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Review of Emory L. Kemp's *Taming the Muskingum*

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Taming the Muskingum

By Emory L. Kemp

(Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 2015. Pp. x, 141. Illustrations, tables, appendix, notes. Paper, \$49.99.)

Illustrating how engineers, government agencies, and local advocates collaborated in the early twentieth century to control flooding in Ohio's Muskingum River basin, Emory L. Kemp weaves together stories of local flood disasters, feats of river management, and a welfare-state program to share an engineering saga. Although river flooding threatened many communities, Kemp's study reveals how Ohio uniquely positioned itself and set a national example in flood control.

Kemp begins with pre-twentieth-century efforts to connect the East Coast with resources in the West. As part of a movement promoting internal improvements, entrepreneurs and the federal government deployed roads, canals, and railroads to transform the wilderness on the other side of the Appalachian Mountains. Promoting their work as "a project of national importance" (p. 6), Ohio boosters and politicians sought federal aid to build a canal to connect the Great Lakes to the Ohio River. Although flooding caused setbacks in canal designs and construction, early improvements in the Muskingum watershed—a key component of the route to the interior—were limited to navigation.

Reiterating the Muskingum's significance for transportation, Kemp explains the construction of nineteenth-century locks and dams, including the weaknesses in these designs exacerbated

by episodes of flooding. Private management and ill repair led to an 1887 transfer of the waterway to the federal government to form part of "a network of river navigations stretching nearly 1,000 miles" (p. 40) from Pittsburgh to Cairo.

While the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers remained focused on river navigation and the federal government limited its flood assistance to financial relief, Ohio legislators had authorized organization of conservation districts, with flood control topping the list of concerns. The 1913 flood became a turning point in local flood-control efforts, with formation of the Miami Conservancy District, led by Arthur E. Morgan, a young and innovative engineer who designed a system of "dry dams." Kemp includes details of this project, as well as of the politics and ideologies that led to creation of the Muskingum Water Conservancy District (MWCD) following another major flood in 1927. The MWCD's goals for flood control developed into a cooperative arrangement with federal funding and oversight, local management, and a timely project for the New Deal public works program.

As a precursor to presenting the methods used for the Muskingum, Kemp reviews the progression from "rules of thumb" to "modern theories" in flood control technology (p. 64).

Giving credit for foundational work to engineers Karl von Terzaghi and Joel D. Justin, Kemp covers the intricacies of building sound hydraulic structures. By including helpful diagrams and photographs, he makes the particulars accessible for non-engineers.

In the final chapter, Kemp provides details of planning and constructing the fourteen reservoirs comprising the MWCD flood control project. To convey the enormity of this “grand scheme” (p. 80) and the impressive activity of “men and earth-moving equipment in action” (p. 110), Kemp describes dam designs, employment statistics, weather disasters, legal hurdles, and structural setbacks. While this chapter would have benefitted from more subheadings to manage the vast amount of information, the vignettes of specific land acquisition cases and contractor disputes help to ground the story.

Kemp prefaces the book by noting his emphasis on engineering and

construction of the Muskingum projects, while pinpointing the importance of flood events and federal politics in shaping the outcome. He has clearly satisfied this agenda, utilizing primary sources to present the evolving technology, politics, and ideology of river management in the early twentieth century. His understandable explanations of complex engineering concepts and designs, along with a wealth of historical data, should prove beneficial for anyone interested in river basin transformations.

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For Their Own Cause: The 27th United States Colored Troops

By Kelly D. Mezurek

(Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 2016. Pp. x, 354. Maps, illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$37.95.)

Given the opportunity to fight for freedom and equality during the Civil War, many Ohio African Americans joined the Union Army. In *For Their Own Cause*, Kelly Mezurek documents the 27th United States Colored Troops

(USCT), one of two black regiments raised primarily in Ohio. This excellent work, based on extensive archival research, gives a human face to the trials and tribulations of these largely forgotten Ohio soldiers.