

Fire Within explores what Walt Whitman called the interior history of the Civil War—the war waged and witnessed by common people. Through diaries, letters, and newspaper articles, Kerry Trask weaves together personal viewpoints and wartime events to reflect the passions of the times and describes the conflicts encountered by the men who went to war and the people who remained at home. This colorful, often moving account reveals the experience of James Anderson, a young Scottish immigrant who enlisted in the 5th Wisconsin Volunteers soon after President Lincoln issued his first call. Leaving his home of Manitowoc, Wisconsin, he, like many other young men, set off with expectations of high adventure. From the field, Anderson requested that his parents take good care of his diary and letters, writing, I intend if I ever get out of this term of service to write an account of my three years campaign. Though he returned home, his story was never written. Anderson's rendering of the war is further enriched by Rosa Kellner's splendid journal. From the Williams House Hotel, this teenage Bohemian innkeeper was a spectator and participant in the community. Her writings offer essential insights into wartime life on the homefront. Remaining in Manitowoc, Rosa longed to take part in the struggle: If I were only a boy tomorrow with other brave men I would enlist! Along with the strong central core of James and Rosa's stories, Trask uses the accounts of other Manitowoc soldiers and community members to complete this portrait of the Civil War. For soldiers and civilians this real war was often difficult and painful. What they wrote in their letters and diaries offers a look at the conflict from a small-town perspective and reveals the true nature of war. An engaging work, Fire Within will appeal to the general reading public as well as to Civil War scholars and specialists.

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