

Chimborazo: The Confederacy's Largest Hospital

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Review

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Green, Carol C. *Chimborazo: The Confederacy's Largest Hospital*. University of Tennessee Press, \$29.95 hardcover ISBN 157333162

Curing Confederates

A study of the South's efforts off the battlefield

Carol C. Green quotes Jefferson Davis on page 143 of her book, The only department [of the Confederate Government] that was not demoralized was the Hospital Department that was well in hand and doing efficient service until the end of the war. Dr. Green's book, **Chimborazo**, narrates the history of the hospital which was the shining star of the Confederacy until the end. In the ruins of the Confederacy, Chimborazo Hospital was an unmitigated success in planning, administration, and patient care.

Beginning with the Preface, Green presents a readable narrative built upon the little accessed official records of Chimborazo Hospital, Richmond, Virginia, and the much better known and human diaries of Phoebe Yates Pember. Although the records of most Confederate hospitals were burned, records of Chimborazo are now housed in the National Archives. Among these surviving records are the sets of orders and memorandums sent between James Brown McCaw, the director of Chimborazo, and his staff.

The first chapter explains the organization of the Confederate Army's Medical Department and introduces the reader to the organization and state of the medical profession of the 1860s in the United States. It is also obvious that the author is of the new school of scholars of Civil War medicine such as Jay Bollet and Jack Welch and the social historians of medicine. Green points out the historians' past penchant for vilifying Civil War doctors and ridiculing their ignorance. In contrast, she takes every opportunity to accurately describe the knowledge a physician working at Chimborazo had access to and how that knowledge compared to medical knowledge among the best educated physicians

of the Civil War era.

One chapter of the book includes details of Chimborazo's staff, including the employment of slaves of the doctors and free blacks. Dr. Green is obviously persuaded that McCaw was a humane, wise and able administrator and that he found appropriate solutions for problems of personnel and materials.

In the next chapter, the author focuses on Chimborazo's patients. Details of the transit of patients to the hospitals and how they were housed are given. Visitors to the hospital caused many problems for the hospital staff. Anyone interested in the life of a Confederate soldier would be well advised to read at least this chapter.

Supplying the hospital with the items to heal and make patients comfortable became more and more difficult as the Confederacy's strength ebbed. The heroic struggles of Chimborazo's staff to benefit their patients are impressive. Although the Confederacy had no organized civilian group equivalent to the United States Sanitary Commission, Dr. Green has found records which show that contributions received from private groups in the various Confederate States made it possible to maintain high standards of care.

Another chapter details the type of medical treatment given to the patients and meticulously compares that treatment to medical standards of the day. The closing of the hospital and the evaluation of the Chimborazo's place in the rise of American hospitals concludes the book. The influence Civil War hospitals had on the growth of American hospitals and the formation of the medical profession in the United States after the war is an overlooked phenomenon.

Glenna R. Schroeder-Lein has previously delivered a detailed picture of the mobile Confederate hospitals in the Western Theater, *Confederate Hospitals on the Move: Samuel H. Stout and the Army of Tennessee*. These Confederate hospitals were organized by Samuel H. Stout. Green builds on Schroeder-Lein's work in revising the image of the Civil War surgeon and medicine, she presents a detailed picture of probably the best run hospital of the Civil War and its administrator, Dr. James Brown McCaw.

Dr. Green has accomplished the seldom fulfilled task of interpreting statistics, records, and official correspondence into a meaningful, readable text. This is the first Civil War book whose main character is a hospital itself. The

book is a worthy addition to literature on Civil War Medicine in general and the workings of the Confederacy off the battlefield.

Nancy Pippen Eckerman has been the special collections librarian at the Indiana University School of Medicine for over 15 years and is the author of Indiana in the Civil War: Doctors, Hospitals and Medical Care. She is a frequent lecturer on Indiana Civil War surgeons and Midwestern hospitals during the Civil War.