Front Matter

Abstract
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During the summer of 2009, I had a series of conversations with Dr. Michael J. Birkner, who was then commencing his tenure as Interim Director of the Civil War Institute at Gettysburg College. One of our conversations dealt with the lack of an undergraduate journal focusing on the field of Civil War Era Studies. We agreed that this void could be easily addressed. Over the course of the subsequent months, we drew up a proposal for a journal, gathered a group of dedicated students to serve on the editorial board, drafted and disseminated a call for papers, and waited to observe the response. It is pleasing to note that we received about thirty submissions from students at different colleges and universities. With such a large field of submissions, we were able to cull out the best submissions. That is and will continue to be the goal of this journal: to solicit and showcase the most compelling work in the field of Civil War Era Studies by undergraduate and recently graduated students.

The four papers selected for this volume treat a variety of topics. Kristilyn Baldwin, in “The Visual Documentation of Antietam: Peaceful Settings, Morbid Curiosity, and a Profitable Business,” offers a thoughtful consideration of how people documented war. By focusing on Alexander Gardner and the photographs he took in the wake of the battle of Antietam, Baldwin offers a critical perspective on the uses of photography and sketches to document the aftermath of the terrible and bloody battle of Antietam. Ashley Whitehead, in “A Debt of Honor: The Hegemonic Benevolence of Richmond’s Female Elites at the “Last Confederate Christmas” of 1864,” analyzes the 1864 Christmas celebration in Richmond. Whitehead considers the role of the social elites of Richmond and how they used the Christmas celebration to maintain their leadership positions. Annie Powers examines the conflict between Congressmen Francis Cutting and John C. Breckenridge in “An Altercation Full of Meaning”: The Duel between Francis B. Cutting and John C. Breckinridge. Powers also describes how the conflict between the two men was part of a culture of violence influenced by the Kansas-Nebraska Act. Finally, in “The Fall of a Sparrow”: The (Un)timely Death of Elmer Ellsworth and the Coming of the Civil War, Adam Q. Stauffer offers his perspective on the life and death of Colonel Elmer Ellsworth, his connections with Abraham Lincoln, and his death in the early weeks of the Civil War. Stauffer considers the reactions to Ellsworth’s death in the North and the South and connects Ellsworth to the culture of death during the Civil War.

It is my hope that this journal, in addition to being a vehicle to showcase the best student work concerning the Civil War Era, will also be a resource for both students and professors. With that, I now present the inaugural issue of The Gettysburg College Journal of the Civil War Era.

Evan Rothera
Gettysburg College
May 10, 2010
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Kristilyn Baldwin is a senior at Arizona State University and is double-majoring in history and English literature. Kristilyn is currently working as a crime scene photographer/technician and is applying for graduate school. She enjoys studying U.S. military history with an emphasis on the home front during times of war.

Annie Powers is a third-year history major at the University of California, Berkeley who attended the Gettysburg Semester in Fall of 2009. Other than the Civil War Era, she is interested in historical memory, environmental history, and early twentieth century radical movements.

Adam Q. Stauffer is a senior history major and political science minor at Elizabethtown College. He will be attending the University of Rochester in the fall to pursue a doctorate in history.

Ashley Whitehead is a 2008 graduate of the College of William and Mary and a master’s degree candidate at West Virginia University. A student of 19th century American history and Public History, Ashley currently focuses her research on southern cultural history, self-fashioning and self-performance, and urban Confederate society. Ashley works as a seasonal park ranger at Richmond National Battlefield Park, and will be pursuing her doctorate at WVU beginning in the Fall of 2010.
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In exercise of freedom’s rights,
My country and her laws,
In exercise of freedom’s rights,
My country and her laws.

Mary S. Robinson’s popular 1866 book, A Household History of the American Conflict, featured a striking frontispiece of Ellsworth in his prime. Chapter five reported a fictional account of a father recounting Ellsworth’s life and death to his children, telling them they would do well to emulate this soldier. “Remember that name, children. He was a true man; the youngest and greatest hero of the war, thus far.” But for the father it was Ellsworth’s virtues that stood out. “I can remember no truer specimen of a Christian American youth than Elmer Ellsworth.”

It is difficult to contemplate what might have been if Ellsworth had not been shot and killed in Alexandria. One commentator has stated that “on the roll-call of great captains, when this greatest of all wars closed, his name might have stood second to none.” Even Robert E. Lee, upon hearing about the Marshall House incident, is said to have remarked that Ellsworth would have become the commanding general of the Union Army had he lived. “The world can never compute,” John Hay wrote in 1896, “can hardly even guess, what was lost in his untimely end.” But this, of course, is all speculation. Ellsworth rose from poverty to the national spotlight in the span of just a few years. He captured the hearts of many patriotic citizens, eager soldiers, and young damsels. Yet there is no escaping the fact that in death he contributed more to the Union cause than in life. Ellsworth was himself aware of what his potential martyrdom might entail. As he wrote to his parents before that fateful day: “I am perfectly confident to accept whatever my fortune may be, and confident that He who noteth even the fall of a sparrow, will have some purpose even in the fate of one like me.”

Today, Ellsworth is a largely forgotten figure in the annals of American history. His legacy has been overshadowed by Civil War giants like Grant, Lee, and Sherman. During the early days of the conflict he was remembered as the first soldier to sacrifice his life for his section—but there were many more to come.
