Announcer: The Missouri State Journal, a weekly program keeping you in touch with Missouri State University.

Emily Yeap: Spreading across roughly 40,000 to 45,000 square miles, the Ozarks covers much of the southern half of Missouri and a large part of northern Arkansas. It also extends into northeast Oklahoma and southeast Kansas. There are many stereotypes about the Ozarks and Ozarkers. They range from frontiersmen to hillbillies and moonshiners. With his research on Ozarks history, Dr. Brooks Blevins tries to dispel those misconceptions and present the most complete portrait of the region. I'm Emily Yeap.

About six years ago, Blevins, who is the Noel Boyd professor of Ozarks studies at Missouri State University, started to write a comprehensive history of the Ozarks. It resulted in a trilogy. “A History of the Ozarks, Volume 1: The Old Ozarks” was published last summer. “A History of the Ozarks, Volume 2: The Conflicted Ozarks” came out this summer. Volume three is in the works. Blevins joins me today to discuss his research and share highlights from volume two of his trilogy.

Brooks Blevins: I'm a native of the Ozarks, so I've been interested in the history of the Ozarks as long as I can remember. It's part of my history. I really noticed that there was a need for a comprehensive history of the region for the people of the region. The trilogy that I'm writing is a sort of beginning to today. For the first two volumes, really what I'm concentrating on is what we call the physical Ozarks, the region that geographers would define as the Ozarks here in the middle of North America. And then for volume three that I'm still writing, I concentrate more on what I call the cultural Ozarks.

Emily Yeap: Volume two focuses on slavery, the Civil War and the birth of the modern Ozarks.

Brooks Blevins: The first chapter of the book is mostly a history of slavery in the Ozarks. With the modern day demographics that we have a lot of people don't realize that slavery was prominent in the Ozarks, not as much as in the deep south, but certainly here there were close to 30,000 enslaved people at the time of the Civil Car. I begin the book with that because that's part of the ramp up to the Civil War and helps divide the region as well, just as the country was divided.

The second thing is the sort of real part of the Civil War in the Ozarks is the brutal hom efront war that we often forget about. We like to focus on battles and marching armies and all that kind of stuff and for good reason. That's what so much of the Civil War was about, but for most people in the Ozarks, their experience of the war was a very scary home front experience where guerillas were everywhere and anytime someone came riding up to your house, it probably wasn't a good thing.

They're going to take your livestock and take your food and possibly endanger your family. And it just became really a war of survival for the people who were on the home front and many of them didn't survive. It was such a brutal thing and a lot of that was just because of the Ozarks was so divided from the very beginning of the Civil War. You had people who were loyal to the Union, people who were loyal to the South and often they were neighbors or relatives and it was everywhere in the Ozarks. It was just a terrible, divisive thing that turned into a bloody guerilla war on the home front.

And then the last thing is the post-war era. We think of peace coming in 1865, but it really didn't in the Ozarks. The Civil War was the war that refused to end. And there's still violence and bloodshed that goes on for years and years after 1865 and it was mainly due to how deeply divided the people of the Ozarks were.

They didn't just come home and put aside those animosities and those hatreds for one another and go back to living life the way it had been. They carried these things with them and they fought for political control of their communities. They targeted old enemies. It was something that dragged on and on for years, to the point that really the Bald Knobber story, which is one of the famous post-war stories of southwest Missouri. It begins in Taney County, Missouri, in 1885 it's really an extension of the Civil War 20 years later. It's many of the same people and their families on one side fighting against the same people who were on the other side in the Civil War. So instead of the Union against the Confederacy, it becomes a fight of Republicans against Democrats, for instance, over political control of their county. And it really is kind of the last gasp of the Civil War in the Ozarks, and it's just a reminder of how difficult it is for places to overcome civil war.

Emily Yeap: Volume two is available for purchase online. Tune in next Tuesday for the second in a two part series about Blevins’ work.

I'm Emily Yeap for the Missouri State Journal.

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