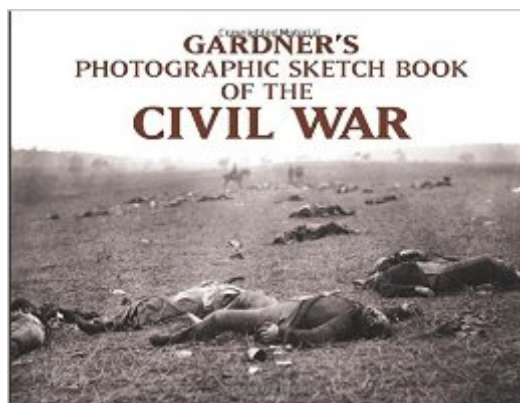


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Gardner's Photographic Sketchbook Of The Civil War



Synopsis

Second only to Mathew Brady as the foremost early American photographer was Alexander Gardner, the one-time manager of Brady's Washington salon and Brady's chief photographer in the field during the early days of the Civil War. Indeed, Gardner "who later photographed the War independently" often managed the famous horse-drawn photographic laboratory and took many of the pictures that used to be attributed to Brady. He accompanied the Union troops on their marches, their camps and bivouacs, their battles, and on their many hasty retreats and routs during the early days of the War. In 1866 Alexander Gardner published a very ambitious two-volume work which contained prints of some 100 photographs which he had taken in the field. A list of them reads like a roster of great events and great men: Antietam Bridge under Travel, President Lincoln (and McClellan) at Antietam, Pinkerton and His Agents in the Field, Ruins of Richmond, Libby Prison, McLean's House Where Lee's Surrender Was Signed, Meade's Headquarters at Gettysburg, Battery D, Second U.S. Artillery in Action at Fredericksburg, the Slaughter Pen at Gettysburg, and many others. This publication is now among the rarest American books, and is here for the first time republished inexpensively. Gardner's photographs are among the greatest war pictures ever taken and are also among the most prized records of American history. Gardner was quite conscious of recording history, and spared himself no pains or risk to achieve the finest results. His work indicates a technical mastery that now seems incredible when one bears in mind the vicissitudes of collodion applications in the field, wet plates, long exposures, long drying times, imperfect chemicals "plus enemy bullets around the photographer's ears. It has been said of these photographs: photography today . . . is far easier, but it is no better.

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Customer Reviews

Alexander Gardner and Matthew Brady are the two photographer icons from the American Civil War. Until photos from the Battle of Antietam were placed in galleries in New York City causing draft rioting there, the public (civilians) in both the North and South did not have a concrete understanding of the brutality of a conflict that would eventually kill upwards of 650,000 citizens; almost 2% of the American population. This is a coffee table book and photos can be scanned for use in classrooms. These photos are extremely relevant to the telling of that terrible war, and are the 19th century equivalent to the LIFE magazine photos of WW II, Korea, and Vietnam conflicts.

This book was above and beyond what I expected especially for the price I paid for it. My husband who doesn't normally read loves the book too. It's a great view into the past, into a war that tore this nation apart.

100 pictures approximately 7 x 9. I had seen several before but most were new to me. The captions are very special, having been written by Gardner himself in the somewhat flowery literary style of that time period.

Alexander Gardner was the Mathew Brady of the South, and it might be more fair to Gardner's amazing technical skill and his historian's eye to say instead that Mathew Brady was 'the Alexander Gardner of the North'. Gardner was every bit as fine a photographer as Brady, and managed to take magnificent photographs under adverse field conditions, and operating under wartime Blockade shortages of crucial chemicals and supplies, that Brady never had to contend with in the comfortable, well-supplied North. Gardner was based in Richmond for much of the War. Like Brady he operated a retail portrait Studio when the War broke out, but unlike Brady he risked his life and spent an enormous amount of time and resources following the Confederate Army in the first photographic 'field wagon', in the process taking what appear to be the first actual "live combat" photos of Civil War battles in progress, actually happening in front of his camera. This makes Gardner a uniquely important photographer, both in America and worldwide. No photographer before him had ever accompanied an active Army in the field during actual fighting, with all the personal dangers and risks that involved. And at a time when all the equipment--camera, lenses,

glass plates, chemical solutions-- were rare, expensive, difficult to acquire and almost unimaginably fragile and easily broken, jolting along in a horse-drawn wagon over cross-country trails, wading across creeks and through an America transformed into a rural war zone. Unlike Brady, who waited to inspect (or despatched his apprentices to) the battlefields only after the fighting was safely over and days after the events, and was content to drag the days-old corpses of his countrymen about and re-position their bodies as decorative props into more photogenic arrangements and compositions, Gardner was actually there, along with the Confederate Army on the march. That makes Gardner indescribably unique, and his photographs all the more remarkable-- so many of which, unlike the popular and prosperous Mr. Brady's, were soon destroyed and lost to history. Confederate Richmond fell to the U.S. Army in 1865, and that historic city's civilian commercial and residential areas were indiscriminately burned to the ground by the same triumphantly occupying Union Army that had burned all the other conquered Southern cities to the ground. In that chaos of destruction, many of Gardner's existing photographs were apparently destroyed, along with his Studio and workshop. Tragically, countless more photographs that survived the flames were gradually destroyed or lost during the long dismal decade of poverty and starvation that the victorious Union called 'Reconstruction'. An impoverished Gardner, displaced amidst the impoverished former capital of a starving and penniless South, was in no position to store or safeguard his remaining treasure trove of fragile glass plates. Ironically, prosperous Northern museums (including the Smithsonian Institute) as well as wealthy Northern photographers (and collectors) were well aware of Gardner's reputation, and had to be aware that he was penniless and starving (as were most Southerners), and of the historic value of his huge (and endangered) collection of unique wartime images. And yet, not a single Museum, not a single wealthy collector, not Matthew Brady nor any of his rival photographers and exhibitors, no one ever lifted a finger to save these images or acquire any of them, even though Gardner could have had no choice but to sell them for whatever pittance might have been offered. There's some indication he tried to donate his images to the U.S. National Archives, and then to the Library of Congress, and was ignored and rejected by both those institutions. In a post-war North, despite the nation's new fascination with photography, there was apparently no interest in the wartime photographs of a conquered 'Rebel traitor'. There is the heartbreaking story of Gardner's irreplaceable wartime plates being gradually sold off for pennies, by the box load, as 'scrap glass'. Some were melted down. Others were, unbelievably, sold as glass panes for a commercial greenhouse -- with workers being paid to soak and scrape the photo images off the plates so the glass would admit more light. A Richmond writer remarked that as late as the 1890s, if the light was just right, you could still clearly

make out the ghostly traces of the original images, of Generals and Regiments and family portraits, all fading gradually away in the Richmond sun. Until this remarkable and groundbreaking book first appeared, Gardner was largely forgotten, and even many early-photography buffs barely knew his name. Gardner's images in this book, and the extraordinarily difficult (and often dangerous) circumstances under which these images were captured for immortality, are incredible. And equally incredible is the ingenuity and resourcefulness required of Gardner to find the means to physically transport, keep safe and finally chemically develop his glass plates in a Confederacy where all supplies, especially an obscure and exotic luxury like photographic chemicals and imported camera parts, quickly became completely unavailable due to the Union blockade. A phenomenal story, and an extraordinarily resourceful and daring photographer/journalist/historian, forced to see much of his artistry and life's work was destroyed before his eyes, but whose reputation today deserves to be rediscovered and appreciated at last. This is a fascinating book for Civil War enthusiasts, photographers and historians alike. To see these images for the first time is like time travel, as the 1860s come alive again on the page. Gardner had a keen eye, and the shots he captured sometimes seem literally impossible to have captured with the equipment (and the wartime shortages) of the time. Yet, here they are. And this is only a small surviving percentage of Gardner's original work. When you close the last page, you may find yourself wondering at all the lost photographs that were destroyed-- gone forever now, unless some long forgotten attic, or trunk, or basement box in some small town museum yields some unexpected windfall of long lost Gardner images. I'm a romantic, but I like to think anything is possible. A great book, and the perfect gift. I'd give this 10 Stars if I could. I've given it as a gift many times over the years. Thanks for reading my review, and thank you, Alexander Gardner-- Pioneer photographer, groundbreaking photo-journalist, witness to history.

This book for my husband for Father's Day. Absolutely love the Civil War and he really enjoyed this book. Has a bunch of interesting information in there and some very intriguing pictures that we've never seen before. And my husband has a major history buff and he's never seen most of those pictures I really recommend this book if anybody is a history buff or specifically just loves the Civil War.

My disappointment was not about the quality of the book, nor the quality of the photography. The book cover suggests there will be photos of battle scenes. Instead, the majority of the pictures are of historic buildings associated with the Civil War. OK if that's what you are looking for.

Great book! Great photos with interesting information! The book is paperback, so not a top shelf book, but the pictures are still very clear and the information is well written! I would buy again, and may buy again to give as presents!

A great collection of photos from the Civil War, with a write up for each photo. Excellent addition to a Civil War library. Tidbits of information to spark your curiosity and fill in gaps in your war knowledge. As one of the first major events ever to be photo journalized, seeing images from the Civil War is just astounding.

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