Preface

The Civil War was like no other time in American history, a prolonged internal conflict provoked by the cash crops that drove the Southern economy. Enabled by enslavement, the Confederacy fought for the right to cultivate cotton, sugar, tobacco, and rice on a vast scale. As the ethnobotanist Richard Evans Schultes observed on occasion, historians stumble because they know little about botany; according to his worldview, knowledge of plant uses is fundamental to understanding civilization and interpreting conflict. Wartime needs for food, drugs, fibers, and timber in both the North and South relied on the botanical properties of diverse plants, some used traditionally and others adopted in wartime. From the military perspective alone, plants provided virtually all of the natural products essential to the Civil War effort, from fibers for uniforms and timber for military engineering to dietary rations and antimalarial drugs.

This plant-centered history of the Civil War examines in detail the economic botany and ethnobotany of the Civil War period, including discussions of civilian foodways and military diet; medicinal plants and practices; cultivation and management of cash crops; plantation landscapes, farming practices and gardens; and the ethnobotany of enslaved people. My goal in writing this book has been to provide a synthesis of various plant uses and botanical connections as they relate to the American Civil War. It is another contribution to Schultes' desire for history viewed and interpreted through a botanical lens, to some extent a companion volume to my earlier book *Plants Go to War: A Botanical History of World War II* (McFarland, 2019).

Wartime is typically a period of innovation sparked by need. This project has intentionally emphasized civilian and military life in Confederate states, which experienced greater impact from wartime conditions than the North. Many botanical products and commodities were in short supply as a result of the Union blockade, and the devastating effects of war on farms and land resulted in additional shortages. In *Resources of the Southern Fields and Forests* (1863), Frances Peyre Porcher compiled a vast array of known plant uses and potential botanical substitutes, and this wartime compendium served as a valuable guide in understanding both civilian and military needs. Porcher described and suggested possible foods, medicinal plants, dyes, textile fibers, resins, oils, timber, cordage, insecticides, soaps, waxes, tannins and others that could be harvested or produced from local plant populations. Many Southerners returned to traditional uses or experimented with alternatives to traditional foods, fibers, medicines, and other botanical commodities,

some gleaned from Native American ethnobotany. Southern biodiversity, landscapes, plantations, and military action all informed the narrative, as did the ethnobotany of the enslaved people whose labor fueled the Confederate economy.

Many pertinent nineteenth-century resources are now extensively digitized, which suited this project for prolonged social isolation during the recent coronavirus pandemic. I am particularly grateful to the Biodiversity Heritage Library, the Hathitrust Digital Library, the Internet Archive, and to the libraries at Princeton, Duke, and Cornell universities for digitizing and sharing numerous useful books and periodicals, including the Southern agricultural journals that provided insights into Civil War stringencies and adaptations. My research involved a wide range of primary sources, including newspapers; journals and magazines; cookbooks; household, farm, and agriculture manuals; military manuals and texts; period agricultural, gardening, and medical texts; travel reminiscences; and the slave narratives recorded by the Works Progress Administration during the 1930s. The latter have been criticized for providing a sanitized, possibly simplistic view of slavery; although over 2,200 interviews were conducted in 17 states, there was no particular plan to interview a cross-section of former slaves. However, many individual accounts recollect the practices and self-sufficiency of enslaved people during the antebellum and war years. There is no particular reason to suspect that these anecdotal memories are inaccurate, although in some cases vernacular plant names are obscure or inconsistent.

Once again I am grateful to family members for their interest and encouragement. My husband, Stephen Sumner, has served as a sounding board as the project unfolded and the narrative of Civil War botany took shape. His vast knowledge of military history helped to contextualize much of what I discovered in the literature. Our daughter and son-in-law, Dr. Catherine Sumner and Dr. Stephen Eyre, answered medical queries with dispatch and provided encouragement during the somewhat dismal days of social isolation and prolonged winter weather. Our grandchildren, Jeremy and Lillian Eyre, brightened the horizon with their good cheer, much of it shared over FaceTime. Once again I hope that this book will provide insights for readers with interests in history, horticulture, and plant science, in particular the economic botany and ethnobotany of the Civil War era. Given the scope of the project, I regret that omissions seem inevitable, and I am solely responsible for any errors. Information on plant uses during the Civil War is shared for historic perspective only and not to suggest or recommend medical treatments, herb uses, or experimentation with any medicinal species mentioned in the text.