



The Civil War Letters of Colonel Hans Christian Heg: A Norwegian Regiment in the American Civil War

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A collection of Civil War-era letters written by Hans Christian Heg, who grew up in southeastern Norway, migrated to Wisconsin, and traveled to the gold fields of California and the mining camps of the West, only to return to the Badger State to lead a regiment of Scandinavian immigrants—the Fifteenth Wisconsin—in the Civil War. His achievements are well known among Norwegian-Americans but little known outside that circle. However, his life story typifies the processes of transition and service to his new country that have marked the lives of thousands of immigrants.

The many personal accounts by the soldiers of the Fifteenth Wisconsin Regiment, penned in battlefield letters to family and friends, remain the most evocative and moving contributions, valuable primary source material to a wrenching national experience. These intimate narratives relate both the horrors of the conflict and the loyalty of the young men, many of them recent arrivals from Norway, to what they consistently refer to as “our new fatherland.”

The Civil War period is a dramatic watershed event in the adjustment of Norwegian-Americans to the challenges they encountered in America as they moved toward integration with a new society. The heroic roles played by the men of the Fifteenth Wisconsin Regiment remain lasting and treasured images in the iconography of the Norwegian-American experience.

The first managing editor of the Norwegian-American Historical Association, Theodore C. Blegen (1891–1969) also served as superintendent of the Minnesota Historical Society and dean of the graduate school at the University of Minnesota. He researched and wrote extensively on the history of the state of Minnesota and Norwegian-American immigration over the course of his lengthy career.

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