

BOOK REVIEWS

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A Village at War: Chatham, New Jersey, and the American Revolution. By Donald Wallace White. (Rutherford, New Jersey: Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 1979. Pp. 311.)

Inspired to a great extent by the bicentennial celebration of the Declaration of Independence, historians have issued many studies of small localities such as counties and towns. The favorable response received by such works as John Demos's *A Little Commonwealth* has assisted this movement. The birth or revival of local historical societies has furthered the cause.

Donald Wallace White with *A Village at War*, a study of a microcosm of American society, follows this trend and perhaps brings it to a logical conclusion. Chatham is a small town on the Passaic River which did not even receive its name until 1773. The timespan observed is short; the narrative is generally limited to events of the decade 1773-1783. Chatham, named for William Pitt, found its only claims to fame by being an intermediate objective of British offensives in 1776 and 1780. In virtually all other aspects, nothing out of the ordinary occurred there during the War for American Independence.

White was raised in Chatham, and he takes great pride in the activities of the town's eighteenth-century citizens. His pride, however, tends to place importance and uniqueness where none really existed. An amazingly homogeneous society—Presbyterians of English descent formed most of the community—the inhabitants agreed unanimously on their politics. All were Whigs who combined thought control (by prohibiting pro-British publications) and threats of violence (tarring and feathering) to silence the few Tories in outlying areas. One supporter of George III did arrive in 1776. White does not explore the reasons behind his settling in Chatham, but he did so either through ignorance or foolishness, for he later forfeited his possessions.

This consensus of thought plays an important role in White's interpretation which follows a Whiggish viewpoint. As a result, he claims too much for his subjects. Two examples will demonstrate this. He shows that they followed the provisions of the Continental Association of 1774, but he attributes several of the local committee's resolutions to original ideas when the members merely echo the Association's guidelines. He hints strongly that they abstained from drinking tea because of the prohibition against the East India Company's product, but does mention that tea from other sources should have been readily available. Further, he indicates that the May 1776 election was held in defiance of British authority. Yet, at that time, no such authority effectively operated in New Jersey.

White does make several interesting points which should stimulate additional inquiry, the inhabitants' acceptance of black slavery being the most intriguing. Several Chathamites owned slaves, and the local innkeeper traded in those unfortunates apparently without censure. Only a local minister spoke against the practice and then in rather conventional terms with little response from his parishioners. Slave dealing did not die easily in the town; as late as 1831 a slave was sold there. Another illuminating portion of the book is the section on inflation in chapter 13. It clearly and effectively describes the effect of the declining Continental and state currencies on the people.

White performed an admirable amount of research for this study, relying primarily on manuscript and published sources, newspapers, and secondary works such as genealogies. His understanding of, and sympathy toward Chatham and its inhabitants are evident throughout. He is less successful in collating Chatham's experiences with those of towns in other Revolutionary states. One would be hard pressed, for instance, to find localities in Pennsylvania which were so congenial in ethnic and religious composition and political attitudes.

Overall, *A Village at War* is a curiously old-fashioned work. White writes with a smooth, easily read style and with some flair. Still, the book could have been published a century or longer ago and not appeared out of place. That does not, however, reduce its value as local history. The line drawings by Barbara Kellogg ably enhance and amplify the text.

Kane, Pennsylvania

JAMES D. ANDERSON

City and Suburb: The Political Fragmentation of Metropolitan America, 1850-1970.

By Jon C. Teaford. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979. Pp. vii, 231.)

In this closely argued study, Jon C. Teaford addresses one of the pre-eminent problems of our modern urban civilization—the great population migration to the suburbs and the political division of the metropolitan region into a myriad of municipal jurisdictions. In New York, Chicago, Pittsburgh, and elsewhere, scores of separate governments rule in a single urban region. The consequences of this political balkanization are weakened public services, “confusion of authority and a disparity in shouldering the burdens of the metropolis.” Problems demanding regional planning and coordination are left to the various municipalities, who have neither the power nor the resources to properly handle them. Teaford examines both the principal social causes of this political fragmentation and the history of the legal structure that sanctions it.

A specialist in legal history, Teaford first traces the evolution of the permissive incorporation laws that encouraged metropolitan separatism. Beginning in the early nineteenth century, state after state surrendered responsibility for the grant of municipal privileges and gave local voters the right to decide questions of municipal incorporation. But these liberal

incorporation statutes were merely the means by which urban fragmentation occurred, not the real cause of it. The widening social and economic divisions of American industrial society were, Teaford argues, largely responsible for the growth of suburban particularism, as suburban class and ethnic communities of all types formed municipalities to preserve their distinctness and protect their ways of living and doing business.

Still, up to around 1910 these incorporation laws failed to stop the furious outward expansion of the city. This annexation and consolidation movement, Teaford insists, was not generally accomplished by legislative fiat, New York being perhaps the commanding exception. Rather, as in the case of incorporation, the law favored local self-determination, suburban districts voting for unification with the city chiefly in order to share its superior public facilities. Increasingly after 1910, however, the development of improved suburban public services and greater municipal cooperation caused more and more outlying communities to resist unification. Heightened ethnic and racial tensions fueled this tendency. The divided metropolis of today is the unfortunate legacy of this fierce suburban separatism.

All of this is pretty familiar stuff to urban historians. More valuable is Teaford's analysis of the efforts by city businessmen and efficiency experts in the 1920s and 1930s in Cleveland, St. Louis, and Pittsburgh to fashion a federative form of government (modeled on the London County Council system) that retained considerable suburban autonomy while establishing a metropolitan-wide agency with authority to deal with problems that cut across borough boundaries. These reform drives, backed by the most powerful groups in the city, were defeated by an incongruous coalition of "xenophobic" politicians, farmers, and factory workers from the more stable blue-collar suburbs. While today inner-city blacks remain determinately opposed to similar charter reforms, unwilling to hand over hard-won neighborhood power to suburban businessmen whose schemes for metropolitan unification express perfectly their regional economic interests.

This is where Teaford's book is weakest, when he moves from the state house and the courtroom to the discordant realities of the neighborhood and the ward. If metropolitan fragmentation is, as he maintains, the reflection of deep ethnic, racial, and class fissures in the larger society, we need a more scrupulous examination of the ways in which these divisions influenced decisions for or against unification, at least in the three cities he examines most closely. Here was one of the most consequential political debates of the past century, a raucous democratic struggle that shaped the future of our largest cities. Yet there is no full analysis of race, ethnicity, or economic interest as factors in the contest. Thus, while Teaford gives us a clear account of the process of urban political fragmentation, he leaves it to other, more broad-based, sociologically astute studies to uncover the full range of concerns that catalyzed both support of, and resistance to, unified metropolitan government.

Walter George Smith. By Thomas A. Bryson. (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1977. Pp. xiii, 225.)

This biography is a rather interesting study of a rather conservative Philadelphian whom Professor Bryson successfully establishes in the progressive ranks at the turn of the century. In so doing, the author underscores a number of paradoxes about Smith's career that enliven his account and show how complex it is to fix a rigid typology for the progressive movement. For example, unlike most of his progressive compeers Smith was a staunch Roman Catholic whose religious convictions came to the fore in the debate over national divorce legislation. But Smith is even more of an anomaly because unlike the overwhelming number of his coreligionists in the Philadelphia area, he did not emerge from a working class background or new immigration stock. Rather he was so well connected socially that on his honeymoon he and his bride took time from their excursion to the French Riviera to visit with the head of the House of Morgan!

Smith involved himself in the Byzantine world of Philadelphia politics in the role of the "good government" type reformer who sought to rescue the city of brotherly love from boodle and chicanery. Inevitably, his forays were rather quixotic adventures—though in an early unsuccessful race he did refer to justice for the working man in a city notorious for its strikes. Smith fared incomparably better in his professional associations. He eventually became head of the American Bar Association and was foremost in promoting the adoption of uniform commercial laws. This latter venture deserves mention because it exemplifies that thrust toward efficiency that some see as the hallmark of progressivism. His quest for national divorce legislation did not turn out so happily for Smith. He resigned from the Board of Trustees at the University of Pennsylvania because it kept a professor whose views on the divorce question were more liberal than his own.

This reviewer found the last half of the book most intriguing. It deals with Smith's work on the international stage on behalf of the Armenians in the immediate post-World War I era. In fact, Professor Bryson came upon Smith as a biographical subject while he was researching the Armenian question. As another irony in the career of this successful corporate lawyer, Bryson presents Smith as a leader in the so-called "mission lobby" of Americans interested in foreign policy. These were individuals and groups usually associated with the churches who sought to have the United States base its conduct of foreign policy on the moral issue of human rights. In Smith's view that meant the support of the Armenians against Turkish depredations. Bryson sees arrayed against Smith and his "mission lobby" the American business community's representatives that desired to preserve Turkey whole and thus safeguard their prospects for possible oil concessions. Bryson's observations on the ensuing struggle between these two competing groups make interesting—and hopefully enlightening—reading for anyone wedded to a completely economic determinist view of American foreign policy. Smith further compounded the irony by asserting the mission lobby's interests in institutions like schools and

hospitals were as materially significant as business concessions—a case of trying to fight opponents with their own weapons if there ever was one! Smith rounded out his interests in aiding the less fortunate by spending some of his last years working on behalf of the American Indians of the Far West.

One of Philadelphia's most successful lawyers, Smith could count Mark Twain among his clients—though Mr. Clemens was noted to have “tipped his chair back and soon fell asleep” on one occasion where Smith was presenting a case for him. Smith knew personal tragedy in the death of his wife shortly after their marriage. He subsequently maintained himself on a suburban estate complete with its own private chapel, where his own quarters were “really more the bedroom of a monastic” than that of the leader of the bar that he was. There Smith died in 1924—having given much in service to his city, state, nation, and the world.

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Guide to the Records of Special Commissions in the Pennsylvania State Archives.
Compiled by Henry E. Bown. Edited by Roland M. Baumann.
(Harrisburg: Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission,
1979. Pp. 32.)

This booklet describes the records of special commissions created by the Pennsylvania state legislature. Twenty-four are commemorative, monument, or exposition commissions such as the Bicentennial (1968–1977), Gettysburg Monuments (1886–1903), or the Pennsylvania State World's Fair (1938–1941). A second category includes nine investigating commissions ranging from State Forestry (1887–1889) to Corporation and Revenue Laws (1909–1910) to Abortion (1972). Lastly, the pamphlet describes four additional records groups: Highway Planning (1949–1951), Johnstown Flood Relief (1889), Post War Planning (1943–1947), and Port of Erie Steamboat Landing (1907–1909).

C.D.C.