

'LOVE & VALOR' PREMIERE RESCHEDULED FOR FEB. 23

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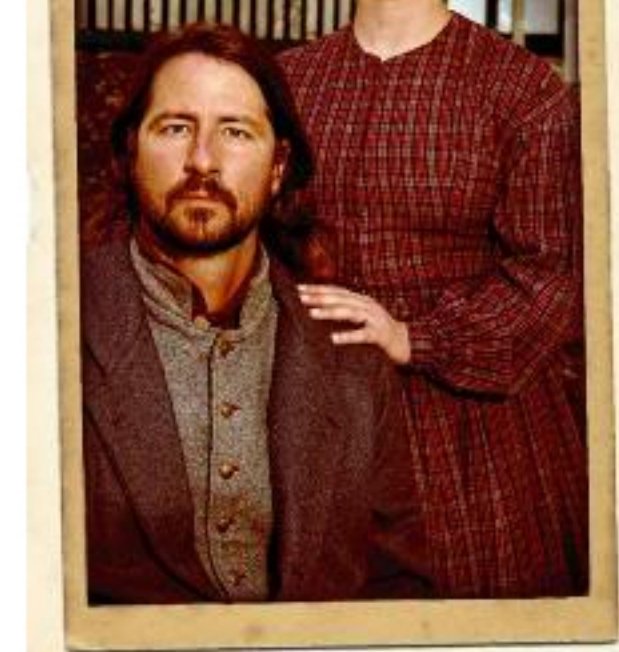
By Loren Keller

NOTE: Screening has been rescheduled for Feb. 23 at 7:15 p.m. Tickets for the 12/8 event will be honored.

Charles Larimer spent about seven years working on his 2000 book *Love and Valor — The Intimate Civil War Letters Between Captain Jacob and Emiline Ritner*, and then another seven years making a feature-length narrative documentary based on it.

But the Chicago-based author and filmmaker says the story drawn from correspondence between his great-great grandparents has yet to be told in its entirety.

"I'm still fascinated with it," says Larimer, whose film "Love & Valor — The Intimate Civil War Letters" premieres at 7:15 p.m. Tuesday at the Collins Road Theaters in Marion. "I continue to find more details about the story. I tell people I will probably be studying this story for the rest of my life."



Narrated by actor Brian Dennehy, the film tells the story of Jacob Ritner, a Mt. Pleasant-area school teacher and farmer who was among the first wave of 75,000 men to enlist in the Union army. Ritner became a captain and fought in the war until it ended while his wife Emiline remained on the home front to raise the couple's four children.

Over the course of the war from 1861 to 1865, the prolific couple exchanged nearly 150 letters.

"To me it's a great American love story told in detail that doesn't show up in many other places," Larimer says.

"It's very rare to meet those criteria: the full period of the Civil War and to have both the man and the woman's letters."

The 92-minute documentary also preserves a part of Cedar Rapids history.

Filmed mostly in Iowa and Wisconsin from 2004 to 2006, many scenes in the documentary were shot at Ushers Ferry Historical Village before it was ravaged by last year's flooding.

"There are scenes that were shot in buildings that don't exist anymore," says Ushers Ferry curator and program director Ann Cejka. "In some ways, (the film) is really the last surviving evidence of what a lot of those building interiors looks like... and what the village was before the flood and what it will never be again."

While scouting locations to film the documentary, Larimer didn't need to look far to find his lead actors: Cejka plays Emiline and Brian Pittman of Spring Green, Wisc. plays Jacob. The two friends have been long-time civil war re-enactors.

"The very first time we sat down together, I figured I was just there to find artifacts and coordinate the horses and buildings they needed," Cejka says. "But Charlie just looked at us and said 'you look exactly like Jacob, and you look exactly like Emiline. You're my Jacob and Emiline.' It was completely unexpected."

Though she had little prior acting experience, Cejka says most of the shooting locations were already familiar to her and the many other Civil War re-enactors who participated in the project. The film includes riverboat scenes filmed on the Riverboat Twilight in LeClaire, Iowa, cemeteries filmed near Mt. Pleasant and battle scenes shot in Boscobel, Wisc.

"My payment was a great deal of Civil War period clothing, which is quite expensive; it was sort of an in-kind donation," she says.

Larimer says the Civil War re-enactors — among them members of a Cedar Rapids "infantry unit" who plan to attend the Tuesday's premiere in full uniform — were a natural fit for the project's relatively modest budget of about \$200,000.

"They already had their uniforms and they take great pride in looking a particular way and developing their own character," Larimer says. "From their perspective I think they were happy that someone appreciated what they were doing and filmed stuff that they were doing anyway."

Even after completing the film based on a book Larimer began researching in 1993, the director says the history of the story is continuing to unfold.



In 2007 he discovered that Ritner's aunt, Mary Ritner, ran the boarding house in Chambersburg, Pa., where the fanatical abolitionist John Brown lived in 1859 while he was plotting the raid on Harpers Ferry. Six months ago, the Civil War letters of a soldier in Ritner's company, Wils Payne, surfaced and provided additional details to many of Ritner's stories.

Larimer has even found family heirlooms on eBay, including a small photo of Ritner taken in Mt. Pleasant and a Bible that belonged to Ritner's grandfather.



"The modern-day contacts have been very rewarding, and it's fun that there are so many people interested in the story and continuing to research it," he says.

Larimer works in Chicago as a full-time actuary; he graduated from the University of Iowa in 1975 with a degree in mathematics. In another ironic twist, Larimer as a student lived just two blocks away from the State Historical Society of Iowa building in Iowa City, where years later he found the original letters written by his great-great grandfather. (He had read his grandmother's typewritten carbon copies of the letters as a child but didn't unearth the originals until beginning his research in the 90s.)

Proceeds from Tuesday's screening will be donated to Ushers Ferry and the HD Youth Center of Cedar Rapids, which is also recovering from the floods. The youth group helped provide some of the extras used in the filming, which included founder Henry Davidson.

Tickets to the 7:15 p.m. screening at the Collins Road Theater, 1462 Twixt Town Road, Marion, are \$8 for adults and \$4 for children. Call Ushers Ferry at (319) 286-5763 to purchase in advance.

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 **UI School of Music Spring Concert Series**

Matisse Trio at Riverside Recital Hall...

 **SSRO Presents: A Voice of My Own**


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