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Martin Crawford. *Ashe County's Civil War: Community and Society in the Appalachian South.* Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2001. xiv + 238 pp. $21.50 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8139-2034-4.

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<cite>Ashe County's Civil War</cite>: The More Things Change…

Ashe County's Civil War: The More Things Change…

Martin Crawford's *Ashe County's Civil War* describes the complex dynamics of an Appalachian community throughout the American Civil War era. Crawford contends "that the experiences of Ashe men and women were shaped as much by their membership in the wider American society . . . as by local factors" (p. xi). Beginning with a detailed and well-researched sketch of several prominent Ashe County families, the narrative quickly establishes kinship and neighborhood association as the foundation of Appalachian communities. Such locally-centered relationships formed an intricate social, economic, and political culture within Ashe County itself, and this community study seeks to determine how the Civil War, a "translocal" event, affected it.

Crawford focuses on the differing approaches taken by the residents of Ashe County to the nation's expanding market economy. Despite its mountainous terrain and rural isolation in North Carolina's northwestern corner, families with good land or easy access to the wider markets appeared to embrace the more cosmopolitan, while those in the less favorable areas tended to become more parochial. The high birth rate in Appalachian communities provided the opportunity for many families to keep pace briefly with slaveholders in the labor market. The growing white male population, however, created discontent among those men who stood little chance of inheriting the limited amount of profitable real estate. This demographic pressure convinced many residents to detach themselves from the community and migrate westward where land was more readily acquired and the kinship networks less established. Of those who remained, intermarriage among similarly-situated families gradually reinforced land holding patterns and the community's attitudes concerning market orientation. As a consequence, the disparity of opportunity and wealth within the county became pronounced. The high degree of self-sufficiency and "the strength and utility of the

community's kinship and neighborhood fabric" muted much of the class conflict, but it began to manifest itself throughout the late 1840s and 1850s in a more visible and externally-influenced arena, partisan politics (p. 40).

"North Carolina politics in the late antebellum period blended oligarchy with democracy," Crawford argues, "mirroring a society in which racial and class divisions belied the often strident egalitarianism of its popular culture" (p. 44). Ashe County's remoteness attracted few immigrants into the county and the high percentage of out-migration ensured that the landed elites faced little opposition in local politics. While Jacksonian democracy remained stilted in North Carolina at the local level, national campaigns attracted the high levels of participation typical in other states, and fierce partisan loyalties soon developed. Crawford discovered partisan affiliation to be distributed evenly across a wide variety of occupations, class, and locales in Ashe County. He reasons "it was family membership, the primary element constructing an individual's identity within the community, that proved the single most visible determinant of party loyalty" (p. 52). Democrats maintained a tenuous hold on the county until the 1850s when the Whigs made a resurgence based on expanding railroads and communications within the state. By the mid-1850s, financing for internal improvements had become a paramount issue for North Carolinians, and in 1860, a proposal for ad valorem taxation of slaves to fund new railroads began to reveal significant class-based divisions. By this time, the taxation of slavery had taken a secondary position to that of determining the future of slavery itself, and the county went seemingly united into the secessionist camp.

The question of slavery and its future in the Union, Crawford notes, forced Ashe's citizens to reevaluate their

"political obligations to the external society" (p. 62). Local representative and former Whig, Thomas Crumpler, like many others in western North Carolina and the Upper South, held steadfast onto their conditional Unionism as the lower South seceded prior to President Abraham Lincoln's inauguration. The attack on Fort Sumter and

Lincoln's subsequent call for volunteers left Crumpler and other Union supporters feeling betrayed. They reluctantly conceded the inevitability of the Upper South's secession and joined the Confederacy to protect their communities and families from the invaders.

After April 1861, external forces exerted increasingly greater influence on Ashe County's internal affairs. Epidemics and military casualties began to disrupt the traditional structure of this mountain community. Crawford's research into Ashe County enlistment patterns suggests kinship and neighborhood networks were key factors in entering military service on either side. Moreover, Ashe County's soldiers usually insisted upon serving in locally-raised units with Ashe's antebellum leadership comprising the bulk of their officer corps. Crawford also uncovered significant class schisms in the county's Confederate nationalism. Younger, unmarried men of the wealthier districts were among the majority in the initial wave of volunteering, while married men of lesser means waited almost a full year after commencement of hostilities to enlist. Accordingly, the younger recruits in the interior districts, whose families possessed the majority of the slaves and had significant connections to the wider market economy, were the quickest to respond to the call to arms. Male heads of households living in the outlying districts, whose labor was essential to subsistence farming and who had less prominent ties to the market economy tended to be Unionists, or at best neutral, would later have to be coerced into Confederate service by the conscription acts. Only by late 1862 did Confederate enlistments among the two differing groups begin to reach similar percentages.

Death, desertions, depredations, and disaffection eroded Ashe County's Confederate nationalism, and took a huge toll on the county's population and political economy. Almost one-third of Ashe County's Confederate soldiers died during the war. The interdependent kinship networks ensured that one in seven households lost at least one male member of the household, with approximately forty percent being married men with families. The need for more soldiers as the war dragged on caused the broadening of the Confederate conscription acts which reached deeper in the community's manpower. Already hesitant to support the Confederate cause, many older, married conscript-recruits reluctantly joined the others already serving. Their infectious disenchantment with the war effort spread among those already at the front causing a significant number of desertions within Ashe County units. Distressing developments on the homefront encouraged even more desertions. Families they had left behind began to suffer numerous depredations from conscription enforcement parties and roaming bands of thieves. Compounding these tragedies was the growing cycle of vengeance escalating between the home guards and a sizable Unionist population in Ashe's northern areas bordering Unionist East Tennessee.

With the close of the war, many Ashe County men trickled back into the mountains to resume their lives. Crawford argues, "postwar progress would be measured by the community's ability to reimpose familiar order on disrupted and, in many cases, shattered lives" (p. 153). This was a difficult task as the losses sustained by Ashe County had "left a permanent scar across the community's demographic face, depriving it of the means of renewal" (p. 171). Opposing wartime allegiances intensified rivalries among family groups and made the task of rebuilding even more arduous.

Ashe's citizens relied upon the familiar to confront these difficulties, looking to the old elites for leadership in the immediate postwar period. The chaos inflicted by the war often erupted into violence and the reestablishment of law and order became a primary concern. For postwar political representation, the community discarded partisan proclivities and relied upon local, familiar candidates whose reputation corresponded to their community's values. The majority of these representatives, not surprisingly, were members of the same elite families that had dominated Ashe politics in the antebellum period. Contributing to the reemergence of the elites was the high percentage of Ashe County men lost in the war - fourteen percent of males ages fifteen to forty-nine. Many households had lost the primary provider of domestic independence in the war, and the county had to find some means to compensate for the loss of its agricultural slave labor force and effectively neutralize the freedmen's newfound political power.

Such tragic losses of in the white male population in theory "should have partially solved the community's Malthusian dilemma; in reality, the tragedy deprived it of an indispensable supply of male labor that almost certainly helped postpone postwar economic rehabilitation" (p. 159). The loss of labor and the lack of cash resources severely crippled the county's agricultural econ-

omy. Most elite families had the luxury of land to compensate for the loss of their slaves, and this gave them greater options for rebuilding their economic fortunes. Many elites quickly abandoned agriculture and turned to commerce in order to rebuild their fortunes, using their land holdings to invest in new entrepreneurial enterprises like railroads, ore mining, and merchandising. In fact, the postwar gap between the elite families and the subsistence-farming families of the county exceeded the disparities of the antebellum era.

Politically, postwar partisanship resembled traditional antebellum patterns. Candidates continued to rely on the strength of their personal reputations and kinship connections as a basis for their support, and partisan politics remained a vehicle for diverting attention from local tribulations. Despite the perseverance of provincial religious and familial roots in partisan affiliations, postwar politics in Ashe County served to broaden the perspectives of voters to external issues that tied the community to the region, state, and nation. Issues such as black suffrage and "moonshine" taxes squelched the community's political tensions. The unity issues such as race and taxes provided were manifestations of the county's growing postwar emphasis on "translocal" concerns that had developed during the war, in particular, the special interests of the elite's new enterprises.

Ashe County's Civil War sets a high standard for future community studies. Researchers will appreciate the amount of time and effort expended to interpret mounds of data and primary sources into meaningful analysis. Crawford was indeed fortunate that so much of Ashe County's Civil War era history survived. Even in places where a paucity of records would seem to exist, for example the community's religious history, he wisely uses what was available to provide the narrative with depth and color. The problem with Crawford's work, and perhaps with several recent Civil War Appalachian studies, appears in the supporting secondary literature. The book relies heavily upon John Inscoe's *Mountain Masters* (Tennessee, 1989) and the recently published, _The Heart of Confederate Appalachia: Western North

Carolina in the Civil War *(North Carolina, 2000), edited by Inscoe and Gordon B. McKinney, while ignoring other relevant works. For example, Crawford's emphasis on market orientation as a factor in determining allegiance (which supports the recent conclusions of W. Todd Groce's Mountain Rebels) could have benefited from Lawrence F. Kohl's study of the market revolution's effect on the second party system,* The Politics of Individualism *(Oxford, 1989), yet this book appears nowhere as a reference. Additionally, research on any southern community's culture and how that culture affected southern attitudes toward secession would appear to be remiss without including some discussion of Bertram Wyatt-Brown's southern honor thesis, which is notably absent here. A truly puzzling exclusion was any mention of William J. Cooper's* The Politics of Slavery *(LSU, 1978) despite a chapter bearing that exact title and reaching conclusions similar to those of Cooper himself. Crawford also curiously chooses to embrace Gerald Linderman's controversial* Embattled Courage *(Free Press, 1987) to explain soldiers' motivations for military service rather than the more widely accepted* For Cause and Comrades *by James McPherson (Oxford, 2000). Finally, he neglects Eric Emerson's excellent study of desertion between North Carolina's coastal plains and mountain Confederate regiments that might have added to his argument concerning leadership and desertion rates among Ashe County units (*Southern Historian_, Spring 1996). These historiographical concerns aside, Crawford's study has several enlightening and provocative insights into the community dynamics of Ashe County during the war that should spark the interest by historians researching Appalachian, Civil War, and southern history.

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