

From Hometown to Battlefield in the Civil War: Middle Class Life in Midwest America

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The colonists wanted a *dominee* (Dutch minister) to help them adjust to a foreign land; Scholte was more interested in setting forth a vision of unity in Christ in the “free market” of American society and culture. For most of the Pella colonists, he remained a compelling preacher, but his congregational and premillennial convictions fed the general disaffection from him as a religious leader. Nevertheless, in Iowa and beyond, Scholte’s example in colony planting and his fundamental support for Reformed theological orthodoxy were echoed elsewhere. Rev. Albertus C. van Raalte, an *Afscheiding* colleague whom Scholte had mentored, planted Holland, Michigan, in 1847, slightly earlier than Pella’s founding. In 1870, two years after Scholte’s death, Henry Hospers, a lay understudy of Scholte in journalism, education, business, and politics, led colonists from Pella to found Orange City, Iowa.

The book is not easy to read. Heideman’s prose is dry, and his theological focus can make it heavy going for readers not versed in Reformed doctrine. He does try to set context and offer explanations, yet these can at times be confusing rather than clarifying: Was the church order adopted in 1837 Utrecht’s or Dort’s (110, 125, 128)? Further, the copyediting throughout is weak (Scholte’s birth date is given as 1803 on page xxxi and 1805 on page 3). Nevertheless, Heideman has made a solid contribution to our understanding of an important person in the history of Iowa and the Netherlands.

From Hometown to Battlefield in the Civil War: Middle Class Life in Midwest America, by Timothy R. Mahoney. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016. xii, 404 pp. Illustrations, notes, index. \$120.00 hardcover.

Reviewer Robert D. Johnston is professor of history at the University of Illinois at Chicago. He is the author of *The Radical Middle Class: Populist Democracy and the Question of Capitalism in Progressive Era Portland, Oregon* (2003).

From Hometown to Battlefield in the Civil War Era completes a trilogy of books on the midwestern middle class to which Timothy Mahoney has devoted most of his professional life. This latest book focuses on the period leading up to the Civil War, specifically dealing with the economic crisis of the late 1850s and then proceeding on to the war itself. *From Hometown to Battlefield* is a rich and well-researched narrative of social experience in cities that were significant in the early nineteenth century but that largely settled into the relatively minor status of small towns after the Civil War. Mahoney endows places like Galena, Illinois, and Dubuque, Iowa, with a kind of dignity that they deserve—and that urban historians rarely provide them.

Mahoney's primary achievement is to identify the economic, cultural, and political leaders of these cities and to dig deep into the archives to reveal their hopes, dreams, and actions. Little-known, but influential, characters such as Elihu Washburne of Galena, the Langworthy family of Dubuque, and William Wallace of Ottawa, Illinois, come to life. So do the street life and political conflicts of these mid-western sites of intense boosterism—each of which only fitfully gave up the fervent belief that it was on the cusp of greatness.

Mahoney is above all interested in the painful transition that denizens of cities like Dubuque and Galena made from a small-scale life centered on face-to-face interactions to a more impersonal, centralized, national modern life. Up through the mid-1850s, the richness of the economic, civic, and associational life in these booster cities provided Mahoney's protagonists with a complete universe for fulfilling their ambitions—at least for the men, with their vigorous masculine subculture. (Mahoney spends some time discussing the role of women and feminine gentility in the construction of these "provincial lives"—the title of another of his books—but it is mainly men who take center stage.) With the onset of severe economic crisis in 1857, however—and even more with the coming of the Civil War—such local communities lost most of their autonomy. Citizens began to cast their sights on a larger, increasingly national, social space.

Mahoney is more careful, attentive, and respectful to these largely forgotten midwesterners than any other scholar has been. There are some real gems in this book, ranging from his characters' search for political positions amid economic collapse to their learning the ways of bureaucracy within the impersonal northern military machine.

Yet in fundamental ways it is unclear just who these people were. Mahoney believes them to be "middle class" because of their economic position and their devotion to a middle-class culture of self-improvement and refinement. That, however, seems like a problematic designation for people Mahoney himself frequently characterizes as "elites." And elites they clearly were. They were not only wealthy and exercised "oligarchic control" (54) of their own cities, but they were so thoroughly enmeshed in networks of national power that a good number of them became governors, U.S. senators, and diplomats—with one (Samuel Freeman Miller of Keokuk) even becoming a U.S. Supreme Court justice. (There was also, of course, U. S. Grant, the future commander in chief of the Union Army and future president of the United States; he moved to Galena in 1860 and was quickly adopted and celebrated as a hometown boy.) We ultimately learn little here about small-scale bakers or printers or clerks in law offices—those

who were the numerical heart of the period's middling sorts—as Mahoney focuses instead on the very cream of the bench and bar.

Also less than convincing is Mahoney's contention that his characters thought of themselves as citizens of a "Great West." Despite his concern for his subjects' "spatial mapping," he unfortunately presents little evidence of such a regional consciousness, which is important for a book where that event of ultimate sectionalism—the Civil War—plays such a substantial role. Indeed, more broadly, Mahoney pays little attention to the ideology of his protagonists. We see them get very intensely involved in the Civil War, for instance, but we don't really know why they cared so passionately about that cause other than that they were fighting for each other and for their home towns. This is an important insight, but it leaves politics stranded. What did the people of Galena think about slavery, or the Dred Scott decision, or the slave power? What did those in Dubuque think about John Brown, or abolitionism, or Abraham Lincoln's economic policies?

These limitations and issues aside, we should be grateful that Timothy Mahoney has worked so hard to reveal a world that at times seems like our own—but is, in fact, decisively on the other side of a historical divide.

A final note: although Mahoney's own writing is sure and solid (one is tempted to say classically midwestern), the copyediting done by Cambridge University Press shows signs of the general deterioration in that fine art upon which just a little bit of civilization depends. One would hope that a \$120 price tag would inspire more care. Make Copyediting Great Again!

Grenville Mellen Dodge in the Civil War: Union Spymaster, Railroad Builder and Organizer of the Fourth Iowa Volunteer Infantry, by James Patrick Morgans. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2016. vii, 196 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$29.95 paperback.

Reviewer Richard F. Kehrberg lives in Ames, Iowa. His research and writing have focused on U.S. military history.

Over the course of the American Civil War 66 Iowans became generals in the Union Army. Arguably the most famous of these was Grenville M. Dodge, who rose from colonel of the Fourth Iowa Infantry to major general and became a close associate of U. S. Grant and William T. Sherman. Dodge went on to be a prominent railroad engineer, successful businessman, and respected politician, but it is the Civil War years that form the heart of James Patrick Morgans's biography of this famous Iowan.