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Book Review: Sherman and the Burning of Columbia, by Marion Brunson Lucas

Huntsville-Madison County Historical Society

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: Book Review: Sherman and the Burning of Columbia, by Marion Bruns

should be acquired by residents of Huntsville and Madison County. But Brantley never was afraid to make judgments or to "speak his piece." Perhaps this is what makes "Three Capitals" interesting to read as well as being informative.

Lucas, Marion Brunson; Sherman and the Burning of Columbia. 167 pp. Appendixes, bibliography, index. College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 1976. \$10.95.

Many Southerners still bristle when reminded of certain episodes of the Civil War. Perhaps foremost among these is the burning of Columbia during Sherman's march through the South. Marion Lucas, a native of South Carolina and a graduate of the University of South Carolina at Columbia, wrote his doctoral dissertation on this subject and now it has been further "polished" for publication. This is largely a dispassionate look at the events leading to the burning and an attempt to distribute the guilt as Lucas sees it.

His conclusion is that only about one-fourth of the city actually burned, the residential areas largely escaping the conflagration, and that about every group involved in the burning shares a part of the blame.

Labeling the burning a tragedy that has long helped to keep North and South from complete reconciliation, he blames Confederate military and civilian leadership for leaving cotton bales piled high upon the streets in the business section of the city, to be burned by drunken federal soldiers, local rabble and who knows else.

Liquor stored in the capital was not destroyed by Confederate officials and seems to have been the catalyst for rioting, looting and the arson.

Union generals are blamed for not sending troops into the city to put down the rioting that went on unabated

for some five hours before troops were finally dispatched to do so. Yet Lucas adds that "It seems impossible to believe that Sherman ordered the town burned" and that "Union authorities made an effort to provide food for those left in the capital after the fire."

Lucas has written what surely must prove to be the definitive work on the burning of Columbia, but I am equally sure that many people will continue to blame Sherman and his troops.

