

Review : John Brown: The Man Who Lived; essays in honor of the Harper's Ferry raid sesquicentennial 1859 – 2009.

Louis A. DeCaro, Jr.

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This book of essays is an appropriate immersion into the John Brown anniversary commemoration. Louis A. DeCaro, Jr., the author of the first full biography of John Brown in the 21st century: *Fire from the Midst of You; a Religious Life of John Brown*, NYU Press 2002 and *John Brown, the Cost of Freedom*, International Publishers 2007.

His particular genius is the study of Brown's early years in Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Massachusetts. In so doing he places John Brown directly in his historical milieu. This historical placement is what is lacking in contemporary analyses and depictions, which DeCaro skillfully skewers in several historiographical essays on 'Scientific historians' of Brown and especially the characterization of John Brown as a terrorist in contemporary terms.

My research relationship with the author has spanned fifteen years of sharing, discussing on email, and occasional meeting, most notably at the commemoration of John Brown's birth at North Elba in May 2000. Therefore it is with gratitude that I am honored with dedication of the book of essays. The preface is written by Alice Keeseey Mecoy, a descendant of John and Mary Brown who is avidly researching and speaking about the family.

My favorite essay is "John Brown's Steamers," the travel method used for domestic and overseas travel in the late 1840s and 50s. As a wool merchant and farmer Brown traveled frequently, and found steamers a good way to concentrate and catch up on business and personal correspondence. This delightful essay includes drawings of the vessels such as the 'United States' on Lake Champlain and the 'Cambria,' on which Brown traveled to England in 1849.

If you want the wonderful story that Louis A. DeCaro has researched called "A Steamer of His Own" you will need to consult the book. It is, as James Baldwin put it, worth "the price of the ticket."

Jean Libby

