

September 2012

Born to Battle: Grant and Forrest—Shiloh, Vicksburg and Chattanooga (The Campaigns that Doomed the Confederacy)

by Jack Hurst

Basic Books, a Div. of Perseus Books Group, New York, NY—2012

reviewed by Carole Babyak

The first book the author wrote examining Grant and Forrest was *Men of Fire*, and he wrote a biography of Forrest, so he is with familiar research.

In this 414-page book the author points out that Grant grew up around hard working people, not privileged, and Forrest also had to work from a young age. With this in mind, the author makes a case for the two men coming from a similar background. In spite of his West Point education, Grant was not of the upper class, Forrest was not West Point educated and was looked down on by men like Braxton Bragg.

Of course there is a lot the two men had in common. You will learn more about them and will also understand why Bragg's Lt. Gen. such as Longstreet, D.H. Hill and Buckner, among others petitioned President Jefferson Davis to get rid of Bragg. Bragg stifled Forrest because Bragg was concerned with class. Long after the war, Jefferson Davis stated to a Tennessee Governor that he didn't realize how important Forrest was.

Grant's triumphs and mix-ups with many details not emphasized in other books are in this book, and the more that is revealed about Grant the more one understands why he was made Major General in the regular army. Keep reading; all these new books help us better-understand the Civil War and that era.

December 2012

The Long Road to Antietam: How the Civil War became a Revolution

by Richard Slotkin

Literary Publishing Corp.

reviewed by Carole Babyak

This latest book on Antietam is timely because the 150th Anniversary of the Battle has just passed. A hefty book of 428 pages, it is full of the military, social and political maneuverings surrounding the battle. There is good-detailed emphasis on the IX Corp, Burnside's Division.

His Brigadier General was Gen. Jacob Dolson Cox of Warren, Ohio; Commissary Sgt. William McKinley also played a part in the battle. Of course the whole battlefield is covered, but the author has also emphasized Gen. McClellan's role, covering the political intrigues of his officers with Gen. Cox also contributing his opinion. There is continual examination of McClellan's desire to become a dictator.

The author points out that this was happening in Europe, but he goes further than that. In fact on the first page of the introduction he calls all Democrats (presumably McClellan, for he ran against Lincoln on the Democratic ticket) white-supremacists. White-supremacy is a 20th/21st Century term, implying hate crimes and violence. The author doesn't make the case for 19th century people being labeled white-supremacists. Perhaps these Civil War people were very much like ourselves, but they had a different frame of reference and we shouldn't apply 20th/21st century values to them. Perhaps this terminology is applied because modern authors are looking back and extending a branch of Manifest Destiny and turning that into white-supremacy.

To understand as much as we can about that era and this particular battle, one should read as much as one can. Read the General's report, read the Colonel's report, then the artilleryman's view and the infantryman holding the front. Also, the civilians watching their land scrapped bare where the armies had been; not to forget the politicians, then at some point events fall into place. This book is full of good information about the battle, but I feel that McClellan's complex psyche has not yet been revealed.

January 2013

We Have the War Upon Us

by William J. Cooper, Boyd Professor of History at LSU and author of *Jefferson Davis, American*
Alfred A. Knopf, New York, NY 2012

reviewed by Carole Babyak

This book covers events from November, 1860, to April, 1861, presenting all the points of view of that time as well as people like Seward who maneuvered politically to bring his beliefs to the forefront. The background for state's rights comes from the 1790s with Thomas Jefferson and James Madison's thoughts, projecting that states created the Constitution and Federal Government, ratified conventions, and could decide to join or leave the Union.

There were also many complicated views, like Senator Stephen Douglas who opposed President Lincoln politically but not on preservation of the Union. The American people's attitudes also added to the turmoil. President Lincoln again showed his political skill by maneuvering between these different viewpoints.

Compromise is a hallmark of American Politics. This failed in these months before the Civil War. Background information contained in this book helps the reader understand what happened and what failed; and will give you a better appreciation of the men who lived through these events.

February 2013

African-American Faces of the Civil War—an Album

by Ronald S. Coddington

John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, MD. 2012. 269 pages

reviewed by Carole Babyak

The author has arranged this book with photographs of each man, followed by a biography, including birthplace, Civil War service and what they accomplished after the war. These men fought in the Army, served in the Navy, guarded prisoners, were ministers, and wrote poetry and novels.

The first man is Martin Delaney, Major, 52nd U.S. Colored Infantry. Born in Charlestown, VA, 1812, Martin was a barber in Pittsburgh, PA, a writer with Frederick Douglas' *The North Star* and wrote "Blake; or the Huts of America."

The 54th Mass. is well represented, but there are other Army units represented as well as seamen. Charles Redding born about 1840, in Boston, Mass. was taken in by an abolitionist, Henry Lemon. Charles joined the Navy in 1862 (the Navy accepted blacks before the Army). He served on the U.S.S. Kearsage as a steward and cook and was aboard when it sank the C.S.S. *Alabama* in the English Channel, June 19, 1864.

There is even a Confederate soldier, Silas Chandler, who saved Sgt. Andrew M. Chandler after the battle of Chickamauga. Andrew had been hit in the leg and Silas took him home to West Point, Mississippi. He became a carpenter, dying in 1919, before Andrew who died in 1920. The story of what happened after their deaths shows the division still evident in our country. When the Sons of Confederate Veterans and the United Daughters of the Confederacy put a cross on Silas' grave, Silas' descendants expressed opposite reactions to their ancestors service.

Robert Smalls was a pilot in Charleston, South Carolina harbor. Gathering his family and friends on the side-wheeler, *The Planter*, loaded with guns and ammunition, he successfully sailed past Confederate batteries to deliver the ship to the U.S. Navy, also giving them much information.

Many of these men fought in Petersburg at the Crater, took part in the capture of Fort Fisher, were present at the surrender of General Johnston to General Sherman, were recipients of the Medal of Honor, and are buried in Arlington National Cemetery.

Here's a quote from 2nd Lt. James Monroe Trotter, Co. G., 55th Massachusetts (C. I. who greatly appreciated music and wrote a book in 1879 is especially significant): "Music, the noble beauty of music, a contemplation of whose own divine harmony should ever serve to promote harmony between man and man."

A good expression of the sensitivity, dedication and hope of these men.

March 2013

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April 2013

Freedom's Cap

by Guy Gugliotta

Hill and Wang, 2012

reviewed by Gary Reel

Freedom's Cap is a comprehensive history of the building of the extensions of the Capitol and its crowning dome. In its 400 pages, it chronicles the squabbles, delays, politics, and achievements in adding such a major public works project to the city in very trying times. As we see today, simple projects can become much more complex when politicians try to make a name for themselves and have to pull strings to achieve success. This is very much the case in the completion of this shining marble and cast iron dome.

The major characters in this twenty-year struggle are self-proclaimed "architect" Thomas U. Walter and his allies in Congress and among Democrat Presidents versus Gen. Montgomery Meigs and his chief ally Jefferson Davis. Early chapters deal with the leaky wooden dome that covered the original Rotunda, and the shortcomings of both Congressional chamber rooms and the makeshift attempts for solve the issues. Davis had been a strong advocate of major renovations, but did not support Walter, so was able to bring Meigs onboard as an army engineer. The Washington Aquaduct project and Post Office expansion were also major public works in the same period of time that pulled funding and attention away from this

more apparent improvement to the D.C. skyline. Squabbles over design and materials, plus art work and furnishings, brought delays that were often wasteful of work being completed or moved forward. The use of cast iron brought a major change in the project, lightening the load on rotunda walls but still requiring major strengthening of the sandstone, brick, and marble structure. When the contract was finally signed for the cast iron work at a whopping 7 cents a pound, there were critics who thought the government was being cheated to line some pockets, only to find the outbreak of the Civil War caused the price of the necessary iron to soar, making this contract, as it was finally fulfilled, quite a bargain.

The coming of the war hurt Meigs stand with the Lincoln government, who wanted Meigs to be more active as Quartermaster General than a public works administrator. Also harmful was his long term alliance with Jefferson Davis, who quickly became one of the most despised politicians of the era. The return of Walter to control of the Capitol project gave the undertaking more acceptance by Congress and the Republicans, and the completion during the War was an achievement for an administration with so many issues to handle. The book features some excellent photographs and sketches previously unprinted or available, and details show impressive research of primary sources and diaries. The reader needs to have a strong interest in architecture and the limits and advances of this time period to enjoy the efforts of the author. Of special interest is the closing chapter in which Meigs was commissioned to build the Pension Building in the 1880s. Referred to as "Meigs Old Red Barn" because of the use of over 15 million bricks and terra cotta shapes to make a building with a light and airy rotunda that made lighting less important as the technology varied between natural, gas and electric lighting, either Gen. Sherman or Sheridan is said to have remarked, "too bad the damn thing is fireproof" (sounds like a Sherman to me). Today it is the National Building Museum, but its main function is the site for Presidential inaugural balls, for which its lofty columns and green plants give an elegant setting.

The foresight and vision that created the basic Capitol building of today are pretty much lost on Americans, so the value of Gugliotta's work is filling that gap of knowledge. It would be a check on my bucket list to climb the inside of the dome and stare down at the Rotunda floor, thinking of the sights that this room has witnessed since its completion. The climber would also be close enough to the Brumidi fresco that crowns the room to see the faces of Jefferson Davis, Alexander Stephens, and Robert E. Lee as a group of villains under the Washington throne in the section depicting "War."

May 2013

The Man Who Saved the Union, Ulysses S. Grant in War and Peace

by H.W. Brands, Dickson Allen Anderson Centennial Professor of History, University of Texas, Austin.

Finalist for Pulitzer Prize for his biography of Benjamin Franklin

Doubleday, Div. of Random House, New York, NY 2012 637 pages

reviewed by Carole Babyak

The author is frequently seen on television commenting on 19th century America. This is a complete biography with details on Grant's Presidency. Many direct quotes from friends and war-time associates present a clearer picture of this complex man.

You find out Julia's views, especially of interest is the night the Grants did not attend the theatre with President Lincoln. The war time years of course examine his generalship and the drinking problem that he is still being accused of, inflated by jealous associates.

Charles A. Dana was sent by Secy. Stanton to spy on Grant; however, getting to know Grant, Dana sent back favorable reports which influenced Stanton and Lincoln to bring Grant to the eastern battlefields.

Warren's General Cox is quoted about the Civil War and Grant's Presidency, for Cox was his Secretary of the Interior. Jay Gould, another Ohioan who helped finance the Civil War and had interests in the Erie Railroad, was active during Grant's administration. Grant's relationship with American Indians is covered and he was a unifier with them as he was with African-Americans.

In the end, the author makes the case that Grant was the nation's unifier. A long book, but every page is of interest because it presents possibly the most complete biography of Ulysses S. Grant.