

BOOK REVIEWS

Edited by Walter Darrell Haden

Christopher Losson. *Tennessee's Forgotten Warriors: Frank Cheatham and His Confederate Division*. Knoxville, Tennessee: The University of Tennessee Press, 1990.

On September 4, 1886, Benjamin Frank Cheatham died at his home in Nashville. Two days later, after his funeral at the First Presbyterian Church, his body was borne to Mount Olivet Cemetery, where it was interred. The funeral procession "stretched over a mile in length," with some twenty-five to thirty thousand people "taking part in or [having] witnessed Cheatham's funeral procession, and the cortege included whites, blacks, former comrades and foes, and people from every social class." (pp. 278-279) For as long as Frank Cheatham lived, he occupied a special place in the hearts of fellow Tennesseans. But after death his fame dipped to relative obscurity as succeeding generations passed. Over a century later most Tennesseans did not remember the fighting Tennessean. His memory has faded in the shadow of Tennessee's great "Wizard of the Saddle," Lieutenant General Nathan Bedford Forrest. Christopher Losson, in his book *Tennessee's Forgotten Warriors: Frank Cheatham and His Confederate Division*, attempts to shift the spotlight back to this Mexican War veteran and Confederate major general.

Losson adequately covers Cheatham's colorful career. He fought gallantly in the Mexican War under old "Rough and Ready," Zachary Taylor, and old "Fuss and Feathers," Winfield Scott, rising to the rank of colonel and commanding a brigade for most of his time in Mexico. After the war Cheatham went to California for a time, returning to Nashville, from which he was later elected major general of the Tennessee Militia. In 1861 he entered Confederate service as a brigadier general and rose to the rank of major general. Cheatham commanded a brigade until the spring of 1862. His most notable service in this capacity was at the Battle of Belmont, Missouri, where General Ulysses S. Grant was defeated in his first battle. From the spring of 1862 until mid-summer 1864, he commanded a division and led his men through some of the war's most bitter fighting. Cheatham and his men left their mark at Shiloh, Perryville, Stone's River, Chickamauga, and in the Georgia campaign. (p. xiii) Cheatham was an excellent brigade and division commander, but he was not nearly so successful as a corps commander, as was shown at Atlanta, Spring Hill, Franklin and Nashville in 1864.

Cheatham ran for Congress in 1872 but did not win. Neither did ex-President Andrew Johnson, one of his opponents. Cheatham served from 1875-1879 as superintendent of state prisons, having been appointed to that post by Governor James D. Porter, Cheatham's wartime aid. He modified the convict lease system, abolished the use of the lash for offenses and in general tried to boost the morale of the prisoners. Cheatham was postmaster of Nashville at the time of his death, having been appointed to this office by President Grover Cleveland in October 1885.

Losson has given us a very good biography of the life of a colorful fighting general, one who was more like a Nathan Bedford Forrest than he was a Robert E. Lee. He was profane, given to drunkenness sometimes, and something of a gambler. Like Forrest, he often put himself in the thick of a battle where he won the affection and respect of the men he led. In discussing Cheatham and his command, Losson has given a good overview of the Army of Tennessee and its many command problems. He and Richard McMurtry (*Two Great Rebel Armies*) agree that Braxton Bragg and John Bell Hood were disastrous for the Army of Tennessee.

Losson has used manuscripts, letters, diaries, newspapers, official documents, published articles, and secondary works in the research and writing of this book. It is thoroughly researched and documented. Losson, however, has not succeeded in taking the limelight off the South's greatest cavalryman by putting it back on Frank Cheatham. However, as Jack H. DeBerry has stated in his review of Losson's book in the *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* (Winter 1990, p. 257), "Christopher Losson's book attempts to place Cheatham again in the hierarchy of Confederate heroes." In this Losson has succeeded. This is a book that all who are interested in the Civil War should enjoy reading.

Lonnie E. Maness

Jerry O. Potter. *The Sultana Tragedy: America's Greatest Maritime Disaster*. Gretna, Louisiana: Pelican Publishing, 1992.

As the Civil War was ending, newspapers were full of stories concerning Lee's surrender, Joseph Johnston's surrender, Lincoln's assassination, and Booth's being hunted down and killed, this the very day the *Sultana* reached Memphis. This left little room in the newspapers for the worst maritime disaster—even today—in American history. This was the explosion and sinking of the *Sultana* in the Mississippi River just north of Memphis on April 27, 1865. Because the coverage of the *Sultana* disaster was scant, this tragedy has passed almost unnoticed in the pages of American history. Jerry O. Potter, a history graduate of UTM and a practicing attorney, set out to correct this dearth of information by telling the complete story of the disaster, which he does capably.

There were 2,304 soldiers on board the *Sultana*, plus approximately one hundred civilian passengers and a crew of eighty five. The 260-foot, wooden-hulled steamboat was carrying over six times the ship's legal capacity of 376 persons plus assorted cargo, including livestock. This boat was much smaller than the *Titanic*, but it was carrying more passengers than that vessel did. Most of these soldiers were Union men, prisoners of war, who had just been released from the Confederate camp in Cobb, Alabama, and from Andersonville, in Americus, Georgia. They were from twelve states, including 501 from Tennessee, 791 from Ohio, 459 from Indiana, 310 from Michigan, and 194 from Kentucky. They had boarded the *Sultana* at Vicksburg en route to Camp Chase, near Columbus, Ohio, where they were to be discharged.

The soldiers were willing to suffer the crowded condition on board because they believed they were out of harm's way; the War was over; they were on their way home to families and friends. Charles M. Eldridge, a survivor of the disaster, described the men as "singing and dancing on the boat, and telling each other what they were going to do when they got home." Lt. William F. Dixon, another survivor, wrote: "We were all talking of home and friends and the many good things we would have to eat . . . We had no thought but that we would be at home in a few days feasting with our loved ones once more."

When the *Sultana* was just north of Memphis, at 2:00 a.m. on April 27, her boilers exploded. She sank quickly with more than 1,800 lives lost, many of them by drowning. Years after the tragedy, survivor James H. Kimberlin wrote of his amazement that "these living and those who had died should still go unacknowledged in American history." To him this was a disheartening comment on "the country's unfeeling attitude toward its veterans who had been aboard the *Sultana*."

In this work Jerry Potter brings the events of this voyage to life by the use of original military and government documents which have never been used in any prior work. This material has allowed him to document the greed, indifference, gross stupidity, and criminal misconduct reaching as far as the White House, all of which led to the overcrowding of the *Sultana*. Such irresponsible conduct characterized the actions of President Lincoln, an entire chain of army command, and several profit-hungry civilians. These documents also allowed Potter to disclose the cover-up by the military investigation, which resulted in no punishment being meted out for this terrible sacrifice of over 1,800 lives.

This is a well-written work documented with abundant photographs and illustrations. It also has the most complete existing record of the ship's manifest of the 2,304 soldiers, as well as separate lists for the crew and civilian passengers. Potter gives the *Sultana* and its passengers their well deserved places in history in a work that should be read by all who are interested in the Civil War and its many tragedies.

Lonnie E. Maness

Burt Feintuch, ed. *The Conservation of Culture: Folklorists and the Public Sector*. Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1988.

This book consists of seventeen essays by Mr. Feintuch and sixteen other professional folklorists, each exploring some facet of government-funded folklore activity.

The first precedent cited for such use of public funds is that of the Bureau of American Ethnology, which was founded in 1879. Under the direction of Major John Wesley Powell, the BAE began its work, which included "disseminating over one hundred thousand volumes on virtually every phase of American Indian life and culture to libraries and scholars in the nation and around the world."

The second precedent for public sector support of folklore studies is that of the Federal Writers Project of the New Deal. Editor Benjamin A. Botkin and like-minded FWP writers "acknowledged and treasured particular cultural differences in America—regional, ethnic and occupational—as a counterweight to the standardizing forces of modern life."

Other essays describe contemporary public sector folklife programs and deal with programming, formats, and issues, preservation, authenticity and politics. The final essay, "Public Sector Folklore as Intervention" by David E. Whisnant, which treats folklore as a political weapon, contains a most unoriginal piece of Reagan-bashing with attacks on other conservatives thrown in for good measure.

The book contains some good discussion and significant bits of history. It is not easy reading, but there are some entertaining nuggets within its pages. As a layman-taxpayer who has a continuing interest in folk-history-crafts-music, I especially like the following:

Dennis Hastings, Omaha Tribal Archivist in his thoughts on his people's learning their lost tribal songs from the old cylinder recordings. Ed Hazelton's description of a duck hunter who "just thought like a duck all the time" and the account of a folklife exhibit in a small town Kentucky library which became a catalyst for discussion of community history resources and values: "That small exhibit had become a tool for thinking about matters close at hand and close to heart." This reminds me of Tennessee's Homecoming '86, which showed how the public and private sectors can work together.

The Conservation of Culture: Folklorists and the Public Sector is a valuable reference for those who seek to preserve the diverse folkways of America.

Joe Bone

Linda Bobo Davis. *Good Times, Good People, Goodluck: A History of Goodluck, Tennessee*. Bradford, Tennessee: Skullbone Printing Service, 1992.

Perhaps the best review of this new history was done by my ninety-five year old mother who spent the early years of her life near Goodluck. After studying it religiously for a good two weeks, noting a few minor errors and discovering bits of history that she had not known, she remarked, "I feel as if I had just had a visit with all those people whom I used to know."

Mrs. Linda Davis has not only collected, edited and published sixty-five family histories, but she has written a well-researched and very readable narrative history of this large rural community. Her account does not duplicate the other local histories in Gibson County but rather complements them.

Goodluck centers on the intersection of Highway 105 and the China Grove-Keely Mill Road approximately five miles east of Rutherford. Where as many as four stores, a blacksmith shop and barbershop once flourished, there now stands a community center, two vacant store buildings and a couple of private dwellings. The community itself extends two or three miles in each direction,

encompassing five churches and reaching to the old Trenton-Dresden Road on the east and to the Rutherford Fork of the Obion River on the south.

In 1829, the Crockett Post Office was established on the Rutherford Fork, but the name was changed to China Grove in 1835 by David Crockett's political enemies after he lost his bid for re-election to Congress. After the post office was closed in 1845 and the Baptist Church was moved about three miles to the north in 1868, this locale was called by the name of the remaining business establishment, Keely's Mill.

One of the early settlers at Lynn Point was Jimmy Ward, who helped build the Trenton to Dresden Road in 1837. Later, a tanyard was operated at Lynn Point by Mr. James N. Hamilton, who became a wealthy co-owner of the Hamilton-Brown Shoe Company of St. Louis.

The origin of the name "Goodluck" is uncertain, but it is said that upon completion of the first store building, that one of the carpenters remarked "We sure had *good luck* on that job" and the proprietor replied, "Well, let's just name it Goodluck." The McDaniel and Hickman families are best remembered among the store owners and operators.

Eleven of the family histories concern the Swink family, who immigrated from Germany in 1730 and moved to Gibson County in 1850. This family of hardy pioneers acquired, cleared, and farmed a large acreage of good land. At least fourteen of the other families recorded here are related by blood or marriage to the Swinks. Most of the Swinks and their kin attended Salem Methodist Church.

Good Times, Good People, Goodluck began as a project of Tennessee Homecoming '86 and has resulted in a history volume of which the community can be proud. All profits resulting from its publication and sale are to be used by the Goodluck Community Association.

Joe Bone

Theodore Geus. *The Mississippi*. Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1989.

At first glance, *The Mississippi* is a picture book to garnish the finest coffee tables from Minneapolis to New Orleans. The photography of such respected artists as C.C. Lockwood, Thomas England, Larry Knutson, and Nathan Benn highlight a representative work of the people and places that dot the landscape of the Mississippi Valley from Lake Itasca in Minnesota to Pilottown, Louisiana.

The real treasure of *The Mississippi*, however, is the text of German travel editor Theodore Geus. To thumb through the book and peruse only the pictures, as most readers are wont to do, only reinforces the myths and meanderings of one of the world's great rivers. Geus' authoritative and eloquently styled text is a "book within a book" that deserves publication apart from the pictures. The photography will make *The Mississippi* a commercial success, but the book is much more.

In a thoroughly enjoyable essay entitled "People Along the River," Geus points out that Samuel Clemens, the American writer most associated with the Mississippi River, lived a life full of pseudonyms and allegories, of which "Mark Twain" was only one. In much the same way that Geus unmasks Clemens, the author has also unmasked America's greatest river for American readers who should know better.

Not surprisingly, it has taken still another foreign "discoverer" to unveil for an American audience a Mississippi River clouded by myths of steamboats and card sharks. Geus reminds us that the river was not "American" in the first place and the only thing surviving from the bygone millennia prior to the "discovery" of the Mississippi by De Soto is the name—"Mesipi," or Big Water. The text of the essay "River of Destiny" tells an engrossing tale of greed, blood, sacrifice, and conquest. Only traces still exist of the "Indians" who once called the 2,000 mile valley *home*.

When considered together, the pictures and text of *The Mississippi* provide an encompassing view of river history and river life. Having lived on or near the Mississippi in three states, north and south, this critic admires the thorough understanding with which a native German captures the pathos and ironies of the Mississippi River. In contrast to the modern skyline of St. Paul are the Chippewa Indians who still harvest wild rice in Leech Lake, Minnesota. In pictures and in the essay "Faces of America," Geus contrasts the people, architecture, and lifestyle of an industrial St. Louis to the carnival, cuisine, and easiness of a subtropical New Orleans. Geus also offers an insightful discussion of Louisiana's Cajuns and their "symbiotic relationship with the realm that lies between land and sea" in the marshes of the Mississippi Delta.

In "Dreams on the Mississippi," Geus includes a moving essay halfway through the book on the forgotten town of Cairo, Illinois. Here, Geus goes beyond the typical coffee table literature by addressing the dark nature of the river and its relationship with the white man who sought to conquer it. Time and time again, an expanding nation predicted a bright future for this crossroads at the confluence of the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers only to have floodwaters and poor economic speculations rip through Cairo's future. The lesson of Cairo is that the Mississippi controls its own destiny and also the hopes and dreams of those who live along its banks. This is a grim reminder for the industrial "chemical corridor" between Baton Rouge and New Orleans, for at this minute the Big Water is trying to turn away from its present course toward the Atchafalaya Basin in south central Louisiana. Perhaps Geus' most glaring omission is his failure to mention this point—probably the most important issue facing the near future of the river and the people who depend on it throughout southern Louisiana.

Other minor points need clarifying as well. Cajuns call their delicacy "crawfish," not "crawdads" as Geus claims. Ship Island is off the coast of Biloxi, not New Orleans. Despite these errors, *The Mississippi* is a must read for anyone who has ever lived on or near the river. In text and pictures, Theodore Geus brings to life those immortal words of the poet Langston Hughes: "I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe Lincoln went down to New Orleans, and I've seen its muddy bosom turn all golden in the sunset."

David Stiles Shipley