



## *Civil War Places: Seeing the Conflict through the Eyes of Its Leading Historians* ed. Gary W. Gallagher and J. Matthew Gallman.

Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2019. Pp. 199. ISBN 978-1-4696-4953-5.

Review by Bill Backus, Prince William County Office of Historic Preservation (bbackus@pwcgov.org).

In their introduction to *Civil War Places*, editors Gary Gallagher and J. Matthew Gallman reveal their instructions to the twenty-five historians whose essays are included. They were to “select a single place related to the conflict and explain why they chose it. We gave them no other guidelines, beyond insisting that they write about a fairly precise spot and not an entire battlefield or community” (1). Accompanying each essay is a relevant full-page photograph. The result is, at first glance, a slick coffee table book written for the general public or Civil War enthusiasts.

The essays occupy four broad subsections: battlefields, cemeteries, memorials, and buildings. These range from the Devil’s Den at Gettysburg to the Pittsburgh Soldiers and Sailors Memorial Hall. The authors’ choice of sites with special appeal to them makes their contributions more engaging and enlightening than is typical of the genre.

The first section, “Battlefields: Places of Fighting,” is not surprisingly the largest with eight essays. Famous battlefields predominate, with two essays each on some aspect of Gettysburg or Vicksburg. In the one of the Gettysburg chapters, Peter Carmichael (Gettysburg College) uses the grave of a Confederate soldier on Culp’s Hill to demonstrate how he uses battlefields to connect visitors and students to larger themes of the Civil War.

The trace of the burial pit, I realized, offered a diverse range of stories that I could tell that enhanced the military narrative of the battle by showing the reverberations of organized killing. I needed a story that could be centered on the burial pit but could also go beyond the site without cutting off my audiences from the battle itself. (46)

The remaining essays on battlefields treat both famous and overlooked venues. Antietam and Shiloh appear in an essay on the Burnside Bridge and Shiloh Church. More enlightening are two chapters on obscure battlefields. For instance, A. Wilson Greene’s piece on Camp Allegheny in West Virginia is most welcome since fighting in that state was dwarfed by larger battles on both sides of the Appalachians. In one of the best pieces in the volume, Ari Kelman discusses the event at Sand Creek (29 Nov. 1864), clarifying the boundaries “between public and private spaces, between Native nations and an American empire that exploded westward in the mid-nineteenth century, between history and memory, between the past and the present, and between the Indians Wars and the United States Civil War” (50).

Nearly half the essays concern the postwar struggle over the memory of the Civil War. Four them address national cemeteries, Confederate memorialization, and the postwar remembrance of war dead. The essays on memorials take a more novel look at the subject. Just one of the six articles concerns Confederate memorials, in which Gallagher uses Virginia’s Confederate monuments as potential teaching aids. The remaining essays explore an eclectic mix of memorials, from traditional memorial halls to a Union monument (William Sherman’s statue at New York City’s Grand Army Plaza). The most original selection is Brenda Stevenson’s essay on the Emancipation

Oak, a witness tree in Hampton, Virginia, where the Emancipation Proclamation was publicly delivered to former slaves in 1863.

The volume's fourth and final section, "Buildings: Enduring Places," concerns some of the most original locations of the Civil War. Readers will likely be familiar with the McLean house in Appomattox, where Robert E. Lee surrendered his Army of Northern Virginia to U.S. Grant, and the Peterson house, where President Lincoln died. Other sites featured here run the gamut from the Charles Town courthouse, where John Brown was tried after his abortive Harpers Ferry raid, to Richmond's Tredegar Iron Works. Historic houses make up the core of this section: David Blight writes about Frederick Douglass's southeast Washington DC residence, while Catherine Clinton explores a Savannah, Georgia, house museum at the site of a meeting of Black preachers on 12 Jan. 1865.

Two minor criticisms: the first regarding the brevity of the essays. This is understandable in a work that is introductory in nature. But longer essays would have allowed the authors to explore more deeply the evolving memory and historiography of their chosen sites, thus strengthening many observations made in the book. The second criticism concerns the predominance of academic historians among the anthology's contributors. All the featured sites are open to the public as museums or historic venues. To state in the subtitle of the book that its readers will see the Civil War through the eyes of its leading historians is to neglect the fine work of public historians within the National Park Service and smaller state and local organizations.

These critiques aside, *Civil War Places* attests to the ongoing fascination with its subject some 160 years on. Fans of military history in general and Civil War buffs in particular will find it an engaging and instructive addition to their libraries.