves, which often put them at odds with the Confederacy.¹²⁶

Much of Blue Ridge district along the southern border of Watauga County was quite remote and isolated as well because the Eastern Continental Divide ran through the area at the crest of the Blue Ridge, and Unionist guerrillas were very active in that section of the county. As Confederates continued to lose battles and have decreased support back home in 1863, Unionists became much more active throughout the county. By mid 1864, those seeking to go to Federal lines in Tennessee “were met in the Blowing Rock region by one of the three scouts, Keith Blalock, Harrison Church, or Jim Hartley, and conducted by Shulls Mills, Dutch Creek and Hanging Rock Gap to Banner Elk, where after getting relief from fatigue and hunger, they went on by Cranberry to Crab Orchard, now Shell Creek Tennessee.” Harrison Church and Jim Hartley both came from the Beaver Dam district and Keith Blalock from the Blue Ridge district. Besides conducting Union men through the county, they also conducted guerrilla warfare locally.¹²⁷

The story of William “Keith” Blalock and his wife clearly displayed how bushwhacking grew from two mountain dwelling individuals who from the start supported the Union and just wanted to be left alone. Keith Blalock and his young wife Malinda

¹²⁶ Arthur, 169; Hardy, 7; Crawford, 129.

¹²⁷ Hardy, 54; Hughes, 65-66.

Pritchard Blalock lived near Coffey Gap on Grandfather Mountain very close to the Watauga-Caldwell County line in the Blue Ridge district and were farmers. They originally tried to stay out of the war, but in 1862 decided to enlist together after the local militia began to enforce the draft more strongly. Keith got an order of conscription, and Malinda decided to go by the name of Sam, cut her hair, and pretended to be Keith's brother. They hoped to make it near Union lines and then desert, but after being stationed in Eastern North Carolina, Blalock rolled in poison ivy to give the impression he had a terrible and possibly contagious illness. This caused the army to discharge him and Malinda after she disclosed her true nature. For awhile, Confederate officials left them alone, and many other deserters came to live with them in a hut on Grandfather Mountain. After awhile, seeing that he was fit for duty, local Confederates hoped to send him back into the army.¹²⁸

Around the same time that other Unionists in the county became much more active, Blalock, being a Union man to the core, began to take action against the Confederacy and those who supported it. He left Grandfather in May of 1864 and went into Tennessee, where he met up with Federal forces and enlisted as a private in the 10th Michigan Volunteers on June 3, 1864. While there, he gave intelligence to the Federals about the weakness of Confederate defenses around Camp Vance in Morganton, which he had scouted the previous spring. Keith returned home in August in a Federal uniform with a Spencer repeating rifle and a navy revolver and hoped to keep the region out of the hands of the Rebels. Once

¹²⁸ Arthur, 1, 160-161; Hughes, 65-66; *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography*, 174-175; Hardy, 53-54; "A Declaration of Invalid Pension," Oct 28, 1865, Keith Blalock Papers, W. L. Eury Appalachian Collection, Appalachian State University.

home, Blalock along with other Unionists began the long and bloody struggle for the control of Watauga County.¹²⁹

Keith Blalock put together a small band of guerrillas and began raiding Confederates in southern Watauga County and northeastern Caldwell County and especially along the John's River that flowed through both. In the summer of 1864, after Blalock stole cattle from a Confederate widow in Watauga, the local home guard began to chase after him and his men, and they enlisted the help of Confederate supporter and Blalock's step-uncle William Coffey, who was an experienced woodsman. He took them to Blalock's house, but they could not find him. Shortly thereafter while at his step-uncle McCaleb Coffey's house, who was the brother of William Coffey, Keith announced that he planned to kill the Confederates William Coffey, Carroll Moore, Lot Estes, and Rolit Green, although McCaleb contended that they were all quiet citizens and not in the army. Keith threatened McCaleb as well but did not harm him. Three days later, Keith, along with two other Unionists, killed William Coffey in the Blue Ridge district of Watauga County.¹³⁰

Outraged at William's murder, the Watauga home guard under Major Harvey Bingham tried even harder to find Blalock and caught up with him a few days later. Keith was nearly home around the head of the Johns River in Watauga County walking along the road when some home guardsmen came out of the woods 25 feet away and began to shoot at him. They shot Blalock in the arm, but he ran away and escaped into the woods and lay there

¹²⁹ Arthur, 162-163; "Testimony of William Blalock, Special Agent John H. Renton to State of NC" Oct. 24, 1878, Keith Blalock Papers, WLEAC. The Spencer repeating rifle was a lever action rifle that could hold 7 bullets plus 1 in the chamber. The rifle had a shot rate of 20 per minute, compared to 3 per minutes with the common musket or squirrel gun that the home guards generally had giving those who had a Spencer a superior advantage in firepower.

¹³⁰ "Testimony of Jesse Moore, Special Agent John H. Renton to State of NC," Oct. 24, 1878, Keith Blalock Papers, WLEAC; "Testimony of McCaleb Coffey, Special Agent John H. Renton to State of NC," Oct. 24, 1878, Keith Blalock Papers, WLEAC.

for awhile. The next day, his neighbor, James Greggs, found him there and sent word to the Banners, known Unionists over in Banner Elk. Fellow Federal soldier Samuel Banner came with a party of 15-20 men and took Blalock away through Shull's Mill, under Hanging Rock, to Banner Elk, where he stayed the night at Jacob VonCannon's in a cove of Beech Mountain, and then into East Tennessee to heal, where he stayed at Crab Orchard with David Stout.¹³¹

After about a month, Keith Blalock healed and returned to Grandfather Mountain. In order to better protect himself from the home guard, he continued to have a band of local Unionists and deserters for common defense with 12-20 men under his personal command at any given time. They generally remained near Grandfather throughout the fall of 1864 targeting Confederates living near the Watauga-Caldwell line and especially up the spurs and creeks of Johns River. On one raid that fall, Blalock beat up and robbed William Pritchard and his slave Lossen Farr. In another event, Benjamin and Lott Green, local Confederates, attempted to arrest Levi Coffey, a Union man, for avoiding the draft. Levi escaped although they shot him in the shoulder. In response, Keith Blalock went to Lott Green's house with about six Union men to kill him, but several home guardsmen were in the house. The home guard shot one man through the crack in the door, and Blalock retreated with his men. The Confederates pursued them to a house around Shulls Mill and killed one of the Union men, but Blalock and the rest escaped. After this, Blalock continued to bring violence to

¹³¹ "Testimony of David Moore, Special Agent John H. Renton to State of NC," Oct. 23, 1878, Keith Blalock Papers, WLEAC; "Testimony of Joseph Webb, Special Agent John H. Renton to State of NC," Oct. 23, 1878, Keith Blalock Papers, WLEAC; "A Declaration of Invalid Pension," Oct. 28, 1865, Keith Blalock Papers, WLEAC; "Testimony of William Blalock, Special Agent John H. Renton to State of NC," Oct. 24, 1878, Keith Blalock Papers, WLEAC.

Confederates in the region, and his wife often joined him. Other Unionists became more active across the county in 1864.¹³²

In 1864, Federal soldiers stationed in Tennessee often helped Unionists conduct raids of the Confederates in Watauga County. Union Colonel George W. Kirk frequently raided the region and was most active in Watauga, Haywood, and Madison counties. During these raids, skirmishes with local Confederates occurred at times. Along the North Fork of the New River in the fall of 1864, Unionists went on the offensive to avenge past deaths. One afternoon, Big Isaac Wilson, his son James, Jay Howington, and Gilbert Norris were harvesting their crop at Big Isaac's farm on the North Fork of Cove Creek when Unionist friends of Thomas Stout attacked the men in the field severely wounding Big Isaac and killing the other three in retribution for Stout's murder. By this point in time, much of the violence in the region clearly had a personal and retaliatory nature to it, although it generally fell along lines of ideology with the Unionists increasingly taking the offensive in the region.¹³³

Not far from the state line, nine Unionists went to James Farthing's house on the lower Watauga River in Beaver Dam and proceeded to shoot him and then take what they could in the fall of 1864. James Farthing managed to survive and made it to his brother Reuben Farthing's house, where he hid upstairs. Soon after this, the Union bushwhackers came upon Reuben's house as well, but James threatened them with a pistol this time. Instead of fighting, the partisans stole several horses and left. Upon hearing of the attack, Major Harvey Bingham of the Home Guard personally led 18 men to track them down.

¹³² "Testimony of David Moore, Special Agent John H. Renton to State of NC," Oct. 23, 1878, Keith Blalock Papers, WLEAC; "Testimony of Carroll Moore, Special Agent John H. Renton to State of NC," Oct. 24, 1878, Keith Blalock Papers, WLEAC; Arthur, 167-168.

¹³³ Trotter, 157; Arthur, 172.

After doing so, they retrieved the horses from the Union men, who fled the scene without a fight.¹³⁴

Shortly after this in mid October of 1864, Federal scouts in Crab Orchard, Tennessee, which was near the Watauga County border, assembled Union men for an extended raid in Watauga County. Captain James Champion from Indiana advised Lt. James Hartley, one of the most active Union partisans in the county, to take his band of men to the John's River section. He along with 15 others armed with Spencer rifles, including one escaped prisoner from Salisbury named William Burson, entered Watauga County, and about 25 others followed them to watch or visit friends and relatives. While the Union party made one of their many raids, Harvey Bingham with many home guardsmen captured a few Unionists in retaliation for the recent attack on the Farthings: Federal Soldier Bill Guyn of Banner Elk, Bill Shull, who was making shoes at Lewis Banner's at the time, and Jim Clawson after driving off his cattle. They also took children's shoes made by the Banners from Linda Smith along the way. Determined to free their men, Lt. Hartley set out with the 15 armed men from the party to pursue the home guards.¹³⁵

Hartley and his band discovered the home guard's campfires that night around midnight around the start of November outside of Banner Elk, and decided to wait until morning to attack the much larger party. They hoped to ambush the party along the path from Banner Elk to Valle Crucis, but in the morning, they watched the home guard travel northeast higher up on part of Beech Mountain. The local bear hunter in the party Harrison Aldridge advised the group to head them off at the "Rollin-place", so they pursued the home guard and caught up with them up on the side of the mountain. After surprising the home

¹³⁴ Arthur, 174.

¹³⁵ Dugger, 113; Burson, 123-124.

guards, Lt. Hartley commanded them to halt. His brother, who was a member of the home guard, fired at James Hartley whereupon he gave the order for his men to fire back and the battle began. Almost immediately, Dick Kilby, a 20-year-old Unionist who had recently joined the home guard only to please his Confederate father, fell dead after a volley of gun fire. Shortly after this, Elliot Bingham stepped out hoping to kill Lt. James Hartley, but instead Hartley shot him dead. Although the home guard had superior numbers, the Union men outgunned them with their Spencer rifles and after a long shoot-out, caused the home guard to retreat. The Union band killed about 4 other home guardsmen and wounded many others. The Confederates wounded one Union man in the arm. Following their victory, the Union men took mules, blankets, and killed hogs from three Confederates in the region before heading back to Limestone Cove, Tennessee, several miles south of Elizabethton. After the battle and the death of his brother, Major Harvey Bingham took a different attitude on the war, and who in the words of young Shepherd Dugger said “that shooting to kill some dear mother’s son, who would not be forced against his will, was not the matter of sport that his men had made it.” After this defeat, the home guard held significantly less power in Watauga County, and the Unionist bands took much more control over the county.¹³⁶

In early November, 1864, Keith Blalock and his men went to raid Carroll Moore’s house along the John’s River above the town of Globe in Caldwell County since he supported the Confederacy. While there, Moore’s son-in-law and two boys opened fire on

¹³⁶ Burson, 124-125; Drake, 197-199; Dugger, 115-117; Arthur, 174; Hardy, 56; *The Eighth Census of the United States*, 1860. The number of soldiers that participated from the home guard and their deaths at this battle varied greatly in the primary and secondary sources. William Burson, who fought in the battle, listed 6 dead in the book he wrote 3 years later. J. Madison Drake, an escaped soldier who spoke with both Harrison Aldridge and James Hartley a few days after the battle listed 8 dead and 20 wounded and met the Union man shot in the arm. Shepherd Monroe Dugger listed 2 dead and gave their names and stories. Michael Hardy and Jonathan Arthur both list 2 dead in their later books. As for the number of home guardsmen engaged in the battle, Burson said there were 60 and Dugger said there were “many.” Arthur listed 18, and the others were silent on the number of guardsmen.

the pickets outside, and Blalock shot Moore in the thigh before escaping. That same night, they also raided Daniel Moore's house and Job Moore's house. Such scenes continued throughout that fall, and local Confederates feared Blalock. Local deserter Langston Estes, who lived along the John's River, said that although Keith and his men acted harshly at times, they provided local Unionists with a certain degree of protection.¹³⁷

In the early winter of 1864-1865, Keith continued to act as a Union Bushwhacker, and the violence continued. One evening while enjoying dinner with a friend along with his men, he revealed some crucial insights into how mountain Unionists like him thought. His friend warned him of the superior home guard force from Caldwell County that was looking for him and suggested that he leave the area. In response, Keith said that this was where he was born and raised and that he would not let them run him out of it and was determined to defend himself there. He held this motto throughout the war.¹³⁸

Shortly after this on January 15, 1865, Blalock met up with Lt. James Hartley and learned that a home guard force was nearby at Carroll Moore's house. Emboldened by their recent victory over the Watauga home guard, Blalock decided to take his men and attack them. He took about 17 men with him and arrived there right around sunrise. He had his men surround the place, but the five Rebels there detected them. Four of them including their leader Jesse Moore snuck out the back and after firing at the bushwhackers ran into the orchard. Once there, a gunfight ensued. Seeing Blalock, as they had long known each other, Jesse shot him striking him in the face and causing him to lose his right eye with Keith shooting Jesse in the heel at roughly the same instant. The skirmish continued for a little

¹³⁷ "Testimony of David Moore, Special Agent John H. Renton to State of NC," Oct. 23, 1878, Keith Blalock Papers, WLEAC; "Testimony of Langston Estes, Special Agent John H. Renton to State of NC," Oct. 23, 1878, Keith Blalock Papers, WLEAC; Hardy, 54.

¹³⁸ "Testimony of David Moore, Special Agent John H. Renton to State of NC," Oct. 23, 1878, Keith Blalock Papers, WLEAC.

while longer, and a Unionist shot Patterson Moore in the thigh. Some of Blalock's men were wounded as well, and after stealing a horse to take him away, they all retreated. After getting away, other home guard units came to the Moore's aid and pursued the Unionists into the mountains but did not catch them. Blalock then went to Tennessee to heal once again. In February, he returned to the region and continued raiding Confederates until he joined Federal forces under George W. Kirk when they passed through Blowing Rock in the spring.¹³⁹

In early 1865, Unionists took nearly all the power away from the home guard in Watauga. On February 4, 1865, roughly 100 local Unionists under the command of Captain James Champion gathered in Banner Elk, and most of them were armed. From there, they marched toward Camp Mast through Valle Crucis and reached the camp shortly before dawn the next morning. The home guard posted no pickets, so the Unionists surrounded the camp without being detected and built fires all around it to make their numbers appear larger. The Confederate commanding officer was Captain George McGuire since Major Bingham was away, and after the Confederates woke up and realized they were surrounded, he negotiated a surrender. Before doing so, he had his men vote on the matter and 60 wanted to surrender and 11 to fight. As escaped prisoner William Burson discovered, the majority of the men who served in the Watauga home guard were Unionists anyway, so their vote for surrender was no surprise.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁹ "Testimony of David Moore, Special Agent John H. Renton to State of NC," Oct. 23, 1878, Keith Blalock Papers, WLEAC; "A Declaration of Invalid Pension," Oct. 28, 1865, Keith Blalock Papers, WLEAC; "Testimony of William Blalock, Special Agent John H. Renton to State of NC," Oct. 24, 1878, Keith Blalock Papers, WLEAC; "Testimony of Jesse Moore, Special Agent John H. Renton to State of NC," Oct. 24, 1878, Keith Blalock Papers, WLEAC; "Testimony of Carroll Moore, Special Agent John H. Renton to State of NC," Oct. 24, 1878, Keith Blalock Papers, WLEAC.

¹⁴⁰ Arthur, 175; Burson, 102.

The Unionists then took the captured men through Banner Elk and to the Tennessee border. Along the way, many residents of Watauga looked on approvingly seeing the men who terrorized them taken prisoner. Once in Tennessee, they allowed those who voted for surrender to go free since many were Union men anyway, but they sent the other 11 into Tennessee to a prison camp, where some of them would later die. Additionally, Captain McGuire rode off into Tennessee along with the Union officer leading many to speculate that he set up their surrender knowing that Major Bingham would be away and the camp would be poorly defended. Either way, by doing so Captain McGuire clearly showed how many Watauga residents felt about the war by this stage.¹⁴¹

Although the fall of Camp Mast hurt the remaining control Confederates had on the region, the Confederates continued to hold Boone, and the number of active Confederate supporters in Watauga County dwindled but did not disappear. On March 28, 1865, Union General George Stoneman entered Watauga County with about 6,000 cavalry planning to attack the piedmont. He passed through Banner Elk and sent the 12th Kentucky Cavalry ahead to scout towards Boone. In town, the remnants of the home guard along with Confederate soldiers who left their units to fight local Unionists assembled at Jordan Councill's house expecting an attack from the notorious Lt. James Harlley and his men when they saw Federal soldiers enter town. One man immediately fired upon the Yankees, and a short volley of gunfire ensued before the Rebels realized that they were greatly outnumbered. They ran out of the house towards Howards Knob, although a few stayed behind and took shots at the Federals. Calvin Green managed to shoot a Union soldier in the arm before being wounded himself and forced to retreat, and a 15-year-old boy named Steel Frazier killed two Yankees before escaping. Although many of the fleeing Confederates were

¹⁴¹ Arthur, 176; Dugger, 120.

wounded or killed in the process, some of the rebels did escape up the mountain. After the fighting stopped, the Federals took 62 men from the town prisoner, and Stoneman headed along the roads towards Wilkes and Caldwell counties without much incident.¹⁴²

For the remainder of the war, local Unionists and Federal soldiers often plundered known Confederates in the area. Throughout April, Colonel Kirk and his Federals stationed in Boone conducted such raids. In one such instance, Union soldiers came to the house of Confederate Colonel Jonathan Horton, whose house rested on Shearer's Hill near Three Forks Church in Boone. Only his wife was home during the raid, and they took her purse and some jewelry. They tried to take her horse as well, but she scared it into the woods before they could.¹⁴³

As the Civil War progressed, different parts of Western North Carolina reacted very differently with guerrilla violence being most prevalent in areas with strong Union support. Buncombe County, due to its connectedness and large number of slaves for a mountain county, remained supportive of the Confederacy with the only the fringes of the county having significant Union support. As a result, Confederate forces held the county until after the war ended and little partisan violence took place within the county. The situation in Watauga County was much different. With the large number of Union supporters throughout the county due to its isolation, guerrilla violence increased as the war went on and Union bushwhackers slowly took control of the county and captured the home guard. Guerrilla violence was a reaction against Confederate control, and therefore became prevalent in Appalachia.

¹⁴² Hardy, 59-60; Trotter, 254-255; Arthur, 177, 180.

¹⁴³ Trotter, 284; Arthur, 181.

Conclusion

There was a great amount of diversity in Western North Carolina with people living in the broad river valleys generally being more prosperous than those living farther up the more isolated hollows and ridges. In these two areas, the local culture formed differently to some degree and affected which side they chose when the Civil War began. The people in the valleys had a better economy and were more connected to the outside and more in line with the rest of the South. When the Civil War came, most of them supported the Confederacy. Higher in the mountains, people were more likely to see things in local terms, which caused many people's support for the Confederacy to be conditional at best. A majority of mountaineers came from Scots-Irish descent with many families moving south down the Appalachians only a few decades prior to the Civil War. They were somewhat hostile towards any form of central government and had not yet developed a true Southern identity based upon slavery due to their isolation. Therefore, many of the more isolated residents did not see how secession benefited them and were content to live on their small subsistence farms since they had little or no stake in the slavery question.

Within the region, the geography of Watauga and Buncombe counties was quite different causing their outlook on the Civil War to be different. Most of Buncombe County was covered by broad river valleys and had been well connected to other parts of the state and the Deep South through trade. Numerous families from the Deep South would spend their summers in Buncombe County and bring their slaves with them, which often doubled

the slave population in the county which was already one of the highest in the mountains.¹⁴⁴ By the time of the Civil War, Buncombe County had numerous industries and a well established trade with other Southern cities. Therefore, residents there were more likely to identify with the Confederate cause when the war began, and the placement of the Confederate armory in Asheville showed the importance of the town.

In contrast, Watauga County developed much slower before the war and later than did Buncombe County, and even when the war began it still lagged far behind most of the state. Watauga County remained largely isolated and had many more people living farther up the mountains. Even Boone at that time was in many ways a frontier town.¹⁴⁵ In the 1850s, locals built a few industries in the county and trade increased on newly built roads, but the high mountains in the county still caused it to be quite isolated, which greatly affected the view people had when the war began.

In Appalachian North Carolina, Buncombe and Watauga counties experienced the war very differently due to varying degrees of isolation. Buncombe County had Asheville, the economic hub and largest city in the region, but Watauga with its higher elevations and significantly increased isolation also had the lowest white and slave populations in the state in 1860. Leading up to the Civil War, most Buncombe County residents supported the Confederacy, but Watauga County remained much more divided because of its isolation and lack of slaves.

In the first year of the war, enlistments of Confederate soldiers showed a very different picture in Buncombe County when compared to Watauga. In breaking down which districts a sampling of enlistees came from in the county, Confederate strength throughout

¹⁴⁴ Trotter, 26; Inscoe and McKinney, 25.

¹⁴⁵ Inscoe and McKinney, 25.

most of the county was evident. Although Asheville and its surrounding districts had the highest percentage of enlistees, all districts were at least half of the county average with all but Reems Creek being much higher than that. Overall, over 1,000 men from the county enlisted in the Confederate Army before the draft in 1862. A sampling of Union soldier enlistments showed a similar pattern. The vast majority of enlistees came from the four districts on the northern fringe of the county, and most districts were well below the county average. This disparity showed the strength of Confederate support throughout Buncombe County.

Watauga County enlistments showed a much different situation there and the strength of Union support. Only 211 men enlisted before being forced into the army by the draft in April, 1862, and there was a great disparity in Confederate enlistments across the county. Boone stood out with over twice the county average, but Laurel Creek and especially Mountain Home with only one enlistee lagged behind greatly. However, looking at a sampling of Union enlistments showed Unionist strength throughout the county. Most districts were above or near the county average with only Boone and Meat Camp trailing far behind. The districts with the highest enlistment rates, Mountain Home, Blue Ridge, and Cove Creek were the most isolated with the highest mountains in the county. The lack of slaves and a southern identity based upon it in Watauga County caused much of the county to remain strongly Unionist throughout the war.

Although open rebellion against the new Southern government was limited early in the war, deep-seeded Union sentiment remained for a majority of Watauga County residents and many residents on the fringes of Buncombe County. Early in the war, most Unionists, feeling powerless, hoped to simply wait out the war on their small subsistence farms and not

get involved, although some made the long journey to Federal lines in Kentucky to join the Federal Army. As the war progressed and the Confederate Congress instituted the draft, Union men of military age could no longer sit and wait out the war. Many began to join the Union Army, or hid out in the mountains waiting for the right moment to strike back at local Confederates. As local Confederates increasingly pursued Union men hiding in the mountains, they increasingly banded together and fought back.

After Federal troops entered East Tennessee in September, 1863, Union activity in the mountains of North Carolina increased greatly. Many North Carolinians were able to join the Union Army, and Federal soldiers began to recruit in the region and help to arm local Union men. As a result, Union partisan bands formed throughout Western North Carolina. They plundered local Confederates and began the struggle for control of the region against the Confederate home guards. In Buncombe County, continued support for the Confederacy along with a large number of troops stationed in Asheville allowed most of the county to remain firmly under Confederate control with little threat from Union bands. In many instances, troops from Buncombe went into neighboring counties to deal with Union guerrillas, but had little violence to deal with back home. In contrast, Watauga County became more of a battleground starting in the later months of 1863. Union bands increasingly attacked Confederates, and much revenge killing ensued on both sides.

Eventually, the Union partisans led by the likes of Lt. James Hartley, Keith Blalock, and others, began to take control of the county. Skirmishes increased in 1864 in Watauga County, and in the fall Unionists led by Lt. James Hartley defeated the home guard in battle on Beech Mountain. Then in February of 1865, Union partisans captured Camp Mast and took most of the remaining home guardsmen prisoner. Only Boone remained under

Confederate control after that, which ended the following month in March when General Stoneman came through town with 6,000 Union cavalry on his way to the piedmont.

However, Buncombe County remained under Confederate control into 1865. In early April, Federal troops advanced on Asheville, but Confederate troops held the town after a day of battle and the Federals retreated back into Tennessee. It was not until after Robert E. Lee and Joseph Johnson surrendered that the Union Army took Buncombe County, which was at the end of April, 1865.

In the wake of the Civil War, violence continued throughout the region, and hard times fell upon its residents. Casualties both on and off the battlefield strained the labor force, and bitter feelings between the two sides remained. Asheville struggled initially, but soon began to prosper once again. The long sought after railroad that was on the verge of reaching Buncombe County before the war finally arrived in the 1880s. In Watauga County, Keith Blalock continued to bring violence to former Confederates. Seeking retribution for the murder of his step-father, Blalock sought out John B. Boyd, who lived along the John's River in Caldwell County near the Watauga County line. On February 22, 1866, Blalock found Boyd and shot him dead. Shortly thereafter, political power clearly shifted to those who were Unionists or at least disgruntled with the Confederates. William Horton of Boone, who was forced into Confederate service by the draft, served as the county's state representative from 1866-1868 followed by Lewis B. Banner, a staunch Unionist from Banner Elk, from 1868-1870. Union men won the battle for Watauga County, both on and off the battle field.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁶ *North Carolina Government*, 1299; Arthur, 184.

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