

*A Citizen-Soldier's Civil War**The Letters of Brevet Major General Alvin C. Voris*

Edited by Jerome Mushkat

(DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2002. Pp. xi, 321. Illustrations, maps, notes and sources, index. \$36.00.)

*Love Amid the Turmoil**The Civil War Letters of William & Mary Vermillion*

Edited by Donald C. Elder, III

(Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2003. Pp. xiv, 391. Illustrations, maps, notes, bibliographical note, index. \$39.95.)

One of the most positive aspects of the deluge of Civil War literature produced in the past decade has been the publication of primary sources. Once-forgotten documents have been rediscovered, new troves of information have been found, and our ability to understand the people who lived through the nation's greatest crisis has been enhanced. These two editions of Civil War letters continue the fine tradition of publishing such materials, and they do so in ways that not only provide easier access to the words and thoughts of historical actors but also offer analysis of broader themes and subjects of inquiry.

In *A Citizen-Soldier's Civil War*, Jerome Mushkat gives us the letters of a Union officer to his wife in an edition that is not only enlightening and critical, but also an engaging read. Mushkat's fine introduction provides a brief biography of Voris, and his editorial commentary throughout the volume guides the reader through the war years.

Ohio lawyer Alvin C. Voris was an abolitionist and advocate for women's rights, radical positions that

stemmed from his Christian faith and education at Oberlin College. A staunch Republican legislator, Voris was also an idealist who sponsored reform legislation aimed to promote temperance, improve prisons, and provide more funding for schools and insane asylums. He carried these idealistic notions with him into the war, where he found the reality of combat quite unlike the glorious fight for righteousness he had imagined.

Enlisting as a private in September 1861, his political standing brought him promotion to brevet major general in the course of the war as he proved his mettle by bravely leading Union troops in battles from the Shenandoah Valley to the South Carolina Sea Islands, Charleston, the James River, and Appomattox. Although his idealism was tempered by the horrors of war, the typical squabbling between officers and men, and his longing to return home to his wife, Lydia, Voris still believed in the cause for which he fought.

Voris's wartime experience only deepened his support of African American rights. In addition to meet-

ing slaves while in the South, he served with black troops—his unit followed the 54th Massachusetts into battle at Fort Wagner—and later Voris temporarily commanded African American soldiers. Unlike many others, he refused to forget the service of blacks in the war and would often refer to their exploits in public speeches. His letters throughout the conflict also reflected his views on women, as he treated Lydia as a partner, his intellectual equal. After the war, he continued to fight for equality and reform in his role as a judge and a community leader.

In *Love Amid the Turmoil*, Donald C. Elder, III, presents both the letters of Captain William Vermilion, an Iowa physician who served from the fall of 1862 to the end of the war, and those of his schoolteacher wife, Mary.

Born in Kentucky, Vermilion grew up in Indiana, where he was educated at Asbury College (later DePauw University). He moved first to Illinois to practice medicine, then to Iowa, where in 1858 he married Mary Kemper, a young lady he had met in Indiana. A Republican who loyally supported Lincoln, Vermilion enlisted in the Iowa Infantry in 1862, raised a company of men, and led them into battle, seeing action in a number of campaigns in the Mississippi Valley, including the siege of Vicksburg. Like many other officers, Vermilion was an astute observer of camp life and the countryside, and an insightful commentator on the war. His letters included everything from critical remarks about the soldiers' fondness

for whiskey, to financial advice for his wife at home, to accounts of battles, to comments on the cause and the nature of war.

More rare and extraordinary are the letters of Mary to William. She spent many months living with family in Indiana while her husband was away and later returned home to Iowa. Her letters were supportive, but also filled with family problems and comments about the political situation on the home front. Here we find firsthand accounts of the antiwar Copperheads, disheartening complaints about Democratic relatives, worries about finances, and concerns about the everyday matters of life as well as the war. Through it all, William and Mary passionately conveyed their feelings for one another and supported each other through the crisis via their correspondence. Mary proved herself a strong, intelligent woman; she invested wisely in real estate, the profits from which laid a foundation for their fortune after the war. Upon his return home, William became a lawyer, established a successful practice, and went into politics and business. In later years, he made speeches as a leader of a veteran's group and in one entitled "The Ladies—The Soldiers' Best Friends," he offered a fitting tribute to his own wife and her remarkable work during the war.

These two books, then, are valuable additions to the Civil War scholar's shelf. Mushkat and Elder connect the correspondence to recent scholarship, making their introductions

and commentaries all the more valuable, and providing models of scholarly editing. These are also important contributions to the history of the Midwest, as both the Voris and Vermilion families illustrate middle-class lives in a time of crisis. For military historians interested in lower-level officers, social historians analyzing family, race, and gender relations, and regional historians looking at partic-

ular states, these two editions will be significant sources of evidence; and they are also interesting to read.

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Gentlemen, It's Been My Pleasure *Four Decades in the Indiana Legislature*

By Senator Lawrence Borst

(Cincinnati: Guild Press Emmis Books, 2003. Pp. 247. Illustrations. \$24.99.)

In a book that provides all the benefits of an insider's account and contains all the disadvantages of being a personal recollection, former State Senator Lawrence M. Borst writes with three clear objectives in mind. First, he tells the story of the formation and early years of the Republican Action Committee of Marion County, an organization that emerged under the leadership of Keith Bulen as one of the very few urban political machines in the latter half of the 20th century. Borst describes the strategies used by Bulen and his allies to expand their power, and he provides valuable details about the methods used to construct a Republican machine that eventually won control of the city of Indianapolis. Next, he sets the record straight as to how Unigov was conceived, planned, and implemented. His account clarifies several points about the origins of Unigov, includ-

ing who coined the name (Buert SerVaas) and the role that Keith Bulen played in designing the new government (very little). Finally, Borst writes to tell the story of a friend, Indianapolis attorney Ed Lewis, "a funny, shrewd man with all kinds of talents" (p. 8). To this third purpose, Borst provides some interesting vignettes, but his anecdotes fail to provide authoritative documentation of the many roles Lewis played behind the scenes in politics and government.

The promise of this book lay in the number of key events and public policies over the past four decades that might have been illuminated. Borst, as chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, was a leading figure in framing the biennial state budgets and was the main architect of Indiana's tax structure. He mentions that he was a conferee on every state budget since 1971. Unfortu-