



PROJECT MUSE®

---

*Mennonites, Amish, and the American Civil War* (review)

Sean A. Scott

Ohio History, Volume 116, 2009, pp. 133-135 (Review)

Published by The Kent State University Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/ohh.0.0057>



➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/263138>

of these men joined Harrod and Bowman on the unsuccessful Ohio foray, and subsequently “Capt. Wm. Harrod, with 6 others, went up the Ohio to Red Stone in the two keel boats &c. and took along several bones & tusks got at the Big Bone Lick.”<sup>2</sup> What became of these specimens remains unknown, but this was an important early effort at “mining” the deposits at Big Bone. Similarly, neither Jillson nor Hedeem mentions Thomas Rodney’s well-documented stop there on October 10, 1803, less than a week after Meriwether Lewis’s collecting visit for Thomas Jefferson. Rodney not only took measurements of several of the remaining fossil bones but speculated (incorrectly) that no animals larger than bison ever existed there, larger bones being “only Fossil Concretions.”<sup>3</sup> Rodney himself collected a mastodon tooth and a tusk fragment, but these were lost when his boat sank at Natchez.

Curiously, Hedeem merely reproduces without explanation a photograph of three Paleo-Indian points “collected” at Big Bone Lick. Elsewhere, he has written that these were discovered in the lowest level of the Big Bone deposits during William Clark’s 1807 excavations for Thomas Jefferson and are “now likely” housed at the Cincinnati Museum Center.<sup>4</sup> The significance of associated Paleo-Indian artifacts and megafauna at Big Bone Lick should certainly be acknowledged but so too should the considerable debate existing about the precise provenance and pedigree of these artifacts.

Such strictures aside, this book provides ample context for the present Big Bone Lick State Park Museum and should remain a standard resource for many years.

JAMES L. MURPHY  
The Ohio State University

*Mennonites, Amish, and the American Civil War.* By James O. Lehman and Steven M. Nolt. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007. xiv, 353 pp. Cloth \$39.95, ISBN 0-8018-8672-4.)

When war engulfed Virginia in the summer of 1861, Mennonite Christian Good was conscripted into the state militia. After Good experienced battle and failed to discharge his rifle, his perturbed captain asked him why he

2. Henry Hill, “Bowman’s Campaign—1779,” *Ohio Archaeological and Historical Publications* 22 (1913): 519.

3. Simon Gratz, “Thomas Rodney,” *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 43.2 (1919): 132–33.

4. Stanley Hedeem, *Natural History of the Cincinnati Region*. Cincinnati Museum Center Scientific Contributions No. 1 (Cincinnati: The Center, 2006), 23. In the same publication, these artifacts are captioned only as “most likely [discovered] during William Clark’s 1807 expedition” (Plate 24).

had refused to shoot at Union soldiers in clear view. The committed pacifist reportedly responded, “They’re people; we don’t shoot people” (58).

While most Protestants north and south wholeheartedly supported their governments and sent scores of soldiers to fight in the Civil War, members of Anabaptist sects struggled to balance the conflicting duties of citizenship in both an earthly state and a heavenly kingdom. As religious outsiders who traced their origins to the radical fringe of the Protestant Reformation, many Mennonites and Amish had settled in America to avoid compulsory military service in Europe. More significant than challenging their civic loyalty and threatening their commitment to the principles of pacifism, the Civil War forced them to engage the political and cultural mainstream and adapt to the contingencies of war in order to protect their distinctive and countercultural religious beliefs.

In a compelling narrative, Lehman and Nolt effectively recount the unique circumstances of American Anabaptists in three geographic regions. In Virginia’s Shenandoah Valley, conscripted pacifists could secure an exemption from military service by paying a \$500 commutation fee or furnishing a substitute. Although a few Mennonites fought for the Confederacy, many more attempted to flee north and avoid supporting the rebellion. During the autumn of 1864, the Union’s hard war policy resulted in the destruction of several Mennonite farms, and these southern conscientious objectors suffered at the hands of Rebels who confiscated their crops and livestock and Federals who destroyed what remained.

Pennsylvania Mennonites, in contrast, benefited from political ties to Radical Republican senator Thaddeus Stevens, who helped his constituents secure military exemptions from the state militia without paying a commutation fee. Most Pennsylvania pacifists realized that political participation was essential to the preservation of their religious privileges.

For several reasons, midwestern Mennonites and Amish lacked the political connections of their Pennsylvania brethren. Many pacifists drafted in Ohio and Indiana paid a \$200 commutation fee or hired substitutes to avoid service. Several Ohio Anabaptists supported the Democratic party, and townships with large pacifist populations in Holmes and Wayne counties produced large majorities for Clement Vallandigham in the 1863 gubernatorial contest. However, by the campaigns of 1864, many midwestern Mennonites had adopted the apolitical stance espoused by John Funk, who began publishing the *Herald of Truth* in Elkhart, Indiana, and asserted in its pages that a consistent application of pacifist principles prevented a conscientious objector from voting, seeking public office, or purchasing a substitute.

Most Mennonites and Amish, the authors conclude, remained true to their spiritual convictions despite the turbulent conditions of civil war. By highlighting the struggles of these religious outsiders who strived to keep

the church distinct from the world, Lehman and Nolt have produced an insightful study that further elucidates the centrality of religion for a proper understanding of the Civil War.

SEAN A. SCOTT  
Ouachita Baptist University

*Politician Extraordinaire: The Tempestuous Life and Times of Martin L. Davey.* By Frank P. Vazzano. (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 2008. xiv, 322 pp. Cloth \$45.00, ISBN 978-0-87338-920-4.)

With his biography of Martin Davey, Frank Vazzano sets out to tell the “good story” of a “very, very interesting man” (x). He accomplishes this goal admirably as an “unabashed story teller” and as an historian. Certainly, no one knows Davey better than the author who has written three articles about Davey’s terms as governor, all of which appeared in *Ohio History*.

An effective biography not only examines the subject’s life but also the nature of place and time and the meaning of change. As the title indicates, Vazzano understands this well. Vazzano is especially successful in describing Davey’s life and times during his formative years and early career during the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries. Born of an immigrant father obsessed with the apparently quixotic quest for scientific tree care and raised in poverty in small town Kent, Ohio, Davey grew to manhood as a gifted salesman and businessman, community booster, and brilliant politician. Vazzano captures the transformation of Davey during changing times as he turns his father’s vision into a successful business with customers across much of the nation and helps “boost” Kent from a nineteenth-century village with dirt streets to a modern community with all the amenities of public services.

Vazzano successfully captures the emergence of modern America and the nature of local politics. Barely out of his teens, Davey is traveling to Cleveland to sell his father’s book, *The Tree Doctor*, and then New York to promote the Davey Tree Expert Company. He boldly cultivates captains of industry, wins the tree care of the Capitol grounds, and uses advertising to creatively expand the reach of the business. At the same time, Vazzano aptly shows Davey mastering local politics: the network of friendships and personal alliances, the use of patronage to reward friends and define political power, the necessity of strong organization, and the efficacy of public speaking. He was elected mayor of Kent, served well, and, as countless politicians before and after him, used that base to win higher office.

Although one of Ohio’s most successful politicians in the twentieth century who served multiple terms as mayor, in Congress, and as governor of Ohio, Davey remains elusive as a political leader. Vazzano documents Davey’s brilliance and limitations as a politician; his organizational skills, his tireless