Love and Valor: Intimate Civil War Letters Between Captain Jacob and Emeline Ritner

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ers recognize that LeClaire and especially Patterson determined how
this autobiography read. They included many remarks that Black Hawk
probably did not make, for Patterson edited what LeClaire brought to
him to make the life story of the then-famous Black Hawk appealing
to white readers. Although Nichols wants readers to understand Black
Hawk and Sauk life, he does not overwhelm us with an array of scholar-
ly annotations. Rather, he provides enough to clarify particular indi-
viduals and places, but the bulk of the book is the text. He also sup-
plies a short, solid bibliographical essay.

Although Nichols's concern for credibility is well placed, much of
what is contained in this new edition of Black Hawk's autobiography
is clearly either true or accurately reflects Black Hawk's thinking. For
instance, Black Hawk's comments on his family history and life, his
remarks on Sauk cultural ways, his rendering of his actions in the
Black Hawk War, and his antipathy toward Keokuk all seem to hon-
estly stem from Black Hawk.

Black Hawk may well be Iowa's most famous Indian, even though
he lived in the area that became the state only during his last few
years. His autobiography, is well worth reading, and Roger Nichols
and Iowa State University Press should be commended for bringing it
to the public in a compact yet edifying format with the injunction that
"modern readers using some care can indeed find much that was Sauk
and that was Black Hawk in this account" (xxi).

Love and Valor: Intimate Civil War Letters between Captain Jacob and
Emeline Ritner, edited by Charles F. Larimer. Western Spring, IL: Sig-
ourney Press, 2000. 453 pp. Illustrations, maps, notes, appendix, bibli-
ography, index. $19.95 paper.

Reviewer Kenneth L. Lyftogt is a lecturer in history at the University of Northern
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Students of the American Civil War have long been fortunate in the
availability of research materials. There are national and state military
and political records, as well as an abundance of memoirs and per-
sonal letters. Love and Valor, as an example of a collection of personal
letters, edited and annotated into book form, deserves to take its place
in the Civil War bibliography.

The book is the result of years of family research by Charles F. Lar-
imer of Illinois. Larimer explains in the book's introduction how he be-
came interested in the subject and how he was able to use the Internet
to enhance what was originally a family collection of letters from Jacob
Ritner, a Civil War officer. Most state and local archives have collections of letters from Civil War soldiers. Such letters were sent home from the front and carefully preserved by loved ones. But letters sent to the soldiers are rare. Letters from wives and sweethearts were carried on the march, read and reread, subjected to weather and camp life, and, as a result, were often destroyed. *Love and Valor* represents a refreshing exception. Larimer was able to find letters from Jacob's wife, Emeline—not as many as one might want, but the real thing—and her letters bring a magnificent home-front dimension to this collection.

A true love story unfolds as one reads the letters. Ritner was not eager to leave his wife and family to go to war, but his valor is exemplified by his willingness to serve, first for three months in the First Iowa Volunteer Infantry and later for the duration of the war in the Twenty-Fifth Iowa Volunteer Infantry. Emeline did not want her husband to be away, and often expressed her resentment of his absence, but she understood the magnitude of the struggle and tried to maintain life at home when it seemed that her husband and most of her male relatives were serving the Union.

This is also a first-rate Iowa story, with Jacob and Emeline and other family members writing to each other and expressing their views on the crucial issues of the age: the need to preserve the Union, the evils of slavery, the qualities of the officers under whom the men served, and the role of Christian faith in a family's life. The letters are rich in their descriptions of hometown life at each stage of the war as well as the process by which civilian volunteers slowly became true soldiers. If there is a deficiency, it is in Jacob's sparse battle descriptions. Although he was in some of the fiercest fights of the war, it is as if a gentleman does not offer the bloody details of combat to his wife.

The greatest strength of the book is its complete story, from the dream of a short war that would be over in three months to the grinding reality that the war seemed to go on forever, a reality that had profound effects on both the soldiers and their loved ones at home. Anyone interested in going beyond the scholarly narratives of the war and looking at primary sources will be well served by this collection.


Reviewer Janet Welsh, O.P., is assistant professor of history at Dominican University. Her dissertation was "Where the Spirit Dwells: Catholic and Protestant