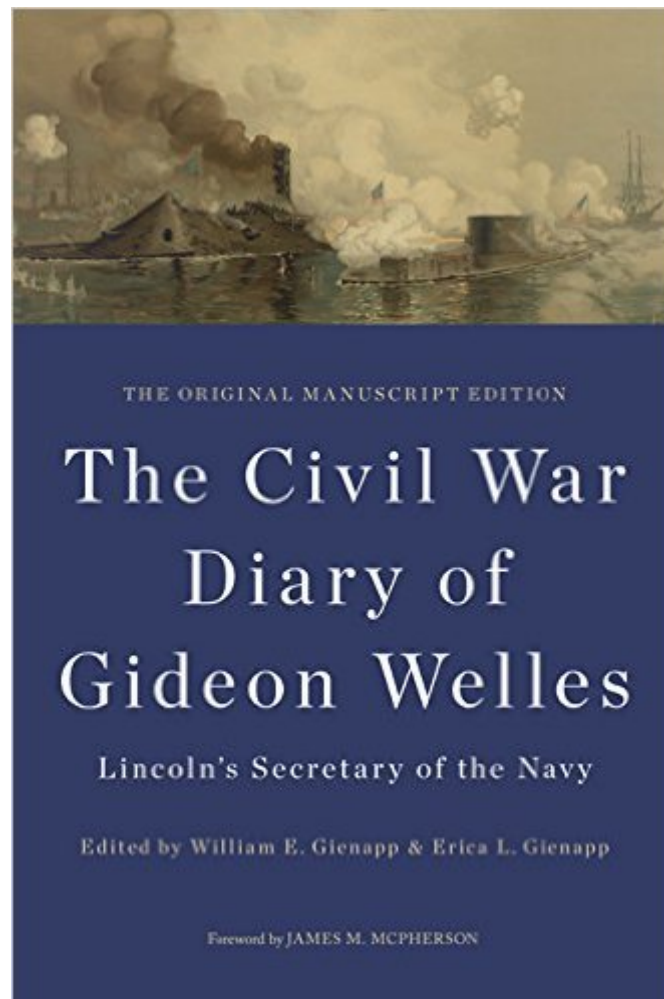


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The Civil War Diary Of Gideon Welles, Lincoln's Secretary Of The Navy: The Original Manuscript Edition (The Knox College Lincoln Studies Center)



Synopsis

Gideon Welles's 1861 appointment as secretary of the navy placed him at the hub of Union planning for the Civil War and in the midst of the powerful personalities vying for influence in Abraham Lincoln's cabinet. Although Welles initially knew little of naval matters, he rebuilt a service depleted by Confederate defections, planned actions that gave the Union badly needed victories in the war's early days, and oversaw a blockade that weakened the South's economy. Perhaps the hardest-working member of the cabinet, Welles still found time to keep a detailed diary that has become one of the key documents for understanding the inner workings of the Lincoln administration. In this new edition, William E. and Erica L. Gienapp have restored Welles's original observations, gleaned from the manuscript diaries at the Library of Congress and freed from his many later revisions, so that the reader can experience what he wrote in the moment. With his vitriolic pen, Welles captures the bitter disputes over strategy and war aims, lacerates colleagues from Secretary of State William H. Seward to General-in-Chief Henry Halleck, and condemns the actions of the self-serving southern elite he sees as responsible for the war. He can just as easily wax eloquent about the Navy's wartime achievements, extoll the virtues of Lincoln, or drop in a tidbit of Washington gossip. Carefully edited and extensively annotated, this edition contains a wealth of supplementary material. The several appendixes include short biographies of the members of Lincoln's cabinet, the retrospective Welles wrote after leaving office covering the period missing from the diary proper, and important letters regarding naval matters and international law.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Gideon Welles's Diary provided much needed insight into the inner workings of the Navy Department and Lincoln's cabinet during the Civil War. As a big Lincoln fan, I particularly enjoyed the subtle hints starting in December 1863 when Welles started to mention that Salmon Chase seldom attended the cabinet meetings prior to his resignation in June 1864. On a more serious note, I truly appreciated that the editors chose to include Welles's entries from the first year in Lincoln's presidency as an appendix since Welles did not start writing his diary until 1862 and the entries for 1861 were written well after they had taken place.

There is an aspect of this book that is like the relation between Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead and Hamlet. You are seeing the Lincoln administration from a perspective that is entirely different from those with which we are familiar. Here the battles are being fought in the background while members of the executive interact with each other, with members of the legislature, with military officers, and with civilians, many of whom are asking for something. Wells writes very well and has a deft eye for characterization both good and bad. His portraits of Stanton and Seward are among the bad. He holds Lincoln in very high regard but identifies some of his failings. In particular he characterizes Lincoln as wishing to support all petitioners. (We know from other sources that there were exceptions to this: Fremont, for example.) This is, of course, Welles story and he comes across as the level-headed conciliator. That may be a bit exaggerated, but I still see him as a rock solid cabinet member whose first concern was the welfare of this country.

This revision is the best I've ever read. The book is very insightful and unmodified. Gideon's insights should be read by every political science major and are a must for any serious history major. Gideon Welles offers real insight on personal behavior, political behavior, and ethics. It is also a great read for all Navy personnel and those who study the Civil war.

A summary of the review on StrategyPage.Com: 'Although this is not the first published edition of the wartime SecNav's diary, the Gienapps have restored the text as written at the time, rather than as revised, corrected, and edited by Welles postwar. While doing this, they have added their own annotations and commentary, which include the later revisions made by Welles or "corrections" •

added by earlier editors. As a result, this edition of the diary gives us a much clearer and more immediate picture of what Welles thought about events at the moment he was writing. We get a vivid look at how confusing and frightening the opening weeks of the Lincoln administration seemed to those experiencing them. We also often get very critical assessments of particular politicians, officers, and others, and see how Welles's opinions about some people evolved over the years. In this diary Welles gives us an insider's perspective on discussions of political, strategic, and technical questions, operational planning, and much more. Although probably not a volume one would read for enjoyment, this reference is certainly of immense value to anyone writing on the war. For the full review, see [StrategyPage.Com](#)

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