

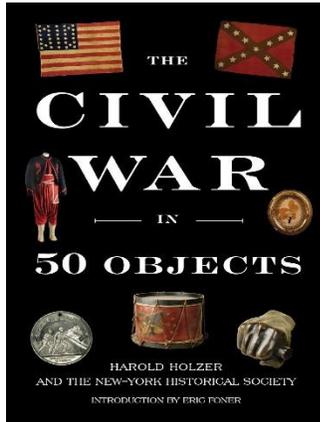
The Civil War in 50 Objects

By Harold Holzer &

The New York Historical Society

(Viking Publishers, 2013)

380 pages



The New York Historical Society is the oldest museum in New York City and has served as a repository of a multitude of historic objects that are in the collection that represents the span of American History. Many of the objects in the collection have been donated to the Society to remember loved one and significant events in our culture and history.

In this book, Holzer chooses fifty items and provides a history of the civil war by telling the stories of the numerous items. He selects the items and then tells the background of that object, how it came into the societies' possession and then tells how this particular object reflects the story and experience of the Civil War.

Some of the objects are possessions that belonged to soldiers in the war and others are paintings, drawings, and portraits of significant events or persons who impacted the unfolding drama of battle. He utilizes material that has come from newspaper accounts and letters and diaries of soldiers and loved ones.

His first object is the shackles that were used to bind the hands of a child used in the perpetuation of slavery. He tells the story behind the shackles that reminds the reader of the incredible tragedy of human bondage and tells the story of Abraham Lincoln's encounter with the slave trade during his early years in Springfield, Illinois.

His last object is a copy of the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution that was the culmination of the war. The Thirteenth Amendment was passed by Congress at the end of January 1865 during a lame-duck session. The Amendment then went to the states for certification and ratification. This amendment to the Constitution secured the freedom of all slaves in all of the United States.

Holzer adds an interesting end note to his final chapter on the Thirteenth Amendment. It took the country nearly a year to approve the amendment, having 26 states ratifying the amendment. However, Kentucky (the birthplace of Lincoln) did not reconsider and approve the amendment until 1976 and the final state to approve the Amendment, Mississippi (the birthplace of Jefferson Davis, the president of the Confederacy) only did so in 1995. This delay serves as a reminder that discrimination and prejudice die hard.

As a minor Civil War buff and avid reader, I was intrigued by the book. Its short chapters and captivating stories made for easy reading and imparted some tidbits and knowledge about the war and its heroic figures (both North and South) that I had never heard before.

The book serves as a reminder of our past. As George Santayana (1863-1952), a philosopher and essayist in his book *Reason in Common Sense: The Life of Reason (vol. 1)*, has said: "Those who cannot

remember the past are condemned to repeat it.” This book reminds us of the horror of a society that gives into the belief that one race is better than another.

The book is a great reminder to see our fellow human beings with respect and honor.

I heartily recommend the book and hope it reminds you to be kind to call and celebrate the freedom our country is now able to experience!