


BOOK REVIEWS

ark Abbot Stern. *David Franks: Colonial Merchant*. (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010. Pp. xvii, 263. Appendixes, notes, bibliography, index. Cloth, \$60.00)

The second half of the eighteenth century in North America was dynamic and filled with opportunity, tragedy, and change. From the Seven Years' War period to the Colonial Crisis and culminating with the Revolutionary War, the era presented individuals with both tremendous opportunity and significant risks. Perhaps no colony experienced such a drastic shift during this period than Pennsylvania. Still a Quaker-dominated government at the outbreak of the Seven Years' War, the colony-turned-state had become the seat of a revolutionary government, significant battlefield, and home to radical revolutionaries during the War for Independence. This period of transition, however, presented outstanding financial opportunities for men willing to seize them—including David Franks. Mark Abbot Stern, a retired engineer,

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adeptly tracks the life and business career of one of Philadelphia's leading merchants between the Seven Years' War and the conclusion of the American Revolution in *David Franks: Colonial Merchant*.

David Franks was born to a New York-based Jewish mercantile family in 1720. In early adulthood, the ambitious and entrepreneurial Franks moved to Philadelphia, presumably to extend his family's commercial connections. There he thrived through a series of partnerships with both relatives and other business associates. He married into a Christian family, raised a Christian family, and became a participant in Philadelphia's Christ Church while simultaneously remaining active in New York's Jewish community. Throughout his career, Franks dabbled widely in the variety of mercantile pursuits available to him. The Indian trade, land speculation, the import/export business, and even shipbuilding attracted his attention, with varying degrees of success. Military contracting for the British, however, proved both the most lucrative and dangerous of Franks' endeavors. While supplying British armies and garrisons in Pennsylvania during the Seven Years' War and the interwar period provided a steady profit, his contract to supply British prisoners of war during the War for Independence ended disastrously. Despite Franks having congressional approval and General Washington's support, radical patriots in Philadelphia targeted him as a Tory sympathizer. The consequent arrests and ultimate departure from his adopted city resulted in tremendous damage to his family and finances.

While Stern attempts to develop a comprehensive biography, his work heavily favors David Franks' mercantile activities. The author, however, openly acknowledges this result, noting that the available resources necessitated such a treatment. As it stands, Stern's work should prove extremely useful to scholars of the late colonial and Revolutionary periods in a variety of ways due to the scope of detail provided by the author. The transitory nature of Franks' business partnerships, as well as the extensive networks he developed, illuminates the business practices of the era. The initial success he enjoyed, moreover, demonstrates the tremendous opportunities for profit war and a military presence provided Pennsylvanians. *David Franks* will thus be found useful for economic and urban historians.

Franks' extensive involvement in land speculation, the Indian trade, and military contracting in western Pennsylvania is likewise valuable in examining connections between Philadelphia and the colony's hinterlands. For scholars more interested in the British military, the detailed listings of goods provided by Franks will prove immensely useful in perfecting present

understandings of the regular soldier's life. Correspondence between Franks and Henry Bouquet, as well as other British officers, appears quite valuable for those wishing to study the relationship between Pennsylvanians and newly arrived Britons and Europeans.

Finally, Stern's work might best make a contribution to our understanding of the Revolution. Neither an outright patriot nor a loyalist, the author portrays Franks as an individual who simply attempted to survive the conflict while doing what he had always done—providing goods to those who needed them. While treatments of the Revolution naturally gravitate toward those who clearly took a side, be they patriot or loyalist, Stern's discussion of Franks might assist scholars who seek to describe the experience of the ambivalent or undecided, which certainly represents a larger proportion of American society than historians generally suggest. The disdain with which radical revolutionaries in Philadelphia treated Franks, moreover, suggests the difficulties facing those who tried to pursue a middle course. While the primary evidence available to Stern does seem to suggest Franks' "middle path," it should be noted that the family's coziness with British officers during the occupation of Philadelphia does suggest either private loyalist sentiment or simply the opportunistic mentality of the merchant. Without direct primary evidence, however, the author's treatment of the contentious subject of treason appears judicious.

While the detail contained in Stern's work should prove useful to scholars, this work is not recommended for use in the classroom. While the book will be promoted as a work of Jewish history, its value in that sense appears limited. The author does a commendable job of combating the image of Franks as a man who abandoned his inherited faith, but his continued observance of Judaism does not appear to have played a pivotal role in his business life. His business partnerships included Christians as well as Jews. In his personal life, Franks does appear to have straddled the divided between Judaism and Christianity, maintaining his membership in New York's synagogue while at the same time allowing his Christian wife to raise their children in Philadelphia's Christ Church. Yet the mercantile slant to all the materials available to Stern suggests very little about what this actually meant to Franks. Finally, and perhaps most significantly, the rancor directed at Franks during the Revolution appears to have had no connection to his faith but instead to his apparent close connection to British officers.

The clarity produced by Stern's exhaustive research and attention to detail has clearly resulted in a strong history of a colonial merchant with extensive

involvement in a wide variety of economic activities. Stern's ability to make sense of a complicated set of materials will be valuable to colonial and revolutionary historians of Pennsylvania interested in such practices. The nature of the primary materials produced by Franks, however, significantly limits the ability of the author to make definitive cultural or theological statements about this dynamic period in Pennsylvania's history.

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Judith Ridner. *A Town In-Between: Carlisle, Pennsylvania, and the Early Mid-Atlantic Interior*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010. Pp. viii, 287, maps, illustrations, notes, index. Cloth, \$49.95)

Judith Ridner provides important new insights to multiple audiences in her excellent new study of Carlisle, Pennsylvania's first half-century of settlement. Students of early Pennsylvania will no doubt benefit from this comprehensive narrative of the development of proprietor Thomas Penn's new administrative seat for his sprawling interior Cumberland County. Generalists in early American studies will also be enriched by Ridner's deft analysis of how the residents of Carlisle contributed in material ways to such well-known intercolonial and national events as the French and Indian War, American Revolution, Constitutional ratification, and Whiskey Rebellion. Ultimately, *A Town In-Between* successfully balances the need for intimate detail of local and specialized interest with the forging of broader thematic connections that speak to much wider audiences.

Central to Ridner's argument for Carlisle's broader importance was its status as a place "in-between." Her book does not elaborately theorize this framework, but rather allows its multiple meanings to unfold in the course of her chronological narrative. As Native Americans long knew, Carlisle's geographic location provided a convergence of north-south trade routes along the Susquehanna River Valley and east-west paths (later roads) connecting Philadelphia and the Delaware Valley with the expanding western frontier. Thomas Penn hoped these geographic advantages would allow him to extend