


BOOK REVIEWS

 Michael Barton and Jessica Dorman, eds., *Harrisburg's Old Eighth Ward* (Charleston, S.C.: Arcadia Publishing, 2002, The Making of America Series. Pp. 2, 160, bibliography, index.)

At the onset of the twentieth century, Harrisburg city boosters brimmed with optimism. The capital city was a national model for city beautiful design, a vibrant experiment in the nascent field of urban planning. Major streets were paved for the first time. New parks were constructed. Sewers and other infrastructures were modernized. The police and fire departments were professionalized. The symbolic epicenter of this urban renewal was Henry Ives Cobb's magnificent new capitol building completed in 1906 and modeled after St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. President Theodore Roosevelt called it "the most beautiful state Capitol in the nation."

But just behind the new architectural edifice was the notorious Eighth Ward, the Five Points of nineteenth-century Harrisburg. Several years later, municipal officials elected to

expand their city beautiful plan with the Capitol Park Extension; the Haussmanization of Harrisburg was at hand. Shortly thereafter, Harrisburg *Patriot* journalist J. Howard Wert set out to chronicle the impact of the Eighth Ward's demise in a series of thirty-five articles written from November 18, 1912 to July 14, 1913. Michael Barton and Jessica Dorman have dutifully reproduced these publications along with an insightful commentary and rare photographs.

For Wert, the neighborhood's tangled labyrinth of crooked streets and blind courts replicate scenes from Charles Dickens' London, Eugene Sue's Paris, or Jacob Riis' New York. Wert portrays the Eighth Ward in images of light and darkness. Within the razed shacks, for example, "linger legends of deeds of bestiality and depravity that seem almost unbelievable" (74). During the Civil War, the ward furnished "a fruitful calendar of crime," with "orgies by day, and fiercer orgies by night" (62). The State Street Bridge gang "held high carnival; and rioting fights, robberies, and a miscellaneous line of debaucheries were the concomitants of their orgies" (79). Teenage girls enticed off the farms of Central Pennsylvania only found a life "of horror, remorse, degradation, disease and death" (121). For Wert, Harrisburg's problems are the nation's, prostitution and "white slavery" "the menace . . . to national vitality and moral growth" (119).

Wert's Harrisburg evokes Herbert Asbury's *Gangs of New York*. Both journalists present sensational images of neighborhoods full of rough-and-toughs, speakeasies, gambling dens and brothels. The sex-crazed denizens of the Red Lion hotel compare to counterparts in Gotham. Predictably, Wert quotes St. Paul's letter to the Romans: "The wages of sin is death" (135).

Wert's Eighth Ward, however, was not simply a hotbed of vice and contagion. The neighborhood was populated with "honest, industrious, upright, God-fearing men and women . . . who have reared their families in the paths of virtue and rectitude" (60). Canal boatmen and lumber raft Yankees appeared in the antebellum years. Tanner's Alley served as a way station for the "underground railroad." Worshipers at the First Freewill Baptist Church thrived for a time, only to be later outnumbered by Jewish immigrants who transformed the church into Synagogue Keshet Israel. The "Eagle Works" of the W.O. Hickok Manufacturing Company was Harrisburg's forgotten global enterprises, producing bookbinding machinery used in government printing offices in thirteen different nations. Prostitutes and gamblers may have ruled the night, but in daylight businesses like the E.N. Cooper foundry, the Paxton Flour and Feed Company, and the State Street Market sustained the city's industrial economy.

Wert recognized that Harrisburg was losing something, but he never precisely articulated what that something was. Barton and Dorman do that. By illustrating Wert's articles with over 100 photographs from the Pennsylvania State Archives and the Historical Society of Dauphin County, readers are introduced to a social and architectural forgotten Harrisburg. An introduction contextualizes Wert, linking him to the turn-of-the-century journalism of Lincoln Steffens, Ida Tarbell and Stephen Crane.

At times, however, the catalogue of streets, churches, institutions and individuals—many for only one time—make Wert difficult to follow without an intimate familiarity with Harrisburg. The absence of a detailed map of the neighborhood only accentuates this weakness.

A larger message, however, concerns the multiple levels of lost history. Wert indirectly acknowledged that poverty, crime, and violence typified only one ingredient of the nineteenth-century Eighth Ward. Beneath the veneer of "vice" was a more complicated reality. The Lincoln School was a physical reminder of the racially-segregated education system found in most northern cities. Harry Cook's Lafayette Hall was not only the city's premier gambling den, but one of the city's premier mansions. The destruction of the Wesley Union A.M.E. Zion Church and the Bethel A.M.E. Church on State Street represented not only a bygone architectural heritage, but also, according to Wert, "trophies of the perseverance of a race whose pathway to the light of freedom's day was strewn with thorns and baptized with blood and tears" (45). Such was progress in Progressive-era Harrisburg.

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Jeffrey L. Pasley, Andrew W. Robertson, and David Waldstreicher, eds. *Beyond the Founders: New Approaches to the Political History of the Early American Republic*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004. Pp. 435, contributors, index, cloth \$59.95, paper \$24.95)

More than a generation ago a group of bright, young historians proposed a new way of understanding the early republic period in American history. Labeled "New Political History" the interpretation employed many of the analytical tools and methods associated with political science. While the New Political History offered some fresh insights, their opponents criticized its

quantitative methods and impassionate conclusions as dehumanized history. Ultimately the interpretation had limited influence in the field. With this volume the editors, part of another new generation of historians, hope to reinvigorate and update the New Political History interpretation. Their goal is to "broaden the study of political culture beyond partisan persuasions" thus producing "a more integrated understanding of the early republic" (p. 5). This ambitious goal is not completely achieved. Nevertheless, the fourteen selections within this anthology are well worth reading.

The volume is divided into four parts. The first, entitled "Democracy and Other Practices," includes three pieces each written by one of the editors. In it they emphasize the "ubiquity and influence of popular politics" (11-12). Focusing upon the symbolic importance of clothing, the evolution of an increasingly partisan press, and a mammoth cheese that was presented to President Jefferson, the editors attempt to demonstrate that in the early republic there was much significant maneuvering outside the formal political arena. Each is engaging and convincing. Jeffrey Pasley's offering, "The Cheese and the Words," is particularly enjoyable both for the story he tells and the way he shows the evolving importance of political involvement in Americans' lives in the Early Republic.

The four pieces in Part Two contend that political activity and identity touched virtually every part of American society. Though not enfranchised, both women and blacks participated politically in various not so subtle ways. Reference to gender also served as an important tool used when determining a political identity. All four essays describe how Americans learned to participate politically. A central theme in this section involves deference and the ways that men, but especially women and blacks, responded to political deference. Most illustrative is Richard Newman's description of the evolution of black Americans' political activity from that of a patron-client relationship to the confrontational stance which accompanied the abolitionist movement. Another exceptional selection is by Rosemarie Zagarri's "Women and Party Politics in the Early Republic". She argues that women played a central and active role in the formation of partisan government and eventually accepted the role as political moderator and protector of the social sphere.

Part three, "Norms and Forms", is the most thought provoking and in some ways the least satisfying section of the anthology. In it the authors try to build a theoretical foundation for their brand of New Political History. In so doing, they attempt to identify the dimensions of a public sphere through which Americans connected with their government. Most intriguing is John

L. Brooke's "Consent, Civil Society, and the Public Sphere in the Age of Revolution and the Early America Republic" in which he employs numerous tenants of German philosopher Jürgen Habermas to propose theoretical categories that comprised the evolving civil society of the new republic. It is an interesting argument but one that needs fuller explanation than he provides in this essay.

The final section explores changing political attitudes about government during the first half of the nineteenth century and ways that the nation adjusted to those alterations. Focusing upon the anti-rent movement in New York, the appeal of local autonomy engendered in migration to Texas, and the deregulation of communications, each piece identifies a discontented constituency and suggests some of the ways that Americans incorporated change into party ideology during the ante-bellum period. A concise but thorough historiographic essay tracing the course of the New Political History interpretation concludes the publication.

This anthology clearly contains a number of thought provoking pieces. No doubt many current and future graduate students will explore at least some of the selections for years to come. The only significant shortcoming is an absence of quantification. While the New Political History historians faced criticism for relying too heavily on statistical data, some quantification seems appropriate when doing political history. Unfortunately such analytical methods are completely absent in this anthology. Nevertheless, the collection is engaging and enlightening. Though they certainly do not comprise a new paradigm, the volume does, as the editors hoped, suggest some interesting directions for future research and analysis. Most importantly the collection offers a fuller understanding of the initial decades in the American national experience and therefore should be read by serious students of the period.

PAUL E. DOUTRICH
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Jonathan H. Earle. *Jacksonian Antislavery & the Politics of Free Soil, 1824–1854*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004. Pp. xii, 282, appendix notes, bibliography, index, cloth \$59.95, paper \$22.50)

In writing *Jacksonian Antislavery* Jon Earle undertook a tough task for himself, akin to defending Thomas Jefferson's ambivalent views and behavior in

relation to slavery. Andrew Jackson, like Jefferson, was a large slaveholder, but he seems not to have an antislavery side. Perhaps it is more important that Martin Van Buren, who was the Free Soil candidate for president in 1848, was born into a slaveholding family and died a Democrat. The large majority of northern Jacksonians were either pro-slavery or did not care if in the territories "it was voted up or down." Chief Justice Roger Taney, appointed by Jackson and supported by the Jacksonians on the Court wrote the most pro-slavery decision handed down by the Supreme Court.

So what does Earle, who is an associate professor at the University of Kansas, have to say? His basic thesis is that beginning in the 1830s there existed in the Democratic Party a faction that opposed the extension of slavery and with the Free Soil movement, carried the issue into mainstream politics. In this they were much more important in the formation of the Republican Party and the ultimate end of slavery in the aftermath of the Civil War than were the abolitionists. As a political animal himself, Earle disdains the apolitical stance of the abolitionists and writes them off as mainly religious kooks. As he "teases out" the arguments of his heroes, he is hardly "nuanced" about Whig antislavery or the Whigs in general. There is little wonder that Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., has a positive blurb on the book jacket. Not only Earle's portrait of the Whigs, but also his general narrative that carries radical Jacksonian ideas through the Free Soil movement into the Republican party of Lincoln follows lines laid out by Schlesinger fifty years ago. In *The Age of Jackson* Schlesinger was not sympathetic to either the abolitionists or the opponents of the war with Mexico.

The book is a series of essays on individuals, or sets of men from individual states, who were regular Democratic voters, but also opposed slavery in various ways. The main chapters on such men as Thomas Morris, John P. Hale, Marcus Morton, and David Wilmot bring alive a group of very interesting people for readers who have not met them yet. (As much as George Henry Evans fascinates me, I really do not think he fits into the mould.)

Earle writes well and creates interesting sketches of interesting men known to most of the historians in this field. He seems to have found in Abijah C. Beckwith the perfect example of his thesis. He revives a needed interest in Thomas Morris, who was the Liberty Party candidate for the Vice President in 1840, and one of the least studied figures in American history. Earle has given us a new understanding of this group of men who were both staunch Democrats, but also opponents of slavery. He actually might have done more with William Cullen Bryant and Walt Whitman. What Earle has

accomplished is a traditional political and intellectual history of a dozen people who left enough of their thoughts on paper for us to try to understand. What he has failed to do is tell us how important these distant voices were in the Democratic Party or more importantly in the Republican Party. Certainly there were other sources of the Republican's ideology than the Free Soil Democrats.

Some of the problems with this book can be seen with a look at the bibliography. Earle discusses the antislavery Democrats and the money question, but seems not have read the major books on the subject. If the bibliography indicates what he has read, he also has simply avoided a real study of the abolitionists. More important Earle does not mention the New York constitutional convention in 1846, which dealt with the questions of land and black suffrage.

The most unfortunate aspect about *Jacksonian Antislavery* is that it ends in 1848. Yes there is a conclusion that runs through the next six years, but one has to know what actually happened to his subjects and just exactly how many voters moved in this realignment, which he calls a "mass defection." Earle tells what some people said, but does not show what people did.

Earle has written a good book about a handful of generally admirable politicians. He has done it with verve and class. Two more chapters answering some the questions raised here would have made this prize-winning book even better.

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Mark Tebeau. *Eating Smoke: Fire in Urban America, 1800-1950*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003. Pp. viii, 425, appendices, abbreviations, notes, essay on sources, index.)

Eating Smoke examines parallel developments in the evolution of firefighters and the fire insurance industry, both influenced by the broader forces of industrialization and managerial capitalism, as they dealt with one of the most feared and devastating calamities of city life. Mark Tebeau's impressive study shows how the combination of improved practices of fighting fires, the evolution of insurance industry strategies, and the institutionalization of urban building codes shaped the urban landscape and made cities safer. Based mostly, though not exclusively, on the experiences of St. Louis and Philadelphia firefighters, Tebeau draws from the various historical societies and fire museums in those cities, and

from the archives of the Insurance Company of North America and the Aetna Fire Insurance Company. Moreover, it incorporates research in urban history, gender studies, and work cultures in important ways.

Firefighters, as the first line of defense, appeared in the 1800's as independent, voluntary, and often competitive associations. Privately funded, they began to replace what was once a communal citizen responsibility for fighting fires. Acting independently of one another, voluntary companies and firemen represented an improvement over communal methods of fighting fire. The emergence of specialized firefighting units, like the Philadelphia Hose Company in 1803, marked the beginning of this transformation. Though possessed with technical skills and better equipment, such as hardened hoses, specialized carriages, and, later, steam engines, a culture of manhood, which valued physical strength and daring risk-taking, emboldened these firemen.

While this was an improvement, early firefighting efforts did not always keep pace with urban growth. Many times, they focused their energies on competition with other companies rather than on fighting fires. When they did combat fires, volunteer companies still had a limited understanding of the full nature of firefighting and their conception of their roles at that time was to protect property, not save lives. Tebeau points out, for example, that early volunteer firemen rarely entered a burning building to rescue people. Rather, they fought fires from the outside.

As the 19th century advanced, however, firemen formed more complex organizations and employed more sophisticated techniques which corrected their earlier shortcomings. By the 1850's, firemen employed hook-and-ladder instruments to enter and ventilate buildings and trained life saving rescue squads. Some cities, such as Cincinnati, made firemen public employees. The National Association of Fire Engineers, founded in 1872, furthered reform efforts by encouraging the exchange of information and promoted programs to educate firemen about more sophisticated machinery and fighting innovations.

Major change, however, came after a series of devastating fires in Chicago, Boston, Baltimore, and San Francisco in the late 19th and early 20th centuries awakened all to the need for reform. These fires bankrupted many fire insurance companies, exposed the need for urban government reform, and redoubled the efforts of fire organizations to seek new methods of fire protection. The result of the combined efforts of urban reformers, firefighter leadership, and the insurance industry was standard building codes and the incorporation of firemen as city employees, free from political control. No longer members of rough and tumble voluntary fire companies, firemen became public

employees and highly organized members of an elaborate bureaucracy. Clear divisions of labor, complete with a re-defined male working culture that was at odds with earlier assumptions, emerged. What was once a neighborhood firehouse working culture that emphasized personal bravery and mastery of some skills, changed to one which, while still glorifying heroic qualities, stressed middle class values and standards of sobriety, self-control, and membership in a highly organized and structured unit. Tebeau emphasizes that firemen themselves were in the forefront of these changes and vigilantly sought ways to define and control of their work.

The development of the fire insurance industry paralleled this shifting division of labor. In much the same way that the Philadelphia Hose Company exemplified a movement away from communal arrangements, joint-stock insurance companies and the Insurance Company of North America, which began in the late 18th century, represented a new mode of dealing with the problem of fire. The INA provided an alternative to locally based mutual insurance societies and hastened the creation of distant, bureaucratized, and highly rationalized business methods. The Aetna Fire Insurance Company of Hartford, established in 1819, furthered the modernization of the insurance industry. Unlike other companies, Aetna marketed and underwrote nationally so as not to limit, geographically, its risks.

During these early years, the insurance industry focused on "risk protection" and attention to profits rather than "fire protection and fire prevention." Tebeau asserts that this effort, manifested by a rationalized, sober, self-controlled middle class demand to catalogue, categorize, and map risks, mirrored the changes in firefighter work culture. Insurance providers used and shared, industry-wide, this information to minimize risk and establish insurance rates. This modernizing process continued and by the 1850's insurance trade associations appeared, primary among them the National Board of Fire Underwriters. After the devastating fires of the late 19th century, the NBFU, together with urban reformers and progressive firefighters, concentrated on fire protection and prevention. In the early 20th century, the NBFU headed a campaign which led to improved building codes and professional, municipally-funded fire companies. The creation of the Underwriters Laboratory and the National Fire Protection Association furthered the cause of fire safety as it educated the public that fire prevention benefited the entire community.

By the 1950's, urban America, because of the efforts of urban reformers, firefighters, and insurance underwriters was much safer from fire. Tebeau asserts

that this struggle reflected the impact of industrialization and managerial capitalism of the 19th century and the Progressive reform efforts of the early 20th century. In short, he concludes, "The development of systematic fire protection in urban America is the story of the United States writ large." (333).

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Anne E. Mosher. *Capital's Utopia: Vandergrift, Pennsylvania, 1855-1916*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004. Pp. ix, 249, notes, bibliography, index. Cloth \$45.00)

Anne E. Mosher's *Capital's Utopia* uses geographers' tools to enliven historians' conversations. The central issue that Mosher considers is why major discrepancies emerged between the schemes of urban planners and the layouts of cities and towns actually built and inhabited. In particular, she asks why the "model town" of Vandergrift, Pennsylvania, changed so drastically from the designs of 1895 to the reality of 1916. The question is significant, Mosher argues, because Vandergrift's founding represents the intermingling of industrial, class, and ethnic history in turn-of-the-century western Pennsylvania.

Steelmaster George McMurtry's dilemma in the late nineteenth century was to convert from iron to steel manufacturing and temper activism in his increasingly unskilled workforce. Mosher stresses that the advent of tinned iron production brought a group of skilled, unionized British ironworkers, distrusted for their labor militancy, to the Kiskiminetas Valley and the subsequent shift from iron to steel rendered such workers unnecessary. McMurtry envisioned a new mill in the Valley that would combine the latest in steel-making technology with an efficient, compliant workforce. Because of the need to build open hearth furnaces and to distance workers from neighboring strikers and union organizers, McMurtry relocated from the town of Apollo to a nearby site on the Kiskiminetas River. With the nascent town of Vandergrift the company experimented with home ownership and sanitary conditions for workers as a means to foster company loyalty.

McMurtry's guiding philosophy, Mosher notes, was that "social order was achievable through environmental order" (p. 77). Yet the utopian, cohesive town arranged by the Boston firm of Olmsted, Olmsted & Eliot never emerged. The cost of relatively large lots and an influx of immigrant workers from

southern and eastern Europe made McMurtry's vision unrealistic. In Mosher's lively narrative, the emergence of the neighboring developments of Vandergrift Heights and Morning Sun appear as both ominous blemishes on the company's blueprints and a testament to workforce's ability to fashion for itself a viable residential plan. Rather than a single civic unit, a mixed residential pattern—"an ordered model town, a 'standard' western Pennsylvania town, and a disorderly 'hunky flat'" (p. 127)—enveloped the steel mill in Vandergrift.

Mosher's book is noteworthy for several reasons. In chapters one and two, she provides wonderful accounts of the processes necessary to produce iron and steel. Although such scholars as Peter Temin and David Brody previously have explained this, Mosher discusses the technical aspects of metal production in an unusually accessible way. The most fascinating section of Mosher's narrative, chapter three, concerns the negotiations between the company and the design firm. Mosher wryly observes that a ravine, designed to allow residents to "convene with nature," instead became a slapdash garbage dump. Battles over the size of Vandergrift's village green and street curves further symbolized competing visions of cost and community between company officials and designers. Finally, Mosher presents thorough research on the settling of Vandergrift. Mosher uses county tax and deed registers and census records to trace property ownership and provides telling demographic overviews of residential areas to reveal the enduring consequences of differences in skill and ethnicity.

Although the three parts of the book hold together well, the varying methodological approaches of the individual chapters—encompassing geography, demography, labor history, and business history—at times make for a disjointed read. Mosher's methodological ensemble may also strike historians as a fairly standard presentation. Indeed, the geographical-historical hybrid echoes spatial and demographic urban studies of the 1970s and 1980s. Nevertheless, the result is solid, even powerful, scholarship in the vein of Paul E. Johnson or Anthony Wallace.

Ultimately, Mosher succeeds in detailing McMurtry's key tactic that advanced worker loyalty and kept unions at bay: he offered workers their own homes and diffused unrest through the promise of a middle-class lifestyle. Mosher asserts that McMurtry "inserted capital's power into Vandergrift's landscape via the inertial properties of home ownership" (p. 177). Though workers remained anti-union in the first decades of the twentieth century, their trust in the power of an employer to provide a comfortable and stable life was finally betrayed in the 1980s. *Capital's Utopia* leaves the reader with

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a haunting image: residents taught over generations to have an intense attachment to a town—a bond conceived by an employer that did not reciprocate in the end. In its final moments, then, Mosher's book resonates with the same sense of loss as Judith Modell's 1998 work on Homestead, *A Town Without Steel*. Throughout, Mosher reminds the reader of the fascinating ways in which competing images of the good life sketched and sculpted the industrial landscape of western Pennsylvania.

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