

The Guard Always Changes but the Quality Remains the Same

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Editorial

THE GUARD ALWAYS CHANGES BUT THE QUALITY REMAINS THE SAME

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Since the smoke cleared from battlefields across the United States and the guns of the Civil War's combatants fell silent Americans began their timeless endeavor to understand what they had endured. This (now 150-year-old) struggle to understand the complexity of the war and its causes guarantees that, as the generations pass, we will always remain in good hands. Civil War scholarship has evolved constantly since the war and continues to do so in fascinating and insightful ways, hinting that continued research and interest in this topic will continue to yield ripe fruit. The Winter 2013 issue of *Civil War Book Review* will be my last as editor of this fine publication but the conversation will continue and well-qualified hands will lend their guidance in the issues to come. Michael Frawley, who conducted the interview in this issue will take over as editor and I do not doubt that he will prove more than capable of this task.

In this the Winter issue, we feature several books that provide nuanced ways of examining the Civil War and this cutting edge scholarship helps to guide the next generation to a better understanding of its past. Christopher Childers, a former editor of *Civil War Book Review* himself, has written an excellent work that examines the concept of popular sovereignty and the ways in which it challenged Americans prior to the Civil War as they sought to combat the mounting sectional crisis. *The Failure of Popular Sovereignty: Slavery, Manifest Destiny, and the Radicalization of Southern Politics* will undoubtedly prove a useful text for many years to come. Gary W. Gallagher and Rachael A. Shelden have compiled and edited a vital collection of essays that explore other political questions. *A Political Nation: New Directions in Mid-Nineteenth-Century American Political History* proves the continued viability of political history and its contents will appeal to a varied range of scholars. James M. McPherson has provided a comprehensive analysis of naval operations during the Civil War in *War on the Waters: The Union & Confederate Navies, 1861-1865*. McPherson's contribution will surely stand tall for many years to come and contribute a great

deal to the conversation about naval warfare. Megan Kate Nelson breaks new ground in *Ruin Nation: Destruction and the American Civil War*. In this study, Nelson digs deeper to provide an understanding of what the war did *to* people and their environment, blending Civil War studies with environmental history in a very helpful way.

James Oakes graciously granted *Civil War Book Review* an interview and our new editor, Michael Frawley, conducted this interview. Frawley and Oakes discussed his new Gilder Lehrman Lincoln Prize-winning *Freedom National: The Destruction of Slavery in the United States, 1861-1865* which explores Republican Party policy toward slavery both before and during the four years of conflict.

We have several other excellent features this quarter as well. Michael Taylor highlights a collection of letters that shows the intimate relationship between a southerner and his family as the war loomed. Randall Miller wrote a very useful essay for our sesquicentennial column that examines the complex ascendancy of Abraham Lincoln in the presidential election of 1860. Finally, Frank Williams looks at a recent documentary history of Mary Lincoln's insanity trial in order to better understand one of the least-favored first ladies in American history.

As always, and for the last time, I must remind our readers that this scholarly journal would not happen if not for the excellent support staff, including our editorial assistant David Blankenship (who will also leave his post this spring), our fantastic library and special collections staff who help us, and the readers, reviewers, and publishers who continue to work with *Civil War Book Review* and make this a worthwhile venture.