

## A Rich Man's War

Along with the draft, economic hardship, exacerbated by the Civil War, filled the pages of Fritz Rasmussen's diary throughout the fall of 1862.<sup>1</sup> Faithfully, Rasmussen described the local economic prospects but often also the "quite variable" weather (one day surprisingly hot, the next chilly and cloudy). As October drew closer, however, the entries gradually shifted from meteorology to military tidings. With mounting Union casualties, dark clouds were gathering on the horizon.<sup>2</sup> On September 20, 1862, Rasmussen sarcastically noted that he might as well serve in the army, with all the difficulties and dangers that would bring, rather than endure the daily grind in New Denmark.<sup>3</sup> "It is most enough, to derange minor minds, those circumstances that both country and commerce are involved in," Rasmussen wrote:

[For years,] I have been borrowing and going in debt, constantly increasing my property and very well [felt], that if things would continue, I would easily be able to clear up and splendidly, but now everything is down as a bog; and too, the fear of a possible "draft" compelling to go into the war. . . . I have had but little of worldly comfort, when excepting [sic] the greatest of all comforts; a incomparable good health; as I have had to work

<sup>1</sup> F. W. Rasmussen, "Aid to Families of Drafted Men," *Green Bay Advocate*, November 27, 1862.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Fritz W. Rasmussen, "The 12. Friday [September]," in *Fritz William Rasmussen Papers. Diaries, 1857-1876* (Green Bay: Wisconsin Historical Society, 1862). On the military situation in 1862 and mounting Union casualties, see James M. McPherson, *Crossroads of Freedom: Antietam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 84-108.

<sup>3</sup> Fritz W. Rasmussen, "The 20. Saturday [September]," in *Fritz William Rasmussen Papers. Diaries, 1857-1876* (Green Bay: Wisconsin Historical Society, 1862).

most hard and in every way tried, to make both ends meet, which I as yet, have not been able to. But the present greatest aggravation and most contemptible [sic] of all: is to hear those in pecuniary regard, well off, to complain and expressing their patriotism, in the most pitiable manner. So much for human Sensity [sic].<sup>4</sup>

The war had made it increasingly difficult to procure cash, and trade opportunities were suppressed.<sup>5</sup>

In addition, Fritz Rasmussen also recorded his wife Sidsel's dissatisfaction "with things and circumstances" over the summer.<sup>6</sup> According to Fritz Rasmussen, Sidsel had compared their condition with that of others and was "gritty and grumbling," as she was "quite adverse to farming" and considered "a farmer nothing more or less than a hireling or working-animal, for society in general."<sup>7</sup> Rasmussen, however, expressed the hope that her feelings would change "when the dice" would "turn up a little richer" in his favor.<sup>8</sup>

In late May, Rasmussen had written of "work work, steady and allways [sic], so that it blackens up before the eyes; and no time [for] any relax in work," and yet he was not able to procure even the "most necessary wants in the household."<sup>9</sup> Moreover, on May 5, 1862, Rasmussen, "celebrated" his twenty-ninth birthday with a diary tirade rejecting the notion that "life is sweet."<sup>10</sup> To the Danish immigrant, life's sweetness only came true for one in a thousand, while he himself had a difficult time even writing: due to another hard day's work, "the hand will not lay steady," Rasmussen scribbled.<sup>11</sup> At the root of the problem were people, often "those well off," who constructed or maintained hierarchies, Rasmussen argued.<sup>12</sup> One such person was

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> For an example of cash scarcity in New Denmark, see Fritz W. Rasmussen, "The 25 Monday," in *Fritz William Rasmussen Papers. Diaries, 1856-1876 Green Bay Mss 4. Box 8* (Green Bay: Wisconsin Historical Society, 1863).

<sup>6</sup> "The 8. Sondag [June]," in *Fritz William Rasmussen Papers. Diaries, 1856-1876. Green Bay Mss 4. Box 8* (Green Bay: Wisconsin Historical Society, 1862).

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. <sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Fritz W. Rasmussen, "The 27. Tuesday [May]," in *Fritz William Rasmussen Papers. Diaries, 1856-1876. Green Bay Mss 4. Box 8* (Green Bay: Wisconsin Historical Society, 1862).

<sup>10</sup> Fritz W. Rasmussen, "The 5th Monday [May]," in *Fritz William Rasmussen Papers. Diaries, 1856-1876. Green Bay Mss 4. Box 8* (Green Bay: Wisconsin Historical Society, 1862).

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Rasmussen, "The 20. Saturday [September]"; "Den 31. Søndag. Paaske [The 31st Sunday. Easter]," in *Fritz William Rasmussen Papers. Diaries, 1856-1876. Green Bay Mss 4. Box 8* (Green Bay: Wisconsin Historical Society, 1862).

Frederik Hjort, who was described on March 31, 1861, as having Old World class sensibilities.<sup>13</sup>

Since he is a schoolmaster's son from Denmark [he] naturally possesses – to a pretty great extent – the inherent European power-seeking spirit that the poor smallholder or farm hand and the lower classes in Denmark as well as all of Europe sighs under and must tip their hat to. This is not found here and the constitution can therefore not be reconciled with such views, since regardless of how wealthy he is, he must nonetheless settle for being on an equal societal rung with the common man.<sup>14</sup>

If the affluent had been in a different position in life, Rasmussen posited, they would yearn for “Liberty, Equality and the Rights of man,” even if the “present government” was admittedly imperfect (though the American “form of government” was not).<sup>15</sup> The opportunity to use one's free will in the United States, with nobody judging or punishing one's actions (and implicitly thereby allowing for upward social mobility), was the freedom attainable only in the New World, according to Rasmussen.<sup>16</sup>

As we have seen, the class-based discussion between Rasmussen and Hjort that centered on equality also tied into conflicts over slavery between mainly rural congregations and well-educated clergymen in the Scandinavian communities in the North and a year later shaped opinions of the draft as well.<sup>17</sup>

Yet it was not solely in the northern villages that debates raged over who were the producers of economic growth and who were the beneficiaries of that labor. The deepening sense that the rich and powerful were exploiting the poor, a perception familiar to Old World immigrants, was apparent in the South as well.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Peter Sørensen Vig, *Danske i Amerika [Danes in America]*, 2 vols., vol. 1 (Minneapolis, MN: C. Rasmussen Company, 1907), 261–262. See also “Indbetalt På Emigr. [Paid to Emigranten].”

<sup>14</sup> Rasmussen, “Den 31. Søndag. Paaske [The 31st Sunday. Easter].” <sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. An intellectual who did not understand the meaning of freedom in the Old and New World, in Rasmussen's view, was destined – “here as well as there” – to remain with his “plow or axe” and accept that, in the United States, a man would not be able to “earn his bread with his mouth” like the preacher and the dog. See also John Gotlieb Matteson, *Matteson Liv Og Adventbevægelsens Begyndelse Blandt Skadinaverne – En Selvbiografi [Matteson's Life and the Adventist Movement's Origin among the Scandinavians – an Autobiography]* (College View, NE: International Publishing Association, 1908), 63–64.

<sup>17</sup> Mary Yeater Rathbun, ed., *The Historic Perry Norwegian Settlement* (Daleyville, WI: Perry Historical Center, 1994), 191.

<sup>18</sup> Discussions over the relationship between slaveholders and non-slaveholders and slavery's central role in the South as well as in a Northern (rural) capitalist system were apparent across the country. On rural capitalism, see Christopher Clark, *The Roots of*

Accounts of the Norwegian, Swedish, and Danish immigrants' experiences with life in the slaveholding South appeared periodically in newspapers and private letters. These depictions demonstrated that Scandinavians in the South benefited economically from slavery even if they did not directly support slaveownership or the Confederate state-building experiment.<sup>19</sup>

Still, while there is evidence that several Scandinavians were reluctant participants in the slaveholding economy, class, in combination with significant social pressure, often trumped race in the struggle to achieve upward social mobility. In other words, few Scandinavian immigrants in the South challenged the institution of slavery since many indirectly benefited economically from it. Yet, tacit acceptance of the surrounding slavery-based society did not mean widespread embrace of secession. On the contrary, opposition to the planter class grew stronger as the Civil War progressed even as dissidents found themselves in a perilous position.

In *Emigranten* on May 20, 1861, a Norwegian-born correspondent warned that anarchy reigned in New Orleans: people were being

*Rural Capitalism: Western Massachusetts, 1780–1860* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), 226–229, 72–80. For the connection between slavery and capitalism, see Sven Beckert, *Empire of Cotton: A Global History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014), 146–147. On discussions within the Scandinavian community, see “Negerslaveriet Og Fremtiden [Negro Slavery and the Future].” In this piece, published in the Democratic newspaper *Den Norske Amerikaner*, the writer argued: “Slavery probably impoverishes the South, as they say, but from there it does not necessarily follow, that it necessarily impoverishes the individual slaveholders themselves. Slavery impoverishes Virginia, but it enriches a John Taylor, a John Mason, a Wm. Smith, who rule Virginia. . . . In reality, slave labor is a highly profitable and advantageous monopoly and its great advantages are only restrained by competition amongst itself. Slavery is no different in its harmful repercussions than other monopolies.”

<sup>19</sup> Some Scandinavian immigrants, for example, inherited enslaved people upon marrying or rented slaves when they needed work done. See Marco Giardino and Russell Guerin, *Mississippi's No-Man's Land: An Echo of the Koch Family Letters* (Denver, CO: Outskirts Press, 2006), 4–11. Also *The Swedes in Texas* asserts that Swante Magnus Swenson, who owned more than 100,000 acres in Travis County, Texas, had become a slaveowner through marriage but sold the family's slaves when the Civil War broke out. See Ernest Severin et al., *Svenskarne i Texas i Ord Och Bild, 1838–1918* [*The Swedes in Texas in Text and Images, 1838–1918*], vol. I (Austin, TX: E. L. Steck, 1919), 160–167. See also Carl T. Widen, “Texas Swedish Pioneers and the Confederacy,” *Swedish Pioneer Historical Society* 12, no. 3 (1961): 101. See also “Mississippi Dec. 28, 1860,” *Hemlandet*, January 16, 1861.

forced into military service and intimidation was ever-present.<sup>20</sup> A Dane living in Alabama in 1861 also alleged that “hangings and killings . . . were the order of the day,” for people who displayed sympathy for the North.<sup>21</sup>

Moreover, the threat of violence forced a Scandinavian company into Confederate service around New Orleans. Along with all other residents in New Orleans, Norwegians, Swedes, and Danes had been directed to report for drill training. As Union forces approached the city in the spring of 1862, the “the Scandinavian Guard” was presented with documents to sign up for six months of military service.<sup>22</sup> Few, if any, of the company’s soldiers, however, wanted to join the Confederate cause, and the unit’s leaders, according to an anonymous correspondent, explicitly framed the conflict as a rich man’s war.

Almost all of us balked at signing and said that we had nothing to fight for until the enemy came within 3 miles of the city. Moreover, we found it more suitable if they would enlist one of the regiments consisting of rich Americans, many of whom had property and negroes worth more than 2 million dollars; these people had started the war and had something to fight for. We were foreigners who had to support ourselves through work. But all arguments were in vain.<sup>23</sup>

The powerlessness articulated by the Danish-born immigrant was far from isolated to Scandinavian residents in New Orleans. As Keri Leigh Merritt has demonstrated in her study of non-slaveholding whites, attaining political influence in the South was “an unrealistic dream” for most, as voting

<sup>20</sup> “Skandinaverne i New Orleans [The Scandinavians in New Orleans],” *Emigranten*, May 20, 1861. According to the writer, a sizable group of Scandinavian immigrants who continued to participate in the slave-based economy existed. “A Norwegian, who has just returned from New Orleans, recounts that the Scandinavian residents there are mainly rebels,” the correspondent noted, adding that a Swedish immigrant had even attempted to form a Scandinavian company to fight for Jefferson Davis. This observation is backed up by a study of Norwegian soldiers in the Confederacy where the authors maintain that it is “probably correct to say, as one source puts it, ‘The Texas Norse were divided over the Civil War. Though most were Union men . . . the records show that [many] served in the Confederate Armies.’” See C. A. Clausen and Derwood Johnson, “Norwegian Soldiers in the Confederate Forces,” *Norwegian-American Studies* 25 (1972).

<sup>21</sup> “Skandinaverne i New Orleans [The Scandinavians in New Orleans]”; H. L. P., “Amerika [America],” *Lolland-Falsters Stiftstidende*, July 4, 1861.

<sup>22</sup> “Skandinaverne i Syden [The Scandinavians in the South],” *Emigranten*, December 1, 1862.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

restrictions in a state like Louisiana barred the majority of “white men from the polls.”<sup>24</sup>

Along with poor whites, slaveholders in the South worried about immigrant influence to such a degree that they incarcerated newcomers, especially men and women from Ireland, at a higher rate than their proportion of the population would otherwise warrant.<sup>25</sup> Despite such hardship, and their initial reluctance to support secession, many Irish immigrants still chose to join the Confederate ranks when war broke out. As an ethnic group, the Irish earned a reputation for bravery, but also, in the words of David Gleeson, “had a propensity to desert” and thereby challenged the notion of a “united Confederate nation.”<sup>26</sup>

The relatively few Scandinavian immigrants' wartime actions further undermined the alleged Civil War era Solid South. When “the Scandinavian Guard” was forced into Louisiana's Chalmette Regiment, they, in their own words, did everything they could to resist and delay their service while consciously trying to set themselves apart by embracing Old World Scandinavian symbols as opposed to identifying with the newly formed Confederacy. The company named the throughway between their tents “Scandinavian Street” and the first tent on the street “Dannevirke,” inspired by the historic and mythical Danish fortification in Schleswig that dated back to the pre-Viking age.<sup>27</sup>

When the threat of a Union invasion became real, the entire Chalmette Regiment refused to ship out toward Fort St. Philip but were forced at the point of guns and bayonets to do so.<sup>28</sup> In an act of defiance, the correspondent noted that the Scandinavian soldiers, by then, “had taken down the rebel flag but the Danish one still flew.”<sup>29</sup>

The Scandinavians were positioned as sharpshooters at Fort Jackson in the middle of Louisiana's swamp region, surrounded by “snakes and

<sup>24</sup> Keri Leigh Merritt, *Masterless Men: Poor Whites and Slavery in the Antebellum South* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 165–166. According to Merritt, “Louisiana's poor whites were so removed from the voting process” that some considered “the state an oligarchy.”

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 73–75, 191.

<sup>26</sup> There was, for example, widespread support for the national Democratic candidate Stephen Douglas in New Orleans during election of 1860. See David T. Gleeson, *The Green and the Gray: The Irish in the Confederate States of America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 7–8, 33–42.

<sup>27</sup> “Skandinaverne i Syden [The Scandinavians in the South].” <sup>28</sup> *Ibid.* <sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

insects as well as crocodiles,” but when the attack came on April 24 at 3 a.m. the Chalmette Regiment, with its contingent of Scandinavian troops, surrendered “without firing a shot.”<sup>30</sup> As Michael Pierson has shown, the surrender at Fort Jackson indicated “just how little resistance” nonvolunteers around New Orleans were willing to offer, and the lack of Confederate zeal was underlined a few days later in a mutiny at Fort Jackson involving many German and Irish immigrants.<sup>31</sup>



FIGURE 8.1 The Union Navy’s attack on Fort Jackson and Fort St. Philip on the way to New Orleans on April 24, 1862, is here depicted as more dramatic than the parts of the battle where Old World immigrants were involved. Photo by MPI/Stringer/Archive Photos/Getty Images.

<sup>30</sup> Michael D. Pierson, *Mutiny at Fort Jackson: The Untold Story of the Fall of New Orleans* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 112. See also “Skandinaverne i Syden [The Scandinavians in the South].”

<sup>31</sup> Pierson, *Mutiny at Fort Jackson: The Untold Story of the Fall of New Orleans*, 68–112; Keating, *Shades of Green: Irish Regiments, American Soldiers, and Local Communities in the Civil War Era* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017), 100–102.



With the fall of New Orleans, the only Scandinavian ethnic unit in the Confederate military ceased to exist, but the class-based tension underlying its military service persisted. In an example of subtle criticism of the Confederate ruling class, Danish-born A. J. Miller wrote a satirical letter to a friend on June 26, 1862, about the absence of patriotism he and his sons felt. Both of Miller's sons, Jon and Charles, had been conscripted "into the great Confederate States' army to fight for freedom and against – I don't know what," Miller wrote and continued with a comment on the hardship the Civil War had already visited on the community as evidenced by the condition of his poultry.<sup>32</sup> "The fowl had consumption – as it was said – from lack of something to consume."<sup>33</sup>

Christian Koch, a Danish-born sailor who had married into an American family and settled in Bogue Homa north of New Orleans, quickly experienced the fear and privations of Civil War as well. Koch operated a schooner which was seized by Union forces early in the war and therefore had to navigate the borderlands between Union-held territory around New Orleans and his family home in Confederate-held Hancock County, Mississippi. Writing from New Orleans on September 10, 1862, Koch urged his wife Annette to help their sons avoid military service by hiding from Confederate authorities. "If they have not yet taken Elers, send him, for Gods sake, of[f] at once, let him stay in the swamp," Koch wrote, "I think Emil had also better keep out of theyr vay [sic], as I hear the[y] take boys from 16 years."<sup>34</sup>

Additionally, in a testament to challenges both North and South, Swedish-born Frans O. Danielson in his November 20, 1862, letter home from Helena, Arkansas, explained to his family that southern politicians had passed a law "that no man" owning "twenty Negroes" could be drafted.<sup>35</sup> "That will make some of the lower classes open their eyes," Danielson added.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Vig, *Danske i Amerika* [*Danes in America*], 1, 241.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid. Miller's one son, John, came home after twelve months of service, but when the letter was sent his "poor Charles" was "still in the grip of these great champions of freedom."

<sup>34</sup> Christian Ditlev Koch, "No. Sept 10 1862," in *Christian D. Koch and Family Papers, Mss. 202, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections. Box 1* (LSU Libraries, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, 1862). See also Giardino and Guerin, *Mississippi's No-Man's Land: An Echo of the Koch Family Letters*, 5–13.

<sup>35</sup> F. O. Danielson, "Helena, Arkansas November 5, 1862," in *Mathilda Cassel Peterson Danielson (1834–). SSIRC Mss P: 55* (Augustana College, 1862). See also Check and Johnson (translator), "Civil War Letters to New Sweden, Iowa," *Swedish-American Historical Quarterly* 36, no. 1 (1985): 3–25

<sup>36</sup> F. O. Danielson, "Helena, Arkansas November 5, 1862," in *Mathilda Cassel Peterson Danielson (1834–). SSIRC Mss P: 55* (Augustana College, 1862).



In time, poor whites and immigrants in the South did open their eyes, at least if measured by their opposition to military service. According to Merritt, “the Confederacy suffered incredibly high rates of desertion” among “poor whites” fighting against their will, and David Gleeson observes that “Irish soldiers deserted more often than their native-born colleagues,” while a predominantly German company in the Army of Northern Virginia had the worst desertion rate of all.<sup>37</sup>

Though the number of surviving records is small, a similar development seems to have taken place among Scandinavian immigrants in the South. In a letter home, Elers Koch, who by 1863 was conscripted into the 9th Mississippi Cavalry, expressed support for his Uncle George who had seemingly deserted, and Christian Koch, in an April 13, 1863 letter, cursed “the ‘rascals’ who caused the war.”<sup>38</sup> Moreover, forty-eight-year-old Charles Stevens, another Danish-born sailor, only reluctantly joined a cavalry unit in Georgia in 1864 and was later claimed to have opposed secession.<sup>39</sup> In short, the class tension underlying military service revealed itself repeatedly whether it was around New Orleans or New Denmark.

Fritz Rasmussen’s brother-in-law, Celius Christiansen, hired a fellow immigrant to serve in his place when he was drafted in 1862, but two years later, when Christiansen was forced into the military again, he no longer had any “pretense about hiring a substitute”: by then “it was only

<sup>37</sup> Merritt, *Masterless Men: Poor Whites and Slavery in the Antebellum South*, 36; David T. Gleeson, *The Irish in the South, 1815–1877* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 150. See also Gleeson, *The Green and the Gray: The Irish in the Confederate States of America*, 221.

<sup>38</sup> Elers Koch, “Monticello, April 3, 1863,” in *Christian D. Koch and Family Papers, Mss. 202, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections. Box 1* (LSU Libraries, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, 1863). Earlier correspondence also supports Christian Koch’s reservations toward the slaveholding elite’s power even if at times he benefited from using enslaved people as laborers. On July 15, 1856, Koch wrote Annette from his hometown in Denmark and expressed frustration over the family lumber business in Mississippi. In Christian Koch’s view, “indeed there” was “a heap more liberty here than in the Southern states.” See Christian Ditlev Koch, “Kirkeby, July 15, 1854,” in *Christian D. Koch and Family Papers, Mss. 202, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections. Box 1* (LSU Libraries, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, 1854). The quote from Christian Koch appears in Giardino and Guerin, *Mississippi’s No-Man’s Land: An Echo of the Koch Family Letters*, 15–18.

<sup>39</sup> Charles E. Pearson, “Captain Charles Stevens and the Antebellum Georgia Coasting Trade,” *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 75, no. 3 (1991): 505. I am grateful to David J. Gerleman for bringing this story to my attention.

the rich man who enjoyed that right.”<sup>40</sup> Christiansen's rural draft experience mirrored that of numerous immigrants in American cities. As Tyler Anbinder has found, “immigrants were far less likely than natives to buy their way out of the draft.”<sup>41</sup> However, different strategies for draft resistance strategies ensured that urban immigrants, often German and Irish, overall were underrepresented in the United States military while the onus of the draft fell “disproportionately” on “native-born laborers, especially those residing in rural areas.”<sup>42</sup>

While there were several exemption categories, it was clear that immigrant enclaves, urban and rural, would now even more concretely have to decide what citizenship meant to them. To Scandinavian immigrants, exercising the right to vote was a key part of citizenship, and the war's ebbs and flows led some to a reassessment of political allegiances.

While Fritz Rasmussen generally supported the Republican Party's economic ideals, he at times also considered its policy implementations flawed. For the Danish-born New Denmark resident, the disillusionment with the war and the country's overall economic circumstances likely led him to stray from the Republican Party. In his diary on November 4, 1862, Rasmussen noted that he went down to the local schoolhouse in the morning to “observe ‘the general election’” and afterward brought home salt for a neighbor who had to split a barrel with a countryman due to the rising prices.<sup>43</sup> In the early afternoon, Rasmussen and his Uncle Knud both voted for the Democratic county clerk candidate Myron P. Lindsley, who had written to Rasmussen personally to ask for his vote.<sup>44</sup>

At the state level, the 1862 midterm election also proved difficult for Republican candidates. The Democratic Party picked up three of Wisconsin's six seats in the House of Representatives in Washington,

<sup>40</sup> Celius Christiansen, *En Pioneers Historie (Erindringer Fra Krigen Mellem Nord- Og Sydstatene)* [*A Pioneer's Story: Memoirs from the War between North and South*] (Aalborg: Eget forlag, 1909), 48–49. “It was now the third time I had to leave home to go to war, once in Denmark and twice in America,” Christiansen recounted.

<sup>41</sup> Tyler Anbinder, “Which Poor Man's Fight? Immigrants and the Federal Conscription of 1863,” *Civil War History* 52, no. 4 (2006): 351.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 347–351.

<sup>43</sup> Fritz W. Rasmussen, “November 4, 1862,” in *Fritz William Rasmussen Papers. Diaries, 1856–1876. Box 8. Green Bay Mss 4* (Green Bay: Wisconsin Historical Society, 1862).

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

DC, and thereby split the number of representatives equally with their Republican opponents.<sup>45</sup>

At the national level, however, Fritz Rasmussen gave the impression of being a solid, though not uncritical, supporter of the Republican Party as evidenced by his December 1862 exchange with the local Bohemian doctor, Mr. Patrzizny, “as fanatical a democrat as any.”<sup>46</sup> On their political differences, Rasmussen noted, “Laying that aside we are very sincere freinds [sic], he not having the remotest idea; of my adheranse [sic] to a different creed.”<sup>47</sup>

A few weeks earlier, partly demonstrating his frustration with the draft, Rasmussen recorded a derisive description of Brown County’s Irish-born draft commissioner, Henry S. Baird, who, in Rasmussen’s view, had “branded” himself as “thorough Democrat” and normalized “aristocracy” in handling his responsibilities.<sup>48</sup> Still, most community members in New Denmark managed to avoid the draft in 1862, and Fritz Rasmussen’s somewhat intermittent surviving diary entries in the early part of 1863 dealt more with local than national news. Partly because of the Danish-born immigrant tiring of the daily writing and partly because of a diary having gone missing, little is known of Fritz Rasmussen’s end to 1862, but on Friday, March 20, he picked up the pen for the first time in 1863.<sup>49</sup> “Finally I thought to have become true to my oft taken decision of ending my scribbling or diary-writing and observations,” Rasmussen began before citing his reasons to

<sup>45</sup> “The Next Congress,” *Wisconsin State Journal*, November 8, 1862. *Emigranten* on November 10 attempted to explain the results as something to be “expected” but also made the losses seem smaller than they actually were by, perhaps inadvertently, reporting a Republican 4–2 advantage. See “Valgene,” *Emigranten*, November 10, 1862.

<sup>46</sup> Fritz W. Rasmussen, “Sunday December 14, 1862,” in *Fritz William Rasmussen Papers. Diaries, 1856–1876. Green Bay Mss 4. Box 8* (Green Bay: Wisconsin Historical Society, 1862).

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.* Rasmussen voted for Lincoln in 1860, cast a Union vote in November of 1863 and voted to elect Ulysses S. Grant in 1868. See “November 1860. Den 7de. [November 1860. The 7th].” Also “Tuesday November 3, 1863.” Also “The 3rd Tuesday [November],” in *Fritz William Rasmussen Papers. Diaries, 1856–1876. Green Bay Mss 4. Box 8* (Green Bay: Wisconsin Historical Society, 1868).

<sup>48</sup> Fritz W. Rasmussen, “Den 27. Torsdag [November],” in *Fritz William Rasmussen Papers. Diaries, 1856–1876. Green Bay Mss 4. Box 8* (Green Bay: Wisconsin History Society, 1862).

<sup>49</sup> Fritz W. Rasmussen, “Den 20de Fredag [Marts],” in *Fritz William Rasmussen Papers. Diaries, 1857–1876; Account Books, 1856–1909; “Record of Scandinavians Who Have Been Settled and Lived in the Town of New Denmark, Brown County, Wisconsin.” Box no. 8* (Green Bay: Wisconsin Historical Society, 1863).

contemplating quitting; difficulties getting paper, poor lighting, and weariness after a day's work were all reasons, yet in the end he had to admit that keeping his journal had become a habit and a few years later also admitted that writing had a therapeutic quality to it, as it helped dispel his "troubled thoughts."<sup>50</sup>

The following months provided ample opportunity for "troubled thoughts" concerning both local draft politics and national party politics. In addition, local tragedies provided immediate grounds for reflection in the early summer.

In his diary entry from June 5, 1863, Fritz Rasmussen noted that he had passed the early part of the day "with talk and political discourses and differing opinions about the same (politics)" with his work crew before going up to Einar Quisling to attend the funeral of the Norwegian farmer's youngest who "died the other day."<sup>51</sup> A number of neighbors congregated at Quisling's home after the funeral to pay their respects, and just as people finished greeting each other, "yet another little girl (the second oldest), who laid 'saddled with with death,' died":<sup>52</sup>

It was decided to lay the second child to rest that Sunday and that morning Rasmussen helped prepare the grave for Quisling's little one and attended the funeral with his father and father-in-law. At one point later in the day, Sidsel, seven months pregnant with her and Fritz's third child, feared that their daughter Rasmine also had fallen ill with the same symptoms as the two children who had just passed way. The Rasmussen family, however, breathed a sigh of relief when it turned out that Rasmine's condition improved quickly.<sup>53</sup>

In short order, illness had taken two of the youngest New Denmark community members, and the Civil War was threatening to take several older ones. As previously noted, Johan Hauer died from disease on February 15, 1862, his older brother August had since volunteered as a substitute, and Niels Peter Pedersen had been gravely wounded on June 2, 1863, during the siege of Vicksburg.<sup>54</sup> Now, as the draft rolls

<sup>50</sup> "The 26th Friday [July]," in *Fritz William Rasmussen Papers. Diaries, 1856-1876*. Green Bay Mss 4. Box 8 (Green Bay: Wisconsin Historical Society, 1867).

<sup>51</sup> "Den 5te Fredag [June]," in *Fritz William Rasmussen Papers. Diaries, 1856-1876*. Green Bay Mss 4. Box 8 (Green Bay: Wisconsin Historical Society, 1863).

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.* <sup>53</sup> Fritz W. Rasmussen, "Den 7de Søndag [June]," *ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> Vig, *Danske i Amerika [Danes in America]*, 1, 356.

were once again being made up in Wisconsin during July and August 1863, Fritz Rasmussen, along with his twenty-nine-year-old neighbor Theodore Hansen and several others, found their names on the official “draft registration” list.<sup>55</sup>

Hansen, who was born in the same Old World village as Fritz Rasmussen’s wife and regularly swapped labor with Fritz Rasmussen in America, owned a plot of land close to the Rasmussen family.<sup>56</sup> In March 1861, Fritz Rasmussen recorded in his diary that Theodore Hansen, who had been part of the New Denmark community since 1855, was looking to buy yet another plot of land in New Denmark and thereby indicated that the relatively young immigrant was on his way to realizing upward social mobility through landownership in America.<sup>57</sup>

Military service could be an avenue to upward social mobility with enlistment bonuses and, theoretically, a steady monthly income, but Theodore Hansen’s dreams were tied to farming not fighting. Hansen’s stepfather, Mads Rasmussen, who had avoided military service likely due to his age and marital status, harbored little affection for his stepson and might have exerted pressure, directly or indirectly, to make the younger family member enlist in his place.<sup>58</sup> A later account, at least, maintained that Theodore Hansen enlisted to avoid Mads Rasmussen’s having to serve.<sup>59</sup>

After enlisting in the 22nd Wisconsin Infantry on November 13, 1863 (and initially expressing satisfaction with the lighter workload in the army compared to life on the farm), Hansen’s subsequent letters demonstrate that his motives for enlisting were not tied to economic aspirations or patriotic sentiment.<sup>60</sup> Hansen’s reluctance to serve mirrored dynamics

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Fritz W. Rasmussen, “20. Løverdag [Juni],” in *Fritz William Rasmussen Papers. Diaries, 1856–1876* (Green Bay: Wisconsin Historical Society, 1863).

<sup>57</sup> “Den 20. Onsdag [Og Indlæg Fra Marts Også],” in *Fritz William Rasmussen Papers. Diaries, 1857–1876; Account Books, 1856–1909; “Record of Scandinavians Who Have Been Settled and Lived in the Town of New Denmark, Brown County, Wisconsin.”* Box No. 8. *Green Bay Mss 4* (Green Bay: Wisconsin Historical Society, 1861).

<sup>58</sup> For Fritz Rasmussen’s assessment of Mads Rasmussen and Theodore Hansen’s relationship, see Fritz W. Rasmussen, “Den 13de Tirsdag [September],” in *Fritz William Rasmussen Papers. Diaries, 1857–1876; Account Books, 1856–1909; “Record of Scandinavians Who Have Been Settled and Lived in the Town of New Denmark, Brown County, Wisconsin.”* Box no. 8 (Green Bay: Wisconsin Historical Society, 1864).

<sup>59</sup> Johnsen, “New Denmark 3/8 Ad 1882 [March 8th].”

<sup>60</sup> Theodore Hansen, “Murfreeboro Feb 13[,] 64,” in *Civil War Mother’s Pension. Application 258778* (Washington, DC: National Archives, 1864).

within the German immigrant community, where Mischa Honneck has found that the “compulsory features” of the 1863 Enrollment Act even “invited comparisons to slavery and tyranny.”<sup>61</sup>

Still, despite the draft resistance apparent on the ground in immigrant communities, important political differences remained between the Scandinavians and larger ethnic groups.<sup>62</sup>

Hans Borchsenius, the recently converted Democrat (and, on account of illness, recently discharged army adjutant), specifically warned against backing his former party. “I know that the Democrats are working hard to assume government power and are attempting to persuade people in every possible way,” Borchsenius wrote in a piece published by *Emigranten* on October 27, 1862.<sup>63</sup> Democratic critique of high taxes and hard times, however, rang hollow when considering their unrealistic political platform, Borchsenius maintained. “Everyone ought to have their attention directed at the congressional elections, as the nation’s fate might depend on a fortunate outcome,” Borchsenius argued, and the soldiers of the 15th Wisconsin Regiment responded with strong Republican support.<sup>64</sup>

With the exception of three men, the 15th Wisconsin voted unanimously for a Republican candidate in the 1862 midterm election and counted 239–0 votes for the Republican candidate in Wisconsin’s chief justice election in April 1863, along with 41–0 in Wisconsin’s gubernatorial election on November 3, 1863 (in comparison, 82 percent of the

<sup>61</sup> Mischa Honeck, “Men of Principle: Gender and the German American War for the Union,” *Journal of the Civil War Era* 5, no. 1 (2015): 56.

<sup>62</sup> On the political differences, an unnamed immigrant wrote home to the Old World Danish newspaper *Flyveposten* on July 30, 1863, that the political situation in the North was “disintegrating in every respect.” The two main parties, “the Democrats and the Republicans (the black negro Republicans),” hated each other, and, added the letter writer, who seemingly identified with neither party, “now conscription has arrived, but the Democrats won’t join.” Everyone were so tired of war that they wanted peace at any price, the writer claimed, before noting, “The wisest thing for me to do might not even be to stay here until next year, as I risk conscription for the army with the next draft.” See “Af Et Brev Fra En Dansk i America [Of a Letter from a Dane in America],” *Flyveposten*, September 24, 1863.

<sup>63</sup> Borchsenius, “Et Par Ord Om Valgene [A Few Words on the Elections].”

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.* “Let us support the Union and the Constitution and we shall yet experience a fortuitous and honorable end to the war while having the fond knowledge that we, through our votes, have contributed to bring about the implementation of old Jackson’s saying ‘The Union must and shall be preserved.’”

predominantly German 9th Wisconsin and 25 percent of the mainly Irish 17th Wisconsin supported the Republican candidate, James D. Lewis).<sup>65</sup> Fritz Rasmussen also threw his support behind the party in power during the gubernatorial election of 1863:<sup>66</sup>

In the afternoon gone down to Schoolhouse No. 1, to vote, at the general Election; of course "Union vote" and, what a clamour [sic] the "Catholics" made; who are all without national distinction – "Democrats."<sup>67</sup>

To Rasmussen it seemed as if American society, no matter how great the expression of "adherence to republican sentiments and institutions," was becoming increasingly hierarchical and undermining opportunities for individual expression.<sup>68</sup> "Dog over Dog," that is human nature," he noted, but much of his frustration was also tied to renewed worries over the draft.<sup>69</sup> *Emigranten* recorded the 1863 election results on November 9 and described the outcome as the largest Republican victory in Wisconsin since Lincoln's election in 1860, but the paper quickly turned its attention to draft-related issues as well.<sup>70</sup>

Given the draft's magnitude in the Scandinavian-American community it therefore seemed only fitting that Fritz Rasmussen ended 1863 on a conscription-related note. In his December 31 entry, Rasmussen described his farm-related chores (chopping stove wood) and community-related work (helping residents with official and personal

<sup>65</sup> A. C. Johnson et al., "Statement of Votes Polled for State Senators by the Electors of Company B of the Fifteenth Wisconsin Regiment of Infantry at an Election Held at Bowling Green Ky. On Tuesday, the Fourth Day of November, A.D. 1862," in *Wisconsin. Governor Military Votes, 1862–1865. Series 60. Box 2* (Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society, 1862); "Wisconsin Military Vote-1863 and 1864," *Prescott Journal*, December 10, 1864.

<sup>66</sup> The "Wisconsin Seventh" and the "Third Wisconsin" also voted overwhelmingly for the Republican candidate. Frank Klement, "The Soldier Vote in Wisconsin During the Civil War," *Wisconsin Magazine of History* 28, no. 1 (1944): 45. Regarding Irish and German support for the Democratic Party, see Keating, *Shades of Green: Irish Regiments, American Soldiers, and Local Communities in the Civil War Era*, 74, 141; Walter D. Kamphoefner and Wolfgang Helbich, eds., *Germans in the Civil War: The Letters They Wrote Home* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 12.

<sup>67</sup> Fritz W. Rasmussen, "Tuesday November 3, 1863," in *Fritz William Rasmussen Papers. Diaries, 1856–1876* (Green Bay: Wisconsin Historical Society, 1863).

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.* <sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> "Novembervalgene – Unionsmændene Seire i Wisconsin [The November Election – Union Men Triumph in Wisconsin]," *Emigranten*, November 9, 1863.



correspondence). On the final day of the year, Rasmussen paid out money from the “public (Volunteer) fund” to the wife of a local Civil War soldier, and later he helped a countryman, Lars Andersen, write a couple of letters, “one to his son in the Army and one to the Office of the ‘Emigranten’ with a part of his contingent.” On his last line for the year 1863, Rasmussen neatly and gloomily noted, “So ended this year too and has entered the space of nothingness, as many of its predecessors [sic] before it; gone! gone!! And, we are going too.”<sup>71</sup>

<sup>71</sup> Rasmussen, “Thursday December 31.”