
SCWH NEWSLETTER

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Society of Civil War Historians

Spring 2017

A Letter from the President

Dear Civil Warriors,

How exhilarating to have seen so many of you in St. Pete at our annual banquet. It was particularly gratifying for members like me who have been with the Society since its founding in 1985. Indeed, I am starting to feel like a historical figure, as I will very likely be the last of the founders to lead our organization. The remaining few, if not simply retired from the profession, are nearly all dead, diseased or demented.

I do recall vividly, though, our initial organizational meeting in Houston, followed the next year by our first meeting as a Society at the Southern Historical Association conference in New Orleans. We gathered in the late morning, and afterwards, my mentor, Grady McWhiney, who had been a driving force in creating the Society and would become its first president, took me to lunch with Bell Wiley and Charles “Pie” Dufour at one of those little hole-in-the-wall French Quarter restaurants that serve the best food in town. I remember having rice, though I could not say now if it was with gumbo, etouffee, or red beans. Lots of sweet tea, too. Most memorable was the laughter, contented conversation, and optimistic expressions from those three veterans that Civil War historians had created a forum, beyond the restricted program of SHA, to talk about *military* history.

That, of course, had been the initial goal of the founders, and while many of those old-timers would likely shake their heads and rue the fact that we have (inevitably, and not without reason) abandoned their emphasis on battles and leaders, they would surely be proud of our growth as a Society. In terms of membership numbers alone, we are more than four times larger than in the 1980s. Our earliest meetings were very basic affairs, with everyone gathering on the Friday evening of the SHA to enjoy a single traditional conference panel. No one could have conceived of holding an annual banquet, let alone a biennial conference.

Our next conference, I should remind you, will be May 31-June 2, 2018, in Pittsburgh. I trust that all of you took note of the “Call for Papers” sent out from SCWH headquarters. We are in the process of assembling a crackerjack Program Committee, to be headed by T. Michael Parrish. The committee will be keen to entertain proposals for traditional panels, roundtables, even the plenary session that will kick off the first night of our meeting. Of course, individual papers will be considered, but neat packages are always most welcomed. The deadline for submitting proposals is a ways off, September 15, but do not let the date sneak up on you. Submit your ideas now!

For those not attending *la belle affaire* in St. Pete, it is also worth repeating recent changes to the Society’s leadership. Most notably, and regretfully, Carrie Janney has turned over the presidency to me. However, she will continue to provide her uncommonly good sense in all decisions affecting the organization by replacing her predecessor as president, the equally astute Anne Rubin, on the Advisory Board. Nina Silber has joined the board in her capacity as president-elect, to assume the Society’s helm at the conclusion of the Pittsburgh conference. Other new additions, as recommended by the Nominations Committee, are Edna Greene Medford and Paul Quigley, to fill vacancies left by the departure of Joan Waugh and A. Wilson Greene. The remaining stalwart members of the Board are Anne Bailey as editor of the *Newsletter*, Judy Giesberg as editor of the *Journal*, long-time secretary-treasurer Steven Engle, Ken Noe, and William Blair as representative of the Richards Center.

You will have seen in the March issue of the *Journal* an article describing the nearly two-decade long campaign to have Beaufort County, South Carolina, designated as a National Monument to the Reconstruction Era. That campaign, in which we joined with several other historical societies, including the American Historical Association and the Organization of Americans Historians, finally

Cont’t on p. 3

BOOKS IN REVIEW

Stephen D. Engle, Book Review Editor

Andrew S. Bledsoe. *Citizen-Officers: The Union and Confederate Volunteer Junior Officer Corps in the American Civil War.* Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2015. Pp 322. \$47.50.

Andrew Bledsoe has uncovered an innovative opening in Civil War military historiography. Between the effusive research on generals and common soldiers, there lies a significant group of junior officers (Lieutenants and Captains) who were the fulcrum in the execution of command decisions for both armies. Bledsoe is primarily concerned with the sacrificial ethos of the citizen-officer and the cultural importance of that ideal in the history of the republic; and in the strategic effectiveness/implications of small command decisions made by junior officers of both sides. He makes a compelling case that Union and Confederate each believed they embodied the cultural tradition of citizen-leadership best. On the other hand, some might question the implication that small command decisions at the company level had “significant consequences for the outcome of the war” (p. xii). Nevertheless, junior officers had the greatest impact on regular soldiers so Bledsoe has introduced a useful arena of inquiry.

Gary T. Edwards, Arkansas State University

Candice Shy Hooper. *Lincoln’s Generals’ Wives: Four Women Who Influenced the Civil War – for Better and for Worse.* Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2016. Pp. 376. \$39.95

Candice Shy Hooper’s *Lincoln’s Generals’ Wives* is the latest in a series of works to analyze the role of major military officials’ wives, both Confederate and Union, in the Civil War. Hooper focuses on four Union officers’ wives – Jessie Benton Frémont, Nelly McClellan, Ellen Sherman, and Julia Grant – and their relationships with their husbands, their experience of the conflict itself, and their sometimes memorable interactions with Abraham Lincoln. In perhaps her greatest contribution, Hooper convincingly argues that these women’s opinions of and relationship with Lincoln often had a critical impact on their husbands’ careers, decisions, and legacies. Hooper’s clear enthusiasm and interest about these women propels the narrative and effectively holds the reader’s interest. Without greater grounding in the historiography on women’s experiences during the Civil War or the scholarship on the history of marriage, this book is perhaps best suited for undergraduate courses and popular audiences, where it should nonetheless

prove informative and captivating.

Allison Fredette, Appalachian State University

Earl J. Hess. *Civil War Infantry Tactics: Training, Combat, and Small-Unit Effectiveness.* Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2015. Pp. 299. \$45.00.

Earl Hess argued in *The Rifle Musket in Civil War Combat* that small arms’ increased accuracy and range did not revolutionize warfare, as has been commonly supposed. *Civil War Infantry Tactics* expands on this argument, persuasively arguing that 1860s weaponry did not render linear tactics obsolete. Rather, such tactics still offered the most effective means for Civil War commanders to move troops about the battlefield and bring force to bear against the enemy.

Through skillful use of military manuals and wartime accounts, Hess successfully explicates the mechanics of operating Civil War armies. In doing so, he brings both clarity and academic rigor to practical military matters that many historians have too long overlooked. Readers should note that the book primarily addresses tactics in terms of formations and maneuver; to understand elements such as musketry and fortifications, read this volume in conjunction with Hess’s *Rifle Musket* and his field fortification trilogy.

Jonathan M. Steplyk, Texas Christian University

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achieved success earlier this year. The Constitution and By-Laws of our Society severely restrict participation in efforts to “influence legislation” (wisely so, I believe), but this seemed like a worthy exception. In any event, a proposal to support the Beaufort cause received the unanimous consent of the Advisory Board, and a request for your feedback brought universally positive responses.

Finally, I shall make an appeal. As mentioned earlier, our membership is on solid ground, not only in terms of numbers, but also in the breadth of our research and teaching interests, ages and gender, and representation among public historians, archivists, and faculty in history departments large and small. However, it behooves us to expand our membership in all of those categories, as well as in an area where we are woefully out of balance: the numbers of African American historians in our ranks. Toward those ends, I will simply ask each of you to recruit *one more* member to the Society during the coming year. To double the size of the organization in that span of time would be an admirable achievement, and it would certainly vindicate the hopes of our founders.

For now, then, cheers.

Daniel E. Sutherland

MARK E. NEELY WINS JCWE AWARD

Mark E. Neely, Jr., has won the annual George and Ann Richards Prize for the best article published in the *Journal of the Civil War Era* for the 2016 volume year. Three members of the editorial board selected his article, “Guerrilla Warfare, Slavery, and the Hopes of the Confederacy,” for the prize, which earns the recipient \$1,000. The article appeared in the September issue.

Neely’s essay asks why the Confederacy did not turn to guerrilla warfare in the waning days of the war and looks to Confederate national mythology for the answer. Neely argues that Confederate national identity was intimately bound up with the romantic myth of the yeoman partisan. Challenging the conclusions of historians who argue that Southerners ultimately rejected guerrilla warfare for

fear that it would undermine slavery, he counters that Confederate citizens evinced little concern that partisan warfare would put the South’s institutions, including slavery, at risk. Rather, the Confederacy’s military leadership did not resort to guerrilla warfare in last days of the conflict simply because they did not believe it was a viable strategy. The prize committee complimented Neely for revisiting this old debate in a creative and novel way and praised the essay as a “model article” that was “theoretically sophisticated and beautifully written.”

Neely is the emeritus McCabe Greer Professor in the American Civil War Era at the Pennsylvania State University. He is the author of numerous articles and books, including “Was the Civil War a Total War,” chosen as one of the top three articles published in the first 50 years of *Civil War History*, and *The Fate of Liberty: Abraham Lincoln and Civil Liberties* (1991), which earned the Bell I. Wiley Prize and the Pulitzer Prize for history. His most recent book is *Lincoln and the Triumph of the Nation: Constitutional Conflict in the American Civil War* (2011). He currently is at work on a book on Confederate nationalism.

Awarded annually, the Richards Prize recognizes the generosity of George and Ann Richards, who have been instrumental in the growth of the Richards Civil War Era Center and in the founding of the *JCWE*. For more information visit the website at: www.journalofthecivilwarera.org.

CALIFORNIA IN THE AGE OF LINCOLN

The California State Archives is launching its latest online exhibit titled, “A Visit to the Pacific Shore: California in the Age of Lincoln.” It features the Golden State during the age of President Abraham Lincoln. The exhibit is just one element of Google Arts & Culture’s Presidents Day collection (<http://g.co/american democracy>) celebrating the history of the United States presidency from George Washington to the present. The exhibit covers the social and economic changes shaping California in the mid-1800s, while weaving Lincoln’s actions into the story. For more information, go to: <http://www.google.com/culturalinstitute/beta/exhibit/OAKyB2KpYi2VJA>

Mark Your Calendar!

November 9-12, 2017: The SCWH will award the Tom Watson Brown Book Prize at its meeting in November in conjunction with the annual conference of the Southern Historical Association. Your membership must be current in order to attend this banquet. Mark your calendar for the Sheraton Dallas Hotel in the autumn.

May 31-June 2, 2018: The 2018 Biennial Conference of the SCWH will be held in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, at the Omni William Penn Hotel. The deadline for submitting proposals is September 15, 2017. For more information on submissions, see the website at <http://scwhistorians.org/> or contact the Richards Center at 814-863-0151. Final decisions will be made at the Southern Historical Association meeting in Dallas.

Future Meeting Dates of the SCWH and SHA

2018 – November 8-11
Sheraton Birmingham Hotel
Birmingham, Alabama

2019 – November 7-10
Galt House Hotel
Louisville, Kentucky

2020 – November 19-22
Sheraton Memphis Downtown
Memphis, Tennessee

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**For more information, go to:
www.mcwhiney.org**

Membership Rates for 2017

One Year Student Membership – \$30
One Year Student Membership (Foreign) – \$62
One Year Regular Membership – \$65
One Year Regular Membership (Foreign) – \$97