

intensely loyal to his superiors and to those subordinates who supported his viewpoints and methods. His attitude towards Indians was that of a mainstream nineteenth-century military man; he showed little sensitivity to the plight of the natives, believing that their problems were the natural result of contact and conflict with the superior American culture, to which their civilization must inevitably give way. Despite the implication of the title, the army as it existed in the second half of the nineteenth century was as much Sherman's as Sheridan's. Nevertheless, this well-researched and well-written biography will remain the standard work on Phil Sheridan against which all others must be measured.

STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY
OF NORTH DAKOTA

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Dark Lanterns: Secret Political Societies, Conspiracies, and Treason Trials in the Civil War, by Frank L. Klement. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1984. xiii, 263 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliographical essay, index. \$25.00 cloth.

In recent decades historians have reexamined and rewritten the history of every phase of the Civil War except, according to Frank L. Klement, the history of the major Copperhead, or antiwar, societies in the North: the Knights of the Golden Circle (KGC), the Order of American Knights (OAK), and the Sons of Liberty (SOL). These secret "dark lantern" societies are still often described as the powerful and menacing organizations they were alleged to be during the war.

Both the KGC and the OAK originated in the South in the 1850s, the filibustering decade. Both were the products of the grandiose visions of enthusiasts who dreamed of rescuing southern civilization from the attacks of abolitionists by making the South the heart of a great slave empire carved out of Mexico, Central America, and the islands of the Caribbean. The Civil War forced both to adopt new programs. In 1860 the KGC pushed for the secession of the lower South, and in 1861 for the secession of the border region, including the southern parts of Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio. The OAK also shifted its operations to the North, attacking the allegedly dictatorial policies of Abraham Lincoln, especially his emancipation policy. In 1864 the newly organized SOL absorbed the OAK, attracted to its membership a number of prominent Democrats (among them Clement L. Vallandigham, who became "Supreme Commander"), and quickly emerged as the most militant organization opposed to the Lincoln administration.

An apparently alarmed Judge Advocate General of the United States Army reported to the public in 1864 that the SOL (widely known as the "Sons") was a paramilitary society. It was organized by states, counties, and townships throughout the North, and it counted its members, who were disciplined and armed, by the hundreds of thousands. It engaged in a variety of subversive activities: helping soldiers to desert, encouraging resistance to the draft, circulating disloyal publications, sabotaging government property, and conspiring with the rebels. The report was official confirmation of charges Republican politicians and newspapers had already made familiar, and it helped to establish as truth the assumption that the SOL represented a deadly threat to the Union war effort.

This wartime evaluation was routinely repeated in postwar histories and reference works and became generally accepted as fact. It was reaffirmed and given the sanction of what appeared to be modern scholarship in the first two books ever published on the Copperheads (both dated 1942), and many historians have continued to accept it as true. Klement is by no means the first to challenge it, but in this extensively footnoted volume he is the first to give it comprehensive exposure. The SOL and its predecessors, he argues persuasively, were largely paper organizations whose alleged prowess was a fiction growing out of the braggadocio of their officers and public hysteria deliberately amplified by newspapers and by high-ranking Republican leaders, chiefly at the state level. Ardent unionists, political opportunists, and military officers out to make names for themselves exaggerated the size and influence of the SOL in order to weaken the Democratic party by making it seem that all opposition to the Republican or Unionist party was treason. It was no coincidence that the Judge Advocate's report was issued just before the presidential election. The dark lantern societies did not attract anywhere near the numbers of members they claimed and were claimed for them, and most of the members they did attract were neither disciplined nor dedicated.

Well and good; it is high time that organized Copperheadism is exposed as mostly myth. But that does not mean that opposition to the war in the North is also a myth. Revisionism can be carried too far. There *were* speeches and pamphlets urging resistance to the draft and desertion from the army; there *were* antidraft riots and acts of sabotage; there *were* hysterical denunciations of Lincoln's tyranny and warnings of the catastrophic consequences of emancipation; there *were* numberless Copperheads who spied and smuggled for the Confederacy and who sought ways, including assassination, to knock the North out of the war. If these activities were the spontaneous acts of outraged citizens, the Union was in even greater danger than if they had been

planned and coordinated by a disloyal society. After all, the popular protests that forced American withdrawal from Vietnam were not organized, either.

We are indebted to Klement for revising the history of the dark lantern societies, as well as for earlier works revising the image of Copperheads. But study of antiwar sentiments and activities in the North before Lincoln's reelection is more imperative than ever.

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Railroads and the Character of America, 1820-1887, by James A. Ward. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1986. xii, 200 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$14.95 cloth.

It should come as no surprise that as America's first large business, railroads and their leaders wielded considerable impact upon the developing nation. Not only did this network of iron and steel shatter the country's isolation and hasten the process of industrialization and urbanization, but the image of this new and wonderful form of transportation had a profound impact upon the citizenry. James A. Ward, professor of history at the University of Tennessee-Chattanooga, has written what he describes as "a series of essays, each examining a broad spectrum of railroad literature on a topic that illustrates prominent aspects of the character of America" (10). A dozen chapters, all related to the overall theme of railroads and the national character from the 1820s to the enactment of the Interstate Commerce Act of 1887, constitute this work.

The earliest decades of the railroad in America reflected the widespread popular belief, boomed, of course, by company officials and other enthusiasts, that the iron horse would both unite the Republic and yield a remarkable prosperity to those it touched. Railroads, however, would do more than fatten pocketbooks; they would even advance education, morality, and health. Just as William Miller, a charismatic Baptist minister, energized tens of thousands of Americans in the early 1840s to expect Christ's impending return to earth, so, too, did railroad promoters see their work as fostering millennial perfection for the masses. While the cross then symbolized to many Christ's Second Coming, the steam locomotive represented to an even larger number the marvelous life that railroad service would bestow.

Yet the images changed. As the Gilded Age dawned, Americans no longer universally saw the railroad in a wholly positive light. Following the Civil War railways expanded at a phenomenal rate. The 1880s witnessed the heyday of new line construction. More miles of track were built

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