
For a number of years Pennsylvania educators have sensed the need of a course of instruction in the history of this Commonwealth for the public schools. Two major problems have always confronted those who hoped to introduce such studies. First came the problem of finding the proper tools of instruction, and second there was the problem of finding teachers trained in the field of Pennsylvania history.

A great step forward has been made by the publication of the textbook entitled Pennsylvania, The Story of a Commonwealth by Fortenbaugh and Tarman. This volume pioneers a new field and therefore it must be evaluated in two ways. It is primarily an instructional tool for youth at the secondary level of education and at the same time it is a distinct contribution to the general literature dealing with the history of Pennsylvania.

As an instructional tool the textbook is scientifically constructed. The language is simple without giving the impression of being “written down”; the illustrations are wisely chosen and in excellent proportion to the text as motivating material; the problems are challenging; best of all, there are excellent suggestions which can be used to stimulate interest in local history.

Adopting the unit system of grouping factual matter, the authors have divided the story into five units, designed for a one-half year course of study. Obviously it would be impossible to cover the more than six hundred pages of factual text in the brief span of one semester. Recognizing this difficulty, the authors have presented the political and military history of the state in the first three units, adding the economic and cultural story of the Commonwealth as separate units numbered four and five.

From an instructional point of view this arrangement has its disadvantages. There is a tendency to stress only those events which have, traditionally, formed the basis of all histories, namely, wars; elections; personages; and chronological sequences of the dead past. The living past is to be found in cultural survivals, economic and social. History becomes alive to the student when these factors are woven into the fabric of the story. They should not be set apart from the main text, to be perused at leisure, or not at all.

In presenting the early history of Pennsylvania as a colony the authors have given an excellent account of Indian history and a well-condensed
story of the Swedish and Dutch settlements along the Delaware. In their presentation of the problems which confronted the governors deputized by William Penn and his heirs they have furnished the student with a perspective of that period. In the opinion of this reviewer the authors have ventured to pass judgment too freely on a number of points which are still controversial. For instance, they charge Conrad Weiser with the blame for the alienation of the Delaware and Shawnee Indians and it is somewhat ungenerous to declare that Governor Robert Hunter Morris “was neither wise nor efficient.”

Any writer of the history of Pennsylvania is confronted with the problem of establishing a proper balance between the contributions and the parts played by the many racial groups which make up the ethnic pattern of Pennsylvania. Very skilfully all of these groups are brought into the picture and none are neglected. The same is true of localities. It is an “overall” story of Pennsylvania, giving to the Quakers, Germans, Scots-Irish, Welsh and the later comers their just dues.

The contribution to Pennsylvania history in general is to be found in the last two units, which present an excellent story of the cultural development of the state. In these pages the general reader will find a mine of information which is not common knowledge. If the aim of a course in Pennsylvania history is to instill a sense of local pride; if it is to acquaint future citizens with facts that cannot be absorbed in a general course in the history of the United States, then by all means teach the last two units first and supplement them with the material in the first three hundred pages.

The units on the cultural and economic development are superbly written. They are original. Take as an example the delightful portrayal of the “five little worlds” in which Pennsylvanians live. There is the challenge of the present, growing naturally out of the past in the glorious recital of achievement that rings through the final pages.

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Benjamin Franklin. By Mrs. Enid LaMont Meadowcroft. (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1941. Illustrated. Pp. 190. $2.00.)

The appealing and tasteful format with which the Thomas Y. Crowell Company has clothed Mrs. Meadowcroft’s contribution to our understanding of the much-described Dr. Benjamin Franklin is well deserved. In graceful diction and always with clarity and orderly sequence the author’s theme unfolds.

Mrs. Meadowcroft very frankly intimates that she is not attempting to rival the ambitious discussions of Mr. Van Doren; that would be a task indeed. She essays, rather, to give us a simpler treatment suited to readers who cannot or will not take the time to follow the detailed accounts of Parton and Van Doren. The writer has studied her theme well and imbibed a competent amount of Franklinian lore. It is regrettable that her historical knowledge of the period does not measure up to her acquaintance with the subject character. Franklin’s titles are sometimes wrongly given; General Braddock, whatever his faults, would scarcely have received so
prominent a character as the Assistant Post-Master General with the rudeness suggested in the story. Furthermore, Mrs. Meadowcroft introduces John Penn, son of the Founder, as younger brother to Thomas and Richard (whereas he was the eldest child) and makes him Deputy-Governor of Pennsylvania about two decades after his death.

To dilate, however, upon these rather minor discrepancies would be to minimize the skill with which the task, as a whole, has been accomplished. The life and cult of our Great Commoner make for a rich mine wherein countless historical students have delved and will delve. The author of this book has performed her chosen share of this seemingly inexhaustible research with excellence and fidelity. The zeal of the writer has been well supplemented by the tasteful sketches of Donald McKay which adorn this attractive volume.

Reading, Pennsylvania

J. BENNETT NOLAN.


The significance of the life of the Earl of Chatham in current world affairs, the availability of much new material, and the need of a new synthesis of old materials are the reasons given for a new biography of the elder Pitt at this time. In the biography, national history and international politics are sketched only in broad outlines. Rather, the work is centered around the political forces directing the work of Parliament of this period. Thus, the value of the book is enhanced. More is known about the accomplishments of the English government during the eighteenth century than about the social and political conditions under which the work was done.

During the eighteenth century Parliament consolidated its control over the king, but the reforms of the nineteenth century that made Parliament an instrument of democratic control were many years in the future. The ministers of the Crown still ruled England, and the ministers were responsible to the House of Commons. However, the rotten borough system of representation, the limited franchise, and the prevailing corrupt practices at elections left the control of the House of Commons in the hands of the landed aristocracy. An independent income (members of the House of Commons were not paid until 1911) or the favor of a wealthy patron was necessary for a career in Parliament. The Whigs were in control until late in the century. During this century the struggle for political control was in the form of contests between the great families. Robert Walpole used methods to control the Commons which have made his name notorious. When the Duke of Newcastle succeeded him as the dominant figure of the Whig party, there was a change of families in control of the government, but not a change in method. At one time he had 260 of the 500 members of the House of Commons on the public pay roll. It was in the environment of this unreformed House of Commons that Pitt did his work.
The biography begins with the dramatic sessions of the House of Commons in 1755. The Duke of Newcastle had failed to control Pitt, and now determined to put an end to him by destroying his popularity. The story of these sessions reaches its climax when, seizing on a false move by his opponents, Pitt exclaimed: "I grant that the honorable gentleman may have his superiors, but he knows that the king himself is not his superior when the honorable is sitting, speaking and voting in his legislative capacity." Newcastle's patronage-controlled house supported him, and Pitt lost the vote on the bill under consideration. But Pitt had won. He had maintained his popularity in the country. On this he now rose to power.

The biography then relates how Pitt had been able to rise to a position where he could challenge Newcastle. He had entered Parliament from the family-owned borough of Old Sarum. He managed to stay there, even after financial reverses, without becoming a mere protege of one of the leading families. At the same time he succeeded in acquiring a great popular following. He did this without allying himself with the great demagogic leaders of the time, such as Wilkes. When Newcastle failed to destroy him, he had to be taken into the ministry, where he became the leading force.

It was at this time that Pitt aroused the country, reorganized the fighting forces, and won for England an empire in America, the Mediterranean, and India. To Pitt the empire was made up not of a subject people ruled from home, but of free men to whom the English Constitution applied. This was a new concept of empire, understood neither at home nor abroad. It was not until years later that his ideas were accepted, and even now they are too little understood. His last acts were in defense of these principles against a government which had rejected them and as a consequence was about to lose the American colonies.

The book is built around the family alliances that were characteristic of the politics of the time. Accordingly the story is hard to follow for one not reasonably familiar with the names of the period. But such is the substance upon which the history of that time was built, and one cannot understand the politics of the day without some knowledge of it.

The author in many places uses current expressions to make his points. Thus we read that "Egermont was wholly a Charley McCarthy for Lord Bute," and that whenever Pitt retired to his country place, no Whig "chose to lead with his chin in Parliament." These expressions seem somewhat incongruous in an eighteenth-century setting.

It was a wise choice, it seems to me, to place the footnotes at the end of the book rather than on each page. More specific references, however, would have enhanced the value of the book for the student, without unduly impeding the narrative. An extended bibliography and a somewhat full index add to the book.

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