A Letter from the President

Dear Civil Warriors:

I had intended, in this my second and final letter to you as president of the Society, to urge—quite heretically, some will think—that each of you consider at some point in your career escaping the shackles of Civil War history and writing about something completely removed from the war. You will find it refreshing, even liberating, and the experience will give you immense satisfaction as a historian.

Instead, I feel compelled to speak about diversity. Not the usual kind, which we tend to associate with race, ethnicity, and gender, but of geographical diversity. Sounds strange, doesn’t it, so let me explain. I have been made unhappy and frustrated over the past two years by the number of Civil War historians who have either dropped out of the Society or refused ever to join it. This did not seem logical to me, so I made enquiries. It turns out that the majority of the quitters and non-joiners have perceived the Society as being either indifferent or hostile to members of our guild who either live west of the Mississippi or whose principal interest in the war focuses on the Trans-Mississippi or Far West. Sometimes, both factors are in play. The feelings run deep, too, even to the point of having personal friends reject (politely, of course) my request that they join or rejoin our ranks.

They justify their refusal most often by pointing to the fact—impossible to deny—that every one of the Society’s six biennial conferences has been held east of the Mississippi River. It now seems (announcement pending) that the seventh conference, in 2020, will also be held in an Atlantic coastal state. In fact, we have never met farther west than Chattanooga, or any farther south, for that matter. My friends blame the leadership of the Society for this neglect. They point out that members of the Advisory Board have come overwhelmingly from east of the river, both in terms of residence and in their thinking about the war. All but two members of the current board, I was reminded, live east of the river, and mostly in states that border the Atlantic Ocean. Investigation shows that only 4 of 25 Board members over the past decade have come from west of the Mississippi, and only two of those people considered the Trans-Mississippi their primary research interest. Doubling down on the issue of research interests, many “westerners” also grumble that some members of our guild go out of their way to belittle the wartime roles of the Trans-Mississippi and Far West.

Whether or not their perceptions are valid hardly matters. They believe them to be true, and that is why we have a problem worth fixing. We would be quick enough to rebut, challenge, and rise up in righteous indignation at any suggestion of racial, ethnic, religious, or gender bias in our ranks. It is equally right to show that we prize all students of the war by embracing, not simply being sensitive to, geographical inclusivity. In fact, in as much as the protestors are equally discouraged by the seeming lack of respect given their area of study, we might also consider this to be an issue involving a diversity of ideas. Evidence of this may be seen in the number of people who live in the East but still fail to participate in the Society because they believe we do not speak to their interests.

The question, then, is what to do about it. One obvious step would be to hold the 2022 biennial conference west of the river, ideally in Houston, Dallas, New Orleans, or Little Rock. That is a long time from now, and perhaps too late to repair the apparent damage, but there is no question of it being done. As I understand the situation, the argument against a western meeting has always been that it would be poorly attended, given the fact that so many members living east of the river would be less inclined to travel that far. Well now, just think about that reasoning. Many westerners have been saying the same thing when asked to travel to such
BOOKS IN REVIEW
Stephen D. Engle, Book Review Editor


Timothy B. Smith’s Altogether Fitting and Proper: Civil War Battlefield Preservation in History, Memory, and Policy, 1861-2015 traces how Americans have sought to memorialize and preserve Civil War era battlefields and related sites, through legislation, policy, and associations, and, especially, the people who led the way. Smith, although perhaps overly dependent upon the reconciliationist interpretive theme, effectively demonstrates an evolutionary development of ideas behind federal, state, local, and private efforts to establish parks organizationally. Smith uses a generational approach in his chronology, beginning with the Civil War soldiers and veterans who were the first to mark events at sites, through private and state work. Federal efforts notably began in the 1890s, but preservation became complicated, even controversial, as contrasting views on public memory of the war, and changing oversight, policies, and funding often worked at cross purposes. More recently, professional historians and private grass roots organizations are shaping battlefield preservation.

Ginette Aley, Kansas State University


Essays in Soldiers in the Southwest Borderlands highlight the diversity of enlisted men who served in the U.S and Mexican military from the close of the Mexican War to the surrender of Geronimo. Ten biographies profile Anglos, Indians, Mexicans, African-Americans, and European immigrants, many of whom crossed the boundaries of their identities as easily as they crossed geographical boundaries. Three essays concern soldiers during the Civil War; other essays link veterans, freedmen, and post-war expansion to the war as well. Throughout, themes of U.S. empire building, violence, and settler colonialism are explored. Collectively, the authors develop an interesting and diverse social history, including topics such as military justice, mining, entrepreneurship, immigrants, intertribal conflicts, geography, concepts of manhood, Indian sovereignty, and folklore. With growing interest in the Southwest during the Civil War, this book fills a niche providing a broader examination of the diversity of experiences and peoples within the region.

Linda Barnickel, Independent Scholar


Mark A. Lause has completed his valuable two-volume study of Confederate Gen. Sterling Price’s invasion of Missouri. The campaign, begun in September 1864, is a significant but often overlooked operation in the war. The rebel commander’s aims to influence the Union presidential election and bring that slave state into the Confederacy were undermined by his incompetence. Missing golden opportunities to seize Saint Louis and Jefferson City, the invasion devolved into a plundering raid. Federal troops in the state assembled and pursued the rebels westward, while Union forces in Kansas marched eastward to put the squeeze on the invaders. Though they fought the rebels frequently, especially near Kansas City, Union commanders failed to coordinate their actions and in November allowed the remnants of Price’s army to escape. Federal generals Rosecrans, Pleasonton, and Curtis came in for frequent censure; James G. Blunt receives praise for fighting hard and doggedly pursuing Price. Lause’s outstanding effort puts the spotlight on the Trans-Mississippi area of operations.

Stephen E. Towne, Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis

Funding for the Newsletter is provided by McWhiney History Education Group, McMurry University

The SCWH Newsletter is published quarterly. Regular dues are $65.00 and include the newsletter and a journal subscription. Dues should be forwarded to the UNC Press Journals Department, 116 South Boundary Street, Chapel Hill, NC 27514.

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places as Philadelphia, Richmond, and Baltimore.

A Trans-Mississippi meeting might also inspire a broader diversity of ideas, which our biennial gatherings have lately lacked. Of the twenty-three sessions in Chattanooga, only one was devoted to the Trans-Mississippi, and that was on the very narrow topic of the Indian Territory. Only three other papers in the remaining twenty-two sessions dealt with the war in the Trans-Mississippi, and two of those were on the somewhat overdone topic of Missouri’s guerrilla war. Another paper, on the Far West, dealt with wartime monetary policy in California. The West will fare better in Pittsburgh, being featured in one of the twenty-four sessions and in another four papers. However, most of those papers address either the postwar years or Mexico, and there will be only one Trans-Mississippi paper, on Missouri.

Now, I understand that program committees must play the hand they are dealt, but surely it does not stretch credulity to suggest that if a committee receives few papers devoted to the war west of the Mississippi, it might be blamed on a paucity of Society members likely to submit such proposals.

On that same topic, perhaps we could devote a “special issue” of the Journal of the Civil War Era to the Trans-Mississippi. We did that about a year ago for the Far West. I also saw recently an excellent “Field Dispatch” from Maria Angela Diaz on the Muster web page concerning the importance of the Far West. Not that the editors of the Journal, past or present, have ignored the work of Western scholars. As with our program committees, they can only consider what they receive. So it is up to us to encourage colleagues with an interest in the Trans-Mississippi to submit their work, for I do think that a special issue would make the Society appear more welcoming.

Whatever action we take, I suspect it will require time to woo back and win the confidence of the bolters and fence-sitters. Still, like all worthy causes, it is surely worth the effort.

Meantime, I hope to see lots of you, from wherever you hail, in Pittsburgh. Until then, Cheers,

Daniel E. Sutherland

**Silber to Become SCWH President in June**

Nina Silber of Boston University, current president-elect, will succeed Dan Sutherland of the University of Arkansas as president at the Society’s biennial conference in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, May 31-June 2. Silber will serve until 2020 when the newly elected president-elect, Joan Waugh, will take office.

Dr. Silber is Professor of History and Director of the American and New England Studies Program at Boston University. She is the author or editor of seven volumes on the Civil War era, including Daughters of the Union: Northern Women Fight the Civil War (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005) and Gender and the Sectional Conflict (University of North Carolina Press, 2008; paperback edition, 2015).

Dr. Waugh is Professor and Vice Chair for Academic Personnel at the University of California, Los Angeles. She has published numerous essays and books on Civil War topics, both single authored and edited, including her prize-winning U. S. Grant: American Hero, American Myth, (University of North Carolina Press, 2009). Her most recent book (co-authored with Gary W. Gallagher), is entitled The American War: A History of the Civil War Era (State College, Pennsylvania: Flip Learning, 2015).

**Gronningsater Wins Richards Prize**

Congratulations to Sarah L. H. Gronningsater, winner of the 2017 George and Ann Richards Prize for her article, “‘On Behalf of His Race and the Lemmon Slaves’: Louis Napoleon, Northern Black Legal Culture, and the Politics of Sectional Crisis.” The $1,000 prize is awarded annually for the best article in the Journal of the Civil War Era. 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 at Penn State and in the founding of the journal.
SCWH Biennial Conference  
May 31-June 2 in Pittsburgh

The SCWH will meet at the Omni William Penn Hotel, 530 William Penn Place. The rooms are $140 per night. The on-line registration form or the mail-in registration form will be found at the following web address when it becomes available:

https://sites.psu.edu/scwhistorians/conference/scwh-conference-information/

Members registration fee is $75 if paid by May 15 but will be $100 after that date. Non-member registration is $100 and $125 after May 15. Guest registration is $30 per day. Student registration is $25, although graduate students on the program are not required to pay.

A draft of the conference program can be found at:


There will be an “Outstanding Paper by a Graduate Student” award. Check the website for more information. There will also be a “Workshop: Advice for the Job Market” for graduate students as well as a graduate student luncheon on June 1.

**A Reminder:**

The Society of Civil War Historians has a new website address at:

https://sites.psu.edu/scwhistorians

Please bookmark our new address to keep up with the Society’s news and events. The Society’s old address, scwhistorians.org, has been deactivated.

Renowned historian Dr. Charles P. Roland celebrated his 100th birthday in early April with a surprise party at the University of Kentucky. Congratulations Charlie!

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

2021 – November 3-6
Astor Crowne Plaza
New Orleans, Louisiana

**Be sure to check out the SCWH on Facebook for the latest information.**

The *Journal of the Civil War Era* can be found at:

https://journalofthecivilwarera.org

Funding for the Newsletter is provided by the McWhiney History Education Group
McMurry University

For more information, go to mcwhiney.org