

Civil War Book Review

Summer 2000

Article 32

Feature Essay

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Recommended Citation

Madden, David (2000) "Feature Essay," *Civil War Book Review*. Vol. 2 : Iss. 3 .
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/cwbr/vol2/iss3/32>

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Madden, David *REDISCOVERING CIVIL WAR CLASSICS: Hayward Cirker, Innovator.*

Twenty-five years ago, buoyed by the Bicentennial Spirit, I ventured in my Dodge Dart upon a nationwide odyssey of America, giving prearranged and impromptu readings from my fiction. Springfield, Illinois, was my first stop. Listening to the African-American guide in Lincoln's house, I noticed a book of Civil War photographs by Alexander Gardner on the foyer table for sale. I bought it. It was one of the inspirations for my later Civil War novel, *Sharpshooter*, out of the research for which I created the United States Civil War Center. All that is a build-up to my eager public declaration on this occasion that I owe that Springfield moment to the late, venerable Hayward Cirker, venturesome founder of Dover Publications.

Readers of *Civil War Book Review* all know Dover books, the look, feel, and smell of them, and are grateful for their existence. One of the many reasons why it is appropriate in this column to pay homage to Hayward Cirker is that, with very few exceptions, every Dover book is a rediscovery. Hayward was monolithic for me and I miss him terribly, even as only a voice on the phone, in letters, and in his presence wherever I see his books on shelves. I am proud to say that I helped create several and suggested others.

Following the Gardner book and the books of two other photographers Hayward rediscovered, Andrew Russell and George Barnard, the first history of the War I read was Fletcher Pratt's. Sixteen years later, at my urging, Hayward reissued Pratt's *Short History*. Inside my "Dover" folder is a list of almost 40 projects Hayward and I discussed. Every time we talked, like two matches striking each other, we discussed three or four books that needed reprinting or creating, at least one of which actually got published. Our spirited conversations produced *Spies of the Confederacy*, Edwin Forbes's *Civil War Etchings*, Whitman's *Civil War Poetry and Prose*, Bierce's *Civil War Stories*, a Civil War uniforms coloring book, Porter's *Naval History of the Civil War*, Silber's *Songs*

of the Civil War, and a postcard book of Brady's photographs of Civil War leaders.

Hayward was my ideal as one of the last of the great imaginative, innovative, risk-taking publishers. I told him so, often, on the phone, because we never met. What inspired me to write to Hayward was his major publishing innovation of bringing out classics for a buck, exploding into a china shop of overpriced books. Only a man that crazy could get that rich that fast. Rich mostly in the pure enjoyment of doing the deed itself. The kinship I felt with him at that time derived from my own successful effort to innovate in the college textbook market, glutted with overpriced eponymous anthologies, by lowering drastically the price of textbooks I created for Harcourt Brace. We delighted in each other's innovations.

Soon after World War II, with his wife Blanche's intimate collaboration, Hayward created a humble, homemade, homespun, mom-and-pop outfit, named Dover after their home, that mastered a tough business. He discovered books in the public domain and made them affordable. Private profit and public service are a winning combination.

Hayward's intellect was eclectic, his standard was excellence, but amiability and generosity also were traits that made him distinctive among publishers. Dover now offers 7,000 titles--many of which have stayed in print for decades--oddly chosen classics, books as practical as a Swiss knife, music scores, art, architecture, and, above all, some say, timeless illustrated children's books. He explored every conceivable discipline and area of knowledge, with ventures into the odd, even the exotic, and the esoteric. To throw away one of his colorfully illustrated catalogues is to feel at least a twinge of guilt. "This is a permanent book," Dover trumpets, and dealers put Hayward's quality paperbacks next to hardcover books.

"I'm no Renaissance man," he demurred once in a *Time* magazine profile. "I'm just curious." Sounds like the spirit of da Vinci to me. He died without exhausting his vast and deep curiosity. Was Hayward Cirker the last of the myriad minded, venturesome, risk-taking publishers? If the attention he deserves is paid to him, we may find that the man, like his books, will enjoy permanent influence.

Founding director of the United States Civil War Center and currently Donald and Velvia Crumbley Professor of Creative Writing at LSU, David Madden is editor of two newly published books, Beyond the Battlefield (2000) and The Legacy of Robert Penn Warren (2000). He is at work on his ninth novel.