

## BOOK REVIEWS

Patrick Spero. *Frontier Country: The Politics of War in Early Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016). Pp. 343. Index. Cloth, \$39.95.

Patrick Spero's *Frontier Country* is a remarkable reconceptualization of Pennsylvania's political development from an initially successful Proprietary colony in 1684, to a failed state in the wake of the Seven Years War, to a reinvigorated Revolutionary state in the last quarter of the eighteenth century. Spero seeks to upend the field of "Frontier," "Backcountry," and "Borderlands" history popular since the days of Frederick Jackson Turner by accepting the eighteenth-century American and British definition of the word "frontier," and applying that meaning to the actions of the Empire, the Proprietors, the Assembly, and frontier settlers to reveal the transformative power of "frontier political culture," which culminated in the American Revolution.

Spero uses traditional sources for early Pennsylvania such as the Pennsylvania Archives and *Minutes of the Provincial Council*, manuscript collections of politicians, traders, and military men, and colonial and European newspapers, but applies new techniques. First, from all of these sources Spero developed a composite definition of the eighteenth-century word "frontier," which was known and accepted by all. Frontier was "a geopolitical term . . . that was created by the threat of invasion and demanded government support." Moreover, contemporaries perceived a frontier as a defensive limb protecting the heart of a society. Spero also uses digital mapping techniques to expose the locations of frontiers and their movements over time. While in other colonies frontiers were zones of fear and violence, in Pennsylvania Proprietor William Penn's nonviolent Quakerism and his need for peace to attract buyers of his

land led him to envision an expanding colony with no frontiers. His Frame of Government set up an antagonistic divide between the Quaker Assembly, which refused to arm the colony against threats, and the Proprietary executive, who could only order the frontier by establishing new county governments with sheriffs and justices of the peace to keep the peace between expanding settlers and threatened Natives. During the first half of the eighteenth century these pressures led to increased racial violence and frontier people's demands for military protection, along with a colonial border war with Maryland that Pennsylvania won more with good government than with bullets and battles while Indian relations remained relatively stable.

The Proprietors' and Empire's hopes of keeping the Indians within the English and Pennsylvania trading and defensive orbit disintegrated at the opening of the Seven Years War, and the resulting four years of Indian raids from 1754 to 1758 terrorized frontier communities from the northeast corner of the colony to the southwest. When colony and Crown reestablished military and economic ties with Pennsylvania Indians in 1758, settlers were unable to reaccept Indian neighbors, and as they rushed into the Ohio, Monongahela, and Yough River valleys, they demanded security. Pontiac's War led the Paxton Boys to massacre the Conestogas in Lancaster and then the "Black Boys" to assume the powers of militia and trade "Regulators" in the west, as Virginia and Connecticut settlers and governments assumed control of southwestern and northern Pennsylvania respectively. Virginia launched an Indian war in 1774 to win over the white people at the forks, as Pennsylvania lost nearly all control. But, at that moment, the split with the Empire and the formation of the State of Pennsylvania led to a new constitution that put frontier people in control of the Assembly, and effectively turned defensive frontiers into offensive ones, with the clear goal of ridding Pennsylvania of its frontiers by eliminating Indians. This frontier political culture established policies, institutions, and expenditures for ethnic cleansing, and won Revolutionary Pennsylvania the allegiance of its northern and western inhabitants, which led to the establishment of its permanent borders and the ultimate removal of Indians from Pennsylvania in the subsequent decades.

Unlike Turner's vision of a frontier as a zone of opportunity, eighteenth-century people saw them as zones of death and destruction, and the fear and terror of living on a frontier, or of having one's community suddenly become a frontier, led to a culture that demanded liberty through security and then demanded the elimination of a race of people. Joining and expanding upon the recent work of Kevin Kenny and Peter Silver, Spero confronts us with

the uncomfortable reality that Pennsylvania's Revolution sprang from calls for liberty from Indian attacks, and the liberty to wage a racist war of ethnic cleansing. Scholars of early Pennsylvania, the American Revolution, and especially of "frontier studies" will find Spero's book immensely valuable to understanding the intersection of all three.

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William W. Donner. *Serious Nonsense: Groundhog Lodges, Versammlinge, and Pennsylvania German Heritage* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2016). Pp. 164. Illustrations, notes, glossary, index. Paper, \$29.25.

The heritage that the Versammlinge (gatherings) and groundhog lodges celebrate was developed by descendants of eighteenth-century German and Swiss immigrants during their over three hundred years in this colony and state. Their normal port of entry was Philadelphia, where a significant number remained; however, most settled in the rural interior. The vast majority were Protestant, mostly Lutheran and Reformed. A small minority was Mennonite, Amish, and Pietistic German Baptists. Even fewer were Catholic. They spoke Pennsifawnisch Deitsch, which Donner considers a language, not a dialect. It resembles what is spoken in the Rhenish Palatinate. Donner explains that most academicians call them Pennsylvania Germans, though many of the "farmers and working-class people" (10) call themselves Pennsylvania Dutch. Whatever they are called or call themselves, they are different from nineteenth-century German immigrants, and they have preserved their culture longer.

In the 1920s and 1930s, Pennsylvania Germans confronted "a rapidly changing and modernizing world" (iii). When they, especially William Troxell and Thomas Brendle, realized the need to preserve their heritage and language, they organized Versammlinge. They first met in 1933. Donner notes that in 1934, seventeen groups organized formally into lodges, located primarily in southeastern Pennsylvania. The lodges adopted the groundhog as their mascot and claimed that it had the ability to predict the weather, a tradition carried over from Europe. Members were required to speak Deitsch and were fined if they spoke in English. Donner describes the lodges' organizational pattern and specifies their officers in Deitsch with accompanying translations.