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Barbara Bentley Smith, Nina Bentley Baker, eds. *"Burning Rails as We Pleased": The Civil War Letters of William Garrigues Bentley, 104th Ohio Volunteer Infantry.* Jefferson: McFarland and Company, 2004. xi + 226 pp. $49.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7864-1659-2.

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Good Material, Poor Editing

William Garrigues Bentley of the 104th Ohio Infantry saw combat in Kentucky, Cumberland Gap, the Siege of Knoxville, the Atlanta Campaign, Franklin, and the Carolinas Campaign. With a good eye for detail and a skillful pen, he punctually wrote home about what he saw, penning letters at the rate of about one per week from August 10, 1862, through May 1865. Given the frequency of his letters and powers of description, they are of significant interest to both historians and Civil War buffs.

The letters are arranged chronologically and divided into chapters based on the state where Bentley wrote them. The editors adequately introduce each chapter, providing both context and illumination of the 104th Ohio's journeys. To their credit, they include a glossary for those unfamiliar with military terms, yet underestimate the intelligence of potential readers by including definitions for such common terms as "camp," "frontal attack," "lice," and "canteen." Concluding the work is a very nice comprehensive roster of Bentley's regiment.

Unfortunately, amateurish editing pervades this work. Instead of presenting the letters in their entirety, they chose to omit two letters and to delete "long introductions and comments about mail, food and family members" from the remaining letters–information that historians and laymen may have found useful (p. 3). As a result, many of the letters begin with ellipses. They also chose to use ellipses where the author omitted words, thus leading to confusion as to whether the ellipses represented deletions on their part or omissions by the author.

The bibliography is inexcusable. The editors relied extensively on internet sources, many of dubious quality, citing only six published sources as opposed to twenty-four websites. Of those websites, one is an elementary or high school site and five no longer exist or are unreachable. Tourism and hobbyist websites do not a scholarly bibliography make.

In summary, this work suffers from many editing flaws, which overshadow the quality of William Bentley's letters. On the positive side, the chapter introductions are concise and informative while the somewhat flawed glossary and excellent comprehensive roster add nice finishing touches. At $49.95 McFarland has priced this book well beyond its quality.

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