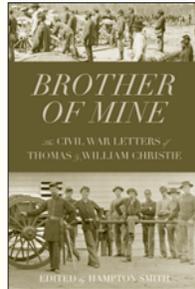


Brother of Mine: The Civil War Letters of Thomas and William Christie

Edited by Hampton Smith

(*St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2011. 330 p. Paper, \$19.95.*)



Brother of Mine draws on the extraordinary Civil War letters of two brothers, Thomas and William Christie. In October 1861 they joined thousands of others by signing up to fight for the Union. Their first choice, the Third Minnesota Infantry Regiment, was slow to organize. So instead, on November 21, 1861, the Christies mustered into the First Minnesota Battery of Light Artillery. They served for the duration of the war, mustering out on July 1, 1865.

Like many Civil War soldiers, Thomas and William wrote letters home to family members; for them, it was to father, sister, and brother. These letters, 274 of them, became part of the Christie Family Papers in the collections of the Minnesota Historical Society. Hampton Smith selected for publication ones that show the scope of the brothers' war experience. His well-written introduction gives the history of both the family and their papers.

Three aspects of the compilation highlight its value. First, most letters and journals now published were written by infantryman; these are from artillerymen. The brothers were proud of their unit and took pains to explain the importance of artillery and the superior performance of the First Battery. Knowing that their father probably had no knowledge of how to operate a gun, Thomas provided a step-by-step description. Late in the war when their younger brother informed them of his plans to enlist, Thomas and William told him to join the artillery and explained its superiority to other military branches. In writing to this young man, Thomas also penned a gripping account of an artillery battle (page 286–97).

Second, the brothers not only served for four years, but their battery saw action throughout most of the South. In early 1865 Thomas noted that they had been in ten states; the brothers covered two more before the war's end. The First Battery fought at Shiloh (in the Hornets' Nest), Corinth, and Vicksburg. It was part of the Battle of Atlanta, the March to the Sea, and the campaign through the Carolinas to Virginia. Thomas had kept a journal, but twice it was lost—at Shiloh and in Georgia. In order to have an account of his war life, he wrote full descriptions to his father and brother, particularly of the fighting and marching in Georgia and the Carolinas.

Third, whereas many soldiers' writings showed a remark-

able literacy, the Christie brothers' letters are among the best of them. They are often long, are always well written, and cover a wide variety of topics, ranging from accounts of fighting to efforts to organize a literary society. The brothers had a poor opinion of doctors, thought wealthy Southerners were being justly punished for slavery, believed they had a duty "to see this war to a close," and expressed support for the reelection of Lincoln and an end to "the curse of slavery." The descriptions of foraging expeditions in Georgia and North Carolina convey a real sense of the impact of Sherman's decision to take the war to the South and live off the land. Perhaps most poignant is William's reflection in November 1863 on two years of war.

This fine collection would have benefited from some additional editing. Any reader not deeply familiar with the Civil War might have difficulty following the movements of the First Battery or knowing what part the unit took in various battles. The siege and battle of Corinth are a case in point. From the letters it is unclear exactly what the battery's maneuvers were. Bridge notes introducing a series of letters could have provided needed context. Additional maps showing sites of the battery's action would have been helpful. The single map provided locates Shiloh in the middle of Tennessee rather than just north of Corinth.

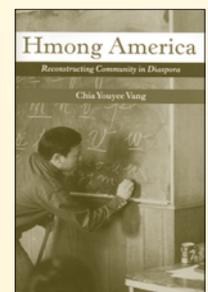
It has been said that the Civil War can be understood only by reading the letters of the men who fought. The letters of Thomas and William Christie add significantly to our knowledge of two artillerymen and their four years of warfare.

Reviewed by Sarah (Sally) Rubinstein, who was an editor at Minnesota Historical Society Press and is past president of the Twin Cities Civil War Roundtable.

Hmong America: Reconstructing Community in Diaspora

Chia Youyee Vang

(*Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010. 200 p. Cloth, \$75.00; paper, \$25.00.*)



Chia Youyee Vang's *Hmong America: Reconstructing Community in Diaspora* presents probably the most comprehensive account to date of contemporary Hmong American history. The author, an assistant professor of history at University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, utilizes a rich mixture of sources including archival research, interviews with community

members, and years of participant observation at community events. Vang opens the volume by providing the reader with information about the Hmong migration from China to Southeast Asia, experiences as a minority group in Laos, the role of the Hmong in assisting the U.S. and the Central Intelligence Agency during the Secret War in Laos, and the resettlement of the Hmong as refugees in the United States and other countries of the diaspora.

A true strength of the volume is Vang's detailed account of how Hmong American communities across the United States have evolved since the refugee resettlement of the mid-1970s. The primary focus is the community in Minneapolis-St. Paul, the nation's largest urban concentration of Hmong. Communities in California, Wisconsin, North Carolina, and other states also receive some attention. To show the agency of Hmong Americans in the adaptation and community-building process, the author focuses on the role of ethnic institutions, including nonprofit organizations and churches, in local Hmong settlements over time. She also traces the evolution of the Hmong New Year ceremony and the importance of different forms of political activism in Hmong American communities over the past 35 years. In her accounts of how these institutions, events, and issues have impacted Hmong Americans, Vang pays particular attention to diverse views and social divisions associated with gender, clan, time of immigration, generation, and religious affiliation. She effectively conveys to the reader the considerable diversity found within Hmong American communities.

A minor quibble is that there is no sourcing on two maps included in the book: *Hmong in the World, 2007* and *Hmong in the United States, 2007*. The author should be applauded for including these maps showing distributions of the Hmong population, however there is no indication on these maps of the sources for the population numbers cited.

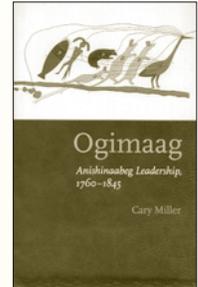
Overall, this book is a very readable and informative account of contemporary Hmong American history. While some theoretical language is presented, it does not dominate the volume. This work is appropriate for both scholarly and general audiences, high-school age and above.

Reviewed by Mark E. Pfeifer, Ph.D., an academic librarian at Texas A and M University, Corpus Christi, and adjunct professor of anthropology at the State University of New York, Institute of Technology, in Utica. Editor of the Hmong Studies Journal and the Hmong Studies Internet Resource Center (www.hmongstudies.org), he published Hmong-Related Works 1996–2006: An Annotated Bibliography (2007) and is coediting a forthcoming anthology of scholarly articles about the Hmong American experience.

Ogimaag: Anishinaabeg Leadership, 1760–1845

Cary Miller

(Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2010. 314 p. Cloth, \$50.00.)



In 1820 the governor of Michigan Territory, Lewis Cass, visited the Anishinaabe village at Fond du Lac at the western end of Lake Superior. Traveling west in search of the headwaters of the Mississippi, Cass met with thousands of Indians at numerous villages as he moved inland through country that was, technically, part of the territory he governed. In truth, however, he made his way through a territory governed by the Anishinaabeg, the indigenous peoples of the western Great Lakes and Upper Mississippi Valley. The reality of this truth would have been brought home to him as he entered village after village, meeting with Native leaders or ogimaag (not American officials), and submitting to diplomatic customs and protocols derived from nearly two centuries of encounter with the peoples of Europe and Euro-America. Cary Miller, in her fine book *Ogimaag: Anishinaabeg Leadership, 1760–1845* takes readers on a similar journey.

Miller has written an important political and social history of a region all too often ignored by scholars interested in the early history of North America. It is easy to think of this history in the eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries as a time of empires and emerging nation-states. In the Great Lakes and trans-Mississippi west, however, Native peoples were the dominant political, military, and economic powers during this period. Focusing on the history of the Anishinaabeg, Miller reveals how Native peoples in this region maintained their independence and avoided removal from their homelands during an era characterized by the expansion of the American nation-state.

Anthropologists have long recognized that the seasonal round of hunter-gatherers such as the Anishinaabeg depends on a deep knowledge of the natural world. At the same time, however, this body of scholarship has often portrayed people like the Anishinaabeg to be socially and politically underdeveloped. In sharp contrast, Miller reveals that this way of life required not only a sophisticated understanding of the natural world but also a correspondingly sophisticated political infrastructure.

The expertise necessary to live this way of life required communities to make a complex range of decisions regarding land use, travel, trade, warfare, and alliance building. Moreover, these decisions were not made by static village communities but, rather, involved the political coordination of a vast array of social units circulating across a trans-

regional space. The smallest units, winter hunting bands (indinaakonigewin) and clans (doodemag), came together to form villages and multi-village coalitions that participated in the global market economy via the fur trade and negotiated with empires and nation-states, as well as with rival and allied Native peoples. This sort of collective decision-making required a multi-layered political structure. Equally important, this political system needed to be fluid in order to accommodate the necessity of moving between social units of varying size and composition on a seasonal basis.

The Anishinaabeg relied on both hereditary leadership and leaders who emerged on specific occasions. Ogimaag from established patrilineal lineages negotiated with outside groups, managed land-use practices, and made certain that resources were distributed evenly throughout the community. An ogimaa was powerful to the extent that his actions created a consensus on issues of war, peace, and land use that secured community well-being. The truly powerful exercised this kind of influence not only within their own village but with Anishinaabe communities throughout the Great Lakes and Upper Mississippi Valley. Mobilizing spiritual power and raising war parties, however, also provided arenas for leadership that anyone might exercise. Miller

defines these nonhereditary positions of authority as charismatic leadership, and the real strength of her book comes from the way that she is able to describe this form of political power.

Miller argues effectively that allowing nonhereditary leaders to emerge in positions of religious and military authority democratized political power among the Anishinaabeg. And, she makes the case that the division between civil chiefs and war chiefs was not always clearly delineated, as dynamic individuals managed to assert their influence in both internal and external affairs during the course of their lifetimes. Miller also places women at the center of Anishinaabe political life, a much needed corrective for a history that is often obscured by the gender bias of archives dominated by fur trade and diplomatic records. This is an innovative reinterpretation of Anishinaabe political history and an important contribution to the history of early America.

Reviewed by Michael Witgen, associate professor of history and the Program in American Culture at the University of Michigan. His book, An Infinity of Nations: How the Native New World Shaped Early American History, is forthcoming this fall from the University of Pennsylvania Press.



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