Huts and History: The Historical Archaeology of Military Encampment during the American Civil War
Clarence R. Geier, David G. Orr, and Matthew B. Reeves (editors)
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Huts and History presents a collection of essays addressing the problems and research potential for the emergent archaeological study of military encampment during the American Civil War. The collected essays, organized into five sections, consist of an introduction and historic background, a discussion of methods for identifying and preserving these resources, a discussion of their layout and organization, case studies in the material remains of these sites, and future research directions. The editors introduce each section with a brief synopsis of the included papers.

Followed by a foreword detailing the importance of encampments to the soldiers on both sides, the editors provide a general outline of the following chapters. In the first section, editors Clarence R. Geier, David G. Orr, and Matthew B. Reeves, using General Phillip Sheridan’s winter camp in the Shenandoah Valley as an example, explain why these sites are important and what information they may contain. Joseph A. Whitehorne follows this introduction with a brief history of the regulations that governed camp layout and organization from the American Revolutionary War to the Civil War. The second section provides two opposing viewpoints of the “problem” of relic hunters. Bryan L. Corle and Joseph Balicki discuss their experiences with local relic hunters in northern Virginia, detailing the skepticism with which most relic hunters view professional archaeologists and pointing out how methods used by relic hunters are effective and can (and should) be integrated into state archaeological guidelines. Brandon Bies, discussing the 14th New Jersey’s encampment near Frederick, Maryland, demonstrates the negative effects that relic hunters can have on a site. The site was in the process of being nominated to the National Register, when local relic hunters heard about it and severely compromised the site’s integrity through looting. Fortunately, the site still retained integrity and was submitted to the National Park Service for listing.

Section three addresses camp layout, focusing on a short-term Confederate encampment and a long-term Union encampment. Joseph Balicki examines several camps in the cantonment associated with the Confederate blockade of the Potomac River in 1861–1862. Based on the excavations, Balicki is able to assign most of the camps to specific units and to draw conclusions regarding the soldiers’ familiarity with and adherence to military regulations. Stephen McBride and Kim McBride, on the other hand, discuss the long-term Union depot at Camp Nelson in Kentucky, paying special attention to the United States Colored Troops and African American refugees housed there. Based on the data, the authors are able to describe the changing use of space over time and draw conclusions about status at the site.

Section four covers the material remains of Civil War encampments. Dean E. Nelson first provides an overview of the architecture of camp life during the Civil War, describing the different military-issue tents available to the average soldier and how these were adapted to create more substantial and comfortable dwellings. Nelson also discusses ways that soldiers used available materials to improve camp life (e.g., creating heating systems for their dwellings). Reeves and Geier then discuss the Confederate encampments at James Madison’s Montpelier in Orange, Virginia, describing the results of archaeological investigations in terms of encampment architecture. Garrett R. Fesler, Matthew B. Laird, and Hank D. Lutton discuss excavations at an unidentified encampment in Yorktown, Virginia, describing the inherent difficulties of studying poorly documented camps, located in areas that changed hands several times during the war. Finally, Orr describes the “travels” of General Grant’s City Point headquarters from City Point, Virginia, to...
Fairmount Park, Philadelphia, and back to City Point, including the efforts to archaeologically locate its former location at City Point. The collection concludes with a brief discussion of future research directions for the study of Civil War encampments.

Overall, *Huts and History* is an important and timely introduction to an archaeological dataset that has been sorely underrepresented in historical archaeology: Civil War encampments. The increasing pace of development in areas such as northern Virginia and south-central Pennsylvania, along with the lack of appropriate methods has already led to the loss of many Civil War encampments. The inclusion of Whitehorne’s overview of encampment regulations from the Revolutionary War days of Baron Friedrich von Steuben to the Civil War, however, ensures that this collection will not be relegated to the obscurity that comes with overspecialization. The understanding of camp regulations, in addition to the more specific Civil War studies, means that this work can be applied to all encampments from pre-Civil War times on.

In addition, *Huts and History* provides pointed and deserved criticism of the historic preservation and historical archaeological communities. For example, Balicki and Corle rightly criticize SHPO guidelines that fail to recognize that military encampments are a special property type that most likely will be missed by conventional archaeological survey strategies. Current survey regimes almost ensure that these sites will continue to go unrecorded before their destruction. The historical archaeological community is also implicated for its reluctance to communicate with those who have the most experience finding these sites: relic hunters. Despite the experiences of archaeologists like Bies, relic hunters cannot be written off as a potential source for the study of these sites; the actions of a few should not override the information these people can provide. Archaeologists and preservationists should listen to this criticism.

The concluding discussion of future research directions is a welcome addition; however, some of the research questions would have been better served by discussion in the main body of this collection. For example, reading these essays, one comes away with a clear understanding of the methods for finding encampment sites and their layout and architectural remains. Although there is some discussion of other material remains, the reader gains little understanding of the day-to-day life and activities of the average Civil War soldier on both sides.

Furthermore, although the collected essays represent a fairly equal distribution of encampments from both sides, there is no single essay that explicitly compares and contrasts Union and Confederate encampments. Especially glaring is that Nelson’s discussion of winter camp architecture mentions no Confederate encampments. Even though Union and Confederate soldiers followed basically the same guidelines, they represented two diverse sections of America; it would seem that sectional variation could have been more fully addressed in the body of this collection.

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