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B. G. Ellis. *The Moving Appeal: Mr. McClanahan, Mrs. Dill, and the Civil War's Great Newspaper Run.* Macon: Mercer University Press, 2003. ix + 677 pp. $45.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-86554-764-3.

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A One Thousand Mile Journey into the History of Confederate Journalism

In *The Moving Appeal* B. G. Ellis traces the exciting history of Memphis, Tennessee's itinerant newspaper throughout its journey around the war-torn Confederacy. During the four years of the American Civil War, editor-in-chief John Reid McClanahan and his devious business associates Benjamin Franklin Dill and America Carolina Dill used cunning, skill and exceptional industry to keep the *Memphis Appeal*, one of the South's most respected daily newspapers, in the hands of a news-hungry Southern populace. McClanahan's paper grew in respectability and gained a widespread readership as it faced down approaching Union armies and traipsed across four states and five major Southern cities. By the end of the war, the *Memphis Appeal* had published not only in Tennessee, but also in Grenada and Jackson, Mississippi, Atlanta, Georgia and finally Montgomery, Alabama. In addition to investigating the lives of the three clever figures who kept the paper running during the war, Ellis uses her work to explore both the *Appeal's* historic trip around the South as well as the fascinating story of how indefatigable Southern journalists produced one of the Confederacy's most widely read newspapers.

John Reid McClanahan, born in South Carolina to a large family encumbered by financial insecurity, was uniquely prepared by life experiences for his wartime exploits. In his youth, McClanahan's older brother Samuel arranged for him to work for a newspaper, and McClanahan continued his interest in the profession as a printer in the 1840s and 1850s. The future editor's service as a soldier in the Mexican-American War prepared him to write educated military editorials on Braxton Bragg, John C. Pemberton, John Bell Hood, Joseph C. Johnston and other western theater Civil War generals. After his service in Mexico, McClanahan returned to newspaper work and eventually became the sole proprietor of the *Memphis Appeal* in 1851. Although initially opposed to secession, McClanahan turned into an ardent Confederate supporter after Lincoln's call for volunteers to put down the rebellion. McClanahan's wartime editorials were shrewd and his instincts for running a successful newspaper keen.

The Dills, who became involved with the *Appeal* in the late 1850s as McClanahan sought sound financial representation for business investments, were integral to the operation of the newspaper during its Civil War exploits. Unlike McClanahan, however, Ellis portrays both Carolina and Benjamin Dill as opportunists whose primary objective was to help themselves to as much of other people's money as they could. Carolina, whose father was a land speculator who taught her about a life of financial insecurity and living off of credit, used this experience to cleverly maneuver her way into McClanahan's graces and publish her own well-written and often controversial editorials in the *Memphis Appeal*. She became the only woman to publish editorials in a major daily newspaper during the Civil War. Her husband, who carried on the facade of holding law credentials, was just as sly about keeping his true intentions of stealing money from McClanahan secret. But Ellis argues that Benjamin Dill was not the writer or thinker that his wife was. Nevertheless, the author demonstrates that both Dills aimed to wrest control of the newspaper from McClanahan as he became more and more incapacitated due to alcoholism.

Under the editorial leadership of John McClanahan and Carolina Dill, the *Memphis Appeal* gained a reputation for nationally important news in spite of unreliable Confederate postal and wire services. McClanahan drew his news from a wide variety of sources, including paid reporters and a Confederate wire agency called the PA. McClanahan built the paper's circulation beyond Memphis during the early days of the war by offering discount prices to the soldiers serving in western theater armies. The paper became the most popular choice of men in General Braxton Bragg's Army of Tennessee, and as Ellis recounts, McClanahan followed the battles of this

force closely. McClanahan's ultimate goal, however, was to become a major voice for the South on the world stage, something he accomplished by maintaining relevant national and international coverage throughout the war.

After the fall of Memphis to Union forces in early June 1862, Ellis shows that McClanahan and the Dills had no intention of surrendering or giving up their efforts to build the paper's circulation. McClanahan developed a method of packing up his press and contracting out the remainder of his issues to local printers in the city he was about to leave. He then sent his financial ambassadors, the Dills, and his efficient Hoe press to the next city at which he intended to publish. McClanahan would then leave a skeleton crew to produce the final issues in the first city, and after the fall of that town, the crew simply slipped away to their new publishing home.

Over the next three years, the *Appeal* moved first to Grenada and then Jackson, Mississippi. As the major news stories about the threat to Vicksburg, Mississippi filled its pages, McClanahan and Carolina Dill worked tirelessly to write editorials and stave off rival local newspapers in their temporary cities of publication. While on the road, the *Appeal* accessed materials for publication by buying in bulk and paying for ink, coal, and paper in cash. While McClanahan spent his free time drinking, Benjamin and Carolina Dill took over the accounting books and began skimming large sums of money from the paper.

In June 1863 the paper made a precarious move to the competitive news market in Atlanta, Georgia. From Atlanta, McClanahan followed the battles at Chickamauga and Chattanooga, William Tecumseh Sherman's hard fight down the corridor against Joseph Johnston and John Bell Hood, and ultimately the siege of the Gate City. Even in Atlanta, McClanahan's paper continued to publish right up until the day the city fell. As he and his crew moved the Hoe press and type to Montgomery, Alabama he left a trusted printer to publish broadsides until it came under Federal occupation. By the time McClanahan and the *Appeal* moved to Montgomery, alcoholism had begun to take a heavy toll on the quality of his editorial work. Carolina Dill propped up the paper with her fiery editorials, while pocketing more of the revenues. By this point, the paper had grown famous for its ability to elude Federal capture and had made thousands of dollars by continuing to publish in a news-starved Confederacy. From the fourteen thousand issues published by the *Appeal*'s Hoe press during the conflict, Ellis estimates a wartime readership totaling seventy thousand people, an amazing achievement given its one thousand mile journey (p. 1).

Ellis's final chapters analyze the intriguing events surrounding the deaths of both John McClanahan and Benjamin Dill. In June 1865 while undergoing treatment for syphilis and preparing to relaunch the newspaper in Memphis, McClanahan was beaten to death in the back alley of the lavish Gayoso hotel. The news stories about his death claimed that the editor had fallen from a window, but Ellis argues convincingly that he was murdered (probably for money) and that the killing was covered up to prevent speculation that it was a political assassination by Union occupation troops. The death of McClanahan left the Dills in an ideal situation to take over the paper that they had coveted for years, but Benjamin F. Dill's poor health and angry creditors threatened the Dills' plans for the *Appeal*. The Dills restarted the newspaper in November 1865 but Benjamin Dill died shortly after in January 1866.

One of the most interesting parts of Ellis's work is her detailed and thoroughly researched legal history of Carolina Dill's battle after her husband's death to gain ownership of the *Memphis Appeal*. In late 1865, Carolina Dill became the force behind the paper's resurrection. Even though she and her husband still owed creditors on their original quarter partnership, she claimed she now owned the newspaper. During the mid-1860s, Carolina Dill became the only woman to run a major daily newspaper in the South. Nevertheless, years of lying and credit fraud caught up with Carolina Dill as she fought both her creditors and McClanahan's family to maintain possession of the paper. Ultimately, a judge ejected Carolina Dill from the paper in 1868 and ordered the profits divided among McClanahan's heirs. Carolina Dill fled the city shortly after and made off with perhaps thousands of dollars of filched money for her "pension" (p. 408). Legally, however, the case was not completely resolved until the early 1900s when the final payment was made from McClanahan's estate and long after Carolina Dill had died.

Ellis's book is a fascinating account of the inner workings of the Confederate press during the Civil War. The volume is strongest in its analysis of the actual content of the *Appeal*'s daily coverage during the war and provides an excellent example of thorough research into the legal and journalistic issues associated with operating a nineteenth-century Southern newspaper. The author combed archival materials in more than one-hundred repositories around the United States to bring to life this comprehensive history and has done so with clear writing. For historians interested in nineteenth-century business practices, the Dills' incessant attempts to purloin and elude creditors provide a window into the deceptive side of American entrepreneurship. But any reader in-

terested in Civil War journalism, the history of the press in nineteenth-century America or Confederate business history will find *The Moving Appeal* an interesting book.

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