BOOK REVIEWS


This encompassing work examines the American Antimasonic party and contains major chapters about its impact in Pennsylvania. Vaughn advances the thesis that Antimasonry was a persevering protest movement and that it developed in response to the ominous challenges posed by Masonry to American society. He also maintains that Antimasonry functioned as a third-party movement, relying upon coalitions with the two major parties in America and upon effective political machinery and propaganda. The first two chapters center on the social and political origins of Antimasonry in America and on the Morgan Affair — the major event in western New York that led to the formation of the Antimasonic Movement. The remaining chapters are devoted to an analysis of the state and regional variations of the Antimasonic party.

Vaughn devotes considerable attention to two major aspects of Antimasonry — its ideologies and its social composition. Antimasons perceived the Craft as being antirepublican, elitist, and exclusive. They also believed that unlike their European brethren in the eighteenth century American Masons in the early nineteenth century were the Establishment, dominating the American political system and flagrantly obstructing the judicial process. Vaughn convincingly argues that there was a religious dimension to Antimasonry. Antimasons, who were not particularly either anti-Semitic or anti-Catholic, believed that the rites, oaths, and tenets of Masonry vitiated major teachings of Protestant sects and that a moral crusade should be launched against Masonic lodges, for these social agencies housed sinful and inebriated men. In his treatment of its composition, Vaughn maintains that Antimasonry revealed the conflict between rural and urban America and that its strength was in rural districts and in small towns. While some of its leaders were professional men and nationally prominent politicians, the Antimasonic party, for the most part, consisted of lower-middle-class groups and, because of the affiliation of
Andrew Jackson with the Craft, seemed to pose a challenge to the Democrats in some rural districts.

Detailed accounts concerning the features and activities of the Antimasonic party appear in this work. Vaughn demonstrates that effective organization and propaganda were two salient ingredients of Antimasonry. Antimasons especially depended upon local newspapers and upon county and state organizations to secure support for their candidates and platforms. Vaughn is at his best in showing that coalition politics produced a significant impact upon Antimasonry. Because of coalitions, Antimasonic programs varied somewhat from state to state. However, state Antimasonic programs tended to take a stance on banking and internal improvements and contained statements that called for the creation of a democratic society through the destruction of Masonry. Through alliances, especially with the National Republicans and later with the Whigs, Antimasons succeeded in enacting legislation that severely crippled or discredited the Craft. Masonry suffered greatly from the Antimasonic onslaught in Vermont, Rhode Island, New York, Pennsylvania, and Ohio. Yet, Masonry remained unscathed in southern states, where the Democrats were entrenched and where the Antimasons could not develop a base. Although nominating the obscure Willard Wirt for the presidency in 1832 and electing some candidates to state positions and a few to Congress, Antimasonry failed to evolve into a national party. Vaughn contends that shifting coalitions, political fragmentation, and the appearance of new political issues in American society led to the demise of Antimasonry and to the integration of its members into the American two-party system.

Vaughn shows that Antimasonry produced an indelible imprint in Pennsylvania and especially acquired support in western districts of the state. Antimasons in the commonwealth enlisted political support from farmers, formed coalitions with the National Republicans and the Whigs, and sponsored the party's first national convention in Philadelphia in September 1830. After electing Joseph Ritner of Washington County as governor in 1835, Pennsylvania Antimasons launched a truculent assault against the Craft. Through the "Stevens Inquisition," they interrogated Masons about the activities of the order and thus publicly attempted to discredit it. Antimasons also experienced great success in Western Pennsylvania; they established newspapers in Pittsburgh and Butler, developed a strong political base in most of the counties in this region, and in 1829 succeeded in electing Harmar Denny of Pittsburgh to the House of Representatives.
The Antimasons also provoked a major controversy about the operations of the Craft during a meeting in Pittsburgh of the Presbyterian Synod and forced many lodges in Western Pennsylvania to close their doors.

This first-rate study greatly increases our understanding of Antimasonry in Pennsylvania and in other states. Vaughn presents closely reasoned arguments and theses. Moreover, he advances new and exciting ideas about regional and state variations of Antimasonry and provides us with an illuminating account of its effect in Western Pennsylvania. For a better understanding of this movement in Western Pennsylvania and even in eastern Ohio, we need studies that explain the role of Antimasonic newspapers. Vaughn’s work indeed suggests the importance of Antimasonic journalism and much more. This book is gracefully written, is based on primary sources found in state historical societies and in private collections, and undoubtedly will become a classic study of the subject.

Department of History  
Butler County Community College  
Butler, Pennsylvania

R. William Weisberger


The South Returns to Congress is a major contribution to the most controversial and misunderstood era in United States history. It is the first meticulous study (using collective biography and roll-call analysis) of the 251 United States senators and representatives from the South who served in Congress during the last decade of Reconstruction. Professor Seip (University of Southern California) probes the southern congressmen’s personal backgrounds, their voting records on economic issues in the Forty-first through the Forty-fifth congresses, and their strained relationships with congressmen from other regions. He finds that the divisions between northern congressmen and southern congressmen were far more significant than the more celebrated conflicts between Republicans and Democrats. The much maligned southern Republicans, Seip shows, were just as protective of the economic needs of their region as the Democrats.

The work is replete with all-too-rare insights about the era. For