

Lucy Virginia Smith French's
Journal – Near the War's End



Portrait Miniature of Lucy Virginia Smith French, watercolor
Private Collection

- Jan. 1, 1865 “[Still] we are under the clouds—as dull and gloomy as ever—perhaps even more so. There seems but little to live for—yet we live on.... Life to us is devoid of pleasures—and is made up of endurances.... To look back is most saddening—to look forward, even more disheartening for it seems we have nothing for which to hope.... I feel discouraged in every way—our cause seems to be sinking day by day.... [As] a family we merely get along, as agents for any good anywhere—we are powerless.” [Lucy Virginia Smith French journal]
- Jan. 8, 1865 “The sentiment among officers and men caused them to say, ‘There will yet be a Confederacy!... I do not see that the prospect is very brilliant at present.... I do want to improve myself during all these years we are compelled to live under the cloud of war.... But yet I almost despair of being able to accomplish anything.’” [Lucy Virginia Smith French journal]
- Jan. 24, 1865 Writing in her journal, Tennessean Lucy Virginia Smith French considers some of the rumors circulating within the state: “There is a contraband camp [near

McMinnville] where ... poor wretches literally freeze to death by dozens during this severe weather—they have no clothes scarcely—bedding, shelter, and food the same, while their friends the Yankees curse and abuse them for everything low and vile and no account. Of course, who expected anything else? The papers at present are full of Peace rumors. I think the Yanks are becoming quite as weary of the war as Rebs are reported to be.... A more important rumor is the old one revived—Intervention of England and France. It is stated that they will ... recognize Mr. Lincoln as President only of the States which elected him—thus recognizing the Confederacy.”

Feb. 26, 1865 “Last Wednesday was the 22nd Feb.—the day appointed by the Johnson and Brownlow Convention for the people of Tenn. to vote the State back in the Union as a free State!... A sadder day and sadder faces I think I never saw. It was an understood thing ... that everybody should vote ‘Ratification.’ Federal bayonets were on hand—the motive power—and men marched doggedly into [McMinnville], voted, and immediately slunk home again—as if saddened—perhaps ashamed.” [Lucy Virginia Smith French journal]

April 23, 1865 “A great tragedy has been enacted... in the assassination of Lincoln and Seward.... I was out in the front yard clipping some cedars when the Col. [her husband] came to the door ... and he said very quietly, ‘Well, Lincoln is dead.’ I had not the smallest idea it was true.... The story [we read was] that Lincoln and Johnson had been at the theatre together—a man had rushed up and stabbed both—killing Lincoln and mortally wounding Johnson, and the assassin had himself been killed on the instant.... We are told that about 30 citizens of Nashville were arrested because they implicated Andy [Johnson] in the assassination of ‘Honest Abe.’”

Name: _____

Date: _____

Guided Reading Questions

1. How do you think the writer feels in these journal entries?

2. Name two ways she describes her feelings?

3. What are two significant events that happen in her journal?

4. In the first two entries, do you think she believes the Confederacy will win or lose the war? Why?

5. What does she believe happened to Abraham Lincoln? Was she correct? What does this tell us about rumors during the war?