
Leslie Kemp Poole’s Saving Florida: Women’s Fight for the Environment in the Twentieth Century tells the story of Florida’s women environmentalists. With engaging prose and thorough research, Poole persuasively shows how and why determined women campaigned to protect flora, fauna, and landscapes in the Sunshine State and how women’s leadership as environmentalists evolved over time. The author also demonstrates that women played a major role in protecting Florida’s distinctive ecosystems, despite major resistance by a male-dominated society.

Poole organizes her book into three sections. The first, “Working Through Women’s Groups,” shows how wealthy white women in the early 1900s coalesced around issues like the protection of birds, forest conservation, and the creation of parks. Women such as Clara Dommerich, who helped establish the Florida Audubon Society, were shocked by the slaughter of egrets, herons, and other birds by plume hunters. Motivated by moral outrage, female activists used their positions of wealth and independence to lobby for tougher anti-hunting laws and the employment of game wardens. With respect to the Audubon Society, Poole notes, “From a small group of people in Clara Dommerich’s living room, the group grew into a sophisticated organization that got laws passed and aroused the public to action” (29). According to Poole, these women saw preserving the environment as an extension of their traditional domestic roles as housekeepers to keep their communities attractive and orderly.

Part Two traces further progress in the history of women environmentalists. As Poole notes, from the 1930s to 1970s women had the right to vote, and they now embraced an ecological perspective on conservation issues. Marjorie Harris Carr is a notable example. A fierce opponent of the Corps of Engineers’ Cross Florida Barge Canal project, Carr and her supporters marshaled ecological arguments to undermine support for the project in the early 1970s. Poole draws skillfully upon oral histories, correspondence, and other scholarship to demonstrate this point.

In Part Three, “Women Take the Lead,” Poole traces this story to the late twentieth century. She shows how some women, like Ginger Wetherell, parlayed their scientific backgrounds and political skills into positions of leader-
ship, first as elected officials and later, in Wetherell’s case, as director of envi-
ronmental agencies under Democratic and Republican governors. Poole, who
interviewed Wetherell, states that these women “were trailblazers, using their
energies, training, and grasp of facts to gain hard-won respect and power in a
male-dominated and often sexist morass of business, government, and commu-
nity leaders” (215).

Such pithy comments make Poole’s work engaging and inspirational. The
first book to draw together the history of Florida’s female environmentalists,
*Saving Florida* should appeal to most college students and many laypersons,
especially at a time when climate change and political indifference threaten
Florida’s fragile ecosystems.

Charles Closmann

*University of North Florida*

*California Mennonites.* By Brian Froese. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University,

Brian Froese’s *California Mennonites* focuses on the history of the Mennonites
who migrated to California beginning in 1850 and who both embraced and re-
sisted waves of political, economic, and social change through the mid-1970s.
They integrated into mainstream evangelical California, adapted their practices
and expectations to their changing surroundings, and yet held fast to parts of
their heritage that made them distinct. Froese argues that by 1975, “a modern-
izing transformation” had integrated and Americanized California Mennonites
and led them to become more ethnically and racially diverse and more ecu-
menical, action-oriented, and religiously plural (xii). Nevertheless, they resisted
modernity by maintaining their religious and educational practices and institu-
tions. Migrating to and remaining in California, a state known for its remarkable
religious, ethnic, and racial plurality, set the stage to “bring together religious
identity, accommodation, and practice so that Mennonitism could take root in
the Golden State” (xii).

Illustrative of this pattern of resistance and adaptation is the experience of
Mennonite conscientious objectors (COs) during World War II. Mennonite COs
asserted their patriotism and held on to their markers of pacifism and religiosity
by engaging in work of national importance in Civilian Public Service camps.
Although the men who served in these camps contributed to the Allied cause
through such activities as fighting and preventing forest fires and caring for pa-