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Allegiance: Fort Sumter, Charleston, and the Beginning of the Civil War

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Review

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Mangham, Dana M. *Oh, For a Touch of the Vanished Hand': Discovering a Southern Family and the Civil War.* Southern Heritage Press, \$24.95 ISBN 1889332402

Family Reunion

The Civil War publishing field does not lack for works on battles, regiments, and personal histories, but Dana M. Mangham's "**Oh For a Touch of the Vanished Hand**" is one book that explores the Civil War from the view of a genealogist first, historian second. Mangham traces 37 of his Confederate ancestors prior to, during, and after the conflict. He tells this story not only by relating their personal stories but by weaving their experiences into the war itself. In addition, the author provides a useful guide for others interested in doing the same type of research for their own ancestors.

It is a bold task, and Mangham has left few stones unturned in order to meet his goal. In any search for data on individuals who are not famous, papers or letters pertaining to them are likely to be scarce. Indeed, only two of Mangham's ancestors left firsthand impressions of their wartime experiences for him to use. To counter this problem, the author consulted the usual historical sources and then went far deeper. He searched the compiled military service, census, and pension records, period newspaper accounts, letters of those who would have associated with an ancestor, postwar family reminiscences, and both Confederate and Federal unit histories. The sources are so well-blended that the reader seldom notices that multiple documents are required to pull together even the smallest part of the Mangham clan's story.

By working at a personal level, the author was also able to find and use data that those working at a more abstract level would miss. One of the most striking examples of this technique at work concerns the question why his ancestors fought. Having encountered the oft-repeated idea that the common southern soldier was not fighting for the preservation of slavery, Mangham found that

indeed only nine of the 37 men personally owned any slaves. However, further research showed that 20 of them came from families that owned slaves, and six more had other family members who were involved with the “peculiar institution.” Thus only two of the 37 had no known connection to slavery. While not conclusive, this fact, along with other data the author encountered, commands the attention of the reader.

As with any work, some parts of the book find their target better than others. This is not a small book, and does not lend itself to casual reading. It also suffers from the fact that there is no easy choice for organizing such a complex story. Presented on a timeline, the names and places would blend into and unrecognizable jumble, but separate stories by person and the war would need to begin and end several times. Mangham realized this difficulty and took the latter course. It was the better choice, but still makes a long war even longer.

An obvious labor of love, this book also enlightens, challenges, and provokes the reader. Because of its story about the common southern man’s experiences during the war and its usefulness as a guide in genealogical research, **“Oh For a Touch of the Vanished Hand”** presents a rare view into a diverse family’s experiences during the Civil War.

Marc J. Storch is the author of several articles on the Civil War and a co-author with his wife of an essay in the book Giants in their Tall Black Hats: Essays on the Iron Brigade (1998). They are currently working on a regimental study of the 2nd Wisconsin Infantry.