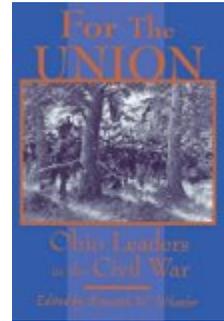


H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Kenneth W. Wheeler, ed. *For the Union: Ohio Leaders in the Civil War*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1998. viii + 497 pp. \$24.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8142-0756-7.

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Ohio's Role in the Civil War

In 1968, Ohio State University Press published this volume of essays describing the contributions of ten prominent state leaders toward Ohio's Civil War effort. Kenneth W. Wheeler, the book's editor, deliberately excluded professional generals and cabinet officials on the grounds that due to their role in national issues they had little direct involvement in Ohio wartime affairs. The other reason Wheeler gave for excluding these leaders was that "historians have exhaustively examined their careers" (p. vii), an assertion which some might have debated even in 1968. Instead, the essays cover the leading Democratic dissenter (Clement L. Vallandigham), a civilian general (James H. Garfield), two correspondents (Whitelaw Reid and Murat Halstead), a Radical Republican senator (Benjamin F. Wade), a minister (Charles P. McIlvane), an industrialist (Miles Greenwood), a moderate Republican senator (John Sherman), and two political humorists (Artemus Ward and Petroleum Nasby).

Thirty years later, Ohio State University Press has published a reprint, choosing not to update any of the articles or their documentation. Because the essays were written several years before this volume's publication, they did not always reflect the most recent scholarship thirty years ago, a situation exaggerated by the passing of three decades. Nor do the notes on the contributors provide any indication of the authors' activities since 1968. That they or others have published full-length biographies of several of the subjects may lead some to question the value of such a reprint. Yet since the original publication has long been out of print, the reprint will be valuable to those unable to find a library or used

copy. In addition, the collection does bring these individuals together in short readable essays which look only at their Civil War roles, thus saving the reader an extensive search through multiple sources. The volume will also appeal to instructors of college-level Ohio history courses, perhaps looking for a Civil War era writing assignment. Few will be pleased with Wheeler's brief and superficial Preface which offers little either to set the stage for the essays to follow or to place their subjects in historical context.

The essays not only vary in length (the range is from twenty-four to seventy-eight pages) and importance of the subject, but also in quality of the presentation. Some cover material familiar to those with a modest knowledge of the Civil War and Ohio history while others look at largely unknown individuals and aspects of the war years.

The author of the first essay, Frank L. Klement, has written widely about Vallandigham and other Copperheads. In fact, his biography of Vallandigham was published shortly after Wheeler's volume. Vallandigham's resistance to the war effort from arrest, court martial, and expulsion to his campaign for the Ohio governorship in 1863 while in exile is a familiar story to most. Readers might wish for a fuller evaluation of his motivation by Klement. Yet the author does convincingly portray his subject as a conservative constitutionalist opposed to strong central government rather than as a traitor as many Northerners viewed him at the time. Alone among those studied in this volume opposed to the Union war

effort, Vallandigham was nonetheless “for the Union” in his own unique way.

Allan Peskin’s essay on James A Garfield preceded the biography by the same author which was published a decade later. In a well-crafted interpretative study of the classic example of a political general, Peskin describes Garfield’s transition from pacifist leanings to a successful and skilled military officer often at odds with the more conservative West Point officer cadre which was sometimes proslavery and often overly cautious militarily. Returning to his seat in Congress at Lincoln’s urging in 1863, Garfield made the successful transition, in Peskin’s words, from a political general to “a military-minded politician” (p. 115).

Robert H. Jones’s brief essay on Whitelaw Reid is the first of two studies of Cincinnati Civil War correspondents. Reid was highly critical of any Union military failure even as he supported the Administration and a full prosecution of the war. Jones’s descriptive essay lacks an interpretive framework and concentrates on Reid’s accounts for the *Daily Gazette* of the battles of Shiloh and Gettysburg. In contrast, Donald Curl, author of a later biography of Murat Halstead, provides a descriptive and analytical view of the more prominent Cincinnati Commercial correspondent Halstead. Already well-known for his eye-witness accounts of the Republican conventions of 1856 and 1860, Halstead was an early critic of Lincoln who came to appreciate the finer qualities of the martyred president only after the assassination. Of the Lincoln cabinet, Halstead praised only Chase and was especially vehement on what he regarded as the corruption and incompetency of Simon Cameron in the War Department. Curl concludes that Halstead’s vigorous reporting made him a giant of “personal journalism” (p. 368).

Like Whitelaw Reid, Benjamin Wade was among Lincoln’s sharpest critics. Mary Land’s interpretation of Wade emphasizes his role as chair of the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War to voice his vigorous dissatisfaction with Lincoln’s prosecution of the war and to lead the efforts to remove General George B. McClellan from his command. Despite its length, the article adds little to the fine 1963 biography of Wade by Hans Trefousse. In contrast, Republican Senator John Sherman has not had a modern biography. In her essay, Jeannette P. Nichols’s presents a largely sympathetic interpretation and concentrates on the central role he played in pro-

viding direction to the Administration’s struggles to finance the war. Working closely with Treasury Secretary Chase, Sherman’s greatest achievement was his work on the National Banking Act. Unhappy with the Administration’s treatment of his brother William, he unwisely joined the abortive effort to dump Lincoln from the Republican ticket in 1864. Nichols concludes that “as a statesman and politician [he] was sometimes wise, sometimes foolish, sometimes blind, sometimes farseeing” (p. 427).

Two far lesser-known Ohioans, Charles P. McIlvane and Miles Greenwood, are the subjects of important essays. James B. Bell describes McIlvane’s role as Episcopalian cleric who served the Administration in England during the war with his persistent diplomatic efforts to convince English church officials of the need for their country’s neutrality at the time of the Trent Affair in late 1861 and later. Carl M. Becker’s biographical study of Cincinnati iron manufacturer Miles Greenwood is a detailed interpretive account of both Greenwood’s civic and industrial leadership. He successfully transformed his facilities, the Eagle Iron Works, into a Union arsenal only to be ruined financially by his frustrating efforts to construct an iron clad monitor. Neither McIlvane nor Greenwood has been the subject of subsequent biographical studies, thus adding to the usefulness of these essays.

Finally, Harvey Wish looks at two prominent humorists who helped ease the war tensions of Ohioans and other Northerners including President Lincoln through their writings in Cleveland and Toledo newspapers. Charles Farrar Brown wrote under the pseudonym Artemus Ward while David Ross Locke created Petroleum Vesuvius Nasby. Both Brown and Locke have been the subjects of full-length biographies. Both were successful lecturers as well as writers who ridiculed politicians, reformers, and other prominent leaders in both North and South, thus doing their part to bolster Union wartime morale. Wish’s essay provides a fitting conclusion to an informative and useful, if dated, collection of essays. Perhaps the volume’s reprint points to the need for new work, biographical and otherwise, on Ohio’s role in the Civil War as the state’s bicentennial approaches.

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