

Preserving the Written Word

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Recommended Citation

Childers, Christopher (2008) "Preserving the Written Word," *Civil War Book Review*: Vol. 10 : Iss. 3 .
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/cwbr/vol10/iss3/1>

Editorial

PRESERVING THE WRITTEN WORD

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Summer 2008

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The recent death of historian John Y. Simon marks the passing of one of the nation's finest documentary editors and gives us a chance to reflect not only on the work of a remarkable historian, but also on what that work means to scholars of the Civil War era.

From 1962 until his death in July, Simon served as the editor of *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant*, a project encompassing a projected 31 volumes of the Union general's papers. Massive documentary editing projects like this facilitate research in collections simply not accessible to a great many scholars. They represent a tremendous investment of time, money, and effort, as scholars comb through mountains of documents and cull the most significant pieces to reprint. Certainly, John Y. Simon's *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant* serves as a model for documentary editing.

As the sesquicentennial of the Civil War draws closer, historians have redoubled their efforts (if in Civil War studies such a task is even possible!) to draw new insights from the documentary record. The books in this issue of *CWBR* exhibit that fact; from cutting-edge efforts at asking new questions to timely reexaminations of old issues, their efforts serve as a fitting tribute to scholars like John Simon, who devote their professional lives to making primary sources more accessible to students of the Civil War era.

This issue features many important new titles that broaden scholarly horizons as well as focus more sharply on lingering questions. Caroline E. Janney has written a study of the efforts of Ladies' Memorial Associations and their role in creating the Lost Cause myth. Anne Marshall reviews *Burying the Dead but Not the Past: Ladies' Memorial Associations and the Lost Cause*, a book that challenges current conceptions about memory and the Lost Cause.

Two books in particular investigate perennial questions about the Civil War. Lex Renda reviews *Lincoln and the Decision for War: The Northern Response to Secession*. The eminent historians David M. Potter and Kenneth M. Stampp wrote seminal works on secession in the 1940s and 1950s, but Russell McClintock revisits the secession winter and analyzes how Northerners and President-elect Abraham Lincoln responded to the crisis. And Mark E. Neely, Jr. probes the brutality of the Civil War in his latest book, *The Civil War and the Limits of Destruction*. John Cimprich reviews Neely's provocative new study.

For many years, students of Civil War history have read Sam R. Watkins's memoir *Co. Aytch* for pleasure and profit. Watkins's great-granddaughter has released his personal copy of the memoir, complete with his own revisions and additions, for publication. John D. Fowler reviews this new edition of a true Civil War classic.

Wherever your own Civil War studies take you—from reading the books in our current issue to researching in the marvelous documentary source collections we have today—enjoy the pursuit!