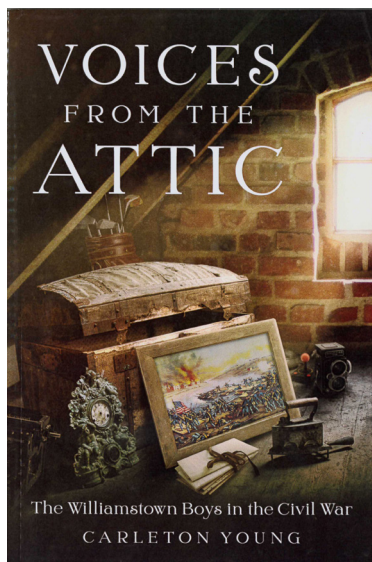


BOOK REVIEWS



Voices From the Attic: The Williamstown Boys in the Civil War

By Carleton Young
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374 pp.
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Reviewed by Aaron O'Data,
University of Pittsburgh Coordinator of Biographic Research
and Stewardship and Duquesne University Public History
program alumnus

When was the last time you cleaned your attic? The process can be as surprising as it is daunting. Questions may arise about where certain items came from, or alternatively where certain items went. A surprising find and a quest for answers is at the heart of a new book,

Voices From the Attic, by local educator and author Carleton Young.

In 2002, Young was helping to clean out the attic of his recently passed father. He found a box containing numerous letters from the Civil War era mostly written by two Union soldiers, brothers Henry and Francis Martin, to their family back home in Williamstown, Vermont. Young, along with family and friends, began seeking answers as to how these letters from an obscure Vermont family ended up in his father's attic in Pittsburgh. They also spent a number of years painstakingly transcribing the letters, culminating in the publication of *Voices From the Attic*. Part anthology, part history, and part genealogy, the book combines interesting selections of transcribed letters, historical context and images, as well as the story of how Young and company discovered their connection to the Martin family. The book is structured with an introduction presenting this story, many chapters which contain excerpts from the letters as well as historical context, and a light-handed narrative to tie it together, followed by a conclusion which explores their genealogical quest.

Young notes that he decided to publish yet another book related to the Civil War, a topic extensively reviewed and published, because these letters offer a unique view of the war. Unlike other soldiers who may have skipped over tough details when writing home to families, the brothers did not shy away from describing the horror of battles, their hardships in camp, and what they saw

as they marched through the South. Henry, in particular, painted vivid images of what battles were like in his messages home, even to the point of being told that at least one of the family's neighbors was questioning his patriotism for being too negative. Indeed, the letters demonstrate clearly that 19th century warfare, like that of any time, was trying physically, mentally, and emotionally.

Overall, the book offers a deeply interesting look into two detailed experiences of the war which explore the battles as well as life in between, when men were left to worry, heal, gossip, and attempt to make the best of a difficult situation. More than merely satisfying an interest in the war, Young uncovers one of the major threads of the American narrative—the movement of people and things—and demonstrates our surprising connections to each other both past and present. Those seeking further contextualizing information about the topics covered may wish to explore scholarship by Aaron Sheehan-Dean, Chandra Manning, and Steven Ramold in conjunction with this work. If a second edition of the book is ever published, it could benefit from an illustrated family tree for those interested in visualized information as well as a glossary in the beginning and footnotes or endnotes throughout for reference. Otherwise, *Voices From the Attic* offers readers greater insight into the war from the ground-level, and may lead them to wonder what voices await them in the nooks and crannies of their own attics. 