



Charles V. Mauro. *The Civil War in Fairfax County: Civilians and Soldiers*. Charleston: The History Press, 2006. 155 pp. \$21.99 (paper), ISBN 978-1-59629-148-5.

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Contested Terrain: Fairfax County in the American Civil War

Charles V. Mauro offers a fascinating local study of Fairfax County, Virginia, during the American Civil War in his most recent work, *The Civil War in Fairfax County*. Based on original primary source research, the author documents the wartime interactions between civilians and soldiers of both Union and Confederate armies operating in this region of northern Virginia.

Mauro identifies the purpose of this text as contributing to the extant scholarship by focusing on the experiences of civilians during the war. He maintains that “very little is focused on the non-combatants—those who were also forced to survive under wartime conditions, those who were forced to flee their homes to avoid the danger to their lives, those whose property was destroyed or confiscated by the military forces around them—in short, the civilians” (p. 9). Mauro cites Maris Vinovskis’s *Toward a Social History of the American Civil War, Exploratory Essays* (1990) and Juanita Leisch’s *An Introduction to Civil War Civilians* (1994) to support this point. Although this assertion may have been true in 1994, the author undervalues a generation of scholarship on Civil War civilians, most notably Mark Grimsley’s *The Hard Hand of War: Union Military Policy toward Southern Civilians, 1861-1865* (1995), Stephen V. Ash’s *When the Yankees Came: Conflict and Chaos in the Occupied South, 1861-1865* (1995), and Joan E. Cashin’s edited collection, *The War Was You and Me: Civilians in the American Civil War* (2002).

Mauro relies heavily on the rich papers of the Southern Claims Commission created in 1870. These files consist of Southern civilians’ claims for loss of property during the Civil War. According to the author, “the claims processed by the commission created a fascinating paper trail from the claimants and from the people who testified for or against the claimants, providing a wealth of detail about the lives of the civilians as they faced the uncertainty of war on a daily basis” (pp.11-12). He also cites civilian diaries, especially that of Anne Frobel (*The Civil*

War Diary of Anne S. Frobel, 1992). Although Frobel’s diary provides a fascinating window into wartime Fairfax, one wonders why the author did not mine local newspapers for broader evidence about civilian reactions to the war waged in the county.

Mauro structures this work according to a clear chronology. The beginning of the text provides an overview of the history of Virginia and Fairfax County, in particular from its establishment to the eve of war. Specifically, the author discusses the debate concerning and eventual adoption of the ordinance of secession within Fairfax County and the rest of Virginia. Here, Mauro does an excellent job of presenting the tensions apparent in Virginian society on the eve of the conflict.

Mauro’s most significant contribution, however, lies in the middle of the text, where he discusses the war’s direct effect on Fairfax County. He examines the interaction between civilians and soldiers during the first year of the war, explaining that much civilian property in contact with Union troops was either appropriated or burned. The sole exception was Mount Vernon, which soldiers of both sides visited only as tourists. He also discusses major battles fought in and around Fairfax County during 1862, especially the Battle of Chantilly or Ox Hill, the only major battle fought in the county. During this battle, civilians saw the horrendous effects of battle close up, “as civilians discovered remains in shallow graves in the days following the battle” and “all the available public spaces in Falls Church were crowded with wounded” (p. 77). During 1863 and 1864, the Confederate raider John Singleton Mosby waged a guerilla war in Fairfax County, aided by the civilian population. Also in 1864, three major actions took place in the county: Jubal Early’s attack on Washington and Mosby’s attack on Falls Church along with his later attack on Annandale. By the beginning of 1865, “the defenses around Washington continued to be manned and maintained at a high level,” yet were dismantled at the end of the conflict (p. 119). Even with

the departure of the soldiers, over the course of the war, Mauro explains, the population of Fairfax increased from four thousand to seventeen thousand.

Mauro offers important and original insight concerning the statistics on gender, race, and geography pertaining to the claims submitted to the Southern Claims Commission. In regard to gender, Mauro concludes that women tended to exaggerate or could not prove ownership, thus they were rewarded a much lower percentage of total claims than men. The claims of blacks, however, were rewarded at 12 percent, double the percentage of white claims. Geographically, most claims were made at “the eastern portion of the county, not coincidentally where the forts and camps were located just outside Washington” (p. 131). Yet, in the end, Mauro reminds us that even in light of such differences, the fact remains that few civilians “received compensation for their losses during the conflict” (p. 136). This was probably primarily due to the fact that to obtain money from the commission, residents needed to show evidence of loyalty during the war, a challenge for a populace that remained staunchly Confederate during the conflict.

This book might have benefited from the integration of the concept of hard war, as framed by Grimsley in *The Hard Hand of War*. When Mauro discusses Union destruction of the homes of Fairfax County residents, he is grappling with this concept. Union soldiers undoubtedly not only appropriated civilian property for their own use, but also destroyed Southern property as a form of retaliation. Moreover, as Grimsley demonstrates, the Union hard war policy evolved over the course of the conflict. Since Fairfax County was continuously occupied by the Union army throughout the war, it would seem to be a perfect environment in which to evaluate the effect of Union hard war policy on a specific Southern populace.

Despite some criticisms, Mauro has written an intriguing text that discusses how Fairfax County was affected by the Civil War. Based on original research, from both diaries and the records of the Southern Claims Commission, Mauro’s book succeeds as a descriptive text that shows the effect of the war on the county over time. Learning the history of this specific region during the war allows readers to better understand the interactions among soldiers and civilians at the local level.

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