

Bridging Deep South Rivers: The Life and Legend of Horace King

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Review

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Lupold, John S. and French Jr., Thomas L. *Bridging Deep South Rivers: The Life and Legend of Horace King*. University of Georgia Press, \$29.95 ISBN 820326267

Many rivers to cross

Slave pioneers architectural design and social equality

The book's title is a little misleading. Picking it up I expected to find a volume on the design and construction of bridges in the Southern United States during the period centered on the War Between the States. Chapter Two gave some hints that this is not what I would find. A sketch of bridge trusses that label a Howe Truss as a multiple King Post Truss put me off at first, but I considered it could be a case of different applications using different names for the same thing. When I set that concern aside and proceeded, I found, rather than a book about the design and construction of bridges in the 19th century, a work on a most unique individual who created 19th century bridges.

The book is a biography of a slave and later freedman Horace King. The tale begins with King as a slave owned by a John Goodwin. It was a truly interesting relationship between owner and owned: a relationship that grew to be one of mutual respect based in part upon King's abilities in managing construction sites as well as upon the nature of the two men. The work also delves into the lives of the two men and their families. As such, **Bridging Deep South Rivers** is less a book on the engineering design and construction of bridges than on the socio-economic life of a developing nation.

The authors, Lupold and French, have done considerable research in giving us a view of life in the South during the middle of the 19th century. It is a well documented work based a great deal on the remaining personal papers of Horace King and John Goodwin. Since these men did not record in any great detail the design steps used to erect these bridges, the authors did not have such material to

go on. Instead they focused on the human interactions needed to accomplish such projects. They do a very credible job of describing the local politics involved in bridge building, something that has not changed much to this day. We also get a picture of the relationships between Southern states, and how those relationships influenced bridge construction. Bridges became a key to economic development throughout the United States, and we get a good sense of this from the descriptions provided by Lupold and French.

More than just a view on the life of those engaged in the design build industry of the 19th century, the authors give us a view of the nature of life in slave states. They show that a freed slave really wasn't free, and that the Jim Crow Laws of the postwar period had their genesis in antebellum laws regulating the lives of freed slaves. We also get a glimpse of the social conditions affecting the South in the period after the war and the impact of these conditions on former slaves and former owners alike.

The one chapter that covers the period of the War Between the States gives us a view of what it was like on the home front in the Confederacy. The development of the industrial base is described by a man who helped build it. The work describes King's relationship with officials of the Confederacy and his life as a contractor for and employee of the Confederate industrial base.

Horace King is a man whose legend grew in the years that passed after his death. Lupold and French have made it a point to separate what can be documented from what can only be guessed at. The authors also raise some valid questions about recent claims that King was an ardent supporter of the Confederacy. The book is well documented with footnotes and a respectable bibliography, though it is not a book that grabs the reader and has you spending long hours turning the pages to get to the end. While it wasn't the book I expected it to be when I picked it up, it was one that did give me a new understanding of this period of American History. Anyone who wishes to better understand the development of the southern United States both socially and economically during this period will find **Bridging Deep South Rivers** a good way to begin that understanding.

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