

“The whole world is in a hurry.”

For someone who lives, technically, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, he seems quite at home in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Gerry Mogren, 64, owns neither computer nor cell phone. He insists on writing letters by hand. He created every one of many hundred thousand information cards by hand. Each entry preserves, so far as he can determine, service records, birth, occupation pre- and post-war, wives' names, and burial records.

The scholarly man, whose gray hair and beard suggest 19<sup>th</sup> century ambrotype images, was first drawn to the Civil War (“War of Northern Aggression”) by a grade school teacher, and by a gift book

Army service was followed by a bachelor's degree in history from the University of Indiana. Mogren augmented this degree with various teaching certificates. Over the course of a life of intellectual curiosity, he has done everything from teaching middle school to driving a taxicab.

But the love of Mogren's life is his research of Confederate officer records.

Mogren chose this topic as his life's work. Though he began by researching Confederate generals, he found his interest extended to lower-ranking officers as well. He considered writing a book about Confederate generals, but thought the subject had been covered adequately by others. He decided his gifts lay in clerical research rather than in fiction or non-fiction.

Write a Civil War novel, as so many others have done? Mogren insists, “Historical fiction has done zilch for history but distort and confuse it.”

Some Civil War aficionados are drawn to tactics or weaponry. Mogren says he's fascinated, instead, by the lives of men who stood up to Big Government. Independence, he maintains, is the true Lost Cause.

Mogren states that he has 15 filing cabinets, each containing 15 drawers each. Each drawer, in turn, contains 5,000 cards, each carrying information on a Confederate officer. These references are not always straightforward; Mogren has run across many cases of misspellings or alternate spellings of names. When possible, he cross-references names. One individual, therefore, may be found on several cards. Mogren believes he may be the first researcher to have accomplished this task.

Mogren began his research, as he states, “before computers.” This involved an enormous amount of footwork, checking out libraries, offices, and similar repositories.

Where does one look for records of Confederate officers? Public libraries still offer many resources, such as genealogical records. Mogren has found much useful information in the Official Records (some 122 volumes), census records, state records, veterans' organization records. Sons of Confederate Veterans camps offer a rich source of documentation, including burial records. Regimental histories can be "iffy," sometimes offering detailed information on officers, sometimes not.

Some sources of information have disappeared or been destroyed over the decades; and occasionally tragedies have narrowly been averted.

Historians may never know how many soldier diaries, letters, and other documents were deliberately or accidentally destroyed. It is possible that some families in the postwar era were ashamed of relatives' Confederate service and deliberately destroyed artifacts, but more often the destruction may have been inadvertent, similar to mothers throwing out their sons' childhood baseball card collections. Mogren cites the example of a Confederate officer who had left a detailed diary---only to have the individual pages turned into paper airplanes by playful grandchildren.

Occasionally records have been destroyed—or nearly so--by the whims of officialdom. Only a few years ago, Mogren relates, the governor of Kansas ordered the destruction of state records relating to the Confederacy. Fortunately this did not take place—but the incident certainly illustrates how easily valuable information may disappear. It is certainly possible that recent political attitudes may have affected Confederate research and the preservation or destruction of records.

World War II saw the Daughters of Confederate Veterans donating thousands of pages of irreplaceable records to paper drives.

Mogren believes that the last time Confederate service records drew any real attention was during the 1930s, with FDR's writers' project---while many veterans were still alive.

On the other hand, Mogren says, it may have been sheer luck that preserved some information. Owing to wartime events, records from the Trans-Mississippi area never made it to Richmond and thus may have escaped destruction during the fall of Richmond and Reconstruction.

And yet one never knows, Mogren says, when new sources may be discovered. He mentions that only recently were some North Carolina rosters discovered.

Identifying Confederate officers can seem like a mystery to be solved—or more precisely, putting together a jigsaw puzzle. For example, some officers' careers may include as many as five different ranks and units, occasionally in different states; Mogren believes that in such cases an officer may have served in several early-war short-term units.

Mogren's chief concern, even as he continues to pursue tantalizing facts, has been the consolidation of all Confederate military records in one place. Mogren had considered donating his life's work to the Jefferson Davis Presidential Library at Beauvoir, Biloxi, Mississippi. However, the Military Order of the Stars and Bars has accepted the guardianship of his work—two file cabinets of 45 drawers each, comprising over 2,500 lineal feet of 3 x 5 cards. MOSB has promised to preserve and complete his records, computerizing them in searchable form and publishing them on their web page. Max Waldrop, the next Commander General of MOSB, has taken physical control of the files and stored them in the society's storage facility in White House, TN, with the promise that Mogren's research will go on.

Mogren now has stage four cancer and is in hospice. But this man who lives in the 19<sup>th</sup> century will be content as long as his life's work is preserved for future generations.

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