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John Niven, ed. *The Salmon P. Chase Papers, Vol. 5, Correspondence, 1865-1873.* Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1998. xxvi + 370 pp. $45.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-87338-618-0.

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One of the delightful realities of studying the history of this country is that every era has been blessed, and often cursed, with some genuine individuals, people who are truly singular and fascinating. Each of us undoubtedly would place different men and women on our lists of favorites, but it is hard to imagine many who would omit Salmon P. Chase from the key political figures of the Civil War era. Whether one considers him a committed and talented public servant or a figure consumed by presidential ambitions or something in between, he demands one's attention. In the final volume of the published edition of the *Salmon P. Chase Papers*, covering his years as Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court, editor John Niven has ably presented ample evidence of Chase's strengths and weaknesses.

Chase's correspondence, as is fitting a person who had served as a United States senator, governor and secretary of the treasury before his appointment to the Supreme Court, focuses mainly on political issues and discussions. If one thinks of the position of chief justice as non-partisan or beyond political intrigue, Chase's behavior will quickly dispose of that notion. Much of the 1865 correspondence relates to Chase's trip through several areas of the South and his reports back to President Johnson. In these messages Chase conveyed forcefully, but not convincingly, his conviction that southerners would accept black suffrage if only Johnson would demand it of them.

The correspondence from 1866 was somewhat more varied in subject matter. Chase remained actively involved in reconstruction politics, but also exchanged views on many issues before the Supreme Court. The letters also reflect two other issues that would remain themes throughout the rest of his life. One was his never-ending desire to be elected president. Month after month, year after year Chase and his rather small group of trusted confidants debated whether he should be an open candidate or whether some other strategy would best serve the goal. Typically, Chase would listen to their predictions that he was clearly the man for the times, then, while acknowledging that when he was younger he certainly sought the office, he would deny any current desire to lead the nation. Invariably he would follow the denial with something very much like, "Well, how are doing? Can we secure the nomination?"

The other persistent theme was Chase's defense of his actions as secretary of the treasury, particularly his roles in the creation of the national banking system and the issuance of the greenbacks. He simply could not ignore criticism of his work and frequently wrote lengthy explanations/defenses of what he had done. He often criticized the incumbent secretary, especially McCulloch, for failing to have the courage to forge ahead with an early resumption of specie payment. On Civil War financial issues, as on almost everything else, Chase saw little reason to rethink his course of action or admit error.

Chase was extremely busy in 1868. In addition to presiding over the trial of Andrew Johnson, Chase was immersed in his own presidential activities. Some of the most interesting and revealing letters in the entire collection concern Chase's efforts to defend his drive to gain the Democratic nomination. Many have found it rather incredible that one with such radical views of black suffrage could consider being the Democratic candidate for president. Chase, who clearly had ante bellum Democratic antecedents, had little difficulty convincing himself that it all made sense. During that hectic year Chase also pushed hard for a new Reconstruction policy that relied fundamentally on universal suffrage and universal amnesty for ex-Confederates. As that suggests, he never cared much for military reconstruction.

By 1871 presidential politics once again assumed a leading position in the correspondence. Chase, who had little respect for Grant, was again willing to discuss the Democratic nomination. From the perspective of those interested in Ohio history, perhaps some of the most significant correspondence in this volume is that between Alexander Long, a long time Democratic leader and Ohio

congressman, and Chase. These two shared a commitment to Chase's aspirations and kept each other well-informed of presidential politics in both 1868 and 1872.

Throughout the years covered in this volume, issues and cases before the Supreme Court appeared frequently in the correspondence. Although not indiscreet, Chase often shared views with others and defended the actions of the Court. This is particularly true of cases such as Hepburn v. Griswold. Nonetheless, this volume makes clear that Chase, even as chief justice, was more an active and involved politician than a jurist. Politics, not legal discussions, dominated his life and these pages.

Those interested primarily in Ohio history might be slightly disappointed by the correspondence presented here. Rarely is the focus on Ohio; little is learned about events or key figures in the state. Between 1865 and his death in 1873 Chase, now clearly a national figure, engaged in correspondence mainly with people from throughout the country and usually on national issues.

The editors, Niven, senior associates Leigh Johnson and James P. McClure, associate Holly Byers Ochoa, and assistant Kathleen Norman, have done a splendid job of collecting appropriate material from numerous archives, helping the reader understand issues, placing matters in a historical context and identifying correspondents and those mentioned in the correspondence. This volume provides excellent background and considerable detail on many of the most crucial financial, political and legal issues facing this nation in one of the most turbulent eras in this nation's history. Chase as chief justice was not just there; he often had a front row seat as this superb volume of correspondence amply demonstrates.

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