Altogether Fitting and Proper: Civil War Battlefield Preservation in History, Memory, and Policy, 1861–2015
By Timothy B. Smith

With a thorough historical and social perspective, Timothy B. Smith delivers a compelling discussion of Civil War battlefield preservation by examining a web of factors including government policy, private action, memory, and race relations. In Altogether Fitting and Proper, Smith begins with the serendipitous wartime preservation of parts of battlefields for burial of soldier dead, and leads the reader through decades of uneven attention to preservation that, despite recurring interest in so doing, never resulted in a national battlefield preservation policy. Smith suggests that the inevitable political struggle at the local, state, and national levels—including changing national priorities and evolving memories of the conflict—were inseparable from evolving race relations. Because his focus is not only on politics and on individual preservation actions, but also on surrounding social forces, Smith joins a growing number of scholars who directly confront the enormous impacts of these forces in shaping our history, our present, and our future.

In seven chronological chapters, Smith takes the reader from the Civil War to the very recent past. Within each chapter, he dwells on the uneven progress of battlefield preservation at the three levels of government, but draws attention to the actions of private individuals and organizations in the process. This narrative leaves the reader with a clear understanding of the reasons for this uneven progress, and the profound effect it had on our preserved Civil War landscape as well as on the public understanding of the war itself. Place does have meaning, and what was preserved, interpreted, and promoted as important places of the Civil War has had a profound effect on the historical narrative itself.

Smith integrally weaves into the narrative an explanation for the changing use and interpretation of our battlefields. Some battlefields were simply marked with small parcels and monuments, or interpreted from existing roads, while others were increasingly preserved through the purchase of large parcels. Larger parcels, now in the care of the National Park Service, were initially meant to preserve and commemorate the Civil War from the veteran’s perspective. Other sites
were used for military training, compatible or incompatible recreation, and eventually as historic sites. Smith explains how the same political and social forces, including evolving race relations, affected battlefield preservation as a whole.

Smith leads the reader to a very positive conclusion—which is the emergence of the Civil War Trust, a private organization that today successfully engages and leads the public in battlefield preservation and, increasingly, education. Smith makes it clear at the end of this important book that without the emergence of private leadership in battlefield preservation our cause today would be in dire straits indeed.

This book is well researched and comprehensive. It is not without error, but given its breadth the error is minor, and it stands as an essential source for the details as well as the general processes of Civil War battlefield preservation. The weave of concurrent and historical layers in this book are essential to the story, but at times do make it a bit tedious. This does not, however, prevent me from enthusiastically recommending this book to the serious Civil War scholar, regardless of genre, and to those with a more general interest in the subject—especially those who enjoy visiting our preserved Civil War landscape.

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Prospects of Greatness: The Rise of Midwestern Cities during the Gilded Age
By Lawrence H. Larsen and Barbara J. Cottrell

From Sandusky and Terre Haute to Hannibal and Eau Claire, the urban Midwest came of age during the two decades following America’s Civil War, a saga told in a pleasant style by Lawrence H. Larsen and Barbara J. Cottrell. At the heart of Prospects of Greatness is “city building,” the process whereby settlements such as county seats can become urban centers as they gain greater purpose and larger populations. In these locations, public services such as policing and firefighting become