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Book Reviews

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BOOK REVIEWS

We are in His Hands Whether We Live or Die: The Letters of Brevet Brigadier General Charles Henry Howard. By David K. Thomson, (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 2013. Pp. 296. Paper. \$19.99)

Though Charles Howard was the less famous brother of Civil War General and Howard University namesake Oliver O. Howard, Charles left a remarkable collection of letters addressed to friends and family, which are currently housed at Bowdoin College. Doctoral student David Thomson worked with family researchers and Bowdoin College to compile and edit a selection of these letters dating from 1852 to 1865. These letters span the time period from when Charles was a fourteen-year-old student at Kents Hill School to his commission as commander of the 126th Regiment, USCT.

Thomson chose these letters for the edited collection, in part, due to their fervent religious content. Charles Howard frequently wrote about prayer meetings or Sunday services and described his Christian faith in the most warm and vivid language. Of particular interest to Thomson was Charles Howard's description of his views on Divine Providence. Howard constantly referred to the events of his life during the Civil War as ordained by God—or, providential. Unfortunately, while Thomson sees this as a unique feature of Howard's correspondence, he provides little context or analysis of the important role that religion played in the Howard family. Charles Howard's letters are filled with references to sermons he heard and the texts that were used as well as some of the preachers he liked and disliked. Hopefully, further analysis of these names and texts will eventually provide a fuller understanding of his religious beliefs.

Notwithstanding, this collection is effectively edited to allow for a smooth reading of the letters, while preserving their original integrity. Moreover, Thomson's decision to provide a variety of letters to different recipients over more than a decade gives the work a biographical character that is most welcome in such a collection. Of particular interest to readers of the collection in Maine are descriptions of life in the state during the nineteenth century. This work may indeed prove useful for students of religion and the Civil War as well as to historians interested

in family relationships and education. The latter will find much to interest them in this collection, as Thomson includes many letters that pre-date the war.

Also of interest was the way in which Charles Howard changed his tone in subtle ways when writing his brothers and his parents. Howard wrote to his younger half-brother, Rodelphus, for example, emphasizing his religious activities and occasionally scolding his little brother for ill-behavior. In writing his mother, however, Charles referred regularly to his religious practices in a manner that indicated a search for approval. The letters also present the changing perspective and vocabulary of a young man growing from a teenager to a Brevet Brigadier General over the course of a mere thirteen years. This alone makes the collection worth reading, since it outlines the transformation of an adolescent into an adult through the trauma of war.

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“A Race of Shipbuilders:” The Hanscoms of Eliot, Maine. By Richard E. Winslow III. (Portsmouth, NH: Portsmouth Marine Society, 2013. Pp. 307. Cloth. \$35.00)

A Race of Shipbuilders, by Richard Winslow, is a linear biographical narrative of the celebrated Hanscom family of New England who made their fame and fortune as shipbuilders and sailors. The book, on its most basic level, is a description of how “the most significant Hanscoms” responded “to a maritime/marine/naval call to sea” throughout the entirety of United States history (ix). On a more complex level, however, the book uses the Hanscom family to mirror the history of the United States in terms of technological development and political, economic, and even spiritual maturation.

Although Winslow’s book begins in the decade following the arrival of the *Mayflower*, the first great story of his narrative is that of Reuben Hanscom who served on the *Ranger*, which was captained by famed Revolutionary War hero John Paul Jones. Ruben, it appears, was a key member of Jones’s crew during both the famed raid of Whitehaven and the *Ranger*’s battle with the legendary British ship, the *Drake*. The unlikely success of the American ship, and indeed the entire American experience, is something that Winslow keenly compares with the history of the

Hanscom family. Although outnumbered and facing great odds, Winslow contends that the family, like the American nation, overcame great turmoil to become “well-established, prosperous, and independent” (11).

While the next two chapters focus on the period of Hanscom proprietary shipbuilding in the early republic, the book quickly moves away from the commercial expansion of the Hanscom dynasty during the first decades of the nineteenth century and, instead, turns its gaze toward the excitement of the American Civil War. Indeed, roughly one-third of the book is dedicated to the study of the Hanscoms’ involvement in the American conflict. Of this study, two members of the family are used as the centerpiece of Winslow’s narrative. First, Isaiah Hanscom is detailed as the great innovator of American ironclad shipbuilding during the war. Isiah, like other naval engineers, was presented with the daunting task of modernizing and, in some cases, creating the North’s wartime naval force. As Winslow noted, Isiah Hanscom was at the vanguard of this “Union industrial surge” that was to “. . . elevate the Union Navy to full wartime footing” (75).

Equally important to Winslow’s narrative of Isiah is his examination of John G. Hanscom, who was a celebrated Northern Merchant Marine captain during the war. Hanscom was tasked with maintaining Northern shipping connections to Great Britain. Instead of shipping cotton from the Chesapeake region, Merchant Marines filled the trade “vacuum” by securing Indian or South Asian cotton for domestic mills and for delivery into English markets. Winslow’s bifurcated consideration of the Hanscoms’ experiences during the Civil War is, by far, the strength of his work. His juxtaposition of the Hanscoms’ relatives demonstrates both the industrial and manual power that propelled the North during the Civil War. Of additional interest is that the story of John Hanscom illustrates a piece of the war that is often removed from popular publications. While the account of Isiah illuminates the domestic and industrial side of the war, John’s tale illuminates the necessity of maintaining international trade. It speaks to the ways in which the American Civil War was a global conflict with far-reaching consequences that extended past its borders in North America.

Although the book is wonderfully researched and the stories of the family are captivating, the book does suffer from moments of “great man” history. The male-dominated stories of the Hanscoms usually revolve around patriotic themes, famous generals, friendly presidents, or stories of great courage and sacrifice. His reverence for the family, at times, seems to get in the way of balanced historical analysis. This may be because Winslow values a readable and captivating narrative, or it

may be due to his closeness with the modern Hanscom family who requested that he write the book (x). Although one could argue that his closeness to the family hinders his analysis at times, the book is well suited for anyone who studies New England naval history or simply enjoys captivating nautical stories that span more than three centuries of American history.

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The Battle for the Fourteenth Colony: America's War of Liberation in Canada, 1774-1776. By Mark R. Anderson. (Lebanon, NH: University Press of New England, 2013. Pp. 460. Cloth. \$35.00)

The Battle for the Fourteenth Colony was conceived while Mark R. Anderson was serving as a military planner in the United States Air Force during its “endeavors to liberate and spread democracy to foreign people in Afghanistan and Iraq.” It was here that he realized the “connection between these twenty-first-century military campaigns and the 1775 Revolutionary War invasion of Quebec. In both cases . . . American liberators sought to bring their own concepts of freedom to a foreign culture” (xi). However, Anderson wisely abandons this comparison outside of the introductory materials, allowing readers to draw comparisons on their own.

This rigorously researched monograph covers the Continental Congress’s efforts to draw Canada, along with its 80,000 French inhabitants, into the common cause of throwing off the yoke of British tyranny. A story similarly told in Justin Smith’s two-volume treatise, *Our Struggle for the Fourteenth Colony*, was published in 1907. What is new here, however, is Anderson’s insightful analysis, which highlights major missteps by the Continental Congress that are as relevant today as they were in the 1770s: fighting a war of liberation without the political or monetary resources to allow it to succeed and the presupposition that a foreign populace—the French and English Canadians—desired American concepts of liberty and freedom.

Indeed, Anderson is at his best when describing the variety of responses in Canada to the American invasion in 1775. The *seigneurs* (landlords) and the clergy supported the British after provisions in the Quebec Act of 1774 restored French civil law in the province, buttressing the power of these elite institutions. The *habitant* (French peasant)

populace had a much different reaction, according to Anderson, who cited that in some parishes as many as one in four French Canadians joined the Continental Army on its way to Quebec. However, most Canadians responded by providing no support for the American cause or providing provisions as well as transportation and carpentry services, thus remaining non-combatants for either side.

Anderson's focus on political affairs, as well as on the will of the Continental Congress to export America's ideology of freedom and liberty, causes him to overlook material circumstances that also explain why the Continental Army decided to invade Canada in 1775. For example, when pitching an invasion of Canada to the Continental Congress in 1774, Benedict Arnold argued that America would gain "an inexhaustible granary" of Canadian wheat and that they would furthermore, "cut the British from the lucrative fur trade."¹ Moreover, Anderson's contention that the Continental Soldier's viewed the *habitants* in Quebec as "peers" is substantially overstated. A thorough reading of the diaries of the soldiers that served in Benedict Arnold's eastern prong of the invasion of Canada, for example, reveals that the soldiers were very skeptical of the French Canadians. The Continentals thought that the Catholic religious practices were very strange, that they were being taken advantage of economically by the *habitants* who were charging exorbitant prices for goods, and that the *habitants* were a simple and backward people.² Examining these factors on the ground a bit more thoroughly would have increased the complexity and sophistication of Anderson's narrative.

Despite these minor faults, this book adds nuance to the current available scholarship on the early Northern Theatre of the American War for Independence. Though much of this work, specifically in reference to the history of Maine, is already in the canon, the whole of Anderson's book is greater than the sum of its parts, with an analysis that provides insights into underexplored subjects of Canadian and United States History. This book is recommended for a popular audience and for specialists in early North American political and military history.

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1. James Flexner, *The Traitor and the Spy: Benedict Arnold and James Andre* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1991), 53.

2. For more information see Kenneth Roberts, *March to Quebec: Journals of Members of Arnold's Expedition* (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1946)