

STATE HISTORICAL
SOCIETY OF IOWA

IOWA DEPARTMENT OF CULTURAL AFFAIRS

The Annals of Iowa

Volume 73 | Number 4 (Fall 2014)

pps. 384-385

Home Front: Daily Life in the Civil War North

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ISSN 0003-4827

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Recommended Citation

Lewis, Dan. "Home Front: Daily Life in the Civil War North." *The Annals of Iowa* 73 (2014), 384-385.

Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17077/0003-4827.12153>

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Home Front: Daily Life in the Civil War North, by Peter John Brownlee, Sarah Burns, Diane Dillon, Daniel Greene, and Scott Manning Stevens. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013. xx, 193 pp. Illustrations, exhibition checklist, notes, index. \$35.00 hardcover.

Reviewer Dan Lewis is the director of Educational Programs for the Virginia Community College System. He has taught American literature and U.S. history at several community colleges in Virginia.

Home Front: Daily Life in the Civil War North is an interdisciplinary collection of essays on “the visual culture of Civil War-era home fronts in the North” (4). The genesis of this volume was a joint exhibition by two of Chicago’s major cultural stakeholders that “juxtapose[s] war-era paintings from the collection of the Terra Foundation [for American Art] with a wealth of material drawn from the Newberry Library’s collection, including popular prints, illustrated newspapers . . . and other ephemera” (8). The book showcases not only a diverse array of “home-front artifacts” (8) but also a talented group of scholars, most of whom are affiliated with one of the two institutions.

At the heart of this scholarship is the notion that the Civil War period encompassed a wide range of different home fronts—spanning urban to rural, New England to Midwest, New York City to Chicago. *Home Front* provides a counterpoint to treatments of the sectional conflict that privilege the battlefield. Instead, it “open[s] a new window onto a world far removed from the horror of war and yet intimately bound to it” (10).

One of the ways Peter John Brownlee and Sarah Burns explore the home front of the Northeast is by focusing on periodicals that were circulated in that region. Brownlee examines prints and cartoons that depict slaves, contrabands, and freedmen and finds that the Confederacy’s overreliance on cotton helped to shape the “slave’s trajectory from bondage to freedom” (18). Burns writes about several of Winslow Homer’s wood engravings in *Harper’s Weekly*, a popular illustrated newspaper, because they highlight women’s increasing agency that was engendered by the exigencies of war: women serving as nurses in hospitals and as laborers in factories producing munitions.

Scott Manning Stevens considers another home front that has been a blind spot in the historiography of the Civil War: “the American Indian home front” (47). Stevens surveys depictions of Native Americans during the war years and concludes that “the home front for the Native Nations of North America was a place of lawlessness and danger in the face of land-hungry settlers” (69).

Daniel Greene and Diane Dillon make much of several U.S. Sanitary Fairs in Chicago and New York that were held to raise funds for

the Union's war effort. Those events not only "brought the war home" to civilians in urban landscapes but also provided opportunities for artists to support the Union cause by painting nationalist pictures and "creat[ing] moving memorials to lives lost in the war" (73, 129).

The authors of *Home Front* contend that the volume offers "a vivid portrayal of the ways in which ordinary Northerners dealt with crisis and calamity, and—ultimately—strove for healing and renewal" (9). Although the book does a good job of introducing readers to the visual culture of the North's different home fronts, the essays are largely silent on the extent to which paintings and prints actually helped audiences come to terms with the war's inherent destructiveness. For instance, Dillon argues that several landscape paintings featuring "glorious scenery" completed in the war years "would have offered visual escape to eyes weary of war" (150), but she provides no contemporary commentary on those art works in support of this intriguing interpretation. Although Dillon and her colleagues struggle at times to convince their readers that the war informed a plethora of art works produced during the war, they nonetheless demonstrate the promise of using visual culture to probe "the undiscovered country" of the home front.

Harriman vs. Hill: Wall Street's Great Railroad War, by Larry Haeg. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013. xvi, 375 pp. Maps, illustrations, appendixes, notes, bibliography, index. \$29.95 hardcover.

Reviewer Sean Kammer is assistant professor of law at the University of South Dakota Law School. He is the author of "The Railroads Must Have Ties: Edward R. Harriman and Forest Conservation, 1901–1908" (*Western Legal History*, 2010).

I have been taught to reject the idea of cyclical history. In reading Larry Haeg's compelling account of the Northern Pacific financial panic of 1901, however, I cannot help but think that history, in this case, has indeed repeated itself; in at least one important respect, the twentieth century closed the same way that it opened. In both eras, new technologies inspired frenzies of speculative stock buying (in the early twentieth century, railroads and steel; at the end of the century, microprocessors and the Internet), and in both, the markets crashed in spectacular fashion.

Haeg, a former executive vice president of corporate communications for Wells Fargo, recounts the epochal battle for control of the Northern Pacific between James J. Hill, who built the Great Northern, and Edward H. Harriman, who headed the Union Pacific and Southern Pacific. At the time, the Northern Pacific itself seemed an unlikely target. The company, after all, had already twice gone bankrupt, even after