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Legacy of war

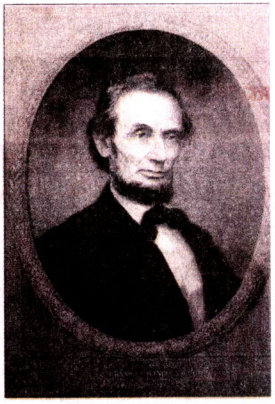
Exhibitions look back at Civil War and ties to the region



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FROM LEFT, a photo of Dr. Albert Vander Veer of Albany, who treated wounded soldiers, and engravings of the 1862 Battle of Cedar Mounta and Abraham Lincoln, who visited Albany in 18

BY AMY GRIFFIN
SPECIAL TO THE TIMES UNION

With the firing on Fort Sumter on April 12, 1861, the Civil War began. Now, 150 years later, two exhibitions place the Capital Region in the context of the deadliest war in U.S. history.

"Albany and the Civil War: Medicine on the Home and Battle Fronts" at the Albany Institute of History & Art is the more modest and limited in scope of the two shows. Its focuses on more than just medicine, however. One section concerns Lincoln's 1861 visit to Albany. He met with Gov. Edwin D. Morgan and with citizens at the Delavan House, a hotel on Broadway. He would not return again, although his funeral procession passed through the city, an event illustrated by a poignant, well-preserved pencil drawing made by a local child who witnessed it.

There was another notable and tragic Albany connection to Lincoln's assassination. An engraving depicting the events at Ford's Theatre show U.S. Army Maj. Rathbone and his fiancee, Clara Harris, both of Albany. Rathbone was injured when he tried to restrain assassin John Wilkes Booth. Later, suffering from depression, Rathbone murdered Clara and tried to kill himself. He died in an asylum. This sensational story adds a new layer of intrigue to this familiar part of history.

The opposite wall focuses on medicine and relief efforts. The journals and letters of Albany brothers Albert and Garrett Vander Veer detail their experiences on the battlefield. Albert, a physician and, later, a professor at Albany Medical College, kept detailed records of all the soldiers he treated and his medical practice was informed by them. Through ephemera such as souvenirs and donation catalogs, the exhibit also examines the efforts of local women, including Clara Harris, who raised $117,000 for medical care for Union troops by organizing the Albany Relief Bazaar in 1864.

The Mandeville Gallery takes a broader look at the war with "Illustrating the War," an exhibit jointly curated by Union College associate professor of history Andrea R. Foroughi, Joseph Privitera, a senior in the history program, and interim gallery director Marie Costello. Here, we see the war through the eyes of the artists whose illustrations appeared in Harper's Weekly and Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspapers. Although photographs were made of the war, these engravings were the most common way of bringing images of the war to the people at home. Because both newspapers were based in New York, the curators note, these images have a Northern slant. Indeed, in some images, the Confederate soldiers have a crazed, almost savage look about them.

One artist, Alexander Simplot, graduated from Union College. After graduation, he returned to his native city, Dubuque, Iowa, where, soon after the attack on Fort Sumter, he sketched the emotional scene as a crowd gathered to send volunteers off to fight. He sent it to Harper's Weekly, was hired as a "special artist" and covered the war for the next few years. Examples of his work appear alongside engravings by the likes of Winslow Homer and Thomas Nast.

These artists sketched in the field and, just as often, reconstructed scenes. Reproductions of original drawings provide an interesting supplement to the wood engravings. In some, the artist includes notes to the engraver and it's nice to see the progression from sketch to final engraving.

Arranged chronologically, the engravings depict battle scenes but also other aspects of the war. One of Homer's sketches, "Winter Quarters," 1863, shows a side of the war less often seen: Soldiers are crammed in tight quarters, some arguing, others sleeping, reading or tending fire. "The winters brought with them a decrease in the amount of combat, yet this did not necessarily mean safety and freedom from hardship," writes Privitera in the wall text. The curators have written captions for each image to flesh out the scenes.

While both exhibits are sure to appeal to Civil War history buffs, "Illustrating the War" may grab a broader audience, because it gives insight into how the war was "sold" to the American people and raises questions about how our impressions of war can be shaped by the media.

► *Amy Griffin is a frequent contributor to the Times Union.*

On Exhibit

"ALBANY AND THE CIVIL WAR: MEDICINE ON THE HOME AND BATTLE FRONTS"

- **When:** Through Feb. 26. Hours: Wednesday-Sunday, 10 a.m.-5 p.m.; Sunday, noo 5p.m.
- **Where:** Albany Institute o History & Art
- **Info:** 463-4478; http://www.albanyinstitute.org
- **Admission:** Adults, $10; seniors and students w/ ID, $8; children 6-12, $6; members and children unde 6, free

"ILLUSTRATING THE WAR SELECTED ENGRAVINGS FROM HARPER'S WEEKL AND LESLIE'S ILLUSTRATE CIVIL WAR"

- **When:** Through Nov. 27. Hours: Monday-Sunday, 10 a.m.-6 p.m.; closed Thanksgiving Day and Nov.
- **Where:** Mandeville Galler
- **Admission:** Free
- **Info:** 388-6729; http://www.union.edu/Resources/Campus/mandeville