

Recalling Deeds Immortal: Florida Monuments to the Civil War

Thomas J. Brown

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/cwbr>

Recommended Citation

Brown, Thomas J. (2015) "Recalling Deeds Immortal: Florida Monuments to the Civil War," *Civil War Book Review*: Vol. 17 : Iss. 1 , Article 11.

DOI: 10.31390/cwbr.17.1.12

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/cwbr/vol17/iss1/11>

Review

Brown, Thomas J.

Winter 2015

Lees, William B. and Gaske, Frederick P.. *Recalling Deeds Immortal: Florida Monuments to the Civil War*. University Press of Florida, \$44.95 ISBN 978-0-8130-4996-0

Examining Florida's Markers of Memory

This book is a valuable contribution to research on Civil War commemoration. William B. Lees, who is executive director of the Florida Public Archaeology Network at the University of West Florida, and Frederick P. Gaske, who is former state historic preservation officer for Florida, have crisscrossed the state to examine monuments and combed manuscript archives, government documents, newspapers, and other primary sources related to these sites. They have also acquainted themselves with much of the scholarship on Civil War memory that has proliferated so dramatically over the past few decades. *Recalling Deeds Immortal* provides a thorough catalogue of Civil War monuments in Florida that ably highlights initiatives of interest beyond the state.

Lees and Gaske present a treasure trove of information. Ralph Widener's *Confederate Monuments* (1982) identified thirty-two memorials in Florida, not counting gravemarkers for individuals. *Recalling Deeds Immortal* describes fifty Confederate monuments installed before the publication of Widener's book and almost thirty dedicated since then, as well more than a dozen Union monuments and several Florida monuments at military cemeteries and battlefield parks outside of the state. The 142 photographs in the book include an outstanding selection of period images and Lees's clear documentation of the recent appearance of almost every monument. Individual entries discuss local experiences of the Civil War as well as monument sponsors, fundraising strategies, suppliers and designs of memorials, siting questions, inscriptions, dedication ceremonies, and in many cases, the post-unveiling careers of monuments, including vandalism, relocation, and various forms of renewal.

Aiming to provide an overarching history as well as a detailed listing, Lees and Gaske do not organize their findings in alphabetical or geographical order but in a series of chapters defined by chronology, the sponsorship of monuments, and a distinction between community monuments and markers for hallowed sites. Introductory and concluding sections in each chapter seek to contextualize the coverage of individual monuments. This ambition sometimes carries the authors beyond their local expertise, and the book can be an uneven guide to the sectional politics, gender and race relations, and militarization of American culture that shaped the heyday of Civil War monuments from the 1860s into the 1920s or the factors that have prompted a flurry of new works since the 1980s. Despite the breathless title they have adapted from the Confederate monument dedicated in Jacksonville in 1898, however, Lees and Gaske fully recognize that monuments are not transparent tributes to timeless virtues but accretions in which the obviously commemorated aspects of the Civil War form only one set of layers.

Although the extensive literature on Civil War memory has devoted little attention to Florida, this book points toward several dimensions of state remembrance that are distinctively significant. Northern migration yielded an unusual number of Union monuments, including the zinc statue in Jacksonville's historic Evergreen Cemetery that Lees and Gaske have chosen as their cover image, evidently because its backward list so vividly illustrates their sense of the current vulnerability of Civil War memory. *Recalling Deeds Immortal* measures the potential and limits of Union commemoration in the deep South, most notably in the veterans' colonies at Zephyrhills, St. Cloud, and Lynn Haven. The prominence of the Battle of Olustee in the combat records of black Union soldiers is another local story of national importance. Lees and Gaske show that this memory was controversial in 1899, when the UDC successfully advocated the repeal of state legislation authorizing an intersectional memorial at Olustee because white southerners "did not care to divide honors intended for the confederate dead with negro dead of the union army" (196). The memory remained controversial when the book went to press in 2014 with debate simmering over a proposal to install a monument to Union soldiers in Olustee Battlefield Historic State Park that would complement the Confederate monument dedicated in 1912. The struggle over that initiative was merely one facet of a third striking feature of Civil War commemoration in Florida, the post-Reagan surge that has seen more Confederate monuments installed since 1980 than the state unveiled between 1880 and 1920.

These provocative highlights and the authors' assiduous research make *Recalling Deeds Immortal* a welcome resource for scholars of Civil War memory as well as visitors to the Florida monuments that Lees and Gaske so meticulously profile.

Thomas J. Brown, associate professor of history at the University of South Carolina, is the author of Civil War Canon: Sites of Confederate Memory in South Carolina (University of North Carolina Press, 2015).