The Confederate flag represents a variety of different interpretations of the Civil War. A constant media barrage of conflicts over these contested meanings leaves little room for debate that the flag itself resists being defined in a single, particular way. War came to East Tennessee in the form of guerilla conflicts that harassed the lesser-developed portions of the United States in 1861. The area known as the Smoky Mountains was a hostile environment in which to attempt to survive, and its population reflected that fact. Russell Gregory, pastor of the Primitive Baptist Church, closed his doors and organized fellow loyalists into a home guard. Confederates in the Attic gains steam once Horwitz leaves Kentucky and really gets his Civil War tour underway. Horwitz really has to go down some dark alleys to find the unreconstructed nuts (but he finds them, to be sure). The true undercurrent of Confederates in the Attic is race. The cause of the Civil War, after all, is slavery. Their minimization of slavery’s role, or its effect on black Americans, smacks of defensiveness of their chosen hobby. To me, the
most interesting question raised by Horwitz is why these Civil War nuts (I believe they like to be called “buffs”) do what they do. Horwitz also exposes the racist attitudes hidden within societies such as the Sons of Confederate Veterans who try to market themselves as legitimate and historical groups. “Our Northern confederates, after a full and calm hearing of all the facts, after a fair warning of our purpose not to submit to the rule of the authors of all these wrongs and injuries, have by a large majority committed the Government of the United States into their hands. The people of Georgia, after an equally full and fair and deliberate hearing of the case, have declared with equal firmness that they shall not rule over them. By anti-slavery it is made a power in the state. The question of slavery was the great difficulty in the way of the formation of the Constitution.” Mississippi’s declaration is somewhat more straightforward on the subject when it states: “Our position is thoroughly identified with the institution of slavery.”