

Book Reviews

Michael D. Gibson, Book Review Editor

Civil War Iowa and the Copperhead Movement, by Hubert H. Wubben. Ames: The Iowa State University Press, 1980. pp. xi, 280. Photographs, notes, bibliographical essay, index. \$15.95.

After six score years the Copperhead movement remains an enticing phase of the never-ending epic of the American Civil War. In 1861 Iowa was a largely frontier or developing state with a predominantly agrarian economy and society, yet it was to be heavily involved in a civil war of staggering proportions and unanticipated intensity. Previous scholarly studies have analyzed and interpreted the Civil War political struggles in border slave states like Kentucky and Missouri and in border free states like Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio, where the early settlers had been fairly evenly divided in origin between free and slave states. Now it is good to have a comprehensive, thorough and objective study of the political alignments and controversies which developed in Iowa during the Civil War. Professor Hubert H. Wubben was educated in Iowa and has been able in recent years to scrutinize the Iowa political scene from the vantage point of the West Coast. Both his bibliographical essay and his extensive notes reveal the rich and varied sources for the study. Especially noteworthy are the extensive diaries and correspondence of Charles Mason, probably the outstanding Iowa Copperhead; the official and private papers of Governor Samuel Kirkwood; and over seventy Iowa newspapers, including the German press. The publishers have presented the results in a very attractive format.

Professor Wubben has accurately entitled his book, for it encompasses the economic, social, and political life of Iowa during the Civil War with particular attention to the varying opposition to the Lincoln administration and the prosecution of the war from the Union standpoint. This volume is definitely not a military history of Iowa or of the country as a whole. The young men of Iowa, and some not so

young, volunteered in large numbers and fought in both historic battles and in numerous minor skirmishes, but their valiant endeavors receive little attention here. Wubben's major emphasis throughout is upon the political struggle within the state and even more upon the Democratic division between those who generally supported the Union war efforts and those who opposed these efforts in different ways and in varying degrees. Since the so-called Copperheads never controlled the state government their arguments and activities represented a more or less disloyal opposition which caused serious concern for state and federal officials and among the loyalist elements of the population. On a continuing basis the local newspaper editors were the most persistent spokesmen for their political party or faction, but partisan encounters also dominated legislative sessions, state conventions, local public meetings, and even private associations.

For decades the crucial issue among the historians concerning the Copperheads has been how much of a danger or threat were these anti-war elements to the gigantic national efforts for the preservation of the Union by military force. Wubben concludes that there is no convincing evidence of a large or well-organized conspiracy in Iowa to force the state to withdraw from or scale back in its support of the war. Nevertheless there was a substantial minority of Iowa citizens who were frustrated and distraught by astounding Union military failures, shocked and deeply saddened by the war's mounting death toll, aroused by the threats of the draft, and angry at what they considered to be unwarranted, illegal and even unconstitutional war measures taken by the Lincoln administration. Popular discontent was intense and widespread in Iowa, especially after the traumatic military defeats in December 1862. Accordingly, by 1863 the Copperheads blatantly declared the war to be a failure and unrealistically called for an armistice and the restoration of the Union by peaceful negotiations rather than by bloody battles and other fruitless measures. At the same time Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation aroused the latent anti-Negro sentiment among many citizens and enabled the advocates of an early peace to claim that the original purpose of the war had been perverted into an unconstitutional crusade to free the slaves. The deep concern over the future of the nation affected all classes of people in Iowa. The Copperheads were aggressive and confident of success. Government officials and loyalist citizens firmly believed that the Copperheads were definitely rendering aid and comfort to the enemy, indirectly and probably directly as well. Perhaps at no time in the entire history of the United States was popular morale as low and the

Book Reviews

danger of national disintegration as great as during the early months of 1863.

But in early July the tide turned decisively, both on the great battlefields and on the homefront in Iowa and throughout the North. Professor Wubben carefully traces the decline in Copperhead prospects through their stinging defeat in the fall elections of 1863, the rising economic prosperity, and the slow but relentless military successes of 1864. During this second half of the war the Copperheads moderated their political tactics somewhat but they continued to demonstrate their unwillingness, or perhaps their inability, to perceive the true nature of the Civil War and its likely outcome.

The Civil War stands out as the most tragic and significant episode in American development, and Wubben shows clearly its impact in the agrarian state of Iowa. His use of sources is adept; his analyses are scrupulous and sound; his interpretations flow naturally from the evidence; and his conclusions are restrained, logical, and fair. His style is clear, concise, and vigorous. The book was obviously designed for serious students of history but it will also appeal to general readers. If there are such things as definitive accounts of a lively and controversial subject, this book should be definitive for the Iowa Copperheads.

This reviewer finds one minor fault of omission in the book, particularly as it serves the general reader. Very little attention is given to the general military course of the war, except for the discussion of political developments during 1865. While professional historians and serious students will not consider this a special handicap, less sophisticated readers would profit from the insertion of a sentence or phrase at appropriate points to provide background information on major military or political developments.

Professor Wubben closes his fine book with a frank and critical analysis of the fundamental historical question of Copperhead loyalty. He concludes that at least some of the anti-war Democrats were definitely disloyal in that they strove incessantly for an early and negotiated peace even if it involved the dissolution of the Union and worked against its restoration by military victory, which was the prime objective of the federal government. The repeated Copperhead call for "the Constitution as it is and the Union as it was," was a deceptive diversion since the prewar Union had been destroyed beyond peaceful restoration. By 1862 the overwhelming majority of both northerners and southerners knew what historians today consider beyond question: that the leaders of the Confederacy had not the slightest intention of voluntarily returning to the Union under any foreseeable cir-

THE ANNALS OF IOWA

cumstances. Thus active opposition to the war for the Union by deed or word became actual disloyalty or a grand delusion and probably both. Finally the author makes clear that for a generation after 1865 Iowa Democrats paid a heavy price for their failure to realize that during a great national crisis disloyalty can be a cardinal political sin. Anyone wishing to understand the delicate nature of loyalty in America during wartime will find Wubben's concluding chapter both illuminating and interesting.

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Your Affectionate Husband, J. F. Culver, edited by Leslie W. Dunlap.
Iowa City, Iowa: Friends of the University of Iowa Libraries, 1979.
pp. 466. \$15.00.

This book offers Americanists valuable insights into the Victorian mind in the Midwest. Captain Joseph F. Culver was only twenty-eight years old. He left his wife in Pontiac, Illinois while fighting for the Union cause during the Civil War. His great-grandson, Senator John Culver, has rendered a very valuable service in donating 233 wartime letters of Captain Culver to the University of Iowa libraries.

Leslie W. Dunlap, dean of library administration at the University of Iowa, has judiciously annotated the key concepts of Captain Culver's letters. His religious and moral convictions sustained him through many campaigns. The careful reader can follow war change since Culver marched under General Sherman. The letters selected were written between August 1862 and June 1865. The letters are quite detailed, revealing Culver's political outlook (he came around to supporting Lincoln's views) and essentially Victorian convictions. The editor's footnotes greatly aid the reader in evaluating the primary documents.

Your Affectionate Husband includes an introductory essay, extensive annotation, and a reliable index. It should provide a stimulating source of documentation. Soldiers in the Union cause wanted to win the war; Culver's self-revealing letters show how he articulated that winning desire.

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