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Review: Review

Reviewed Work(s): The Diary

of Elizabeth Drinker: The Life Cycle of an Eighteenth-Century  
Woman by Elaine Forman Crane

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*Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies*

Elaine Forman Crane, ed. *The Diary of Elizabeth Drinker: The Life Cycle of an Eighteenth-Century Woman*. Abridged Edition. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010. Pp. xl, 366. Illustrations, notes, biographical directory, index. Paper, \$22.50.)

It might seem somewhat strange to review a book sixteen years after it first hit the bookshops, but this new abridged edition of Elizabeth Sandwith Drinker's diary, which "falls somewhere between a historical and a literary document," is certainly worthy of critical appraisal (xxvii). To put it quite plainly the diary, which covers the years between 1758 and 1807, is a fascinating insight into the thoughts and actions of Drinker (1735–1807), the wife of Henry Drinker, a Quaker Philadelphian who lived through a tumultuous period of change. This edition by Elaine Forman Crane, based on the three-volume unabridged diary published in 1991, has a new preface and provides a fresh audience with the opportunity to become acquainted with the woman who can, if you allow the text to guide you, become a "friend" (vii).

The preface, as the editor points out, was intended to "review the secrets that the diary has already yielded and to propose new ways of translating Drinker's words into historical lessons" (vii). She suitably scrutinizes the modern historiography concerning Drinker and how between 1994 and 2006 various historians have sifted through her journal entries to construct their arguments on the political landscape of Revolutionary and post-Revolutionary Philadelphia, gender roles, medical developments and the ever-present spectre of disease, courtship and family life, changes in material culture, race issues, and the more personal insights into the diarist herself and her principles. Moreover, as Crane observes, historians have not finished with Drinker as there are many "new research opportunities that scholars have only begun to contemplate" (ix). Raising a number of research questions she posits the view that Drinker's diary can illuminate topics such as the lifestyles of the wealthy and less-affluent members of Philadelphian society, as well as diverse themes such as tales of mermaids, weather patterns, and medical ailments, including cancer.

The twelve-page introduction reviews some of the salient points of the journal and the structure of the current volume—a four-part chronological piece exploring Drinker's youth and courtship, her role as a wife and mother, the middle years of her life in times of crisis, and her experiences as

a grandmother and “Grand Mother.” It reveals Drinker’s commitment to her husband and family, her devotion to her unmarried sister and friends, her commentary on infant mortality and other health issues, wartime pressures, as well as exile and the return to Philadelphia of Quaker-loyalists during the Revolution. Crane makes clear what has been omitted in this abridged version of the diary—“stress, suicide, delusions, fantasy, and murder . . . sights and sounds of eighteenth century Philadelphia”—but this only tends to whet the appetite for the unabridged version (xxiv). The editorial note (xxvii–xxix) is important as it shows how a good transcription of a diary ought to be conducted, while the bibliography of printed and secondary sources is an invaluable guide to contextualize Drinker’s journals.

Each of the four sections of the diary begins with an editorial commentary that sets the scene, and the text is admirably annotated with care to detail and provides full references. The bibliographical directory breathes life into many of the individuals specified in the volume and further contextualises the period under review. I wonder, however, if extra color could have been added by a select number of images for the period, but the diary itself is a fascinating read and my understanding of eighteenth-century Philadelphia and environs has been greatly enriched. If Professor Crane was sitting opposite me today I would warmly congratulate her for her years of devotion to this most remarkable of women.

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Susan E. Klepp. *Revolutionary Conceptions: Women, Fertility, and Family Limitation in America, 1760–1820*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009. Pp. 312. Illustrations, tables, notes, index. Cloth, \$65.00; Paper, \$24.95.)

Susan Klepp’s *Revolutionary Conceptions: Women, Fertility, and Family Limitation in America, 1760–1820* is a groundbreaking and thorough study of how women empowered themselves during the revolutionary period by limiting childbearing and by gaining more control over their own bodies. Klepp shows how late eighteenth-century colonial American women rebelled against