



FROM FADING LINES

BOOK ONE

THE CIVIL WAR ERA

American History:
Stories from Inscriptions in
Vintage Autograph Albums

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Note: The story told in each chapter was prompted by researching information in, and the original ownership of, an autograph album. In this table, the name of the original owner is listed together with the owner's state of residence and the year of the first entry in the album.

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INTRODUCTION

On a sunny June day in the year 1861, a fourteen-year-old boy walked along the rows of Union Army tents in the meadows beside the Connecticut River north of Hartford. For barely three weeks the temporary Camp Mansfield had been home to a thousand young men, who were training to become the first-in-the-nation regiment responding to President Lincoln's call for troops to serve three-year terms. Many, including the boy's cousin Samuel Hatfield, were college students. The youngster asked for inscriptions in his autograph book from soldiers who, three days hence, were due to strike their tents and depart by steamer to go to Washington and to war.

A month earlier, in an enclave of North Carolina settled mostly by Scottish immigrants, Ella McQueen bid farewell to the first of her cousins who was entering into the service of the Confederate States Army. In the following months and years one after another of her relatives departed for military duty, and she awaited reports in the newspapers about their progress. In May of 1864, it was a sad young woman who pasted into her "Boudoir Album" clippings detailing the recent deaths of three of her soldier-cousins, the youngest of whom was just seventeen years old.

These and the other stories included in this book emerged from research into old autograph albums. From fading lines that kept alive the memories of schoolmates, friends and relatives, appeared inscriptions, with names, dates and places that connect the reader to individuals who lived through the Civil War era. The original owners of the albums were mostly mothers, wives, daughters and cousins of the subjects of the stories.

Whether their names were recorded in albums before, during or after the War, these Americans all experienced that terrible event in one way or another. For this book I selected equal numbers of narratives from North and South. Whereas a majority of the subject

individuals were soldiers, there were also pharmacists, merchants, politicians and an inventor, all of whom were embroiled in the conflict.

A note about what this book is not. This is not a collection of signatures of famous generals. It doesn't provide new insights into well-known campaigns. I make no pretense to be a Civil War buff or a professional historian. Rather I have identified families and individuals whose Civil War-era stories deserve to be told.

The chapter endnotes include details about each of the albums as well as historical and genealogical references.

For more about the history and evolution of autograph albums, a description of the album collection and the process of exploration which yielded the stories recorded here, see the appendix to this book.