

Florida Historical Quarterly

Volume 35
Number 1 *Florida Historical Quarterly*, Vol 35,
Issue 1

Article 8

1956

Book Reviews

Florida Historical Society
membership@myfloridahistory.org



Part of the [American Studies Commons](#), and the [United States History Commons](#)

Find similar works at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/fhq>

University of Central Florida Libraries <http://library.ucf.edu>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by STARS. It has been accepted for inclusion in Florida Historical Quarterly by an authorized editor of STARS. For more information, please contact STARS@ucf.edu.

Recommended Citation

Society, Florida Historical (1956) "Book Reviews," *Florida Historical Quarterly*. Vol. 35: No. 1, Article 8.
Available at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/fhq/vol35/iss1/8>

BOOK REVIEWS

A History of the Freedmen's Bureau. By George R. Bentley. (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1955. 298 pp. Notes, appendix, bibliography, and index. \$5.00.)

THE RUNAWAY NEGROES, who began to appear at Union army headquarters early in the war, and who came in increasing numbers after Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation of January 1, 1863, had to be fed and cared for. They could not all be put to work or enrolled in the army. And as it became clear that emancipation would be a result of the war, some permanent solution of the problems of the freedmen had to be found.

The United States Government moved slowly and awkwardly toward a policy. Army officers were detailed to handle the problem temporarily. United States Treasury agents who managed confiscated Confederate property had a hand in it. Meanwhile, Freedmen's Aid Societies were raising money, providing some relief, and maintaining orphanages and schools. But all of these were temporary and somewhat makeshift arrangements. There was growing demand for a government policy and an agency to carry it out. Congress, finally in March, 1865, created the Bureau of Freedmen, Refugees and Abandoned Lands, commonly called the Freedmen's Bureau.

A mixture of motives brought this agency into being. Friends of the Negro wanted the Bureau to help him secure not only relief from his immediate economic distress, but also the land, education, justice, and civil and political rights which they doubted he would get without some such assistance. Business men wanted the Bureau to get cotton production under way, to be assured of a labor supply, and to protect investments in land and planting operations. Politicians wanted it for the patronage and votes it might involve. Needless to add, the freedman was often caught between those who would help him and those who would exploit him.

The Bureau never had the budget or sufficient personnel to accomplish the purposes for which it was created. Even the Radical Congress was unwilling to go that far in social and economic legislation. The Bureau did administer relief to freedmen and

refugees and, on many occasions, to destitute whites. It supervised the making of contracts that helped put the freedmen back to work and secured more equitable terms for them. It also encouraged the building and maintaining of schools for its charges, but these were gradually integrated with the state school systems. Its agents held court and administered justice in minor cases where freedmen were concerned until the new state governments under Radical Reconstruction began to function.

The Bureau failed to secure any considerable amount of land for the freedmen, either from the public domain or from confiscated estates. Unfortunately too, Freedmen's Savings Banks, legally separate from, but intimately associated with the Bureau, failed because of loose management, and the Negroes lost their meager savings. Finally, says Professor Bentley, the Bureau got an extension of its life to help organize the freedmen for political action. Bureau agents, already in contact with freedmen, were in a strategic position to teach them to vote, and, of course, to vote for their liberators, the Republicans. Just possibly they held the balance in the election of 1868.

This is a timely book. It recounts the story of one of the first efforts to secure for the Negro the benefits of his newly acquired freedom. The Bureau could never be better than the people who manned it and those with whom it worked. They all appear in the pages of this book. A reading of this account throws considerable light upon some of the factors in the current segregation-integration controversy.

This is historical scholarship at its best. It is notable for clarity of expression and readability. It is full of aptly chosen quotations that lend human interest to the story. And it is a very human sort of story. It is recommended for reading by laymen as well as scholars. It is fully documented, although some may object to the placing of the footnotes at the end of the book. It was awarded the Albert J. Beveridge Memorial prize for the best manuscript in American History submitted in 1954 and is published under the auspices of the American Historical Association.

This is a Florida book in the sense that Florida was one of the states in which the Bureau functioned. The author is a Floridian, a graduate of Miami High School, and the holder of

two degrees from the University of Florida where he is a member of the faculty.

CHARLTON W. TEBEAU

University of Miami

The Three Pebbles. By Richard Parker. (New York, David McKay Company, 1956. 218 pp. Illustrations. \$2.75.)

THE THREE PEBBLES is a fictional account of the French Huguenot attempt to colonize Florida in 1564 under Rene de Laudonniere. Written as historical adventure to appeal to young people of age 13 to 17, the story will find in addition a much wider audience whose interest is Floridiana.

The main character is teen-aged Huguenot, Pierre Debre, whose father, a printer, was forced to leave the son behind when he fled to Switzerland to avoid the penalty for being one of those who secretly printed little tracts explaining Calvinism.

Pierre's desperate attempt to be free from his underground existence brings him two friends, Pierre Gambi - a street boy adventurer who lives by his wits, and Pierre - a farm boy strong and practical. The three Pierres impulsively join the Florida venture, each for his own purpose.

Richard Parker takes the story of the expedition from its leaving Le Harve to the point approximately a year later when the unexpected appearance of the ships of Sir John Hawkins gave Laudonniere an opportunity to bargain for the rescue of the sad remnants of his colony.

Pierre Debre has become the personal servant of Laudonniere. Through his eyes the reader becomes acquainted with the leader, his lieutenant, Ottigny, also Arlac, La Caille and others of historical importance. Debre relates the landing on the St. Johns River, then called Riviere de May; the building of Fort Caroline and the gradual sad reduction of the colony by famine and unfortunate dealings with the Indian chiefs, Saturiba, Outina and Potanou. Gambi uses his quick tongue to serve as an interpreter between the French and the Indians and to further his own search for the wealth and treasure that was the typical goal of the bulk of the expedition. The farm boy struggles futilely to interest the

colonists, most of whom had never done any real work, in planting and trapping to feed themselves.

The plot is based on the facts given in Francis Parkman's *The Pioneers of France in the New World*, Chapters 4, 5 and 6 and utilizes the three main sources summarized there: The letters of Rene de Laudonniere, an account by the expedition's artist, Jacques Le Moyne, and a story of the colony by the carpenter Challeux. While the writing is not outstanding, the ingenious linking of little known historical facts and characters with the plausible adventure plot makes a worthwhile light historical novel.

MAY H. EDMONDS

Miami Public Library

AS THEY SAW FORREST. Edited by Robert Self Henry. (Jackson, Tenn., McCowart-Mercer Press, 1956. 306 pp. Maps and illustrations. \$5.00).

THE PAST TWENTY YEARS has brought an increasing interest in military history: in the United States a great deal of this interest has centered upon the Civil War. World War II, the Korean Conflict and the continuing interest in national defense is partly responsible for this trend. The volume under consideration here is one of the most recent additions to this body of military historical literature.

The subject of the book, General Nathan Bedford Forrest, is one of the most noteworthy of our American military leaders. Inexperienced in the arts of war, and with no formal military education, his successes in the Civil War were merely one phase of a varied and exceedingly active life. His boyhood was spent in a backward rural area as the son of a blacksmith. At sixteen he became the chief provider for his mother and numerous younger brothers and sisters. As farmer, horse-trader, real estate operator, slave dealer, and plantation owner, he had gained fame and fortune when at the age of thirty he enlisted in the Confederate States Army, and began the career which is the subject of the present volume.

This shrewd, successful business-man brought to the profession of arms a resourcefulness that seemed never to desert him. He was able to combine the cunning of the Indian-hunting frontiersman and the common sense of the American pioneer.

He would size up a situation and make decisions quickly without reference to the accepted rule-books. This combination brought to his military operations an originality that usually dumbfounded his adversaries and gained for him a reputation of invincibility. By mid-1864 General Forrest had assembled a versatile mounted fighting force of 10,000 men and 300 wagons, armed and equipped exclusively with captured Federal materiel. In more than two years, he had not received one requisition of either subsistence or ammunition from his own government, and had done more successful fighting than any other Southern general.

This collection of writings covering the military career of General Forrest is fairly representative of the period. Some of the authors served with him during various parts of his numerous campaigns. Others, such as General Viscount Wolseley, were contemporaries of General Forrest but had not known or served with him personally. A very small portion of the volume was set down in the form of diary entries at the time the incidents took place, but a vast majority of the material was written years or even decades after the war, and so are reminiscences rather than accurate history. The chief value of the present volume lies in the fact that it brings together the accounts of these various authors and makes them easily available in one place.

The last chapters of the volume include several selected pieces from General Forrest's correspondence. There are many other similar items that might well have been included in this section. This is not a reflection upon the items reprinted. However, this would have been an excellent place to have included many more of his writings. One might even wish that the editor had made this work a collection of all the important letters, orders, reports, official documents, and business correspondence of General Forrest. This would have produced a much larger volume, but the services and reputation of General Forrest were such that he certainly deserves to have his important papers collected and made easily available for those who are interested.

The writer also believes there is a place for the collected papers of the businessmen of General Forrest's period, especially those who contributed so much to the post-war economic development of the Southwestern states. General Forrest's exploits in

the business world are just as interesting, and display his remarkable characteristics fully as well as his military career, even though they may not be as hair-raising. He had amassed a fortune at the age of thirty (when the war began), and even though the war cost him most of his earlier fortune, he used the same energy, persistence, and good common sense to regain much of his former position and wealth after the war closed. One might also include the story of his connection with the Ku Klux Klan, and his other efforts to maintain the society he had fought so hard to defend during the war years.

There are two very excellent maps in this last section: the first is a detailed drawing of the campaign at Brice's Cross Roads, one of the more brilliant of Forrest's operations. The second is an excellent map of the entire territory over which General Forrest fought during his Civil War service. One could hardly overestimate the value of this to the student of Civil War history.

The quality of the book is excellent. The paper and print leave little to be desired; the illustrations are as much as could be expected from the original old prints and plates. The maps are easily followed and are on a special grade of paper that will stand a great deal of wear. The format is better than most, and the book is easily readable.

THEODORE R. PARKER

St. Petersburg Junior College

