

Cradles of Conscience: Ohio's Independent Colleges and Universities. Edited by John William Oliver Jr., James A. Hodges, and James H. O'Donnell. (Kent: Kent State University Press, 2003. ix, 588 pp. Paper \$50.00, ISBN: 0-87338-763-5.)

Ohio has an unusually rich and deep heritage of private institutions of higher education. Apart from Pennsylvania, no state has more independent baccalaureate colleges and universities, and this ambitious book of forty-three essays examines the history of all of them, along with many more that no longer exist. Although uneven and marred by editing and organizational problems, this book nevertheless is an important contribution to the historical literature of higher education in Ohio, and serves as a valuable reference work for anyone interested in the state's "Cradles of Conscience."

College histories are an idiosyncratic literature, written for and appealing to largely parochial audiences with personal interests in the school studied. As a result, most college histories stand more or less alone, with only passing references to other colleges of the time or area. Thus, while the reader may get a deep understanding of the institution studied, often the comparative element is missing, leaving the reader unaware of just how ordinary or unusual events and trends in school history were. With only about ten to twenty pages devoted to each school, *Cradles of Conscience* can not hope to rival traditional college histories in depth, but provides instead unprecedented breadth in examining the landscape of private colleges in Ohio. The succinctness of each chapter also shows, in sharp relief, the major themes and trends evident in the history of each school, facilitating comparisons with other colleges and universities throughout the state.

This comparative potential is one of the great strengths of the book, and allows the reader to trace common trends and make key distinctions among the institutions profiled. Despite the unifying theme suggested by the title, even the editors admit that the designation "Cradle of Conscience" does not really fit all schools studied. Secular interests founded Defiance, Franklin, Lake Erie, Ohio Northern, and Tiffin, and only later did some of the institutions pick up a church affiliation. Conversely, some institutions founded by religious denominations explicitly for perpetuating Christian ideals have become largely secular over the years. To be fair, it is perhaps impossible to unify the histories of more than forty colleges of such diverse backgrounds under a single thematic rubric. However, while no single theme characterizes all of the schools, all of the schools do share one or more of several major themes evident in a general

reading of this text. Indeed, after reading a few of the essays, one can begin to predict the common patterns that will emerge in most of the subsequent treatments.

For example, one of the themes shared by nearly all of the Protestant colleges examined is the issue of financial instability, particularly in the institution's early years and during times of national economic stress. A number of these schools either suspended operation temporarily (e.g. Antioch, Ashland, Urbana, Wilberforce) or came close to shutting their doors for good (e.g. Bluffton, Baldwin-Wallace, Mount Union, Lake Erie, and Muskingum, to name only a few), and were saved from extinction either by dogged presidential leadership, timely largesse (from alumni, affiliated denominations, or community), or both. Perhaps as significantly, the Catholic institutions profiled were relatively freer from the kinds of dire economic exigencies suffered by their Protestant counterparts. Although it is not explicitly stated by the authors of these pieces, the implication seems to be that the Catholic Church provided surer financial support of its four-year schools than did most Protestant denominations, or at least that the Catholic colleges took advantage of lower overhead costs achieved by using Church property for classes and employing priests and/or nuns as faculty.

Another theme that becomes increasingly evident throughout this book is the profound impact war made on nearly all of the institutions profiled. War could have both baneful and beneficial influences on these colleges, occasionally at the same time. For example, major conflicts like the Civil War and World War II claimed so many students for the armed services that enrollments in all institutions. Colleges with strong German roots (e.g., Wittenberg, Baldwin-Wallace) met with marked anti-German hostility from their local communities during World War I. The situation was even more difficult for institutions affiliated with pacifist denominations (e.g. Wilmington and the Quakers, Bluffton and the Mennonites). A high percentage of students and faculty at these institutions were opposed to war, raising accusations of disloyalty from the community and sometimes government officials. Such tribulations sorely tested the conscience cradled by these schools.

Conversely, nearly all of the authors mark World War II and its aftermath as a watershed event in the growth of their institutions. During the war, the U.S. government chose most Ohio colleges as locations for military training centers. This timely government intervention brought both new students and cash to schools greatly in need of both thanks to the Depression and the draft. Furthermore, the G.I. Bill filled campuses across the state to overflowing, ushering in an era of growth and prosperity that these colleges had rarely (if ever) experienced in the past. World War II was not

the only war to provide generous windfalls either: ROTC programs and college deferments to the baby-boom generation during the Vietnam War had similar effects during the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Along with the effects of war, other common themes among these schools include ones that defined larger changes in American society and higher education. For example, debates over the introduction of co-education and/or the admission of African-American students mark the history of many of the institutions profiled. Similarly, most of the essays make direct or indirect reference to the loosening of school rules and the gradual demise of *in loco parentis* status over the years. Furthermore, nearly all of the colleges faced the issue of curriculum reform in some manner, whether it was the classical vs. modern elective system, the liberal arts vs. vocational education, or a secular vs. a religious orientation.

Other themes are not as universal, but are surprisingly common. Debates over whether to allow Greek-letter fraternities and sororities on campus, for example, mark many of these narratives. More seriously, devastating fires beset a number of schools, highlighting the prevalence of this hazard in the 19th and early 20th centuries. These fires were particularly serious for small colleges, as such schools often ran on a shoestring budget from a single building. Thus, when a fire struck, it could carry away not just the Old Main, but all school possessions as well. Because of this, fires doomed at least two Ohio colleges, and came close to shuttering several others.

Perhaps the most pervasive theme shared by most of these institutions, though, is the tension between their largely religious roots and increasingly secularizing trends in standard curricula and academe in general. Ohio colleges dealt with these tensions in a continuum of ways, from achieving truly independent secular status, to maintaining some form of denominational affiliation, to embracing ever more tightly their religious orientation. This theme provides a shared point of reference as well as some of the most compelling contrasts in these narratives. This is an important feature for a book that struggles, at times, with less-than-compelling composition.

As may be expected from a large anthology, the essays are somewhat uneven stylistically. Although most are generally dispassionate in tone, almost all are also (perhaps understandably) tinged with affection to lesser or greater degrees. Some, however, go beyond mere tingeing and are unabashedly subjective. This subjectivity ranges from vigorously and approvingly touting the institution's religious doctrines or mission (Murray Murdock's Cedarville essay is only one example of this) to the actual use of personal pronouns like "we" and "our" in describing the school (see, for

example, John Carrigg's treatment of Franciscan University). One piece in particular (Kelli Nowlin and Helga Kittrell on Franklin University) abandons all pretense of objectivity and reads like nothing less than a promotional piece of literature from the institution's public relations department. The background of the authors chosen to write the essays can explain much of this stylistic diversity. While most of the authors are historians (or in a couple of cases, history graduate students), nearly 40% are not. The latter group includes English professors (3), archivists and librarians (4), administrators (directors or vice presidents of development or public relations) (5), a theologian, and a former student. As such, the flavor of the narratives occasionally veers away from traditional historical idioms toward those characteristic of the background and training of the authors.

Despite the real stylistic differences between these essays, what is striking are their structural similarities. This is particularly true of the approach used. A few (like Perry Lentz's treatment of Kenyon) are highly literary in nature. Others (especially Mary Ann Janosik's piece on John Carroll) are more thematic in approach, using issues such as community, educational and religious priorities, and modernity to drive the narrative. Most, however, follow a relatively straight chronological approach, often broken down by major historical milestones (such as wars and depressions) and the terms of the college presidents. Nearly all finish with some requisite reflection on the current status of the college in the context of both present circumstances and its overall history. This uniformity of approach is understandable, but makes it difficult for individual essays to stand out and can be a bit wearing when reading the book straight through.

Oddly, perhaps the most fascinating essay is not any one of the forty-three chapters, but rather the Appendix: "Defunct Ohio Private Colleges and Universities" by Erving E. Beauregard. For every private college in Ohio now, there are nearly two that were chartered and did not survive. This essay discusses these eighty schools and seeks common reasons for their foundings and their ultimate failures. Two helpful tables list all of these schools (one for defunct schools, and one for those chartered but never opened), including their locations and years of existence. Beauregard (author of an important history of Ohio's defunct Franklin College) addresses a surprisingly wide range of issues in this relatively brief piece, one that could easily have been twice as long without losing the reader's interest. With its breadth of scope in examining these forgotten institutions, Beauregard's essay serves as a fitting coda to an already fairly comprehensive volume.

For all of its finer points, though, there are some serious flaws and missed opportunities evident throughout this book. Perhaps most obviously, the book is copyedited surprisingly poorly throughout, with sometimes glaring mistakes evident in both the text and photo captions. Granted, it adds unintended amusement to read about (for example) the actions of a college's "hoard of trustees" (155), but in general the steady stream of misspellings, typographical errors, missing words, and other such problems distracts the reader from the content and detracts from the enjoyment of the book.

Another issue concerns the volume's organization. Schools are presented in alphabetical order for no compelling reason other than convenience, one guesses. While perhaps a valid scheme for a book that people might use for reference purposes, the editors of this volume lost a tremendous opportunity to enhance the volume's strongest suit—its comparative potential. The editors could have used any one of several organizational structures to augment the contents. For example, a denominational approach could have grouped all the Catholic schools, all the Methodist schools, etc., to underscore similarities and differences in the "consciences" of these schools. A geographical approach could have allowed the reader to understand more easily how institutions of higher education started and developed in relation to each other in a regional context. Perhaps the best organizational structure might have been a chronological approach, presenting the schools in order of founding date. This format would allow readers to achieve a more profound understanding of how post-secondary education developed and changed over time in the state of Ohio, and more readily compare and contrast the themes discussed above as a function of the time. If there is to be a second edition of this book, its editors should give at least as much thought to its reorganization as they give to clearing up the many copyediting problems.

Despite these flaws, *Cradles of Conscience* remains an ambitious work drawing on the expertise of dozens of scholars to provide an unusually broad insight into the history of higher education in Ohio. A welcome addition to the literature as a reference work, it is perhaps even more important as a counterweight to the often-parochial idiom of most college histories.

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