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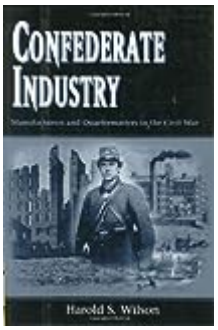

Harold S. Wilson. *Confederate Industry: Manufacturers and Quartermasters in the Civil War.* Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2002. xxii + 412 pp. $45.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-57806-462-5; $30.00 (paper), ISBN 978-1-57806-817-3.

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Manufacturers and the Confederate State

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Photographs of fallen Richmond from the last days of the rebellion depict burned-out buildings, tall plain structures with many close-set windows: factory buildings. The Confederate capital's gutted mills illustrate not only the devastation of war, but also the recognition by the Union of an industrial sector that had sustained the war effort. In *Confederate Industry*, Harold Wilson explores the history of southern manufacturing and the entrepreneurs who guided it, their relationships with the state, Confederate, and victorious Federal governments, and their paths between diplomacy and commerce with the wider Atlantic world. Wilson uses these stories to argue two main points: that the experience of war moved the Confederacy into an "experiment with military socialism," and that Old South manufacturers provided the foundation for New South industrialization. A somewhat frustrating read because of its detailed, source-driven narrative, Wilson's book nonetheless shines the light of extensive primary research on the changing roles of southern industrialists and the course of the business-government relationship within the Confederate States of America (C.S.A.).[1]

Wilson sets his stage by chronicling a war of statistics that predated the military conflict, in which northerners promoted their manufacturing predominance and southerners rebutted with their own impressive numbers. He also introduces his key manufacturers: the Crenshaws, woolen manufacturers of Virginia; Francis Levin Fries and Edwin Michael Holt in North Carolina; William and James Gregg, father and son mill-owners in South Carolina; James Barrington King and Henry Merrell in Georgia and Arkansas; and Daniel Pratt of Alabama. These and other manufacturers opposed secession, according to Wilson, because they knew which side of their bread had all the butter. Northern and foreign banks supplied their credit, and their factories required machinery from international suppliers. Though mill-owners opposed the formation of the Confederacy, they served it reasonably well and overcame the extensive difficulties of dealing with quartermasters' demands and the evolving Confederate bureaucracy.

In two chapters, Wilson explores the controversial tenure of Abraham C. Myers, the Confederacy's

first quartermaster general. Myers, the grandson of Charleston's rabbi and a career army officer, proved unable to parlay his devotion to the Confederate cause and his logistical successes during the Mexican War into an adequate supply system for the several far-flung armies of the Confederacy. He sent circulars to manufacturers inviting their bids, directed purchasing agents to visit mills and make arrangements on site, and established warehouses and manufacturing operations in port cities. Yet "traditionalism" dogged Myers's bureaucracy, which owed as much to patronage as to efficiency. He delegated too much authority to his assistants, favored factories by exempting workers from conscription, and gave lucrative appointments and contracts to his friends. Volunteer companies outfitted themselves, which meant competition for goods within the army. In the winter of 1861-62, this system was already breaking down, and the closing of the Mississippi further interrupted trade within the Confederacy. Rather than meet needs creatively, Myers often responded to complaints with tiresome recitations of regulations.[2]

To be fair, Myers's responsibilities loomed larger than keeping the armies supplied, as Wilson points out. The quartermaster general distributed all the army pay, secured all prisoners of war, and controlled water and railroad commerce for several years as well. High inflation made his job harder. Attempts to regulate prices failed, and many textile manufacturers held weekly auctions of their goods. Industrial access to raw materials and machine parts suffered not only from the Union blockade but also from wartime disruptions in cotton and wool production. The rapid depreciation of the Confederate currency made businessmen unable to pay distant debts, while workers deserted the factories for the army. Too often, "relief associations, ladies' societies, state agencies, friends and families" did a better job of supplying basic goods to the armies. While Myers had many high-ranking friends, line officers despised him. After Gettysburg, in 1863, Jefferson Davis appointed brigadier general Alexander L. Lawton to outrank Myers and move the quartermaster department toward the "full mobilization of Confederate resources."[3]

Lawton escaped many of Myers's failings by pushing for "a uniform standard of procurement and production." This included establishing standard clothing and shoe sizes and patterns to eliminate inefficient cutting in clothing manufacture, and instituting a uniform system of contracts as well. By the end of 1864, Lawton had a satisfactory structure in place for mobilizing the manufacturing resources of the Confederacy to supply its armies. But full self-sufficiency proved impossible. While manufacturers of replacement parts for textile machinery proliferated across the C.S.A., the absence of wire-pulling machinery (necessary for the card clothing that separated cotton fibers) crippled the mills. Manufacturers turned to commerce to keep their factories going, running the Union blockade with supplies. Government and private steamers landed needed goods on the coasts, but Wilson argues that "with more emphasis on importing machinery, the domestic contribution [to army supplies] might have been far greater." When factories fell to fire or siege, scavengers quickly salvaged their parts to keep other mills running.[4]

With the coming of total war, advancing U.S. armies laid waste to the C.S.A.'s factories. Active mills, with their fires and food stores, drew the civilian population made destitute by war. After Appomattox, Wilson argues, the devastation of private property, the wrecked railroads and mills, and the "disorganization of labor" combined to make economic Reconstruction the cornerstone of Andrew Johnson's policies. Pardons for manufacturers came easily, though few willingly accepted the repudiation of Confederate debts. Wilson judges Presidential Reconstruction as an attempt "to forestall greater chaos" and Radical Reconstruction, briefly, as an interruption to the process of building a New South on the foundations of the old.[5]

Wilson tells his story with a vivid pen and an especially fine gift for descriptive turns of phrase. For example, he completes a sketch of complex railway connections around lost territory and destroyed lines with an image of the army that "dangled at the end of a supply line almost 1,000 miles long." When he tackles Presidential Reconstruction, he uses his manufacturers to place Andrew Johnson clearly within the shifting class identities of the defeated South with the simple and telling phrase, "Johnson worked with these self-made men." But he has less flair for structure. He has not pruned the minutiae of his narrative enough to sustain his argument clearly over the course of his book, nor to present his analysis of events as they occur. He shows too many trees, with few guideposts through the forest.[6]

In support of this detailed story, Wilson has done a truly impressive amount of primary research. He has mined manuscript collections at fifty depositories, the Confederacy's papers in Record Group 109 at the National Archives, manuscript census materials for population and industry, newspapers across the C.S.A., records of legislative assemblies, coverage of commercial and

manufacturing expositions, and then some. He has even dug up Mary Chesnut's reference to yarn circulating as money in 1864. Yet Wilson's cumbersome citation system–a combination of parenthetical references and endnotes, sometimes more than 200 notes per chapter–detracts from this accomplishment. Better consolidation of his sources at the ends of paragraphs would better suit his narrative style and could aid the reader in following the structure of his argument.

This attention to primary materials, however laudable, may also have barred Wilson from an opportunity to address the historical debates surrounding American industrialization. Except for three pages of historiography sketched in the preface, the author makes little effort to place his work within the literature. When he cites recent books, such as Bess Beatty's *Alamance* or Scott Reynolds Nelson's *Iron Confederacies*, he generally mines them for information rather than engaging their arguments. Yet he could have used the issues raised by his colleagues to sort out the implications of the Confederate state's "experiment with military socialism." In tracing continuities between antebellum and New South industry, he implies (and occasionally declares) that the Civil War accelerated industrialization. Quantitative scholarship, however, has revealed a very different story of destruction, interference, and retardation, one for which Wilson has himself provided vivid narrative evidence in the ruin of southern business.[7]

Richard Franklin Bensel's exploration of the shifting relationships among business, industry, and the state during the Civil War and Reconstruction revealed similar outcomes to those Wilson has uncovered, but Bensel does not characterize the political economy that emerged from the war as anything other than capitalist. Wilson's own sources could have let him fully confront the contradictions between the economic and physical devastation of industry on the one hand, and the impact of government policies fostering industrialization on the other.[8]

If Wilson's inattention to historiography may leave a scholarly audience wondering what conclusions to draw from his work, popular readers will likely enjoy the story with its lively characters and intriguing relationships between the Confederacy and its leading citizens. And Wilson's Herculean efforts in the archives serve well as a guide for future researchers in exploring nineteenth-century Southern industry, who will have to contend with his findings.

Notes

[1]. Wilson, *Confederate Industry*, 237; "Richmond, Va. Ruined buildings in the burned district," photograph, April-June 1865, Library of Congress Call Number B811-3234, <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/amhome.html$>$.

[2]. Wilson, *Confederate Industry*, 94.

[3]. Ibid., 80, 92.

[4]. Ibid., 94, 179.

[5]. Ibid., 235, 243.

[6]. Ibid., 96, 230.

[7]. Ibid., x, 229, quotation at 237; Bess Beatty, *Alamance: The Holt Family and Industrialization in a North Carolina County, 1837-1900* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1999); Scott Reynolds Nelson, *Iron Confederacies: Southern Railways, Klan Violence, and Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999); Ralph L. Andreano, ed., *The Economic Impact of the American Civil War* (Cambridge, Mass.: Schenkman Publishing Co., 1962).

[8]. Richard Franklin Bensel, *Yankee Leviathan: The Origins of Central State Authority in America, 1859-1877* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

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