Situated in Virginia’s Lower Shenandoah Valley, Winchester, Virginia, endured numerous occupations during the Civil War. Arguably the worst the townspeople endured was General Robert Huston Milroy’s—January 1, 1863-June 15, 1863. A staunch abolitionist and fervent supporter of the Union, Milroy fought a war not only against Confederate troops, but against the Confederate population as well. He firmly believed that only an Old-Testament style scourge of the land could rid this country of slavery and restore the Union. Milroy’s strong convictions moved him to inflict his will on Winchester’s population. Exiles, arrests of civilians (women and children included), secret detectives, and widespread destruction of property, were the norm during Milroy’s occupation.

While this study examines Milroy’s biography from birth to death, its focus is on his six month tenure as military commander in Winchester. General Milroy has never before been the subject of an in depth biographical study. His military career was plagued by his constant bickering with West Point graduates. Ultimately it was his contempt for West Pointers that brought a rapid conclusion to his military career. He despised professional soldiers and spent his Civil War career trying to prove that non-professional volunteer officers were equal or better in ability to graduates of the United States Military Academy.

"My will is absolute law" also serves as a valuable tool for scholars interested in understanding the undying Confederate spirit on the home front and how Federal soldiers initially enforced President Abraham Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation in occupied areas.