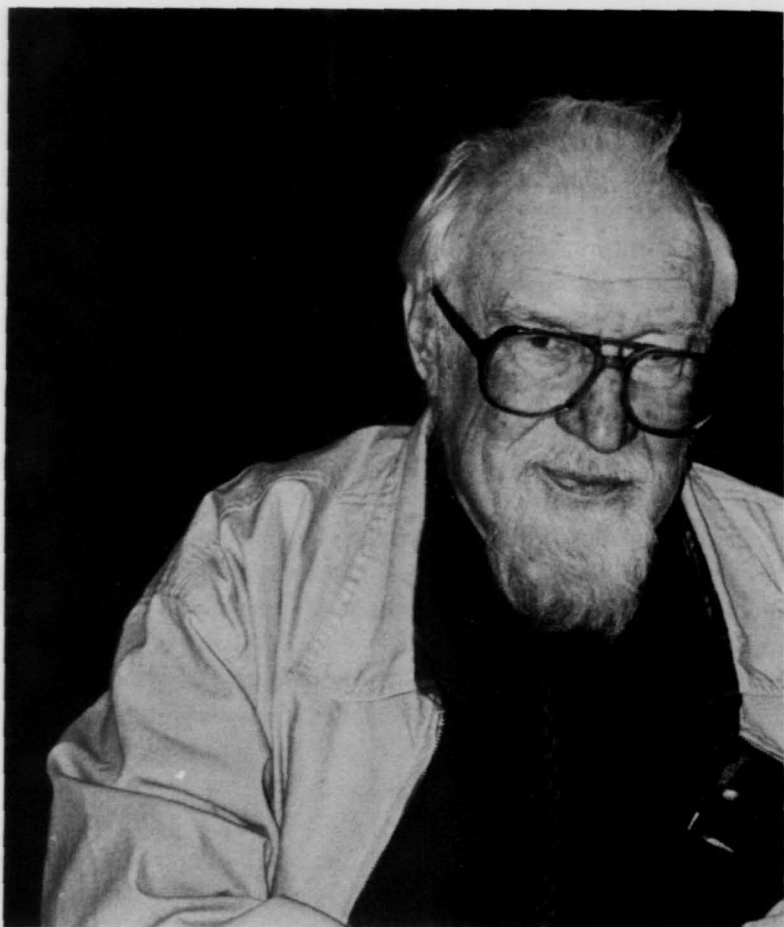


## Obituary:



*Courtesy of Charles T. Cullen, President, The Newberry Library*

### Francis Jennings (1918-2000)

Francis P. Jennings – who made a major contribution to Early American history with his boldly revisionist interpretation of Indian-White relations – died on November 17, 2000 in Evanston, Illinois after a long illness at the age of eighty-two. Fritz, as he was known to all of his friends, was born in Pottsville, Pennsylvania in 1918, grew up in the poverty and deprivation of the 1930s and became a committed radical, dedicated to changing the unjust society that he lived in. He also developed a passionate interest in learning and in history – which led him to

revisit the injustices of the American past. He earned a B.S. in Education at Temple University in 1939, served in World War II, and taught in a Philadelphia high school until he was dismissed in 1954 for refusing to testify to a Congressional committee about his left-wing activities. When I first met him around 1960 he was teaching at a private school, working toward a PhD in American Civilization at Penn, and looking for a dissertation topic on American Indian history. His first plan was to attack Francis Parkman's portrayal of Indians as savages, but he decided instead to investigate Indian-European relations in colonial Pennsylvania, with special focus on the ways in which William Penn's sons and their agent James Logan cheated the Indians of their land. Anthony Wallace and I supervised Fritz's dissertation, and I discovered from looking at my correspondence file that when he turned in his draft in 1965 we told him that his research findings were entirely acceptable, but that he needed to clarify his interpretation by sharpening his argument and generalizing more freely throughout his narrative. Surely this was the last time that anyone ever urged Fritz to sharpen his argument and to generalize more freely!

Fritz received his PhD in 1965, and between 1961 and 1968 he taught in five different Philadelphia-area colleges, always looking for a place where he could spend less than fifteen hours per week in the classroom and have some free time to write. During these years he produced an important series of pugnacious articles stemming from his dissertation, including "Incident at Tulpehocken" (1968) and "The Scandalous Indian Policy of William Penn's Sons" (1970) in *Pennsylvania History*. In 1968 at the age of fifty he became the head of the History Department at Cedar Crest College in Allentown, and was finally able to teach Colonial American history on a regular basis. Shortly before this he had sent his revised dissertation to the Institute of Early American History and Culture at Williamsburg, and was told to trim his manuscript and resubmit. But instead of trimming, Fritz decided to expand. He told the Institute book editor that "the deeper I get into the sources, the more convinced I become that no one has yet written a history of colonial period Indians that can be relied upon past the title page." And he began to write an ambitious multi-volume study of the Iroquois Covenant Chain, which he saw as a creative political and cultural system for establishing and sustaining peace between the Indians and the English colonists especially in New York and Pennsylvania – a system that endured from 1675 to 1763.

In order to establish the origins of the Covenant Chain he began his story in seventeenth-century New England, and published his first volume, *The Invasion of America: Indians, Colonialism, and the Cant of Conquest* in 1975. In this hard-hitting book, Jennings asserted that the Puritan leaders systematically doctored and/or destroyed most of the treaties they made with the Indians, and he vigorously assailed those scholars

who had defended the Puritans' Indian policy in the era of the Pequot War and King Philip's War. When *The Invasion of America* came out, I believed that Jennings would transform our understanding of early Indian-White relations in much the same way that Peter Wood had transformed our understanding of early Black-White relations in *Black Majority*, published the year before. This didn't happen, partly I now realize because of Fritz's shrill tone, and partly because other scholars in the field rejected his contention that much of the incriminating evidence of White skulldruggery had been deliberately destroyed.

*The Invasion of America* did however create a stir. Fritz was rewarded when the Newberry Library appointed him Director of the D'Arcy McNickle Center for the History of the American Indian in 1976. Jennings threw himself into his important new job with gusto, and made a special point of bringing Indians into communication with non-Indians in Chicago, and of taking Newberry research fellows on field trips to Indian communities in the Southwest to share knowledge and ideas. He retired from the Newberry in 1981 because his beloved wife Joan was in poor health and because he wanted more time to write. He held a series of fellowships at the John Carter Brown Library, the Huntington Library, and the Institute of Early American History and Culture while he worked on the second and third volumes of his trilogy on the Covenant Chain. *The Ambiguous Iroquois Empire: The Covenant Chain Confederation of Indian Tribes with English Colonies from its beginning to the Lancaster Treaty of 1744* appeared in 1984, and *Empire of Fortune: Crown, Colonies, and Tribes in the Seven Years War in America* followed in 1988. After Joan's death in 1989, Fritz returned to the Newberry as Senior Research Fellow, and he produced three more books. *The Founders of America*, published in 1993, is a broad survey of American Indian history, well summarized in its subtitle: "how Indians discovered the land, pioneered in it, and created great classical civilizations; how they were plunged into a dark age by invasion and conquest; and how they are reviving." His next book, *Benjamin Franklin, Politician: The Mask and the Man*, which came out in 1996, moves away from the Indians to take an acerbic look at one of the chief founders of the American Republic. And *The Creation of America: Through Revolution to Empire*, published just before Jennings' death in 2000, rounds out his portrayal of colonial and revolutionary America by presenting the colonists as conquerors of Indians and Blacks and their war against Britain as a power grab to establish an independent (and not very democratic) empire for White Americans. It seems to me particularly characteristic of Fritz that he fought through ill health in his determination to complete this last book. Let us salute an indefatigable old warrior who had plenty to say and who died with his boots on.

Richard S. Dunn, Director Emeritus

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