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Society of Civil War Historians

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SHAUNA DEVINE WINS TOM WATSON BROWN AWARD

Shauna Devine, research fellow at the School of Medicine and an assistant professor in the Department of History at the University of Western Ontario, was awarded the \$50,000 Tom Watson Brown Book Award from Tad Brown, president of the Watson-Brown Foundation, at the annual banquet in Little Rock in November. Dr. Devine won the award for her book, *Learning from the Wounded: The Civil War and the Rise of American Medical Science*, published by the University of North Carolina Press in 2014. The following is an excerpt from her acceptance speech:

I began this book project with an interest in American medicine's move to professional maturity and the role that scientific standards played in that transition. I have always been fascinated by the way in which the interactions with certain diseases and developing ideas about germ science and bacteriology were used to guide and shape medical practice at multiple levels from new anti-germ measures in the bacteriological era to the development of official public health policy in the final third of the nineteenth century. In the mid-nineteenth century there was a transforming medical profession that was struggling hard with theories of contagion, causation of disease, germ theories, quarantine measures, ideas about prevention, how to study and structure medicine, and the role of the medical sciences in medical education. At the outset, I was not sure if physicians addressed these issues in the Civil War hospitals; if medical practice in the war affected science in the practice of medicine; or if, as many historians have written, the war retarded the medical sciences.

The degraded standards in medicine and medical education prior to the war have been well documented. In the 1830s and 1840s, in response to attacks on elitism and the professions in Jacksonian America, most states had abandoned licensing laws and official recognition of medical societies. The American medical community had an almost insignificant proportion of university-educated M.D.s; virtually all practitioners trained by apprenticeships. As a result, there was a deficiency of general education and a lack of widespread conviction in the possibility of scientific progress in medical care. By the 1840s, many leaders recognized that the competition

NEW EDITOR FOR *THE JOURNAL OF THE CIVIL WAR ERA*

At a reception held by UNC Press during the Southern Historical Association, Judith Giesberg, of Villanova University, was officially announced as the new editor of *The Journal of the Civil War Era*. She succeeds William Blair, the Ferree Professor of Middle American History at Penn State University, who founded the journal in 2011. Selected by the *Library Journal* as one of the best new periodicals of 2011, *The Journal of the Civil War Era* quickly emerged as one of the leading scholarly publications in the discipline of history. Blair steps down after a 15 year editorial career, having edited *Civil War History* from 2000 to 2010, before launching *The Journal of the Civil War*. Giesberg previously had been an associate editor in charge of book reviews since the journal's inception. Rachel Shelden, of the University of Oklahoma, has joined the journal's editorial board as its new book review editor. Associate editors Greg Downs, of the University of California, Davis, and Kate Masur, of Northwestern University, jointly oversee the creation and publication of the journal's review essays.

for students was harming U.S. medical schools and that the spread of M.D. degrees did not reflect advancement in medical practice. The absence of legal regulations for medicine lowered educational standards and encouraged the proliferation of competing medical sects including unorthodox practitioners. There were few hospital facilities for medical teaching, which meant that medical school learning was almost entirely didactic. After decades of struggle, only two states had anatomy acts on the eve of the Civil War. In this situation, elite physicians increasingly went abroad for their education. Although these physicians made a strong case for the importance of educational interventions like the "Paris Clinical School" for the improvement of American medicine, they were too few in number to bring about a change in the country.

What has been less well documented were the sources of the dramatic changes that took shape after the war. As

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BOOKS IN REVIEW

Stephen D. Engle, Book Review Editor

Vitor Izecksohn, *Slavery and War in the Americas: Race, Citizenship, and State Building in the United States and Brazil, 1861-1870*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2014. Pp. 251. \$45.00.

One searches in vain in the indexes of the standard biographies of Abraham Lincoln, or in the classic one-volume histories of the Civil War, for references to the Paraguayan War (also known as the Triple Alliance War), although the parallels are numerous. Fought between 1864 and 1870, the latter conflict pitted a stronger nation, Brazil, against Paraguay, a country with meager resources and a smaller population. Although slavery was less a cause of the war in South America than in the United States, Brazil proved quicker than the Lincoln administration to conscript slaves. In both conflicts, the use of black soldiers hastened both emancipation and political reform, and in the case of Brazil, eroded support for the monarchy.

Less an examination of the actual links between the two conflicts than a comparison of the dual wars, Izecksohn, a Professor of History at the *Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro*, declines to internationalize the Civil War, as some recent accounts have. Rather, by crafting a thoughtful appraisal of these surprisingly similar wars, Izeckson raises important questions regarding political centralization, race and reform, and national sacrifice. American readers know very little about the Paraguayan War, but this elegantly written, richly researched volume should help resolve that unfortunate fact.

Douglas R. Egerton, Le Moyne College

Holt Merchant. *South Carolina Fire-Eater: The Life of Laurence Massillon Keitt*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2014. Pp. 263. \$39.95.

While the traditional view is that few southern “fire-eaters” subsequently played significant military roles in the Confederacy, Laurence M. Keitt proved an exception. As a congressman in the 1850s Keitt ardently defended both the institution of slavery and the right of secession. After serving as a representative in the Provisional Confederate Congress, Keitt led a regiment in the defense of Charleston and in Virginia. At Cold Harbor he assumed command of a brigade, but shortly thereafter fell mortally wounded while leading an attack. In this relatively brief but well-written biography, Holt Merchant contends that Keitt “devoted his public career to preparing the people of South Carolina to leave the

Union,” but that by the time of his death he realized the South “would not win its war for independence, that slavery was doomed, [and] that the appalling loss of life and property was all in vain” (p. 192).

David Coles, Longwood University

Luke E. Harlow, *Religion, Race, and the Making of Confederate Kentucky, 1830-1880*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014. Pp. 242. \$90.00.

As one of the few slave states that remained loyal to the Union throughout the Civil War, Kentucky has a particularly interesting history. In *Religion, Race, and the Making of Confederate Kentucky, 1830-1880*, Luke Harlow delves into this history and shows that theological commitments led many white Kentuckians to identify with the Confederacy after the war. He explains that although most were dedicated to preserving the Union, they nonetheless remained steadfast in their belief that slavery was a Christian institution. Consequently, when the war ended slavery, many Kentuckians shifted their allegiances and politics to align more with their Southern neighbors. This is a thorough and nuanced history in which the author takes into account denominational differences and includes discussion of many of the most influential pro- and anti-slavery thinkers of the time. It is an important contribution that complicates our understanding of Civil War ideologies and the role that religion played in shaping them.

Monica C. Reed, Louisiana State University

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early as 1867 societies and regulatory associations established or strengthened licensing laws, the federal government sponsored epidemiological projects into infectious diseases and reforms were initiated in medical schools. At the same time, beginning with Pennsylvania, state after state began passing anatomy acts, making unclaimed bodies available to medical schools for teaching and research. These changes coincided with scientific pressures for reform. While historians agree that by the end of the nineteenth century, science had become “a third estate within medicine,” the role of the Civil War in shaping new conceptions of scientific medicine has not been integrated into the larger narrative of nineteenth century medicine. If historians of the Civil War and nineteenth century American medicine have been skeptical about the impact of the war on American medicine, who can fault them? The most recent estimates show that more than 750,000 men died as a result of the war, a number that would be proportional to 7.5 million people today.

My book strikes out in new directions. It focuses not on the high rates of death due to infectious disease, the usual approach when evaluating medicine and the Civil War, but on the processes more than the outcomes. It puts the emphasis on the physicians and how their questions changed through the war, the types of medical challenges that demanded support for newer and more scientific methodologies, and the institutional support provided by the government.

I recount the similarities and interactions with some of the leaders in 19th century medicine and suggest that the broader changes or medical transformations that took shape during the war can be best understood in an international context. Historians of nineteenth century medicine have celebrated the so-called “great men of medicine” and their discoveries: Ignaz Semmelweis, Rudolph Virchow, Louis Pasteur, Robert Koch, Joseph Lister, William Osler, and Harvey Cushing among them. The Civil War hospitals and laboratories did not produce any one “great man,” and those who doctored during the war stand in the shadow of Pasteur and Virchow in medical history. However, in the 1860s both in America and abroad elite physicians around the globe were struggling with the same medical challenges: What caused disease? What role could medical specialization have in modern medicine? Should medical education center on the patient, the laboratory or the hospital? The medical improvements in last part of the century may seem stunning when compared to the Civil War in which two thirds of all soldiers’ deaths were the result of infectious diseases. But looking at the labors of American doctors during the war in a broader context reveals a new significance to the questions, research

projects, and advances they collectively made in medicine.

In its challenges, the war provided new opportunities for American physicians—traumatic battlefield injuries, which led to new surgical techniques; deadly diseases but also new hospitals to study and treat them; technical and institutional support from the government; and an Army Medical Department, which demanded, facilitated and shaped the production and development of new forms of medical knowledge. The new Army Medical Museum, devised to provide intellectual support for some emerging specialties and scientific medicine, was central to achieving this goal. Microscopes, an instrument few American physicians had ever used before, were distributed to hospital physicians for the benefit of science and wartime medicine. By standing orders of the Surgeon General, physicians who had never dissected a body were ordered to perform autopsies, where practicable, and the medical department taught them how to do so. Many physicians were exposed to new scientific techniques and gained a practical experience whose value could not be overestimated.

There were no simple answers about disease germs in the postwar period. Debates between opponents and proponents of the germ theory and laboratory medicine raged for at least another three decades. The war years, however, were important in preparing physicians for this new environment. The war paved the way for the transformation from the open medical market place in Jacksonian America to a professional and scientific medical system that could respond to the changes in medical practice taking shape with the bacteriological revolution in the late 19th century. Wartime physicians gained an inestimable medical identity through the bodies they diagnosed, the specimens they prepared and studied and the case histories and publications they submitted to the Army Medical Museum. In a medical system comprising nearly two hundred general hospitals with 86,000 beds extending from Maine to the Gulf of Mexico and from the Atlantic to the Pacific, the best of American medicine responded to the health crisis as the war raged well past the initially prophesied three months and in the process transformed American medicine.

Shauna Devine

**Check out the new website at
<http://scwhistorians.org/>**

**Visit the new Facebook page by
searching for The Society of Civil War
Historians**

Biennial Conference Set for June

The SCWH will host its biennial conference in Chattanooga, Tennessee, from June 2 through June 4. The Chattanooga Hotel, 1201 Broad Street, will serve as the headquarters for the meeting. Single/double guestroom rate is \$129.00 per night plus state and local taxes.

The SCWH Wants You—To Write for the Website

Do you want to try your hand at writing short pieces for a large public audience?

Have you recently thought about writing a piece connecting current events to Civil War history?

Have you given an assignment in your courses that has worked particularly well to help your students understand and convey Civil War history?

Have you been to a Civil War public history site or event, and want to publish your reflections?

The Society of Civil War Historians invites you to submit short pieces (300-500 words) along these [lines to scwhistorians.org](http://scwhistorians.org). Approved posts will appear on the website's main page, and will be promoted on the SCWH Facebook page and Twitter feed.

You can pitch post ideas or submit written pieces via the "[Submit Posts to Publish on the Website](#)" page at scwhistorians.org or via email addressed to Megan Kate Nelson, SCWH website curator, atmkn@megankatenelson.com.

For back issues of the newsletter, go to http://scwhistorians.org/?page_id=209

For a short history of the SCWH, go to http://scwhistorians.org/?page_id=302

Meeting Dates of the SCWH and SHA

2016 - November 2-5
Trade Winds Island Resort
St. Pete Beach, Florida

2017 - November 9-12
Sheraton Dallas Hotel
Dallas, Texas

2018 - November 8-11
Sheraton Birmingham Hotel
Birmingham, Alabama

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