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Confederates in the Tropics: Charles Swett's Travelogue of 1868

Sharon Hartman Strom, Frederick Stirton Weaver

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Charles Swett (1828-1910) was a prosperous Vicksburg merchant and small plantation owner who was reluctantly drawn into secession but then rallied behind the Confederate cause, serving with distinction in the Confederate Army. After the war some of Swett's peers from Mississippi and other southern states invited him to explore the possibility of settling in British Honduras or the Republic of Honduras.

Confederates in the Tropics uses Swett's 1868 travelogue to explore the motives of would-be Confederate migrants' fleeing defeat and Reconstruction in the United States South. The authors make a comparative analysis of Confederate communities in Latin America and use Charles Swett's life to illustrate the travails and hopes of the period for both blacks and whites.

Swett's diary is presented here in its entirety in a clear, accessible format, edited for contemporary readers. Swett's style, except for his passionate prefatory remarks, is a remarkably unsentimental, even scientific look at Belize and Honduras, more akin to a field report than a romantic travel account. In a final section, the authors suggest why the expatriate communities of white southerners nearly always failed, and follow up on Swett's life in Mississippi in a way that sheds light on why disgruntled Confederates decided to remain in or eventually to return to the U.S. South.

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