

BOOK REVIEWS AND BOOK NOTES

EDITED BY RUSSELL J. FERGUSON
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Robert Morris: Revolutionary Financier. With an Analysis of His Earlier Career. By Clarence L. Ver Steeg. (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1954. Pp. 276. \$5.00.)

It is not difficult to understand the reasons this study of Robert Morris's career as Superintendent of Finance during the American Revolution was awarded the Albert J. Beveridge Memorial Fellowship of the American Historical Association. *Robert Morris: Revolutionary Financier* is a noteworthy contribution to the fiscal history of the Revolutionary era and a significant portrayal of the public career of an important Pennsylvanian. Moreover, Morris's Revolutionary career is a complex subject which Clarence Ver Steeg interprets and presents in a sagacious and a lucid manner.

In 1781 Robert Morris was appointed to the position of Superintendent of Finance because he was "generally acknowledged as the foremost merchant in America." But Morris was not given this office until serious doubts concerning his integrity were reconciled. In fact, an interesting parallel can be drawn between Robert Morris's situation in 1781 and Charles Erwin Wilson's in 1951. Both were successful businessmen and both were appointed to positions in the national government where their business connections could have caused them to pursue personal rather than public interests. But here the parallel ends, because, as we know, Wilson's appointment was approved by Congress only after he sold his stock in General Motors, while Morris refused to sever his commercial connections and he was not forced to do it. During the Revolution, the fiscal affairs of the new nation demanded the guidance of an experienced hand. This was the overriding consideration. As Joseph Jones of Virginia put it, "Our Finances want a Necker . . . Morris is I believe the best qualified of any our Country affords for the arduous undertaking."

Morris's appointment as the chief financial officer of the nation was approved at a time when the public credit was near collapse. Money was desperately needed to carry on the ordinary operations of the government and to provision the troops in the field with food and supplies. Morris believed the crisis could be solved only if substantial economies were effected and if the public credit were resuscitated. Consequently, the Superintendent of Finance attempted to fashion tools to put these solutions into action.

He brought about economies in expenditures by instituting a contracting system to supply the army. The collection of taxes was improved by creating Continental receivers in each state and by addressing entreaties to the public. The foundation of Morris's program was not these reforms, however.

Restoration of the public credit was the foundation, and to achieve it the Superintendent of Finance established the first National Bank; sustained public credit by issuing notes, labelled the Morris notes, as a substitute for the national currency; and provided a plan for funding the debts of the Confederation. All but the funding of the debts, which was not approved by Congress, were successful.

The gains attained through the institution of these policies emphasize Robert Morris's abilities as a financier and as an administrator. The creation of a National Bank was an innovation which provided credit for important loans. The Morris notes halted the depreciation of the currency. And the administrative reforms in purchasing supplies and collecting taxes brought about important savings.

Professor Ver Steeg delineates these policies of Robert Morris in bold detail. This reviewer's only criticisms of his volume concern the press and not the author. The footnotes are presented at the end of the text, causing the reader inconvenience, and the index could be more complete. But these are minor criticisms and they are not presented to detract from a thoroughly valuable study.

PHILIP I. MITTERLING

Politics in America. By D. W. Brogan. (New York, Harper and Brothers, 1954. Pp. 467. \$5.00.)

In the tradition of Tocqueville and Bryce, Professor Brogan comes to us again and again and with the perceptive eye of a keen political scientist sees things so obvious that they elude the attention of the native. Thus he observes that our national nominating conventions provide "the maximum integration that the national party system is capable of"; that they "decide which candidates are available and then which of the available candidates is most available," a sifting process that a national nominating primary can never do. He perceives that the governorship of a state provides an apprenticeship for the presidency and that state patronage dispensed by the governor is a means of engineering presidential nominations. In fact Brogan finds "the Convention system works, works as well, in its own sphere, as Congress does in its," and no really effective substitute for it has ever been suggested. This conclusion contrasts diametrically with the comment made to this reviewer by Sir William Lawther that "your nominating conventions are the craziest things on earth." That's the difference between the opinion of a competent English labor leader and a competent English political scientist.

Brogan ranges the whole spectrum of American politics from the character of our polity through party system, race, machines, bosses, morals, nominations, campaigns, President, Congress and the law. He concludes that in Vice Presidential candidate Nixon's television apologia "the issue, if there was one, was drowned in emotion-rousing rhetoric" which converted a liability into an asset. The Hatch acts may have done no more than "make legal ingenuity in even greater demand."

Concerning Presidents who have failed to measure up to the great office Brogan observes "that there is a vacancy which a President can make but no one but he can fill." President Truman epitomized the Chief Executiveship by the notice on his desk, "The buck stops here." However, Brogan to the contrary notwithstanding, it was Franklin Roosevelt, not Harry Truman, who was first to veto a revenue bill. But is it "now part of the *unwritten* constitution that the President has the right to offer to Congress a legislative program when the *written* Constitution specifically provides that he shall from time to time give to the Congress information of the State of the Union, and recommend to their consideration such measures as he shall judge necessary and expedient"?

Slips like these are insignificant and they scarcely mar at all this brilliant and witty exposition of our system by a genuinely sympathetic Englishman. This is but one of a succession of Brogan's books about us. We hope it will be by no means the last one.

Ohio Northern University

WILFRED E. BINKLEY

The North Reports the Civil War. By J. Cutler Andrews. (Pittsburgh, University of Pittsburgh Press, 1955. Pp. 759. \$6.00.)

Three books dealing with the correspondents for Northern newspapers during the Civil War have appeared within three years, and a fourth, Robert S. Harper's *Lincoln and the Press*, published in 1951, told of the wartime President's contacts with newspapers and newspapermen. Bernard A. Weissberger's *Reporters for the Union* (1952) was a short pioneer study which barely scratched the surface. *The Bohemian Brigade*, by Louis M. Starr, published in 1953, is more complete. It, however, is limited largely to the study of the New York papers and their treatment of Washington and the eastern campaigns, and devotes little attention to the west. Andrews's *The North Reports the Civil War*, coming close on the heels of the other two, should be the final word.

The study of wartime newspaper correspondence must deal with the personalities of the reporters. It must deal with the position of the press and the efficiency of its operation at the time hostilities break out. In particular, the study of Civil War correspondence must cover the problems arising out of the rapid rise of the press in the preceding thirty years, and the fact that no prior conflict had found a well-financed, strong, active newspaper industry using rapid communications means to transmit news (the reviewer is advisedly aware of Crimean War reporting in making this statement). It must consider the impact of this novel problem on military operations. It must study secrecy, accreditation and control of correspondents, the political power of the press in a democracy and its influence on both civilian and military officials, and the technical problems of news transmission and handling.

Andrews has attacked all of these phases. In telling the story of battle-field reporting, he relates press accounts of the significant campaigns as they were handled by most of the major newspapers of the North. The reader rides with his newspapermen often under fire from Bull Run to Ap-

pomattox, and from Gettysburg and York to the Sabine. He joins them as they observe naval conflicts from the masts and forward decks. He follows them as they race to get their news to their home offices in an age of bitter press competition. On the other hand, he accompanies the reporters as they interview Cabinet officers in Washington and fight the problems of censorship. He enjoys the benefit of extensive research in manuscripts and newspaper files as well as the personal accounts which many of the correspondents published after the war. None of the other studies is so complete.

Some historians of journalism—and Starr's *Bohemian Brigade* is among those which err slightly in this respect—are contemporary newspapermen who are unable to remove themselves from present-day practices and jargon as they examine older files and the work of reporters of another age. They are unable to cast their thinking, habituated to today's press, to understand their predecessors. Andrews has avoided this fault. The Civil War came just as the American press had come through a period of rapid change in news-gathering enterprise and transmission. On the other hand, it was still highly opinionated, and closely associated with political party, although the War itself was influential in bringing about a changing attitude towards the importance of objective news.

Andrews fully understood the impact of the war on the newspaper practices of the day, without becoming confused by later habits. And, although the book follows generally a sequential treatment, from the beginning of the war to the end it moves skillfully from one to the other of the novel problems posed by this first great war to occupy the attention of the correspondent in the field.

FREDERICK B. MARBUT

My Philadelphia Father. By Cordelia Drexel Biddle as told to Kyle Crichton. (Garden City, N. Y., Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1955. Pp. 257. \$4.00.)

Colonel A. J. Drexel Biddle, as his name indicates, was a scion of two of Philadelphia's most prominent families. This "rollicking biography" (as the dust cover calls it) was written by his daughter, whose full name is Cordelia Drexel Biddle Duke Robertson. Kyle Crichton was the "tellee."

The style of the sprightly book savors of *The Saturday Evening Post*. It is full of invented conversation which makes good reading and which, one may guess, is the work of Crichton. Inasmuch as it was not written for the historian but rather for the general reader, this reviewer will not attempt to apply historical standards. Instead, he proposes to say something about A. J. Drexel Biddle, the man.

One of the Colonel's Drexel ancestors received some notice as a minor sort of mogul in Stewart Holbrook's *The Age of the Moguls*. But A. J. was not a mogul. He represented a generation of inheritors of wealth who had ability, ambition, and dedication, but who floated around between two worlds, unable to find anchorage.

Some sons and grandsons of the rich go to pot, a fact which need not be

documented with actual names, although there are numerous instances. Biddle was too honest and too sound to become a mere parasite, wasting his riches in wining, dining, and womening. Having plenty of money, he did not have to work. Unwilling to sit around and vegetate, he got into the most fantastic series of seemingly unrelated activities that one could imagine—all of them worthy, or at least not disreputable.

Drexel Biddle was a “character”—using that word in the best sense—who never did things by halves. He would get an idea or become interested in some activity, and then put everything he had in the way of energy and drive into it. The side-splitting situations that arose out of his fulsome support of these varied, but often ephemeral, interests could be used by the well-known TV series, “Life with Father.”

He reported on a newspaper. He wrote and published books. He followed pugilism and became a successful amateur boxer and savage fighter—a career which he continued longer than most of the others. He trained marines in World War I. He got interested in religion, supporting Billy Sunday and organizing “Drexel Biddle Bible Classes” based upon what he called “Athletic Christianity.” He tried opera singing; the dust cover says he “distinguished himself with the Manhattan Opera Company by performing the worst *Pagliacci* ever heard in the Western Hemisphere.” In World War II, at the age of sixty-seven, he taught marines bayonet-fighting, judo, jujitsu, and other ways of killing the enemy softly and easily. His daughter leaves us with a strong impression that in this business her father finally found himself after years of dilettanteism.

In 1948 the old warrior died of an earlier boxing injury. He had had much fun in life.

As one puts the book down, however, he has the suspicion that, much as Drexel Biddle enjoyed life, his varied efforts amounted to frustration. The book forces this reader to conclude that a rich man to be happy needs more than wealth and highmindedness. He requires consecration to one thing that he believes in so much he will spend his life in it: something more than pugilism.

Interestingly enough the Colonel’s grandson, Anthony Drexel Duke, seems to understand that sporadic and aimless doing good all over the lot just to enjoy oneself does not in the long run bring much satisfaction. He is spending his wealth and his life dedicated to one activity, namely, to a youth center called Boys Harbor, at Easthampton, Long Island. On the radio recently young Mr. Duke said he believed those who enjoyed inherited riches had an obligation to use them for the benefit of humanity. Whereas his grandfather got fun out of keeping alligators in his living room, one can hardly imagine the grandson employing his money for such tomfoolery, especially in view of the incubus of juvenile delinquency.

There seems to be good stuff in these Biddles, Drexels, and Dukes, more particularly in the present generation.

Susquehanna University

WILLIAM A. RUSS, JR.

Bartram, William, *The Travels of William Bartram*. Edited by Mark van Doren. (New York, Dover Publications, Inc., N.D. Reprint of 1928 edition, Macy-Masius, publishers, New York. Pp. 414. Cloth, \$3.95; paper, \$1.95.)

The Travels of William Bartram is one of the great source books depicting life and conditions among the Indian nations of the southeastern United States at the time of the American Revolutionary War. His travels carried him over much of north and north central Florida, central and southern Mississippi, Alabama and Georgia, and parts of South Carolina. They cover a period of nearly five years. The author was well prepared to make such a series of scientific expeditions. He had accompanied his father, the illustrious botanist John Bartram of Philadelphia, an original member of the American Philosophical Society and friend of Benjamin Franklin, on a year-long trip into central Florida during the years 1765-1766, and on many shorter scientific excursions.

William Bartram's contribution to the success of these earlier expeditions was sufficient to attract the attention of Dr. John Fothergill and other English naturalists of the period. These men financed the travels (1773-1777) of William Bartram, who in return agreed to send seeds, roots, bulbs, plants, and other specimens to his backers in England. He lived up to his part of the agreement, but some of the shipments were prevented from reaching England because of the unsettled conditions during these years.

William Bartram was recognized as second only to his father as the leading botanist and naturalist of the American States both here and in Europe. In 1782 he was appointed Professor of Botany at the University of Pennsylvania and four years later was elected to membership in the American Philosophical Society. His intimate friends included George Washington and many other well-known Americans and Englishmen of his generation.

The importance of the *Travels* and their general acceptance is indicated by the fact that they went through at least six editions in the United States and Europe during the first eight years after their initial publication in 1791. Before the end of the century translations had been published in German, Dutch, and French, notwithstanding the wars occasioned by the French Revolution.

Bartram's *Travels* are divided into two separate parts. The original edition was published with a separate title page for each. The first part includes the accounts of the author's travels. The travels themselves are divided into three periods. The first period was taken up by three expeditions made from Savannah into the area between that city and the present cities of Augusta, Brunswick, and Jacksonville, and extending some considerable distance into the interior areas of southeast Georgia. The second expedition was into the north and central peninsula of Florida. On these he traveled at least as far west as the present city of Tallahassee, the town of St. Marks, and the mouth of the Apalachicola River. He spent many weeks exploring the country lying to the south and southeast of the Suwanee River.

The author's third expedition carried him over a very extensive route. Some of the places visited include the present sites of Chattahoochie, Tuskegee, Tallahassee, Montgomery, Mobile, Jackson, Pensacola, and at least two town sites on the Mississippi River. He returned through south-central Mississippi and Alabama. His accounts of this area are of particular importance, as few travelers of this period have left records of this territory and its inhabitants. The last part of his return journey was by way of central Georgia, Augusta, Savannah, and on to his home in Philadelphia. This section of the *Travels* also includes some interesting information on the Indian trade and traders of the period.

The second part of the *Travels* contains the author's observations of the native peoples with whom he was in contact during most of his journeys. He does not include all his descriptions of Indian customs and behavior in this rather brief final section. The entire account includes innumerable random comments upon their life and manners. However, this section is different in that it is devoted exclusively to Indian life. One chapter discusses their civil government, another their dress, feasts, and sports, while another deals with their agriculture, arts, and manufacturing. Marriage, funeral customs, language, and manners are also given brief space in this final section.

The author's interests in nature throughout his accounts are almost without limit. While he concentrated his investigations on the vegetable kingdom, he seems to have missed nothing of importance in the other fields of natural history. He gives minute descriptions of the Indians, and their use of and reaction to their environment. Diplomatic exchanges between the Indians and the white traders are interspersed with the author's Quaker philosophy concerning the causes of human discord and war. He includes interesting and accurate information about geology, mineralogy, and the natural resources available for the relatively undeveloped industries of his fellow Americans of the period. He reports accurately the kinds and numbers of animals in the regions through which he passed. He includes valuable information concerning the birds, reptiles, and even the many kinds of fish that came under his observation. He even comments upon the tonal inflections and the qualities of the various Indian languages, the songs of birds, and the sounds of animals of these regions.

In spite of his numerous scientific interests, Bartram had ample time to admire and record the many beautiful scenes that came under his observation. The large flowing springs, tall forests, wide savannahs and hummocks, beautiful lakes and ponds, and other natural beauties are each given their just emphasis in his accounts. He observed the brilliant sunsets and the beautiful sheen of the full southern moon, with the eye of a true poet. It seems that nothing worthy of human notice failed to receive the appreciation to which it was entitled.

The present edition is an exact reprint of the 1928 edition published by Macy-Masius, New York. The pagination, lines per page, and even type-faults are identical in both issues. Dover Publications have improved their

issue by adding facsimile reproductions of the original copyright, the dedication, and the title pages of the original edition. They have also included the thirteen illustrations of the original edition which were drawn by the author.

The selling price of the paper edition, \$1.95, makes it available to all libraries and interested scholars, regardless of their degrees of poverty. Dover Publications must be commended for this reasonable price, and the good quality paper and general appearance of this edition.

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T. R. PARKER

Pennsylvania's Oil Industry. By Ernest C. Miller. (Gettysburg: The Pennsylvania Historical Association, 1954. Pp. i, 53. \$50.)

This is a brief narrative of 53 pages about the Pennsylvania petroleum industry from its beginnings to about 1872. There has long been a need for such an account for use by schools and colleges and general readers. The Pennsylvania Historical Association is to be congratulated for including the subject in its scholarly series on different phases of Pennsylvania's history.

Beginning with references to petroleum in ancient Egypt and China, the author of this booklet discusses the early evidences of petroleum found in New York and Pennsylvania, the search for a new and cheap source of illumination between 1840 and 1859, and Kier's efforts to use petroleum as medicine and, later, to refine and market it as an illuminant. These events are but a prelude to one of the main events of the narrative—the drilling of Drake's famous oil well at Titusville in 1859, the first oil well deliberately drilled for petroleum, which marked the birth of the petroleum industry.

The story of the early wells, the spectacular Rouse fire, the methods used to transport oil to market, the invention of the Roberts torpedo for shooting wells, John Wilkes Booth and "Coal Oil Johnny," oildom's most famous boom town—Pithole City, the building of refineries, John D. Rockefeller and the South Improvement Company, and the construction of the Tidewater Pipe Line from Bradford to Williamsport are among the principal topics treated after 1859.

Since Pennsylvania was the only major source of petroleum for the world until about 1890, one wonders why the author did not discuss the fabulous Bradford field, the great flowing wells in the Butler region, and the oil developments south of Pittsburgh. Moreover, there is nothing by way of summary about the significance of Pennsylvania's early oil industry—in developing a new source of national wealth, in stimulating the growth of other industries, in sending forth experienced oilmen to open new fields in the West and Southwest and in Europe and Latin America, in helping the Union win the Civil War, in developing new techniques for drilling and refining, and in furnishing light for the world.

Two errors stand out. First (p. 22), Colonel Drake did not "discover" petroleum; he demonstrated in a practical way how petroleum could be produced in greater abundance. Secondly (p. 45), Pennsylvania in 1954 ranked

fourth, not second, in refining capacity, according to *Petroleum: Facts and Figures*.

A bibliography, a list of maps of the early oil region, and a list of oil region newspapers are included.

Hamline University

PAUL H. GIDDENS

Pennsylvania German Tombstones. By Preston A. Barba. (*The Pennsylvania German Folklore Society Yearbook*, XVIII. Allentown, Pennsylvania: Schlechter's, 1954. Pp. v, 232. \$5.00.)

Mr. Barba, in this Eighteenth *Yearbook* of the Pennsylvania German Folklore Society, has assembled illustrations of ninety-two Pennsylvania German tombstones, the earliest of which is dated 1743 and the latest 1853. In addition, the author has included some remarks on folk art in general, a discussion of the motifs found on the stones, a more specific section entitled "In the Palatinate" in which he considers some of the direct background of the Pennsylvania stones, and a bibliography of pertinent works. The motifs about which there are remarks number nine: the sun, the swastika, the six-point compass, the spiral, the *Ur-bogen*, the tree of life, the tulip, the heart, and the confrontal design.

The treatment of the tombstones is excellent. Instead of photographs, which are not always as effective as is commonly supposed, the illustrations are in the form of drawings by the author's wife. It is apparent that obliterations or other deficiencies were not glossed over. A full page was devoted to each drawing, while the notes were placed on the page opposite the illustration. Where necessary, translations were made, and the page numbers of cross-references given. The net result is that the material is readily accessible, the reader is not condemned to the task of eternally trying to match notes and items.

There is no summary chapter embodying the final thoughts of Mr. Barba. For this reason, care must be taken in the reading of the notes, for it is here that the conclusions are to be found. Perhaps one last chapter would have been, by the nature of the subject, repetitive, but still it would have proved valuable.

The author's views on folk art are subject to controversy. He characterizes the individual only as "the medium or vehicle for the common expression of a people" (p. 4), a statement which places him in the communal theory group. The validity of this position is questionable. It is not surprising, therefore, that the author has used such expressions as "the soul of a people," and the "voice of nature" (p. 3). There is a strong element of in-group feeling found in the opening chapter. However, these ideas are not found in the notes on the stones themselves. The motifs represented form the basis of the discussion there. The author has done a fine piece of work in accomplishing the task that he set for himself: depicting some Pennsylvania German tombstones and commenting upon them as they stand.

Punxsutawney, Pa.

PHIL R. JACK