

### Guerillas in Civil War Missouri

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## Review

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**Erwin, James W.** *Guerillas in Civil War Missouri*. The History Press, \$19.99  
ISBN 978-1-60949-388-2

### Uncovering Guerrilla Warfare in Missouri

The Civil War is still a live issue in Missouri and Kansas, and many of the hard feelings created by the vicious guerilla war between Missourians and Kansans from 1854 to 1865 still remain strong today. The moral and philosophical rectitude of the warring factions are still in dispute in Kansas and Missouri, and though the Civil War formally ended in 1865, in Kansas and Missouri, a war of words and hard feelings still rages in many quarters.

James W. Erwin is an attorney who holds a Bachelor of Arts in Mathematics from Missouri State University and a Master of Arts in History from the University of Missouri. Erwin earned his law degree from the University of Missouri Law School, and is a veteran of the United States Army. *Guerillas in the Civil War in Missouri* is the first book Erwin has published. Erwin writes a chronological narrative that tells the basic story of the guerilla war in Missouri, and how it affected the lives of Missouri civilians during the Civil War. The Civil War in Missouri was inextricably linked to the Civil War in Kansas, and Erwin also tells the story of Kansas's effect on the guerilla war in Missouri in this work.

Erwin writes for the general public and his writing style is engaging and easily understood. Erwin offers snippets of quotes from the era's newspapers, and leading historical figures throughout his work, but primarily relies on his narrative to tell the story of the Civil War in Missouri. Erwin's work cites recent authoritative secondary sources in this entertaining and informative work.

He covers the most well-known actions that occurred during the guerilla war during the Civil War in Missouri, those incidents that are most often researched

by historians and readers searching for the basic facts about the guerilla war in Missouri will find their quest fulfilled in this work. However, readers who have studied the guerilla war in Missouri during the Civil War will find that Erwin has not broken any new ground in this work, but to be fair, those who are knowledgeable about the Civil War in the West are not Erwin's intended audience. Erwin's work is an interesting and unsophisticated work that achieves the goal set by the author, to educate the general public about the guerilla war in Missouri.

The author presents a balanced interpretation of pro-and-anti-slavery and Union and Confederate forces, which is rare for a narrative about the guerilla war in Missouri during the Civil War. Most works about the subject matter are strongly biased towards either the Union or Confederacy, and Erwin's work is unusual in that he presents the reality of the historical events during the guerilla war during the Civil War in Missouri that is fair to both the anti-and-proslavery and Union and Confederate sides of the issue in his work, portraying neither side as pure heroes or pure villains. Erwin's work is a breath of fresh air in this aspect, for fair and balanced works concerning the guerilla war in Missouri and Kansas are few and far between.

James W. Erwin's work does not break any new ground in the historiography of the guerilla war in Missouri, but that is not his purpose in writing this work. Erwin's intended audience is a non-academic reader, and his work is extremely effective in simultaneously achieving his goal of creating an entertaining and educational work that stimulates an interest in further research into the topic by the reader. *Guerilla Warfare in Civil War Missouri* is an excellent addition to the canon of historical works about the Civil War in the West.

*Grady Atwater is the Site Administrator of the John Brown Museum State Historic Site in Osawatomie, Kansas. Atwater's research specialty is John Brown and other abolitionists and he writes a weekly column concerning history for the Osawatomie Graphic titled "History and Heritage."*