

"The Infernal War": The Civil War Letters of William and Jane Standard

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a side-splitter. In a time of savage war, critics saw Lincoln's most humanizing trait as his most inhumane: for them, nothing so ill-befit a front line as a punch line, especially a smutty one. If funning was a personal asset for the "Widow-Maker of the nineteenth century," as one Democratic paper called him, it was a political liability.

Nobody will regret reading this book for the jokes alone; they glint on every page. Unlike Lincoln himself, not all of them belong to the ages. But it is no small recommendation in a history monograph to predict that somewhere, every reader will give a yelp of appreciative laughter.

"This Infernal War": The Civil War Letters of William and Jane Standard, edited by Timothy Mason Roberts. Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 2018. xi, 359 pp. Illustrations, appendix, notes, bibliography, index. \$34.95 hardcover.

Reviewer J. L. Anderson is associate professor of history at Mount Royal University. He is the author of "The Vacant Chair on the Farm: Soldier Husbands, Farm Wives, and the Iowa Home Front, 1861-1865" (*Annals of Iowa*, 2007) and coeditor of *Union Heartland: The Midwestern Home Front during the Civil War* (2013).

Between September 1862 and June 1865, William and Jane Standard exchanged more than 200 letters. While William served as an officer in the 103rd Illinois Volunteer Infantry, Jane managed the household and family property, cared for three children, and took in boarders. Their letters are filled with news of neighbors, family, battles, casualties, farming, politics, and the changing material conditions of life on the home front and in the war's Western Theater. William and Jane vehemently opposed the war, regularly condemning Lincoln, emancipation, the Republican Party, and Republican neighbors and family members whose lives intersected with theirs.

Readers will see the myriad problems married couples faced when husbands departed. Jane was surprised on several occasions by the appearance of creditors who sought payment for debts that she did not know they owed. On another occasion, Jane recovered the family's stolen wagon. She bought and sold livestock, hay, and fodder, butchered hogs, and paid taxes and creditors. Ultimately, Jane collected relief money from the county, allowing her to pay property taxes and remain at home.

As much as William hated confiscation and emancipation, he was an active participant in the evolution of hard war. He was an expert forager, "cramping" pork, turkeys, chickens, horses, and other items. His sympathies were clearly on the side of white southerners, and he made frequent disparaging remarks about enslaved African Americans and freedmen. But he also recognized that white southerners were divided

by the war. In early 1863 he made a telling comment regarding the difficulty of serving in an army of occupation: "They said that they was good Union people but it is hard to tell who is for the Union down here" (53).

Among the most fascinating aspects of the Standards' correspondence are William's expressions of his hatred of the army and the correspondence about leaving it. In 1863 William discussed surrendering to guerrillas in Tennessee rather than to regular Confederate forces. The guerrillas, so their story went, paroled their prisoners and allowed parolees to go home. William eventually recognized the improbability of that plan, but that did not stop him from planning his separation. Later that year, both William and Jane made cryptic comments about some "experiment" by which William would leave the army. Jane later replied that she was glad William "made up your mind not to desert" (158). Around that time, they made several comments about moving to California, which may have been part of the plan for desertion. Soon after, however, William contented himself with applying for a discharge (for which he was rejected) and pledging to do his duty. After participating in the Grand Review in May 1865, William praised the generals on the reviewing stand as "the greatest in the world" and affirmed his sense of accomplishment in serving the Union cause. "I will tell you," he wrote, "it makes me feel proud to see so many nice faces, and so many fine little girls and boys, greeting the sunburnt soldier welcome back to his home" (261).

Anyone interested in the Iowa wartime experience will learn a great deal from *This Infernal War*. Although the Standards were from Illinois (via Tennessee on Jane's side), it is not difficult to imagine that their attitudes paralleled those of numerous Iowa couples. Furthermore, the struggles they endured were commonplace across the western states, regardless of political affiliation. My only criticism of the book is that the publisher used a miniscule font size for the epilogue, making it difficult to read. That is a comparatively minor detraction, however, from what is a well-edited, thoroughly annotated, and remarkable collection of letters.

Scandinavians in the State House: How Nordic Immigrants Shaped Minnesota Politics, by Klas Bergman. St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2017. 304 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$19.95 paperback.

Reviewer Anna M. Peterson is assistant professor of history at Luther College. Her research and writing have focused on Norwegian American immigrant women during the Progressive Era.