

Review by David Bulla, Indiana University, Bloomington
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*The Printer's Kiss: The Life and Letters of a Civil War
Newspaperman and His Family*

Edited by Patricia A. Donohoe

(Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 2014. Pp. ix, 257. Illustrations, appendix, notes, selected references, index. \$39.95.)

One way to understand the status of journalism at a particular time in history is to examine the life of a journalist. Often this is done with a major figure: the lives of Horace Greeley, Joseph Pulitzer, William Randolph Hearst, H. L. Mencken, Walter Lippmann, Edward R. Murrow, and Walter Cronkite come to mind as obvious subjects for such inquiry.

Yet we can also learn plenty about journalism from the lives of the less famous, and that is the case with Patricia A. Donohoe's *The Printer's Kiss*, which looks at the life of Will Tomlinson, who was born in northeast England, raised in Canada, moved to the United States as a teenager, learned printing at the *St. Lawrence Republican* in New York, and plied his trade as a journalist in Ohio. Married to a woman whose family had abolitionist leanings (as well as having produced the first president of Indiana University, Andrew Wylie), Tomlinson was a War Democrat in a state that produced some of the Union Army's most decorated leaders. Although he was a Democrat, he was an unabashed supporter of Abraham Lincoln. The publisher-editor abhorred the Peace Democrats and tolerated the abolitionists, believing that reunion was the main reason for the war. Instead of just writing about the war, Tomlinson also participated in the war, raising a regiment in the spring of 1861 and then volunteering and serving during the first year of the conflict.

Donohoe tells Tomlinson's story through the articles he wrote and through the editor's letters to his wife Eliza and others, as well as Eliza's letters back to him and to others. As Donohoe observes, the permanent record left by the denizens of the nineteenth century offers scholars and the public excellent primary sources for reconstructing history. The only major difficulty is deciphering handwritten letters and notes, especially those written in pencil.

What do we learn about Tomlinson the journalist from all this correspondence and journalism? That change was a constant in the life of a midcentury journalist, and that he fell into the common pattern of "build, work, fail, and move on." Tomlinson started and ran four newspapers in Ohio before moving off to Iowa in

1854. There he briefly worked for Dennis A. Mahony, the firebrand Democratic editor of the *Dubuque Herald*. In 1855, Tomlinson moved to Des Moines and

ran the *Iowa Statesman*. When it took a turn for the worse in 1857, Tomlinson sold the *Statesman*, and went on to become the associate editor of the *Iowa State Journal*. Unfortunately, Tomlinson also developed a reputation as an alcoholic. He fled back to Ohio, this time to Cincinnati, where he worked as a compositor.

At the start of the war, Tomlinson raised a regiment, with the enlistment effort starting with a meeting of printers in Cincinnati. Eliza proved to be a sympathetic supporter of Tomlinson's war fervor: "My prayers shall be with you," she wrote, "for the prosperity and success of your just and righteous cause. A God of justice—a God of power will not suffer the destruction of this noble fabric, purchased by the toil and privations and sacrifices of our forefathers" (p. 72). In the same letter, she asks Tomlinson to visit her before he heads off to battle. Tomlinson served for about a year, but was dismissed and went back to Cincinnati, occasionally writing a letter to the editor to the *Ripley Bee* and working as a compositor at the *Cincinnati Gazette*.

The editor of the book is the great-great-granddaughter of Tomlinson, but she makes that point clear, so it is no impediment in terms of its scholarship. On the contrary, Donohoe has found a treasure trove of letters from Tomlinson and his wife. Its discovery has spurred Donohoe to tell Tomlinson's story, not as a relative, but as a journalist at a crucial moment in American history, and this volume does that very well. It is a narrative that moves along with a certain momentum that mirrors Tomlinson's journalistic life—all fits and starts, going somewhere yet barely going anywhere. In that sense, Donohoe's book succeeds in developing the nature and status of journalism during the American Civil War, through the words of an ordinary newspaperman and those of his wife. It was a time when almost all newspapers had small circulations, were located in small cities or towns, and had relatively short existences. Yet they were vital to the public discourse that brought the Civil War—and its major issues, especially slavery—to the forefront.

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