

The Maltby Brothers' Civil War

Jonathan Newell

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Review

Newell, Jonathan

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Delaney, Norman C. *The Maltby Brothers' Civil War*. Texas A&M; University Press, \$32.95 ISBN 9781623490256

Proving The Civil War was Really a War Between Brothers

The Maltby Brothers' Civil War tells the story of three brothers – Jasper, Henry, and William – who were both torn apart and brought together by the Civil War. Norman Delaney, a college history instructor and Civil War naval historian in Corpus Christi, Texas, brings their story to life in a work that explores both the brothers' personal stories as well as the story of the South Texas region they helped to shape.

While originally from Ohio, brothers Henry and William settled down in South Texas. There they engaged in a variety of pursuits including stints as a circus owner, mayor, and publisher. Henry took the most public roles, founding and editing the weekly *Ranchero* newspaper in the frontier town of Corpus Christi. Along the way, the brothers encountered the drama of frontier life replete with its colorful cast of characters, ranging from hard working immigrants to get-rich-quick adventurers.

The coming of the Civil War divided the Maltby brothers. Their older brother Jasper had settled Illinois, finding work as a gunsmith. He joined the Union forces, distinguishing himself in the Vicksburg campaign and receiving both serious injury and accolades for bravery. Henry and William took up the Confederate cause with Henry's editorials advocating a strong secessionist position. William contributed by joining the local Confederate forces in their amateurish attempts to secure the miles of seacoast under Union blockade. These ragtag units ultimately suffered an embarrassing defeat at Ft. Semmes and went off into captivity where Jasper and William were reunited.

Jasper died soon after the war's conclusion, and William and Henry tried to revive their fortunes in South Texas. Both remained bitterly unreconstructed and

returned to the newspaper business with Henry at the office of the *Ranchero* in Brownsville and William at the *Corpus Christi Advertiser*. Throughout the post-war years, the brothers were influential civic figures, helping establish the identities of their respective communities and the broader South Texas region.

While the brothers did not leave many letters behind, their surviving editorials, accounts from contemporaries, and the *Official Records* allow for the creation of detailed portrayals. Delaney has done a magnificent job of pulling together these scattered sources and working them into a narrative that tells the story of both the brothers and South Texas during the years spanning from the antebellum to the post-reconstruction eras. He clearly denotes educated speculation from hard facts and shows a firm command of the region's local history.

Readers interested in the Union blockade of the Texas coast and the action at Fort Semmes and the Aransas Pass will find several chapters of rewarding information. The most insightful sections though deal with the Corpus Christi home front. Delany portrays in stark detail how the impassioned positions that drove the country apart also split the community, resulting in tragically fatal consequences for those whose loyalties were suspect. Readers without extensive background in this local history may find the number of minor characters in these stories a bit overwhelming, but the challenges the citizens faced speak to universal themes of duty and suffering during hardship.

Delaney also includes intriguing sections on the political upheavals of Mexico and Central America. In the antebellum years, the Maltbys crossed paths with the notorious adventurers Henry L. Kinney and William Walker who were leading ill-fated filibustering expeditions in Nicaragua. Then after the war, they were drawn into Mexico's struggle between the forces of Maximilian and Juarez. These incidents lend additional color to the story and show how cross-border political activity affected the lives of Texans.

This work will find its greatest appeal among readers specializing in the history of the Civil War in South Texas and anyone with an interest in the community story of Corpus Christi. Readers already familiar with the territory and its characters will gain the most from the work while a general reader may find the amount of local detail somewhat challenging. There are also times when the Maltbys disappear from view as the narrative pursues related topics and characters.

Those potential drawbacks aside though, the work has much to commend itself. Maps and illustrations are included throughout, giving the reader helpful guideposts to navigating potentially unfamiliar territory, and the story of the brothers is an insightful microcosm of the Civil War experience in South Texas. In conclusion, Delaney has produced as a solid piece of regional history that revives the long-neglected story of the men and movements that helped shape the state of Texas through both war and peace.

Jonathan Newell (newellresearch@gmail.com) served as an Army Reserve officer in religious support operations and now is an independent scholar, focusing on the Civil War in South Carolina. He is currently completing a book manuscript entitled A Service Unobserved: The Life and Times of Colonel Charles J. Colcock, Third South Carolina Cavalry.