REVIEWS

War Upon Our Border: Two Ohio Valley Communities Navigate the Civil War
By Stephen I. Rockenbach
(Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2016. Pp. ix, 237. Map, illustration, notes, index. $45.00.)

A Generation At War: The Civil War Era in a Northern Community
By Nicole Etcheson

“Our best chance of understanding the Civil War era is through the eyes of the ordinary people who lived it,” writes Stephen Rockenbach. Instead of focusing on “representative events” like political elections and battles, historians must view these moments as “a small part of an overall collective experience shared among a diverse group of people” (Rockenbach, p. 192). One way to weave together individual ordinary lives into a “collective experience” is through what Nicole Etcheson describes as “microhistory,” a localized study of diverse peoples in a particular geographic setting (Etcheson, p. 17).

Rockenbach’s War Upon Our Border: Two Ohio Valley Communities Navigate the Civil War and Etcheson’s A Generation at War: The Civil War Era in a Northern Community take readers into the daily rhythms of life, the hopes and aspirations, and the fears and recriminations within two Indiana communities and the capital city of Kentucky. Both works are deeply researched, logically nuanced, and clearly written. How each book tells the story of ordinary people is every bit as consequential as the
layered stories and relationships within each work.

A Generation at War is a longitudinal analysis of Putnam County, Indiana, between the 1850s and 1880s. As the title suggests, the book emphasizes generational change and continuity in the mid-nineteenth century, allowing readers to follow some of the same characters over time. A Generation at War is organized chronologically into pre-war, wartime, and post-war sections, though chapters within each section focus on a different demographic or political element of the community.

Etcheson takes readers into the varied lives of county residents, both as individuals and members of a changing community, including Republicans and Democrats, African Americans and whites, women and men, farmers, mechanics, and professionals. An opening vignette describing the murder of Martha Mullinix reveals some of Etcheson’s previous scholarship stressing the migratory paths that brought people to Indiana in the early to mid-nineteenth century. These migratory streams carried with them different cultural traditions and generated different political allegiances. As these Indianans blended together in the 1840s and 1850s, they produced a recognizable midwestern political economy and culture based on wheat cultivation, transportation, manufacturing, and white supremacy. Many of the internal divisions within Putnam County, whether over the Mullinix murder case or controversy over anti-war “Copperheadism” reflected competing legacies of the old settlement patterns.

Etcheson details the broadening differences between the county seat of Greencastle and the surrounding countryside. Commerce along the National Road in the southern portion of the county gave way to railroad-based commerce and manufacturing in Greencastle by the time of the Civil War. But it was the local Indiana Asbury College (later DePauw University) that came to define the county’s intellectual, cultural, and economic heart. The college came to symbolize both class and gendered differences between town and country. While county residents shared in common a belief in white supremacy, some embraced the free soil doctrine espoused by the Republican Party and others saw free-soilers as racial egalitarians who threatened sectional peace.

Most interesting in Etcheson’s account of Putnam County is the persistence of near-perfect division between pro-war Democrats and Republicans on one side and Copperhead or Peace Democrats on the other. Vicissitudes of war and emancipation policy fueled a politics of backlash that energized the Copperhead faction led by Daniel Voorhees. And yet, even after the
war, residents remained closely divided along partisan lines that reflected debate over the changing economic order in town.

While few African Americans lived in Putnam County during the war era, Etcheson details the experiences of the few black men and women in the area. Despite the small black population, race clearly played a central role in the delineation of political debate during the war and Reconstruction. Emancipation and Radical Reconstruction’s challenge to white supremacy further galvanized the people of Putnam County, thus expanding an already existing political wedge.

In contrast to Etcheson’s longitudinal study of one county, Stephen Rockenbach’s *War Upon Our Border* offers a comparative analysis of two communities straddling the Ohio River. Corydon, Indiana, and Frankfort, Kentucky, shared much in common in the antebellum era. For most of the period, civilians in both cities would have considered themselves neither Northerners nor Southerners, but Westerners. From the 1810s onward, tens of thousands of Kentuckians struggling over uncertain land titles, poorly surveyed property lines, and an aristocratic slave system that stifled the ambitions of small white farmers crossed over the Ohio River to settle in Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois. These upland Southerners comprised the majority of residents in Corydon and Harrison County. Rather than a “border” between the free North and the slaveholding South, the Ohio River created a “commercial and social bond” between communities in Indiana and Kentucky (Rockenbach, p. 2). Larger towns and cities like Louisville, Lexington, Cincinnati, and Evansville generated significant commerce that further cemented relationships among smaller communities across the region. By emphasizing a shared frontier past and common belief in white supremacy, residents of Corydon and Frankfort vowed in common to keep out abolitionist agitators from the North and secessionist firebrands from the South.

As Rockenbach shows, the delicate peace along the Ohio River prevailed for the first two years of the Civil War, despite occasional provocations from guerrillas or suspected slave runaway plots. Confederate support within Frankfort and outlying Franklin County was relatively light, just as Copperheadism in Corydon proved to be more a Republican fear than a reality. Two events permanently broke the spirit of comity in 1863: John Hunt Morgan’s raid of Corydon and the transition to emancipation as a war aim. Both produced complex immediate and longterm effects that served to drive citizens of Corydon and Frankfort
into newly constituted “Northern” and “Southern” spaces.

Morgan's raid caused significant economic damage in Harrison County. Corydon residents came to resent Indiana governor Oliver Morton's implicit accusation of rampant Copperheadism that supposedly “welcomed” Morgan's raiders, even as Federal military leaders provided little military assistance to the community. Ironically, Corydon residents affirmed a stronger dedication to the Union as a result of Morgan's raid than did the more distant community of Greencastle, which never faced a direct Confederate threat.

Emancipation, however, completely changed the relationship between the two communities, despite the persistence of white supremacist thought among citizens. Frankfort Unionists had fought for both slavery and Union; most Corydon residents agreed at first that the war should be limited to preservation of the Union. As the war progressed, however, increasing numbers of Indiana and other Northern soldiers came to see the destruction of slavery as the best means to undercut the Confederate military effort. Morgan's raid drove home to residents of southern Indiana the need to take the war to the Southern social system.

Frankfort citizens, on the other hand, thought the Emancipation Proclamation was a disastrous transformation of a noble war for Union into a diabolical insurrectionary plot. With Kentucky exempted from the Proclamation, Frankfort citizens maintained vigil against Union army abolitionists. In 1864, however, Federal commanders began enlisting black soldiers in Kentucky, enraging and demoralizing much of the white Unionist population. Too late to switch sides, white Frankforters like other Kentuckians devoted as much of their energy toward preserving the last vestiges of slavery as they did fighting off persistent Confederate guerrillas. By the end of the war, Frankfort citizens came to resent their former Indiana friends, and the city, like Kentucky as a whole, developed a Southern identity after the war, while Corydon and other Indiana communities billed themselves as the Loyal West.

A Generation at War and War Upon Our Border thematically reinforce one another in many ways, especially revealing the persistence of white supremacy. But they also present the many faces of mid-nineteenth century Indiana in a time of great transformation. A generation after the various Westward migratory streams blended into a common Hoosier identity, Indians found themselves riven by internal divisions over the primacy of manufacturing over agriculture; the acceptance of German and Irish immigrants; commercial and social ties with the Northwest, Northeast,
and South; and the contested memory of the Civil War itself.

Taken together, these books contribute to the growing scholarly work on the Civil War midwestern home front and the Middle Border. On one hand stands a growing field of Northern rural home front studies that explore gender and family life, local politics, and agricultural change in communities across the Midwest. Etcheson’s *A Generation at War* fits comfortably within this new genre, especially for its thick description of kinship, culture, and economic change over time. On the other hand, Rockenbach has joined a budding scholarly field anchored by Christopher Phillips, who recently published the magisterial *The Rivers Ran Backward: The Civil War and the Remaking of the American Middle Border* (2016).

Further scholarship is clearly warranted, as the field remains sparsely plowed. Especially helpful would be works that consider German immigrants in both rural and urban Indiana communities, relationships between Indiana religious sects, economic studies of shifting agricultural and manufacturing processes in the transforming Midwest, the proto-Great Migration of African Americans to the post-Civil War Midwest, gender and family life in communities altered by war, and environmental studies of Indiana’s fields and rivers altered to serve a growing industrial economy. For now, however, readers will find in the works of Nicole Etcheson and Stephen Rockenbach a rich scholarship that rightly places Indiana’s Civil War experience at the heart of the national Civil War story.

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**Campaign Crossroads: Presidential Politics in Indiana from Lincoln to Obama**

By Andrew E. Stoner


*Campaign Crossroads* tells the stories of all the presidential and vice-presidential candidates who came to Indiana while campaigning and serving in office. That’s a tall order, which Andrew Stoner fulfills by presenting the coverage of these presidential tickets by local Hoosier