



A TRIBUTE TO WILLIAM PENCAK

OCTOBER 8, 1951—DECEMBER 9, 2013

William Pencak, professor emeritus of history at Penn State University, distinguished historian of early American history, historian of Pennsylvania, and twice editor of *Pennsylvania History*, died Monday, December 9, 2013, in Atlanta, Georgia, of cardiac failure following heart surgery.

A native New Yorker, he received his B.A. from Columbia University in 1972, with an M.A. the following year and a Ph.D. in history in 1978. The years that followed included scholarly production on a phenomenal scale. His first books, *War, Politics, and Revolution in Provincial Massachusetts* (1981), and *America's Burke: The Mind of Thomas Hutchinson* (1982), focused on New England, while his third, *For God and Country: The American Legion, 1919–1941* (1989) explored a twentieth-century topic for a very special reason: he wrote the book that a friend had set out to do, prior to his untimely death.

The publications that followed would reveal the polymath mind that Bill Pencak possessed. His score of single-authored or edited volumes ranged from the intricacies of early American ethnicity, culture, and conflict to film studies, opera history, and semiotics. In the last decade, much of his intellectual passion focused on the history of early American religion. His *Jews and Gentiles in Early America, 1654–1800* (2005) took him into the reconstruction of an oft-overlooked segment of colonial society, as well as giving him the chance to focus on his own heritage. The ideas he wrote of in that book led to new avenues to explore in the classroom. He taught classes in Jewish studies prior to his retirement from Penn State's University Park campus, and following his retirement he accepted a position as Bert and Fanny Meisler Visiting Professor of History and Jewish Studies in the department of history at the University of South Alabama. At the same time he wrote the chronological successor volume to *Jews and Gentiles*, he was also working on a biography of Bishop William White, Pennsylvania's first Episcopal bishop.

Bill Pencak's passion for Pennsylvania history was a central focus of his career. He coedited the massive *Pennsylvania: A History of the Commonwealth* as much to engage in a history that fascinated him as to have the chance to work with his friend Randall Miller and numerous other friends. Service to community and commonwealth were always at the center of his life. A decades-long stalwart of the Philadelphia and McNeil Center for Early American History's Friday seminars and Zuckerman salons, he is remembered for his intense intellectual engagement of presenters as well as the sense of humor and love of good fellowship that he had there. Those characteristics combined ideally in the two periods in which he edited *Pennsylvania History*. He expanded its readership and scholarly focus during his first term as editor, including creating the annual *Explorations in Early American Culture* in partnership with the McNeil Center. In 1998, he honored me by inviting me to serve as his coeditor. Later, this work would lead to the creation of the new journal, *Early American Studies*, where he continued to serve as senior consulting editor until his death. While he took a few years off from journal editing to pursue other projects, he returned to helm *Pennsylvania History* a few years later. When news of Bill Pencak's sudden death spread throughout the academic community, stunned colleagues around the country responded with a similar statement: Bill Pencak was the first major scholar who noticed their—our—work, and he was the one who helped craft rough prose into numerous first published articles.

It is hard to sum up the warmth, the kindness, the sense of humor, and other personal attributes that were my dear friend Bill Pencak. Known for enjoying life, he shared Dr. Samuel Johnson's passion for friendships, wit, and good conversation. His generosity in providing hospitality for emerging scholars was unsurpassed. He routinely drove to conferences so he could provide free transportation to young members of the profession who could not afford airfare. On a personal level, we thought of him as a member of our family, and I will always remember Bill sitting on my couch, watching TLA Video VHS tapes for his *The Films of Derek Jarman*, assisted by our yellow Lab (he always joked she enjoyed film history, too); spreading out the illustrations for one book or another on our coffee tables and floors; sitting up to all hours discussing the history profession and its practitioners; and driving to professional meetings, listening to CDs of Julianne Baird and his other favorite opera performers. As I write this, a line Franklin employed to remember one of his best friends comes to mind: Bill was a "Gentleman of some Fortune, generous, lively and witty, a Lover of Punning and of his Friends." Hundreds of grieving friends now mourn Bill's untimely passing.

Bill is survived by his husband, Vincent Parker, and his mother, Harriet Pencak. His father, only brother, and nephew preceded him in death.

GEORGE W. BOUDREAU

PAH Pennsylvania History

A JOURNAL OF MID-ATLANTIC STUDIES

VOLUME 81, NUMBER 1 • WINTER 2014

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Pennsylvania History publishes documents previously unpublished and of interest to scholars of the Middle Atlantic region. The Journal also reviews books, exhibits, and other media dealing primarily with Pennsylvania history or that shed significant light on the state's past.

The editors invite the submission of articles dealing with the history of Pennsylvania and the Middle Atlantic region, regardless of their specialty. Prospective authors should review past issues of *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies*, where they will note articles in social, intellectual, economic, environmental, political, and cultural history, from the distant and recent past. Articles may investigate new areas of research or they may reflect on past scholarship. Material that is primarily of an antiquarian or genealogical nature will not be considered. Please conform to the *Chicago Manual of Style* in preparing your manuscript.

Send article submissions and suggestions for special issues to Editor William Pencak, by email wap1@psu.edu (preferred) or by mail, Dept. of History, Humanities Bldg., University of South Alabama, Mobile, AL 36688.

Send books for review and announcements to Beverly Tomek, School of Arts and Sciences, University of Houston-Victoria, 3007 N. Ben Wilson Street, Victoria, TX 77901.

IMPORTANT NOTICES

Pennsylvania History (ISSN 0031-4528; E-ISSN 2153-2109) is the official journal of the Pennsylvania Historical Association and is published quarterly by the Pennsylvania Historical Association and the Pennsylvania State University Press.

Annual member subscription rates: \$30 for students, and \$40 for individuals (\$55 if outside U.S.). Payments should be directed to Business Secretary Karen Guenther, 216 Pinecrest Hall, Mansfield University, Mansfield, PA 16933. Address changes should also be directed to Karen Guenther.

Periodicals postage paid at Mansfield, and additional mailing offices.

Claims for missing or damaged issues should be directed to Karen Guenther.

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*P*ublication of *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies* is made possible by deeply appreciated support from the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission and the Department of History, the Pennsylvania State University.

We thank Karen Guenther for keeping our membership lists in order.

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On the cover: A canal boat being hauled over the Allegheny Mountains via a system of inclined planes (MG-286, Penn Central Railroad). Courtesy of the Pennsylvania State Archives.