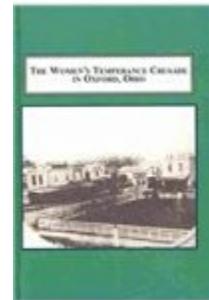


# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

David M. Fahey. *The Women's Temperance Crusade in Oxford, Ohio: Including a Sketch of the Family of Dr. Alexander Guy (1800-1893) with Excerpts from the Memoir of William Evans Guy*. Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2010. Illustrations. iv + 258 pp. \$109.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7734-1386-3.

Reviewed by Deborah Marinski (Ohio University Southern)  
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Commissioned by Sarah E. Miller



David M. Fahey's work, *The Women's Temperance Crusade in Oxford, Ohio*, is a detailed study of a local attempt to crush saloons and the sale of alcohol in a small town in Ohio in the year 1874. The book contains much more descriptive information than this simplistic statement, and it spans decades rather than a single year. For Fahey, crusaders' actions are not the only concern; he also concentrates on the causes of the temperance crusade, town life, and crusaders' background and reasons for participating. Throughout the book, Fahey places the local crusade within the framework of larger state politics and legislation and ends by mentioning the late arrival to Oxford of the national movement of the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU).

Fahey begins his book by addressing what other historians have considered as the main causes of the local and national temperance movements, including causes related to gender, religion, ethnicity, and class, all of which, according to Fahey, were not isolated. They were interconnected to create the initially successful Oxford crusade. He does show, however, that gender had particular importance in the temperance movement in Oxford.

When writing about female involvement, Fahey stresses three points: women did not begin the crusade but were spurred to action by men, it was Protestant white women who took direct action, and it was primarily women who were comfortable financially who were vividly involved in the movement. An examination of women's participation also led Fahey to ask why such a big female crusade developed in such a small town. To answer this, Fahey provides four arguments. First, he

states that "women in smaller places organized more effectively because they knew one another better." Second, in a smaller town it was more difficult for men to react harshly toward women they probably knew. This is especially important because Fahey describes a town with a violent past. Third, small towns "remained the power base of 'feminized' Protestantism which in big cities had given way to the manly Christianity of pious businessmen" (p. 10). Finally, saloons and drinking men were highly visible on the streets, next to churches and stores that women frequented. This last argument couples nicely with Fahey's discussion about family problems related to alcohol. Many crusading women had a personal connection to alcohol problems and some suffered moral or economic hardship because of spousal alcohol abuse. Even women who did not have a family member drinking in the saloons faced threats daily as they walked to church or the general store. Fahey attributes the constant interaction between women and saloons and drinkers as a leading cause of the crusade in such a small town.

Fahey maintains that men from prominent families in Oxford, including physicians, ministers, farmers, and entrepreneurs, came together to initiate action against saloons and the sale of intoxicants. These prosperous men were the first to create a temperance organization, the Temperance Council, after which another group, the Women's Temperance League, formed with men's support. Eventually these men established a joint stock company, the Woman's Temperance League Aid Association, to fund the crusaders' ventures and to defend them in the courts. By relying on wealthier women as the organiza-

tional leadership and the middle class as the rank-and-file activists, the men utilized who they believed to be the best method of reform: Christian women in danger-wives, mothers, and daughters affected most by drinking either directly or indirectly.

Fahey points out that “ethnicity and religion, as well as class, typically divided reformers from drink-sellers, but little was simple” (p. 49). A clear-cut division is impossible, but he does provide some generalizations. For example, saloonkeepers tended to be young, not wealthy, Catholic, and of German or Irish heritage. But Fahey also notes that these ethnic and religious animosities were not the reason for the crusade; instead, he emphasizes threats to families and violence. Fahey devotes several pages to various crimes, including murder, beatings, and robbery, that took place in Oxford in the decades preceding the crusade. To protect the town and women, temperance advocates argued that alcohol needed to be outlawed.

Fahey devotes the longest section of the book to the crusade itself. Here, he provides a methodical account of the actions of crusaders, saloonkeepers, and drinkers. Women prayed daily before they engaged saloonkeepers, peacefully protested outside saloon doors by singing and praying, and utilized “pickets” to write down the names of those entering saloons. Female crusaders did not enter saloons without permission nor did saloonkeepers threaten these women with force. An attempt at an injunction failed in the courts. By and far, the crusade was tranquil with the goal of shutting down the drinking trade through “abstinence pledges.” Within two months, the crusaders had achieved their goals, but the victory was short-lived. Fahey maintains that once the number of female activists declined and overall interest waned, several of the saloons that closed reopened showing that many saloonkeepers who pledged abstinence defaulted on their promise.

To describe the crusade in Oxford, Fahey relies on a variety of valuable resources, including important secondary sources about temperance, Ohio history, and Oxford’s history. His primary sources include personal papers of both male and female activists; newspaper clippings from local, state, and national media outlets; and census records. Fahey thoroughly analyzes his sources, frequently noting discrepancies between different sources and taking into account bias within the ma-

terials. He notes that “most sources for Oxford’s Crusade reflect the opinions of the Crusaders and their supporters almost exclusively” (p. 147). Fahey includes useful appendices with specific financial information on the community and crusade participants. The endnotes provide a further display of his research and are quite enjoyable to read.

While Fahey’s book offers valuable information on a small town crusade, there are some critiques to be made. Since this is a work of local history, a large part of the readership may come from the general public. With that in mind, it would have been useful for Fahey to expand his discussion of the Democrats and Republicans to clarify exactly what the two parties endorsed in the nineteenth century. Even though these two parties exist today, they were ideologically different in the nineteenth century, which may confuse a general audience.

Most weaknesses of the book are editorial and stylistic. The book is not divided into chapters, but by simple headings that introduce new subjects. The endnotes are Roman numerals instead of Arabic numerals, making it difficult to easily find references at the back of the book. Because there are no chapters, the endnotes are consecutive through the entire work, so many of the superscript endnotes are the length of a nine-letter word. This format is distracting while reading and more so when trying to keep up with the endnotes. Stylistically Fahey includes so many names with their alternate forms that it is almost impossible to keep them straight throughout the work. Photographs help to put some images to some of the names and places, but a map of Oxford with specific locations of the saloons, grocers, and churches would have further supported the visual history. Many dates are not always clear because there is a constant shifting back and forth between the crusade and events from previous decades. Some of the stories about violent crimes are repeated several times making it difficult to follow the author’s points. Finally, the book has quite a few typos, including spelling and grammar mistakes as well problems with paragraph structure.

Overall, the subject and information in Fahey’s book is important, thorough, and interesting. I only wish that the book had undergone more careful editing and revision.

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