

Roger D. Launius attempts to answer these and other questions when telling the life story of this generally forgotten man. The research underpinning the book is solid. Launius uses many primary and secondary sources to produce a readable and informative standard academic biography of the life and times of Alexander William Doniphan, whom Launius understands as a true political moderate representing what Arthur M. Schliesinger Jr. defined as the "vital center" (283).

Frank Blair: Lincoln's Conservative, by William E. Parrish. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1998. xv, 318 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$29.95 cloth.

REVIEWED BY WALLACE HETTLE, UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA

William E. Parrish's biography of Frank Blair traces the life of a Missouri politician whose career raises fascinating questions about the Civil War era. Blair served as a Democratic Party operative in the antebellum period, worked as a Republican leader when the approaching Civil War shook Missouri politics, became an effective Union general, and left the Republicans during Reconstruction because he believed Congress to be too radical on racial issues.

Frank Blair, by today's standards, is not a particularly appealing fellow, especially because he sided with the racist politics of Andrew Johnson during Reconstruction. Yet Parrish refuses to judge Blair by late twentieth-century principles, and casts him as a sympathetic character. The multiple references to Blair as "Frank" in the text are probably designed to avoid confusion between Blair and other members of his politically active family, but they also may show that Parrish, like so many biographers, developed a nearly affectionate understanding of his subject.

Parrish has done enormous work in the archives, newspapers, and other primary sources. Moreover, his expertise in Missouri's political history is unsurpassed. This is the definitive life of Frank Blair, and the bibliography and notes are well worth consulting for anyone interested in nineteenth-century Missouri history. Missouri was a peculiar state during the Civil War era, with its combination of diehard boosters of slavery and passionate Republicans such as Blair. In emphasizing the machinations of Missouri's political elite, rather than political culture, campaigns, and voting behavior, Parrish implicitly draws a picture of a state where the elites set the political agenda. His description of the political process is a splendid antidote to the vast body of

contemporary historiography that suggests that in the Civil War period politicians faithfully responded to voter opinion.

Nineteenth-century Missouri was very different from Iowa: it was a slave state, witnessed extensive guerilla warfare during the Civil War, and had a speedy resurrection of the Democratic Party during Reconstruction. In contrast, most Iowans were staunch Republicans whose affiliation with the party grew during the Civil War. The book will deepen understanding of Republican politics on the national level, and that of Iowa troops who fought in Missouri.

Frank Blair was, by the standards of the national Republican Party, a "conservative." But by the standards of his state in his time, he was a radical much of the time. Parrish closely examines the transition from the Democrats to the Republicans, but begs the larger question of the relationship between Blair's Jacksonian politics and Free Soil politics. Are Jacksonian Democratic ideals and attitudes toward race especially congenial to antislavery men in the border states? In many respects, Blair's world view resembles that of his friend Andrew Johnson. W. E. B. DuBois rightly described the politics of such antislavery Jacksonians in the South as those of "unconscious paradox and contradiction." Some of that sense of paradox is missing here.

Blair is too complex, and led too rich and varied a life, to be pigeon-holed as a conservative. But it is almost impossible to criticize Parrish's views on Blair except on the basis of the wealth of information and research that Parrish himself provides on his subject. Parrish's industrious mining of the sources makes the book useful for historians of the politics of the Civil War era.

Constructing the Little House: Gender, Culture, and Laura Ingalls Wilder, by Ann Romines. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997. ix, 287 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, indexes. \$55.00 cloth, \$16.95 paper.

REVIEWED BY CHERYL ROSE JACOBSEN, WARTBURG COLLEGE

Whether or not one has read the Little House series, Ann Romines's interdisciplinary study makes a compelling case for the richness and complexity of both the narratives and their production by Laura Ingalls Wilder and her daughter, Rose Wilder Lane. *Constructing the Little House* is an equally rich and complex—but wonderfully readable—analysis that draws from literary criticism, cultural studies, feminist theory, history, and autobiographical reader-response. Romines maintains that this critical matrix is necessary to understand the "ongoing

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