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Book Review - A Place Called Appomattox: Community at the Crossroads of History

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Off the SHELF

A Place Called Appomattox: Community at the Crossroads of History by William Marvel (The University of North Carolina Press, 2016: ISBN 9781469628394, \$26.00)

If one were to pick William Marvel's *A Place Called Appomattox* off the shelf, the size and heft of the book might bring one to question, "is there really this much to say about Appomattox?" In fact, there is. Marvel's work does nothing less than to bring the place and the people that are oft so two-dimensional on the pages of history sharply into three-dimensions.

Beginning with the creation of the county and descriptions of its initial residents in the mid-1840s, the work follows the most prominent (or well-documented) of those residents into the Civil War and often beyond. Marvel calls upon an extensive number and type of sources, including personal correspondence and diary entries, to recreate the narrative of Confederate life for those serving in the war, those dodging conscription, and those waiting at home.

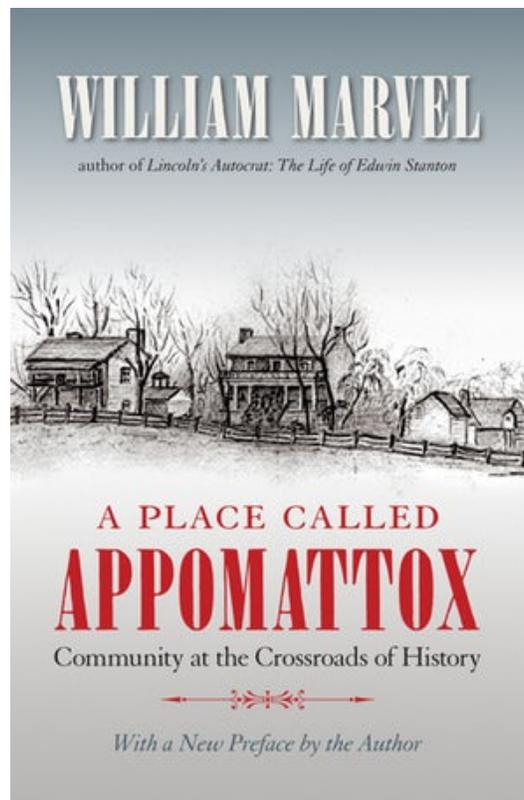
Marvel's work attempts to portray events with the utmost accuracy, and so he dutifully follows the military men of Appomattox into the less than glorious trenches, where disease often killed more ravenously than any Union soldier. The work follows the lucky troops that illness did not claim into each battle and painstakingly

details as many Appomattox injuries, captures, and deaths as can be accurately accounted for. This incredible attention to detail can sometimes become cumbersome when the author attempts to explain the injuries of several Appomattox natives in a given battle. However, this same attention to detail and research ensures that Marvel accounts for all possible Appomattox County soldiers by final tally at the time of Lee's surrender to Grant: a mere 20 or so men of the original 700 or more that the county produced—not always willingly—for the war effort.

Although his work follows southern soldiers through the Civil War, the author spends little time on the reasons dozens of men rushed to serve the newly formed Confederacy in 1861. Judgement on the reasons for the war is reserved for the readers or the authors of other works. Marvel's goal is quite clearly to focus on the people of Appomattox as humans with businesses, families, and lives, regardless of the moral implications of their own

choices and the choices of their leaders. Appomattox's citizens are presented purely as they were: human.

The work—as the title rightly implies—focuses solely on Appomattox County and its citizens. Very little is shared about the proceedings of the war outside of its effects on the designated topic. It should therefore be understood that



this work is meant for an audience with more than a casual knowledge of the Civil War. At least some military knowledge is also recommended, as the author spends no time explaining rank or military unit organization.

Those with special interest or knowledge of this topic would doubtless find Marvel's work a worthwhile addition to their repertoire.

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