My dissertation chapter “To Clap Hands with You Again: How Romance Sustained the Civil War Soldier” examines the emotional “push-and-pull” effect of romantic relationships among approximately one hundred Confederate soldiers from North Carolina and Alabama. Through the careful study of over 1,500 letters between husbands and wives, beaus and sweethearts, this chapter will argue that romantic relationships provided emotional bulwarks that buffered the soldier’s experience of war while also having a profound influence upon their willingness to join, serve, fight, and die during the war. The displays of emotions encapsulated in these letters will also be examined and framed within the context of what historians currently understand about Victorian standards of courtship, romance, and wedlock. This provides an emotional history of the interior of the common soldier while taking a more symbiotic view of the relationship between the home front and the battle front during the war.

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