

Everyday Life During the Civil War (Writer's Guide to Everyday Life Series)

Michael J. Varhola

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As narrative fiction becomes a more popular way to bring actual events in history to the attention of the mass public, books such as Varhola's Civil War writing reference become essential to writers wishing to delve into the subject of the war that divided the States. Each chapter is a brief essay that illuminates a certain aspect of daily life during the Civil War by providing the reader with specific details that can be used in both fiction and non-fiction writing about the period. He leaves no area untouched. At the close of the chapters, he includes the definitions of relevant terms and a variety of statistics ranging from purchases people made to salaries to the value of land at different points during the war. Though it is an overview, this "Civil War dictionary" is detailed enough to interest the aficionado. The statistics would be especially helpful when comparing different periods in U.S. economic history.

Some of Varhola's most intriguing chapters discuss the differences in slang between the North and South, fashion, currency and entertainment—topics not often dissected in Civil War literature. Varhola also includes a helpful time line of the War that spans 1859 to 1877, with a synopsis of many relevant events, not just battles. Varhola does the writer a great service by recommending other resources through an extensive bibliography and a list of television, film and the Internet resources. His best resource is a comprehensive list of historical sites that a writer can visit or research ranging from birthplaces to battlesites.

Varhola is the editor of two notable history magazines and has also researched and written about the Civil War extensively. His book serves a dual purpose as both an excellent reference tool for writers of fiction and non-fiction and also as an overview for any student of the Civil War who wishes to refresh his memory of events and also add some obscure tidbits to his knowledge of the daily life that continued throughout this bloody conflict.

KRISTIN PUTCHINKSI (November / December 1999)

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