

**Book Review: *The Fighting McCooks: America's Famous Fighting Family*.** Charles and Barbara Whalen. Bethesda MD: Westmoreland Press, 5301 Portsmouth Road, Bethesda MD 20816. 2006. 421 pages, \$16.95, paperbound. <<http://www.thefightingmccooks.com/>>. Reviewed by Dan Reigle for the Cincinnati Civil War Roundtable website and for the *Ohio Civil War Genealogy Journal*. All rights reserved by the author.

The McCook family statistics are summarized in this statement from the book's title page: "Seventeen McCooks fought for the North in the Civil War: three major generals, three brigadier generals, one naval lieutenant, four surgeons, two colonels, one major, one lieutenant, one private, and one chaplain. Four gave their lives to save the Union." The numbers, in themselves, are an indication that the McCooks were an extraordinary Civil War-era family, but the numbers do not adequately convey the extent to which these seventeen men, along with their spouses and other relatives, were a fascinating, diverse, and highly accomplished group of individuals. Charles and Barbara Whalen have done justice to these men and their families by presenting engaging and stimulating biographical sketches of each of the seventeen men, woven efficiently into a narrative approximating the chronological context of the war.

The authors devote a very worthwhile chapter to the early history of the McCooks in America, from their Scots-Irish patriarch, George McCook, who emigrated from Ireland in 1790 after he participated in an unsuccessful attempt to overthrow the English that could have resulted in his execution for treason. Settling in western Pennsylvania, George was an active full participant in the Whiskey Rebellion until President Washington extinguished the rebellion in 1794. Benefiting from the President's leniency when the rebellion's leaders were pardoned and allowed to go home, George devoted his efforts to business, raising a family, and community development, including the founding of Jefferson College in Canonsburgh PA, the first college west of the Appalachians.

George's three sons all participated in the Civil War, and were the fathers of the 14 other McCooks who served the Union:

(1) Dr. George McCook, a physician, moved to New Lisbon OH in 1819 to build a thriving medical practice; he served in the Civil War as a volunteer surgeon. After the war, he developed coal mining businesses in West Virginia with his nephews, George (6) and Anson (14). He had one son who also served:

(4) Dr. George Latimer McCook (volunteer surgeon during the 1862 Peninsula Campaign, contracted a fever from which he never recovered and died in 1874.)

(2) Dan McCook, a lawyer, moved to Ohio in 1820 and was instrumental in the formation of Carroll County and Carrollton. Dan served in a variety of volunteer capacities during the Civil War, from helping to organize a security force for the newly-arrived President Lincoln in Washington DC as secession unravelled the country and as the city became personally dangerous for the President to pitching in at the Battle of First Bull Run with two friends who were members of Congress and future generals, John Logan and John McClernand. He received a commission as Major and served as an Army Paymaster. At age 65, Dan was killed in 1863 at Buffington Island when he joined the pursuit of Morgan's Raiders in the (mistaken) belief that a guerilla responsible for one of his sons' death was with Morgan. Dan had eight sons who served:

(5) Dr. Latimer McCook (civilian contract surgeon, 31<sup>st</sup> Illinois.)

(6) George Wythe McCook (law partner of Edwin Stanton in Steubenville; friend of Clement Vallandigham; appointed by Governor Dennison as Adjutant General of Ohio; later Colonel and commander of the 157<sup>th</sup> Ohio Volunteer Infantry on 100-days' service at Fort Delaware POW camp. Post-war: law practice in Steubenville, Democratic candidate for Governor in 1871.)

(7) Robert L. McCook (lawyer in Cincinnati, partner of Johann Stallo with a large practice among German immigrants; organized and commanded the 9<sup>th</sup> OVI, "Die Neuner," an all-German unit; Brigadier General, brigade commander; died August 1862 from wounds inflicted by guerillas near Decherd TN.)

(8) Alexander McDowell McCook (US Military Academy 1852; worked for William J. Hardee at USMA; organized 1<sup>st</sup> OVI at Dayton; brigade commander at Shiloh, division commander at Corinth, and corps commander at Perryville, Stones River, and Chickamauga; Major General. Post-war: continued in Regular Army; Sherman's chief of staff; retired from US Army in 1895; represented the US at the coronation of Czar Nicholas II in 1896.)

(9) Dan McCook, Jr (lawyer in Steubenville and in 1858 in Leavenworth KS with William Sherman, Tom and Hugh Ewing; captain, 1<sup>st</sup> Kansas Infantry and assistant adjutant general for brother Alex; organized

and trained 52<sup>nd</sup> OVI; Colonel and brigade commander; mortally wounded in assault at Kennesaw Mountain GA on 27 June 1862, and died on 17 July at home in Steubenville.)

(10) John James McCook (served in 52<sup>nd</sup> OVI per authors' research, but does not appear in Ohio *Official Roster*; may have served as 17-year-old non-mustered volunteer aide-de-camp to brother Dan at Perryville; appointed captain June 1863; served on MG Thomas Crittenden's staff at Stones River, Chickamauga, Spotsylvania, North Anna, Shady Grove, and Cold Harbor; resigned October 1864. Post-war: Harvard Law School, New York and Wall Street law practice, Princeton University director.)

(11) Charles McCook (18 years old, private, 2<sup>nd</sup> OVI-90 days, killed at First Bull Run, 21 July 1861.)

(12) Edwin Stanton McCook (resigned from US Naval Academy; civilian steamboat captain; appointed captain in 31<sup>st</sup> Illinois; wounded at Fort Donelson; colonel in 1862; brevet brigadier general in 1865. Post-war: Secretary of the Dakota Territory, shot and killed by a local banker in 1873 after a railroad dispute.)

(3) Dr. John McCook, physician, New Lisbon OH, went as volunteer surgeon to treat wounded after Shiloh. His five sons who served were:

(13) Edward Moody McCook ("Horse Ed," Colonel commanding the 2<sup>nd</sup> Indiana Cavalry; Brigadier General and Brevet Major General; commanded brigade of cavalry at Perryville and division of cavalry at Chickamauga, the Atlanta Campaign, and Wilson's Selma raid. Post-war: governor of Colorado Territory, corruption scandals, extensive financial interests.)

(14) Anson McCook (Gold Rush veteran, lawyer in Steubenville; 2<sup>nd</sup> OVI at First Bull Run; Colonel commanding 2<sup>nd</sup> OVI; Colonel commanding 194<sup>th</sup> OVI; Brevet Brigadier General, 1865. Post-war: elected to Congress from New York City in 1876, served three terms; secretary of the US Senate; editor of *New York Law Journal*; New York City financial director.)

(15) Roderick McCook (US Naval Academy 1859; Gulf and Atlantic Blockading Squadrons; Executive Officer, USS *Canonicus* during Wilmington Campaign. Post-war: continued in US Navy, promoted to Commander, health problems, retired in 1885.)

(16) Henry McCook (Chaplain, 41<sup>st</sup> Illinois; abolitionist; Presbyterian minister; resigned January 1862 in protest of 41<sup>st</sup> officers' selling runaway slaves back to their owners; served in a mission to the poor in St. Louis during two cholera epidemics. Post-war: pastor of Philadelphia's Seventh Presbyterian Church, author.)

(17) John James McCook (1<sup>st</sup> Virginia Foot Volunteers at Philippi, on McClellan's staff as assistant quartermaster in western VA. Returned to college in 1863. Post-war: Episcopal rector in Hartford, taught languages at Trinity College until 1923. The last of the fighting McCooks when he died in 1927.)

With the high ranks and commands at the division and corps level, it might be easy to overlook the individual with perhaps the most impressive war service record among the McCooks. The only McCook who participated in Sherman's Savannah Campaign and who marched in the Grand Review in Washington, Dr. Latimer McCook served as a contract surgeon with his brother, Edwin, in John Logan's 31<sup>st</sup> Illinois. 41 years old when the war began and injured at Fort Donelson, Vicksburg, and Pocotaligo Bridge NC, he served without a single day of leave during the war. He was detached from the 31<sup>st</sup> to care for his brother, Dan Jr., when he was wounded at Kennesaw Mountain. He walked in the Grand Review with a cane, accompanied by the two dogs who were always with him. He had marched 4076 miles with the 31<sup>st</sup> Illinois during the war from Belmont MO to Bentonville NC. He had probably cared for most or all of the 471 officers and men whose wounds or illness had taken their lives during the war, and the hundreds of others who had recovered. His health was broken by the war, and he was cared for by his mother and brother George before dying in 1869 at 49 years of age. Although ostensibly not a "fighting" McCook, his service was unsurpassed.

Anson McCook's daughter, Katherine Knox, was responsible for donating the McCook Family Papers to the Library of Congress in 1954, and it was this 3000-item collection that intrigued the Whalens when they discovered it in 1986, starting them on a 20-year research and writing effort. They visited 46 battlefields in 11 states, and collected many additional sources from McCook descendants as well as libraries and historical societies. The authors have effectively integrated excerpts from many of the personal letters and documents into the narrative of events to provide personal participant perspectives when possible.

Perhaps the most important aid that the authors have provided the reader is a two-page family tree, with small

photographs, of the 17 subjects. Located inside the front cover of the book, this graphic is indispensable for the reader in following the events and references to the subjects, especially given that there are three George's, three John's, two Dan's, and two physicians named Latimer involved during the war. The detailed index is also an important reader and researcher tool. The authors build a map throughout the book, illustrating the major areas in which the McCooks served and in which the book's major events are located. By the final map on page 346, this is stunning: the routes and locations literally cover the entire area from Lake Erie to the Gulf of Mexico, and from Missouri and Louisiana to the Atlantic. The book is produced as a high-quality paperback, with an excellent collection of clearly-reproduced images, and with reader-friendly text and layout.

The McCooks were not without their faults, of course. While the authors' portrayal of these men is generally positive, they are careful to point out examples of less admirable behavior, including self-promotion, cultivation and use of influential contacts, and the stereotypical Scots-Irish willingness to fight friends as well as enemies. In some cases, their efforts produced results, such as John James McCook's commission as a Captain at the age of 18. In a few cases, there were serious issues involved, such as Edward's post-war financial and personal misconduct that led to his removal from office twice as governor of the Colorado Territory, or the never-explained mystery of the desertion of Dr. Latimer McCook's wife, Eliza, in the 1850's, who by 1860 was living next door to Edward in Colorado and serving as his housekeeper. In some cases, their behavior came back to haunt them. At Shiloh, Alexander refused an order from Grant to pursue Hardee, and both Alex and Dan Jr. made no secret of their low opinions of Grant's performance at Shiloh. Alex was later scapegoated by Buell for Perryville and Rosecrans/Dana/Garfield for Stones River and Chickamauga, but even though Alex was cleared by the Court of Inquiry, Grant did not see fit to return him to major commands. Dan Jr., in January 1864, took his complaint directly to President Lincoln that, having commanded a brigade since the summer of 1862, he had never received his promotion to Brigadier General. Although he obtained Lincoln's endorsement, Dan waited still longer for his star. He took the unusual step of publishing an article attributed to "A Staff Officer" in the May issue of *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, praising the "genius of Grant" and attempting to undo the earlier criticism. The promotion, however, did not arrive until on 16 July 1864 when it arrived in Steubenville on the day before Dan's death. His response was: "The promotion is too late now. Return it with my compliments, saying, 'I decline the honor.'" Apparently, this message was also disregarded by the Army, as his promotion is officially listed as #1283, with date of rank from 16 July 1864.

Producing a work of this breadth makes it impossible to delve into single events and circumstances in great detail. In nearly all cases, the authors handle this balance admirably. However, I would offer that their references to allegations about Grant's drinking should be better grounded, especially in the oft-cited Yazoo River trip during the Shiloh Campaign and in the circumstances of his meeting with Secretary Stanton in Louisville prior to Grant's assumption of command at Chattanooga. Detailed studies by Brooks Simpson (*Ulysses S. Grant: Triumph over Adversity, 1822-1865*) and Wiley Sword (*Mountains Touched with Fire: Chattanooga Besieged, 1863*) do not support those allegations.

The Whalens cover an amazing range of people, territory, time, and events in this book, and do it in an organized, coherent, and highly readable fashion. They focus each chapter on one of the McCooks involved in a major event, such as "Private Charles McCook at the Battle of Bull Run" or "Naval Lieutenant Roderick McCook Fights the Civil War at Sea." This approach sacrifices the ability to have a full sketch of an individual in one place, but it has the benefit of producing a narrative that has enough context of the war's larger events and actors to be understandable and engaging for the reader. I recommend the book to other readers, particularly those interested in Ohio's role in the war, the war in the western theater, or the human and family aspects of the war.

(Editor's note: For more information on Dan McCook Sr.'s home in Carrollton, operated as the McCook House Civil War Museum by the Carroll County Historical Society under a lease arrangement with the Ohio Historical Society, see <<http://www.carrollcountyohio.com/history/McCook/House/house.htm>> or the OHS McCook House webpage <<http://ohsweb.ohiohistory.org/places/ne03/>>.)