
The object of this book is "to bring together in a single narrative an account of the American West from the time when its exploitation was begun by English colonists to the end of the Confederation period." The focus is not upon frontier development but upon those phases of the Western lands problem which had demonstrable political effect. This is not a casual performance. The bibliography lists 150 manuscript collections in 32 libraries, domestic and British (only the Huntington collections seem to have been beyond Professor Abernethy's orbit); 53 items of "Collected Writings"; 52 listings of printed documents or documentary collections; 10 series of official journals; 17 private journals; 17 newspapers and periodicals; and about 225 secondary sources. If the text were studded with error and prejudice, this bibliography alone would make the book a very desirable possession. But the text is, with the customary allowance of a small dash of salt for human frailty, impeccable; it is succinct, and ruthless.

Ruthless, because the approach does not illuminate the sweetest aspects of men's characters. The book might have carried a subtitle: A Study of the Effects of Lucrative Opportunity on the Morals of Public Officers. (A book may be written from a similar vantage on colonial and Revolutionary speculations in that other frontier, the sea; and for it this reviewer offers a title: Knights of the Middle Passage.) This study points through strait corridors of fact to the conclusion that a country cannot well afford to place its destinies in the hands of men who are engaged in the amassing of personal fortunes. Speculation, Abernethy remarks, is a fairly normal phase of our economic existence; but, firmly stated, "It does matter that men in high place should have used their official position to fasten their claim on the one great asset the nation possessed. Some resorted to more overt forms of speculation. The record speaks for itself... It is of no moment, then, just how many acres various individuals and companies acquired or tried to acquire during the era of exploitation of public lands. It matters that the specters of Vandalia and Indiana and Ohio could never be banished from the halls of council." With the relentless specializing of an X-ray—which no one should think of confusing with an also truthful portrait—from the focus of land speculations Patrick Henry appears as an untrustworthy opportunist; Robert Morris as primarily an exploiter; Benjamin Franklin is
snapped in a guise which will grieve the injudicious among his admirers; George Rogers Clark in less heroic rôles than some biographers have emphasized; the leaders of Franklin and Transylvania as overly interested in nest-feathering. James Wilkinson vindicates his traditional honors in unscrupulosity. There are heartening glimpses of some men—Washington in particular—shaped in the eighteenth-century ideal of a gentleman: independent by circumstances, liberal in views, public-spirited by traditions.

Abernethy's book takes immediate rank, as a study of economic influences in American history, beside Beard's work on the Constitution. The land question assumes, in this substantial monument, an importance hitherto only fragmentarily put. It "was closely bound up with the commercial interests of the period; it affected the policies of Congress and of the various States, and even diplomacy came within the scope of the land speculator. Most of the leading characters of the Revolutionary era were concerned in one way or another. Some were quite willing that the Appalachians should form the boundary of the new Union; others were ready to thwart the formation of the Union in the interest of their Western lands; and still others engineered the separatist movements in the West in an effort to protect their land claims. The very integrity of the young Republic depended on the contests of the speculators."

The story is complex, of course. The interests of speculators in different companies, in different coteries of the provincial "aristocrats," with unlike connections in the British court, were a maze of cross-purposes. Paper boundaries and surveyors' marks made another pattern of conflicting lines. The speculators, writes Abernethy, "with their spurious grants and dubious titles, the settlers with their 'tomahawk' rights, their squatters' rights, their military and treasury warrants soon covered the West with layer after layer of competing claims, which overlapped the land like shingles on a roof."

Dissent from the judgments of certain portions of this study will be variable. Admiration for the book as a whole is compulsive.

University of Pittsburgh

E. DOUGLAS BRANCH.


During its formative years, the United States Navy was served by a group of able and brilliant officers whose example has been the glory and the despair of those who have followed them. The very smallness of the Navy gave unusual play to individual talents, and served to cause the deeds of the pioneers to stand out as they might not have done in a larger organization.

Of the officers of this period, none was more distinguished than Stephen Decatur, the subject of Professor Lewis's biography. The descendent of a seafaring family, Decatur was born in 1779 at Sinepuxent, Maryland, whither his mother had fled from Philadelphia at the time of the British occupation of the city. Reared in Philadelphia, educated at the Protestant Episcopal Academy and for a year at the University of Pennsylvania, he
was employed as a clerk in the mercantile house of Gurney and Smith until 1798. In that year, Decatur received a warrant as midshipman in the United States Navy, and serving through the Quasi-War with France, distinguished himself by his ability and headlong valor in the Tripolitan War of 1801-1805. Commissioned a captain in 1804, at the age of twenty-five, Decatur played an outstanding part in the War of 1812. His capture of the British frigate Macedonian in the United States in the fall of 1812 was characterized by a care and efficiency of action, resulting in victory at the least possible cost to his own ship, which was in strong contrast to his reckless daring of earlier years. Though Decatur was blockaded at New London and New York during the latter part of the war, he made a desperate attempt to get to sea in the President at the beginning of 1815, only to be forced to surrender to the overwhelming British blockading squadron off Long Island. In the war with Algiers of 1815, Decatur was successful in bringing to an end the payment of tribute by the United States to that North African state after a remarkably short and effective campaign. From 1815 until his death in 1820, he was a member of the Board of Navy Commissioners, the professional administrative body of the Navy. A wound, received in a duel with Captain James Barron, brought about Decatur’s death at the age of forty-one.

Always a brilliant and inspiring commander, Decatur seems to have merited the respect and devotion of his men. He was an excellent seaman and a capable administrator. A strong feeling for his position, and perhaps an over-sensitive nature made Decatur’s relations with officers closely associated with him sometimes difficult, and during his years on the Board of Navy Commissioners, he was not always a tractable member. This quality, together with a heightened sense of honor, led finally to the fatal duel with Barron.

Charles Lee Lewis, Professor of English and History at the United States Naval Academy, and author of biographies of Matthew Fontaine Maury and Franklin Buchanan, is one well qualified by interest and experience for this work. He has brought to the book a boyish enthusiasm for his hero, which at times has almost led him to overstep the bounds of dignified presentation and allow his imagination to run riot. Professor Lewis’s style is full of life and color, making the reading of the book a real pleasure. The extensive bibliography, embracing personal and official manuscript materials as well as the printed sources, indicates the care with which the author has prepared his work. Considering the wealth of papers indicated, one cannot but regret that Decatur is not oftener revealed as a human being rather than so consistently as a pedestalled hero. He is painted as such a paragon of every virtue, and his reputation is so valiantly defended from every shadow of reproach, that he seems almost unreal. In his description of the chain of events leading up to the Decatur-Barron duel, Professor Lewis has perhaps included more detail than was warranted by the size of the whole book, while one might wish that he had devoted more attention to some of the less spectacular events in Decatur’s career, and especially to a more detailed account of naval administration during his years in Washington. The extensive recitals of banquets and toasts drunk might well have been
compressed. On page 192, the term “gig” should have been used instead of “barge,” since at that time Captain Bainbridge, whose boat was in question, was not a flag officer. An appendix containing songs and poems relating to Decatur is an interesting and valuable part of the book.

As a whole, Lewis has produced an adequate “official” biography of Commodore Decatur. In spite of the unfortunate failure to present a flesh-and-blood Decatur to the reader, the book gives every evidence of careful research and preparation, and may well take its place in the ranks of the standard naval biographies of the United States.

Pomona College

JOHN HASKELL KEMBLE.


This book, which is an autobiography depicting scenes familiar to the author from childhood, is a connected narrative consisting of a series of stories, some of which have appeared in *The Country Gentleman, The Philadelphia Public Ledger,* and *The Farmer's Wife.* The scene is laid in Pennsylvania German-Land in the horse and buggy age, breathing the atmosphere of the countryside in the old days, with their wholesome life, leisurely ways, and simplicity. The author has managed to invest the story with a certain quaintness and charm, reflecting a serene outlook upon life and a sympathetic understanding of nature and people. Not the least of the merits of the narrative is its naturalness, which is really the result of considerable literary skill.

To the historian this book is of value as portraying the life and customs of a bygone age. Here we have, taken from life, a picture of the rural school, the old white church, the crossroads store, the country physician, the ubiquitous peddler, and other institutions and types fast disappearing or already gone.

The author lived close to the region infested by the Molly Maguires, whom she describes as “our fearsome neighbors.” Those who are inclined to whitewash this band of assassins would do well to read her account of how they were regarded by the country roundabout. They were the terrors of the neighborhood, and there was no feeling of security for either life or property until they were finally brought to justice.

A sympathetic reading of this book by one who looks beneath the surface serves to reveal the sterling qualities of the Pennsylvania Germans, especially in their home life and religious life—qualities that have made them a great people.

The Pennsylvania State College

WAYLAND F. DUNAWAY.


This is a *pot pourri* of reminiscences by a man who went through many varied experiences from his boyhood in Altoona, where he was confessedly
a fighting, swearing, little roughneck, to the end of his career in Philadelphia as official of the Baldwin Locomotive Company. The author has written journalistic sketches and technical papers on engineering problems but this is his only attempt to produce a book and more is the pity for it is a rollicking good story. Possessed of those qualities which have made the American business man the envy of the world, such as tremendous energy, an original and ingenious mind, an aggressive and domineering nature, a willingness to drive himself and his workers to the limit, unmindful of their welfare, democratic in his relations with employees but never prepared to concede an inch to labor agitators or strikers, a gambler willing to stake all on a throw, Custer stands out in this book as a powerful figure typifying much of the business aggressiveness of the 19th century.

Moving swiftly through kaleidoscopic changes, the author narrates the story of the great railroad strikes of 1877, herculean efforts by Sam Vauclain and his associates to produce more and more powerful locomotives, his own efforts to reorganize a great paint factory in Philadelphia, his plunges in the stock market, tinkering with perpetual motion contrivances which for a time not only baffled scientists but actually attracted capitalists who hoped they had found the ideal speculation for their funds, and huge government purchases of iron and steel for war purposes which passed through his hands. Some of the stories and especially those of his youth, are of little historical value, others are vague and shadowy, many give a real insight into the mind of the business man and all contribute to produce a book, interesting and well worth while reading.

Cornell University

PAUL W. GATES.


The volume under review, Presbyterians in Colonial Pennsylvania, is essentially a study of the Scotch-Irish in Pennsylvania within the last sixty years of the colonial period. From about 1718 “until the close of the colonial era,” the author asserts, “the migration of Presbyterians from Ireland provided the numerical strength to Presbyterianism in Pennsylvania.” Beginning with a study of the conditions in Ireland which prompted the emigration of this folk to America, the author continues his narrative by describing the spread of Presbyterian settlements in Pennsylvania, the formation of local Presbyterian societies and their activities, and the growth of presbyteries and their regulation of local societies. He devotes three chapters to Presbyterian charitable, missionary, educational, and political activities in the province, and one chapter to the relations of Pennsylvania Presbyterians with other religious denominations. The growing importance of the Scotch-Irish element of the population of Pennsylvania, as the decades of the eighteenth century slipped by, he reveals in his conservative estimate of 100,000 Presbyterians in the province on the eve of the War of Independence.

For this study the author has derived materials from both original sources and secondary works. He has made some use of local church records, but his most valuable source has been the minutes of the presbyteries. In the
minutes of the Presbytery of Donegal he has found an especially rich mine of information. All the manuscript sources he has used he has discussed in brief bibliographical essays, and to these essays he has appended a list of printed sources and a select bibliography of secondary works. Of the most important of the printed works he has listed, he has given brief appraisals.

This book undoubtedly deserves to be called a contribution to our knowledge of the colonial period of Pennsylvania history. The materials collected in the chapters on missionary, charitable, and educational activities definitely show that important developments within the Presbyterian denomination during the first half of the nineteenth century had their beginnings in the colonial era. The various uses to which the "fund for pious uses" was put, for example, reveal a range of activities that became specialized in the post-Revolutionary period in organizations formed for missionary, educational, and church-extension purposes. Similar monographs treating of the several denominations in the different colonies would doubtless disclose a colonial religious heritage richer than has generally been supposed.

By choosing so broad a title for his study as *Presbyterians in Pennsylvania*, the author has forestalled certain criticisms that otherwise might be made of his book; yet he has not dispelled every doubt. One may readily concede that the sessions and the presbyteries, by reason of the restraints which they imposed upon the lives of Presbyterians, were significant agencies of social control in the frontier settlements of colonial Pennsylvania; but one may well doubt whether certain actions described in the chapter entitled "Presbyterians in Political Affairs" were materially influenced by the fact that some of the important actors were Presbyterians. Perhaps the mere fact that they were frontiersmen, exposed to Indian attacks and subjected to discrimination in the matter of representation, is sufficient explanation of certain of their attitudes and actions. Frontier conditions perhaps evoked similar attitudes and similar conduct from members of other religious denominations.

Several features of this book commend it to the reader. The style is generally lucid, the documentation is satisfactory, and the index is adequate. Moreover, this book, like others brought out by the University of Pennsylvania Press, is well printed.

Bucknell University

J. ORIN OLIFFANT.

*Pittsburgh's Post-Gazette.* "The First Newspaper West of the Alleghenies."

By J. Cutler Andrews. (Chapman & Grimes, Mount Vernon Press, Boston, 1936. $2.00.)

The newspaper biography has long been recognized as a profitable method in journalistic history, but Pennsylvania has been singularly lacking in this branch of historiography. The sesquicentennial of the first paper west of the Alleghenies is an appropriate occasion for supplying this want. Through many vicissitudes, mergers, and changes of title and proprietorship, the *Pittsburgh Gazette* of 1786 has become the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* of today. It is a far cry from the primitive hand press carried over the mountains
BOOK REVIEWS AND BOOK NOTICES

from Philadelphia for the use of John Scull and Joseph Hall in issuing
their first number on July 29, 1786, to the complicated mechanism of today;
and from the single sheet to the mass of reading matter now provided.
(The author is in error, however, in calling Scull's second-hand press the
product of Adam Ramage, for that well-known Philadelphia press-maker
did not arrive from Scotland until 1795.) It was a primitive Pittsburgh to
which the pioneer printer came, and his early career is bound up with the
infancy of the city.

A review of an important newspaper career is bound to be something
more than the chronicle of a business enterprise. It records the rise and
fall of political parties, and the development of institutions. Scull's Gazette
was the western outpost of Federalism and so continued, opposing the
War of 1812, until Federalism was a lost cause. Under its fighting editor,
Neville B. Craig, whose service ran from 1829 to 1841, it championed what
the author denominates "the Antimasonic Heresy." If this were a political
aberration, it was justified by a considerable following in Pennsylvania which
helped to make Ritner governor in 1835. The Gazette followed the Whigs
in subsequent campaigns, and, although not abolitionist, became hostile to
slavery and was uncompromising in its opposition to the Mexican War.

In the meantime it reflected the rise of industry and commerce. It advoc-
ated improved means of communication, and officially adopted the
"American System" to protect manufactures. As early as 1814 citizens
complained that the prosperity of the town was producing an annoying
smoke haze from the fires. Travellers not only noticed this in their
reports, but also commented upon the heavy river traffic. Frontier morals
as well as economic interest prompted the complaint of "An Old Farmer"
in 1803 that whiskey was being used in a "state of dangerous impurity."
In fact, "the use of whiskey is now become so universal, that it is con-
sidered as an indispensable necessary in all families."

The Civil War and Reconstruction found the Gazette warmly Republican.
The chronicle of its subsequent history becomes so multifarious as to defy
summary. Its copious files yield much that is grist for the mill of the
social historian. Changes in journalistic fashions and improvements in
technique are fairly recorded, for the Gazette was progressive, and some-
times a pioneer. Social and community service, as in the days of the Johns-
town flood, or more recently in the flood of 1936, found the newspaper
responsive; and in reporting, too, it had its share of "scoops." An epilogue
might well be appended to note its most recent adventure in journalism—
the "exposé" of Justice Black.

Mr. Andrews has been diligent in his collection of data and fortunate in
his presentation. He is to be commended for a valuable contribution to
journalistic history. May his example be emulated for other members of
the Pennsylvania press.

Albright College

MILTON W. HAMILTON.