

H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences



Eugene C. Harter. *The Lost Colony of the Confederacy*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1985. xiv + 141 pp. \$14.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-87805-259-2.

Reviewed by Douglas W. Cupples (Memphis State University)

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The end of hostilities between Confederate and Union armies in 1865 marked the beginning of a new struggle for many southerners. Returning from military defeat on the battlefield most Confederate soldiers found financial poverty, devastated homelands, and political disenfranchisement waiting for them. For many the future was bleak, at best, and emigration offered the most practicable opportunity for restoring their shattered lives. As many as three million left for the American west and north, and a lesser number to other countries.

A significant amount, perhaps as many as twenty thousand, chose to begin their lives anew in Brazil. The South's Defeat in war had been followed by the policy of congressional radicals labeled Reconstruction. Military occupation coupled with social upheaval and political restructuring acted as a catalyst for many Confederates' desire to escape their devastated region. For most, however, the option of emigrating was not practicable, and many leaders such as General Robert E. Lee actively opposed these ventures.

Although Brazil still recognized slavery, the imminent elimination of this institution was decidedly forecast by the end of the American Civil War, and desires to continue its perpetuation probably held little appeal for the defeated southerners. On the other hand, the South American country was appealing for a variety of other reasons. The climate was similar to the emigres' native South, labor was cheap, and Brazil practiced a high degree of religious and political tolerance.

Although the former Confederates began several colonies, many failed to make it past the 1870s. Nonetheless, a village in Sao Paulo located near the railroad, and called Villa Americana by the natives, was destined to prosper and survive into the twentieth century.

In 1918 an American Geographical Society expedi-

tion visited the colony and reported their findings in the April 1928 issue of the *Geographical Review*. Their report chauvinistically reported that the Confederados were unhappy, living in squalor, and worse off than they would have been living under Federal control in the defeated South.

Contrary to the *Geographical Review's* report, most Confederados had adapted well to their new country and had prospered. Considering the conditions that existed in the 1865 South, anything would have been an improvement. Brazil offered the opportunity to prosper and, despite the return of a few disenchanting colonists, the majority made the most of their new lives and eventually merged into Brazilian society.

The Lost Colony of the Confederacy was written by a descendant of the Confederate immigrants. Eugene Harter returned to the United States in 1935, where he completed his education and embarked upon a career in journalism. In 1971 he returned to Brazil as the United States consul. While renewing acquaintances Harter realized that not a single book had been devoted to this aspect of the War Between the States.

Harter has provided a valuable addition to the historiography of the postwar era. Mostly ignored by historians and maligned by the northern press, the Confederados made an important statement about the war and Reconstruction not previously available to students of nineteenth-century America. Harter has corrected this oversight. To understand how deeply southerners embraced their independence and separation from their northern cousins one must understand how deeply they resented reunification. For a large number reunification was less desirable than a completely new start in a new country.

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