
When the History of the People became an "overnight success" some sixty years ago, it raised two problems for the historiographer. The book itself demanded an analysis of its theme and method; the author himself had to be accounted for. For the former there was the book itself in being. For the latter there was nothing. The author of volume one had neither standing nor repute in the field over which Bancroft and Parkman towered. The title page was as nearly anonymous as any could be which bore an author's name. When the persistent discovered that John Bach McMaster was a teacher of engineering at Princeton, the value of the discovery was minus.

Mr. Goldman has faced these problems squarely in a thin critical biography which leaves the author of the History of the People of the United States intact as pioneer and guide. The task has tested him, for McMaster launched few hypotheses to help a critic but was content to float a volume every four or five years for a generation, leaving interpretation to take its chances. He left less documentary testimony on the workings of his mind than a biographer might desire; but what there is Mr. Goldman has used intelligently.

It was not difficult to show that McMaster as a mere craftsman could hardly have survived in the seminars of most of his own doctors. But none of these pupils has reached the stature of the master. He was not a technician. He had a prerevolutionary contempt for the sanctity of quotation marks and a memory for phrases which was sometimes fatally accurate. In the precise use of the materials which his spade work uncovered in mother lode he was less than perfect. He had not been trained, for in the period of his formal education the history of the United States had hardly made an appearance in college curricula. From a bad start he passed into his thirty years of creative productivity, as it were into a tunnel, lacking all landscape and having ahead nothing but the exit. To this exit, the completion of his job, all was sacrificed.

But the success of the History of the People was instantaneous, complete before it was even realized that there was nothing to be known about the author. For a century historians had talked about democracy as they wrote books which did not contain it. McMaster let the democrats tell their own story without hobbling them with any theory whence they came or whither they were tending. He never knew quite how democratic he
was, for as a citizen and by adoption a Pennsylvanian he accepted the Hamiltonian-Republican approach without a question. He broadened the basis for his successors by bringing into the story the lowly ephemera of life; and as his readers read, they explored with him a new world. His imitators followed so hot on his trail that before he published volume eight, after thirty years of labor, the inherent novelty of his approach had been in part forgotten. But his writing had become a benchmark for the measurement of American attitudes towards the American past.

Berkeley, California

FREDERIC L. PAXSON


No brief review can do justice to this remarkable synthesis and interpretation of the history of colonial Philadelphia. To say that the volume provides a definitive account of the social and cultural development of that city prior to the Revolution is only to note its most obvious achievement, for in tracing the social and intellectual elements that entered into Philadelphia's life between 1720 and 1776 the Bridenbaughs have presented a fine analysis of the best of American culture in the era of enlightenment.

In so doing the authors not only describe intellectual activities in themselves but interrelate these with social and political development. Thus the chapters on medicine and science contain suggestive comments on the social and political influences which their cultivation set in motion. Whereas in New England, for example, the Puritan clergy played a leading part in promoting revolutionary views, in Philadelphia it seems to have been the physicians and natural scientists who provided similar intellectual stimuli. The interpretation is in many cases distinctly original or at least is in contrast to commonly accepted points of view. In a word here is a clear, readable narrative in which thesis and synthesis, rather than mere description, play the predominant roles.

At the same time the authors are so thoroughly familiar with their sources that their presentation seems built throughout upon a solid, empirical basis. In plain English, they know what they are talking about. In view of the novelty of some of the views and conclusions this observation is worth stressing. We are not accustomed, for instance, to think of Philadelphia as the second largest English-speaking city in 1770 or to realize the cultural maturity of this colonial town at that time. The common assumption that American culture only gradually ascended toward European levels through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, is hardly consistent with the picture of Penn's city as a world center of enlightenment by 1770—with the implication that there may have been some decline in the relative position of American culture thereafter. Again, the theory that American democracy arose primarily from the frontier cannot easily be reconciled with this account of democratic forces that focused on an urban seaboard environment. The entire study, incidentally, demonstrates the
possibilities in urban history for periods earlier than that usually associated with "the rise of the city."

_Rebels and Gentlemen_ might conceivably be criticized for not providing a story of economic developments, an account of living conditions among different classes, and so on. The answer is that the work makes no pretense at economic history, any more than an economic history essays an account of cultural institutions. The introductory chapter outlines clearly the general economic position of Philadelphia, thus establishing the setting for the cultural theme.

Each of the chapters gives an excellent discussion of its immediate subject. Materials already familiar to those interested in the history of the city are presented in terms of a more complete integration. In other cases the information afforded is largely new, as in the review of the role of the private schools in promoting a secular, utilitarian education. Notable is the significance attached to medicine and science. While technical history is not followed in any detail—and hardly could be in a general narrative—the compact overviews and interpretations of these fields are more satisfactory than any hitherto available. A good index and an annotated bibliography make the book technically complete.

It is most regrettable to have to report the recent death of Jessica Bridenbaugh, one of the authors. This work should permanently establish her reputation as an outstanding interpreter of our colonial heritage.

University of Pennsylvania. RICHARD H. SHRYOCK


The publication of Henry Melchior Muhlenberg's _Journals_, begun two hundred years after Muhlenberg's arrival in America, is an event of no slight significance. The completion of the project will make available for the region of the middle colonies, and especially for Pennsylvania, an eighteenth-century diary comparable to the New England diaries of Cotton Mather, Samuel Sewall, and Ezra Stiles; and for the history of the middle region it undoubtedly will be more valuable, even though it be considerably less roguish, than the recently published eighteenth-century Secret Diaries of the Virginia-born but English-educated William Byrd will be for the history of the southern region. In brief, Muhlenberg's _Journals_ will make generally available a precious and hitherto little-used source of our colonial history from 1742 through the years of the Revolutionary War; and these _Journals_ have the distinctive merit of giving us a picture of eighteenth-century life in the middle colonies as it appeared to a German-born and German-educated man. It is indeed long past the time when every American should have learned that not all the roots of American civilization were transplanted from British soil.
Muhlenberg was a man who achieved distinction by his own efforts. An able linguist, a carefully trained scholar, and a capable organizer, he preached effectively the Lutheran faith far and wide in the middle colonies, and he laid securely the foundations of the Lutheran Church in North America. He also was the founder of a distinguished American family—a family whose importance to American life is fully attested by the Dictionary of American Biography.

From the three volumes of Muhlenberg’s Journals, the first of which is impressively stout, the earnest student will undoubtedly derive many facts of social significance. From the first volume he will learn much of the pettiness of life in colonial Pennsylvania and much concerning early Pennsylvania German customs. From the same volume he will learn also something of the religious mind of a pioneer Lutheran missionary—for that is what Muhlenberg was—and something of the difficulties that attended the planting of Old World religious faiths in the New World. Before he finishes reading this volume, he will compare Muhlenberg’s labors with the labors of contemporary English missionaries who were sent into the colonies by the S. P. G., and more especially will be compare his labors with those of later “home” missionaries on the American frontier. For Muhlenberg encountered hindrances which, if not greater, at least were not less than those of nineteenth-century missionaries in the American West. If the latter had to contend with what they believed to be the menace of the Roman Catholics, the former had to struggle against what he believed to be the wild errors of the Zinzendorfers. Selfishness and narrow-mindedness were as prevalent in one period as in the other. So comparable indeed are these two situations that one can not help remarking the likeness of the Muhlenberg reports that were published in the Hallesche Nachrichten to the missionary letters that were published a century later in the Home Missionary.

The printing of Muhlenberg’s Journals in English translation rather than in the German in which they were written is a real service to learning in America. Only a faithful few would find time or would screw up the courage needed to read through so many pages of German text. Therefore the translators, the editors, and the publishers of these Journals deserve well of their countrymen, for they undoubtedly have wrought well. The first volume of this comprehensive (one is tempted to say encyclopedic) work is a monument to careful scholarship and to good printing. The beginning has been altogether good. Final judgment, of course, can be given only after the appearance of the second and third volumes; but the present reviewer, who has read with care the first volume from cover to cover, can reasonably well forecast the opinion he will form of the completed work. Every serious student of American colonial history and every librarian in America should be awaiting with eagerness the publication of the remaining two volumes of the set.

Bucknell University.

J. ORIN OLIPHANT

Reading Mr. Current's recent study of Thaddeus Stevens, one realizes how inevitable it is that this biographer, like all Old Thad's previous ones, should become the victim of his hero's difficult though fascinating career. Any depiction of the Great Commoner is bound to prove enthralling and sinewy, for to be that it need preserve only the merest shred of his personality. But there are pitfalls almost impossible to avoid, and Mr. Current has been no more successful than the rest. Stevens "arrived" so late that there is an overwhelming temptation to devote too much space to his many and essentially unlovely years of development. Even when at last he rose to power, his motives remained as ever hidden behind his granite reserve; his actions were unpredictable and often seemed contradictory, so that any attempt to reconcile them and make of them a whole, cohesive unit is doomed to failure.

The author has sought to brush aside these handicaps by a process of oversimplification. He has chosen to believe that Old Thad was impelled solely by political ambition slightly tinged by a desire for wealth. He has selected his evidence and marshaled his facts with this aim in view. His approach has, thinks the present reviewer, brought him to grief.

Mr. Current offers the fullest, best-proportioned, and most expert account of Stevens' early life yet produced. Woodley was equally thorough in his research but fell far short of Current's professional competence in the selection, presentation, and evaluation of material. Yet in his eagerness to justify his basic theme Mr. Current has so underemphasized the one redeeming feature of Stevens' rather sordid formative years, his bold and successful championship of free education in Pennsylvania, that the portrait must be considered as having a serious blemish. A minor criticism may be that the author seems to have been too prone to rely on Alexander Harris' work, biased and undependable as it is.

By the time Mr. Current comes to the crowning years of Stevens' life, when it may be fairly said that the sick old man shaped the destiny of our nation, he tends to lose his grip on the high drama of the role and dissipates his energies in trivial details and side events. Never do we experience the sense of the power which Old Thad wielded so implacably, so mercilessly, so successfully. We get no glimpse of the clash of wills between the stubborn, awkward Johnson, weakly championing the stronger cause, and the imperious invalid, gaining point after point against what should have been the invincible bastions of humanity and compassion. All the evidence is here—and there is an overwhelming mass of it—which proves how Johnson underrated his foe; but nowhere are we brought to realize how each grew more determined, more uncompromising because of the opposition of the other. Is it not reasonable to conclude that the South bore extra burdens, more grievous than even Stevens originally intended, because Johnson persisted in fighting him and fought a losing fight? Similarly, the high passions of the impeachment never show through the careful, scholarly but uninspired account which the author presents.
It almost seems that the less important some phase of Stevens' career has proven to be in a national and lasting sense, the more successful the author is in depicting it. For example, he lumps in one chapter the vital congressional campaign of 1866; the gathering that December of the old Congress, grimly determined to initiate the mandate of the election; and Old Thad's last abortive attempt to gain the senatorship. There is actually more space devoted to this unimportant blow to Stevens' ambition than to either of the others, which finally determined the dominance of the radicals and the form of reconstruction.

Altogether, this volume must be regarded as a contribution only to our understanding of the minor aspects of the Great Commoner's career. Current is most impressive when Stevens is least so.

Philadelphia.

Alphonse B. Miller

Pennsylvania History is being published under difficult circumstances, and it is hoped that its friends will be both tolerant and understanding. Some of the editors are in government work with a six-day week and no holidays; others are heavily burdened with extra labors incident to the war-teaching program. Contributors and book reviewers alike are hard pressed. The magazine will probably appear on time only occasionally.

Some copies of the April issue were incorrectly bound. They will be replaced upon request. The error is regretted, but the printer is doing the best he can under handicaps; he should be commended for his loyal devotion to the association.

The present issue goes to press without the contributors' having had an opportunity to read proof on their articles. Because of the shortage of labor in the printing plant no other course was possible. Too, since gray stock is no longer obtainable, the magazine appears temporarily in new colors.

The annual meeting will be held at Harrisburg on October 16 instead of October 15 and 16 as noted in the News and Comment section.

The Editor.