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The Writing of Colonial Pennsylvania History

"I LIKE MUCH your Proposal of setting some Person to write the History of this Colony," Benjamin Franklin replied to his English friend and fellow scientist, Peter Collinson, 'but a suitable hand, who has Leisure, is hard to find."[1] Only a few months later Franklin's political position changed from neutral to antiproprietary.[2] Meanwhile William Smith, who had worked

[1] Franklin to Collinson, June 26, 1755, in Leonard W. Labaree, ed., *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin* (New Haven, 1959-), VI, 89-90.

Previous accounts of Pennsylvania had been brief, and most should be classed as propaganda tracts. A summary of the writing prior to August, 1682, can be found in Hope Frances Kane, "Notes on Early Pennsylvania Promotion Literature," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* (*PMHB*), LXIII (1939), 144-168. Later tracts of interest include William Penn's *A Further Account of the Province of Pennsylvania*, written in 1685 and reprinted in *PMHB*, IX (1885), 62-81; Thomas Budd's *Good Order Established in Pennsylvania and New Jersey* (1685); Gabriel Thomas' *An Historical and Geographical Account of the Province and Country of Pennsylvania in America* (1698); and Francis D. Pastorius' *A Particular Geographical Description of the Lately Discovered Province of Pennsylvania* (1700). John Oldmixon's *The British Empire in North America* (1708), though it included the first account of Pennsylvania written by an outsider, was clearly influenced by Penn's propagandistic efforts; its only contribution was an unreliable description of the colony's politics.

A handy guide to the literature of Pennsylvania's first two decades can be found in Justin Winsor, ed., *Narrative and Critical History of America* (1884-1889), III, 495-502.

[2] William S. Hanna, *Benjamin Franklin and Pennsylvania Politics* (Stanford, 1964), 83.

closely with Franklin to establish the Pennsylvania Academy, published *A Brief State of the Province of Pennsylvania*, a tract which castigated the provincial Assembly.[3] These two developments supplied Franklin with the motivation to see that a history was written, and he set to work. Shortly after he arrived in London as agent of the Pennsylvania legislature, he informed Joseph Galloway: "The Publication of the Defense of the Province . . . will probably be one of the first Acts of Hostility on our Side, as being necessary to prepare the Minds of the Publick; in which the Proprietors will be gibbeted up as they deserve, to rot and stink in the Nostrils of Posterity."[4]

The man of suitable hand and leisure whom Franklin had found to write the first comprehensive, if prejudicial, history of Pennsylvania was Richard Jackson, an Englishman of wide-ranging interests and knowledge whom Collinson had acquainted Franklin with by mail.[5] *An Historical Review of the Constitution and Government of Pennsylvania, from its Origin; So far as regards the several Points of Controversy which have, from Time to Time, arisen between The several Governors of that Province, and Their several Assemblies* came off the press in late May, 1759. Two weeks later, Franklin was writing to his uneasy ally, Isaac Norris:

The Proprietor [*Thomas Penn*] is enrag'd. . . . He supposes me the Author, but is mistaken. I had no hand in it. It is wrote by a Gentleman said to be one of the best Pens in England, and who interests himself much in the Concerns of America, but will not be known. Billy afforded great Assistance,

[3] Smith's tract appeared in London in 1755 and was immediately answered, anonymously, in a charge-by-charge exoneration of the Quakers. Smith was specifically identified but, undaunted, the following year he published *A Brief View of the Conduct of Pennsylvania*. In his letter to Collinson, Franklin had referred to Smith as "Our Friend" and doubted his authorship. (Franklin to Collinson, Aug. 27, 1755, Labaree, *Papers*, VI, 169.) And Smith wrote to Thomas Penn ([Sept. ?, 1755], *ibid.*, 214) that "Collinson is Part of the innocent Cause of Franklin's Conduct." Within a year the two men were not on speaking terms. Franklin to Collinson, Nov. 5, 1756, *ibid.*, VII, 12.

[4] Feb. 17, 1758, *ibid.*, 374.

[5] Carl Van Doren, ed., *Letters and Papers of Benjamin Franklin and Richard Jackson, 1753–1785* (Philadelphia, 1947), 1–10. Jackson remained anonymous because he wanted to stand for a seat in Commons. He also became Pennsylvania's colonial agent in 1763 through Franklin's intercession. See Franklin to Galloway, Apr. 7, 1759, in Labaree, *Papers*, VIII, 309–310.

and furnish'd most of the Materials. The old Proprietor and some others are set in a Light I could have wish'd not to see them in; but the Author contended for the Sacredness of Historical Truth. . . . It is also a full Refutation of Smith's Brief State and Brief View, without doing the Author the Honour of taking the least Notice of him or his Work.[6]

Smith had argued that the first Quakers conducted the government of Pennsylvania with "Mildness and Prudence," but that later generations "were quite a different Sort of Men" who had enlarged the powers of the Assembly to "extraordinary" and "repugnant" proportions.[7] In *An Historical Review* it was the proprietary element which was degenerate. William Penn, initially a benevolent patriarch "rever'd for the Wisdom of his Institutions," became a ruler who combined "the Subtlety of the Serpent with the Innocence of the Dove." His heirs were worse, altogether "disposed to convert free Tenants into abject Vassals."[8] James Logan, provincial Secretary, was the wily and vindictive agent of the Proprietor; David Lloyd, Speaker of the Assembly, was the watchful guardian of the people's liberties.

Early Pennsylvania politics proved to be a prefiguration of the mid-eighteenth-century scene, to which most of *An Historical Review* was devoted. More than half of the 380-page narrative concerned the administration of Robert Hunter Morris (1754–1758), the years when Franklin was most active; by this time the political situation was clearly divided between virtue and vice.

It is visible, the Governor's Name signified nothing, whether *Hamilton* or *Morris*; except that the hardest Driver was to be the best thought of by him Employers: And it was but natural, that the Assembly should be as resolute to continue the Province in such a State as might render it worth preserving. . . . *Pennsylvania* was more dear to them for the Excellency of its Constitution, than the Excellency of its Soil. . . .[9]

The Crown was depicted as neutral. The King had not exercised his suspending power over legislation. Rather, it was Morris, "this

[6] June 9, 1759, *ibid.*, 401–402.

[7] Smith, *A Brief View* (reprint, New York, 1865), 10–11, 13.

[8] *An Historical Review*, 3, 14. Smith's tract was anti-Quaker, but Franklin's project was also offensive to Friends and did not sell well in Philadelphia because of "some Reflections . . . on the old Proprietor," a development which Franklin had anticipated. David Hall to Franklin, Dec. 15, 1759, Labaree, *Papers*, VIII, 448.

[9] *An Historical Review*, 163.

petty *Proprietary* Governor," who dared to "make a Bugbear of his Majesty's Disapprobation. . . ."[10]

The partisanship of *An Historical Review* need not obscure its significance. Franklin had been printer for the Pennsylvania government since 1730, and he was able to supply Jackson with charters, bills, messages and minutes of the Council and Assembly. Supplementary documents appeared in a lengthy appendix. The result was a factual narrative although, as one historian friendly to Franklin said about him, "his cause did not reject the benefits of partial colouring."[11]

Meanwhile Samuel Smith, a Quaker merchant and provincial officeholder in New Jersey, had come into possession of different materials concerning Pennsylvania. Caleb Pusey, one of the first settlers and a member at different times of the Council and Assembly, left some papers to the Yearly Meeting in Philadelphia. These came into the hands of David Lloyd and Isaac Norris I, who in turn gave them to James Logan. Apparently all these men added to the papers, which Logan passed on to John Kinsey, Speaker of the Assembly and Chief Justice of the province. Kinsey, in consultation with others, revised and supplemented the papers. After his death in 1751, Smith took charge.[12]

The work that emerged was in two parts. In the first, Smith focused on Pennsylvania politics from the establishment of the government to 1726, the terminal year of Sir William Keith's administration, paying little attention to imperial affairs. He carried out his promises to "preserve a Philosophical indifference" and to eschew "the inconvenience of descending minutely into the particulars" for "a general view of the times." The result was rather bland. Except for the unavoidable assertion that the governor and the Assembly were at odds during the administrations of John Evans (1704–1709) and Charles Gookin (1709–1717), he muted

10 *Ibid.*, 165.

11 Thomas F. Gordon, *The History of Pennsylvania, from its Discovery by Europeans to the Declaration of Independence in 1776* (Philadelphia, 1829), 382.

12 Samuel Smith, *History of the Province of Pennsylvania*, edited by William M. Mervine (Philadelphia, 1913), vii, ix-x; Robert Proud, *The History of Pennsylvania, in North America, from . . . 1681, till after the Year 1742* (Philadelphia, 1797–1798), I, 4–5. The Mervine edition of Smith contains only the first part of the history.

conflict and his judgments were generous almost to a fault. William Penn was assigned almost saintly status, and even Governor Evans, who spread a false alarm that the French were sailing up the Delaware to attack Philadelphia, was characterized as "a man of natural good sense but had much the rake in his character."[13]

The second part of Smith's history concerned Quakers in New Jersey and Pennsylvania, men of "reputation and credit" who had to be neglected in favor of those who "were active in legislation . . . in the first part."[14] Depicting prominent Friends, describing the establishment of Meetings and reproducing letters and testimonies, Smith here displayed less "Philosophical indifference," especially with regard to the schismatic George Keith, whose theological inconsistencies and constitutional intemperance were thoroughly documented.

Although neither part of Smith's history was published until long after his death in 1776, the manuscript which he had hoped would "at least furnish materials—perhaps otherwise excite to a more compleat & finished work,"[15] came into the hands of Robert Proud. A Quaker who had come to Philadelphia in 1759 and taught school, Proud had been well educated but, apparently, failure in business and disappointment in love had soured his disposition. When he began working on a history of Pennsylvania he was in bad health and quite unsympathetic to recent political and social developments, which he described as "revolution, rebellion and destruction, under the name and pretence of Liberty."[16]

While *An Historical Review* had celebrated Franklin's social ascent by applauding the popular forces that made it possible, Proud traced the decline of Pennsylvania from its pristine state in

13 Quotations in this paragraph are from Smith's *History*, viii, ix, 88.

14 *Ibid*, vii-viii. The second part of Smith's work, save for a few chapters, is printed in Samuel Hazard, ed., *Register of Pennsylvania, Devoted to the Preservation of Facts and Documents and Every Other Kind of Useful Information Respecting the State of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia, 1828–1836), VI, VII.

15 Smith, *History*, viii.

16 *PMHB*, XIII (1889), 430–440 (Proud's autobiography); XXVII (1903), 377; XXIX (1905), 229–231; XXXIV (1910), 70–72. "R Proud's observations on S: Smith's history," all of them adverse, can be found in the Etting Papers in the Historical Society of Pennsylvania (HSP). Proud's papers, forty-three volumes and four boxes of material, are also in HSP.

In "Robert Proud: A Chronicle of Scholarly Failure," *PMHB*, XCII (1968), 494–506, John A. Neuenschwander compares Proud's work to that of other historians of his time.

a narrative which resembled his own failure to realize early promise. The colony had begun with the highest goals: "the restoration of those natural and civil rights and privileges" denied in England. It was guided by a man whose views were "the best and most exalted, that could occupy the human mind."[17] And William Penn, as Proprietor, provided the political restraint that was essential to true liberty. The turbulence which affected the province after his departure was smoothed over by his return, at which time he benevolently "presented" the Assembly with a charter of privileges. When he took his leave a second time, that body fell into "an ill humor." Proud believed that party spirit, "the offspring of narrow and selfish views . . . deeply interwoven in human nature," was good in moderate doses, causing men to pay attention to their real interests. During the Evans and Gookin administrations, unfortunately, this spirit ran rampant, a development for which the Assembly was largely responsible.[18]

Gookin's successor, Sir William Keith (1717–1726), was "acquainted with the art of gaining the affection of the people," a quality Proud would not ordinarily have admired, save for the fact that this talent allowed Keith to moderate party passions. In the end, however (and one senses the tone of inevitability), his popular predilections overcame him and he disregarded proprietary instructions.[19] The administration of his successor, Patrick Gordon (1726–1736) was distinguished by "moderation and prudence," but with the coming of the war and the consequent demands for defense funds, party passions were revitalized.[20] Here Proud's Quaker sympathies were most apparent. George Thomas (1738–1747), the governor who had to attempt to reconcile imperial demands with provincial pacifism, was "a man of abilities and resolution, but, in some

17 Proud, *History*, I, 5, 168. An estimate of Penn's accomplishments can be found in *ibid.*, II, 105–113.

18 *Ibid.*, II, 443, 460, 479. Proud recognized that Evans' "warm zeal to push his own views" was partially responsible for the trouble between him and the Assembly, but in Gookin's case the legislature was clearly at fault. *Ibid.*, I, 467; II, 8. Proud was critical of David Lloyd's "constant opposition to the claims of the Proprietary," while James Logan's major fault appears to have been that he was not always "courteous and condescending" to people of lesser abilities. *Ibid.*, I, 477–478.

19 *Ibid.*, II, 95.

20 *Ibid.*, 202.

things, did not sufficiently understand the nature and genius of the people, over whom he presided."[21]

Rather than holding Quakers responsible for increasing partisanship as a result of clashing principles, Proud argued that Pennsylvania's reputation for liberty ("than which nothing is more desirable, [but] when carried beyond a certain point degenerates into licentiousness") lured great numbers to the province, "many of whom were persons of very different principles and manners from those of the generality of the more early settlers." It was these people and their descendants who jeopardized liberty "through the formation and increase of party," who joined the Assembly "to foment the spirit of opposition against the *old interest* . . . being chiefly *Quakers*. . . ."[22] (Although Proud, like Samuel Smith, devoted a separate section of his history to the Quakers, he also made explicit connections between Quakers and politics, not only regarding pacifism but also oath-taking.[23]) Ironically, having exonerated the Quakers in his history, the final great disappointment of his life was that Friends were not buying his book.[24]

A generation passed before another history of Pennsylvania was published. In 1829 Thomas F. Gordon, a Philadelphia lawyer (but not a Quaker) who ultimately authored a dozen legal and historical works, put the Quaker colony's past in a perspective which adhered neither to the Franklin-Jackson nor the Smith-Proud tradition. Indeed, he promised his readers a narrative sapped of any color whatever, noting that pacifism, philanthropy, and common sense "extinguished or controlled those passions which create the subjects

21 *Ibid.*, 215.

22 *Ibid.*, 228–229.

23 Proud devoted almost one-hundred pages of his first volume to the rise of Quakerism and a description of Penn's career prior to the founding of Pennsylvania. The latter was drawn from the biography which appears in Joseph Besse's *The Works of William Penn* (London, 1726), while Penn's own *A Brief Account of the Rise and Progress of the People Called Quakers* (London, 1694), as well as the writings of Robert Barclay and William Edmunston, were the sources for the former. The last half of Proud's second volume contains "A View of Pennsylvania . . . between . . . 1760 and 1770," which resembles nothing so much as Penn's early propaganda literature, and an appendix containing the frames of government, first laws, and charter for Philadelphia.

24 Memoranda, Robert Proud, July, 1807, in Proud Papers, HSP. See also Charles West Thomson's "Notices of the life and Character of Robert Proud," *Memoirs of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania*, I (1826), 389–408.

of ordinary historical interest." Pennsylvania's history was "little else than the successful efforts of a peaceful people to improve their private fortunes and their political happiness." Only the latter was "matter for history. But," he continued,

> as their efforts were confined to the narrow theatre of an obscure province, and consisted of long and abstruse discussions, they have slight attractions for ordinary readers, and impose on the historian scarce any other duty than that of accurate and perspicuous narration.[25]

Although neither anecdote nor variety livened Gordon's six-hundred pages, his feeling for the growth of democracy lent vitality to his narrative. In the unfolding struggle between the Assembly, the voice of the people, and the governor, who spoke for the Proprietor, there was no doubt where his sympathies lay. "The inhabitants of Pennsylvania have ever showed a jealous spirit on political subjects. Unawed by names or power, they have opposed a prompt resistance to usurpation. . . ."[26]

While Smith and Proud saw the genius of the colony in its Quakerism, Gordon saw it in democracy. However, he did not share the Franklin-Jackson view of an ever-virtuous legislature and an always-villainous executive, even though his admiration of Franklin seemed boundless. As a lawyer, Gordon recognized the value of institutions, and it was William Penn who had planted "wise institutions" which made the growth of democracy possible.[27]

In this perspective, Gordon's ambivalent assessment of Penn was logical. The Proprietor was to be congratulated for establishing a laboratory for Quaker ideals, yet he expected "greater moral and political perfection for his colony, than a just estimate of human nature would warrant." He had "profound and philosophic views" on government, but he allowed the Assembly too little power and the Council too great. Regarding the body of sixty-nine laws, Gordon believed it

> had many faults, but it also had many excellencies. . . . The proprietary legislated too much. He descended into the privacies of life, and attempted

25 Gordon, *History*, iii. Note the contrast between this statement of restraint and the almost flamboyant proposal Gordon issued when he was drumming up subscriptions for the sale of his book, a copy of which is enclosed in his letter to W. M. Meredith, Jan. 1, 1827, Meredith Papers, HSP.

26 *Ibid.*, 86.

27 *Ibid.*, 54.

to regulate the minor morals. . . . He, with his sect, had drank deeply of the puritanical spirit. . . . But he resisted, with masterly force, the penalty which that spirit, both in England and America, had affixed to the breach of the law.[28]

If Penn's bold and original political theories contradicted the Stuart idea of government, yet his ambition and love of fame caused him to make sacrifices in their pursuit at Court. He did not lose sight of the Pennsylvanians' best interest, yet he did not like it to interfere with his proprietary right. Thus, in 1701, he assented to the charter of privileges, realizing that the Crown might assume control of the province. "He was willing, by the most liberal grant of political rights, to protect himself and his people from oppression by royal governors." But Penn resented the restriction on executive power, and only the advice of James Logan, "that sagacious counsellor," kept him from revoking the charter.[29]

Logan and Lloyd, representatives of proprietary and popular interests, were not villain and hero but merely different in character: "Logan was haughty, reserved, and aristocratic. . . . Lloyd was accessible to all, affable in his manners, pertinacious in his enterprises, and devoted to the people."[30] Sometimes Gordon's sympathies for the Assembly led him to questionable judgments, as in his assertion that during the term of John Blackwell (1688–1690) the legislature resisted "unwarrantable assertions of power."[31] Occasionally his political perspective led to interesting observations, such as his perception that the Keithian schism was more than a religious division but had a secular meaning as well.[32]

Generally, however, Gordon's history differed from earlier efforts on matters of judgment rather than organization or fact. The administrations of Evans and Gookin were certainly tumultuous, but primarily because of the characters of the governors. Sir William Keith, having studied the errors of his predecessors, "ventured to embrace the popular party [and] to support its interest with the

[28] *Ibid.*, 54, 63–64, 71.

[29] *Ibid.*, 122, 175–176. In later biographies of Penn, it became common practice to discuss his life in dualistic terms. See Joseph E. Illick, *William Penn the Politician* (Ithaca, 1965), 255–257.

[30] Gordon, *History*, 133.

[31] *Ibid.*, 93.

[32] *Ibid.*, 98. See also Gordon's observations in his Historical Notes, HSP.

proprietary and the crown, on disputed subjects." Thus, he was "decidedly the best of the proprietary deputies."[33] That Patrick Gordon had a happy because uneventful term while George Thomas suffered the misfortune of being governor during the preliminaries of the Great War for Empire were indisputable facts, but Thomas Gordon's assessment of the quarrel between the governor and Assembly would not have been acceptable to partisans of either: "Charges of untruth, imposture, hypocrisy, tyranny, and faction, disgraced the addresses of the one, and the replies of the other."[34] Nevertheless, Gordon's narrative was sympathetic to the "Quaker, or country party," which controlled the Assembly in opposition to the "*gentlemen's* or governor's party" which mustered support from Philadelphia.[35]

Appropriations for defense and related issues, such as the taxation of proprietary lands to defray expenses, occupied Pennsylvania politicians during the 1740's and 1750's, but Gordon's interest in western military campaigns and conflicts between Indians and pioneers served to obscure the battles between governor and Assembly in Philadelphia. Similarly during the pre-Revolutionary crisis, he neglected provincial politics, choosing instead to describe British policy, motivated by cupidity or revenge, and the wise and courageous intercolonial responses.[36] No doubt Gordon imbibed the nationalism typical of his age, but in so doing he deprived his readers of a chronicle of the final decades of colonial Pennsylvania politics.

The nineteenth century was not notable for significant contributions to the writing of colonial Pennsylvania history. Indeed, it was not until 1896 that a new approach was taken to the subject, William

33 Gordon, *History*, 180, 201. An editorial which appeared in Hazard's *Register* soon after the publication of Gordon's history stated with disdain: "Mr. Gordon who relies very much upon the Historical Review ascribed to Dr. Franklin, is the apologist of Keith, and represents him as actuated by the most patriotic motives in his disregard of the Proprietary instructions." VI, 240.

34 Gordon, *History*, 238.

35 *Ibid.*, 241.

36 In the preface to his history, Gordon had noted: "Subsequent to the year 1753, the policy of Pennsylvania assumed a color analogous to that of the other states. . . . From 1753, the knowledge of the history of the British empire in America, becomes necessary to a proper understanding of that of each colony." *Ibid.*, iv.

R. Shepherd's *History of Proprietary Government in Pennsylvania.*[37] Unlike earlier chroniclers of Pennsylvania, Shepherd was a professional historian, trained at Columbia (where he spent his teaching career) by such luminaries as the German-schooled political scientist John W. Burgess and Herbert L. Osgood, whose interest in colonial institutions led to a seven-volume study of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century America.[38] Shepherd's work reflected the changes that had taken place in historical writing since Gordon's time. His book was organized not chronologically but topically, the first and shorter part consisting of seven chapters on land, the second composed of thirteen chapters on government.[39] It was, in fact, a series of related monographs illustrative of the scientific, institutional approach to history. Thoroughly researched, as footnotes and bibliography made evident, it demonstrated Shepherd's solid education in legal history and his interest, common in the post-Darwinian age, in the evolution of government and law.

Shepherd's was the first systematic approach to the question of land in Pennsylvania. He delineated Penn's plans for its disposal, described the adaptations in these plans in the New World and pointed up the confusion in the land office, which lasted at least until Thomas Penn's arrival in 1732. Only a decade later was work begun

37 Published in New York Other works published during the nineteenth century either do not fill the requirements of a narrative history—Hazard's *Register;* Sherman Day, *Historical Collections of the State of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia, [1843]), Thomas Balch, *Letters and Papers Relating Chiefly to the Provincial History of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia, 1855); Samuel Pennypacker, *Historical and Biographical Sketches* (Philadelphia, 1883), John F. Watson, *Annals of Philadelphia and Pennsylvania, in the Olden Time* (Philadelphia, 1830, 1857 and 1884), the third volume in the third edition being the work of Willis P Hazard; J. T. Scharf and Thompson Westcott, *History of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, 1884); Sydney G. Fisher, *The Making of Pennsylvania An Analysis of the Elements of the Population and the Formative Influences that Created One of the Greatest of the American States* (Philadelphia, 1896)—or contribute little by way of new information or synthesis—W H Carpenter, ed., *The History of Pennsylvania from Its Earliest Settlement to the Present Time* (Philadelphia, 1854); W. M. Cornell, *The History of Pennsylvania from the Earliest Discovery to the Present Time* (Philadelphia, 1876), William H Egle, *An Illustrated History of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Civil, Political and Military, from Its Earliest Settlement to the Present Time* (Harrisburg, 1876); Sydney G Fisher, *Pennsylvania, Colony and Commonwealth* (Philadelphia, 1897).

38 *Who Was Who in America, 1897–1942* (Chicago, 1942), 1115, Michael Kraus, *A History of American History* (New York, 1937), 357, 413n.

39 The last fifty pages of Gordon's *History* contain summaries of government, land and labor, law, religious sects, finance, commerce and literature, but this is not the topical approach of Shepherd.

on a rent roll, even though the collection of quit rents had been a major source of controversy since the beginning of settlement (not until 1770 were they collected without difficulty). In the effervescent early years of the eighteenth century, and again forty years later, the Assembly sought to control the land office despite (or because of) proprietary opposition. It even tried to confiscate proprietary lands, largely because "the wildest ideas prevailed in Pennsylvania concerning the wealth of the proprietors."[40] Shepherd's discussion of Indian affairs from the perspective of land possession left something to be desired, but he deftly handled the topic of boundary disputes, so congruent was it to his approach.

Prefatory to his account of the government of the province, Shepherd depicted William Penn with insight:

> He may be briefly characterized as a seventeenth-century idealist of the more attractive and genial type, one whose knowledge was as extensive as his piety, whose reputation as a courtier was second only to his capacity for religious enthusiasm, and who, though benevolent, never lost sight of private advantage.

But given Penn's role as the representative of the Crown in the colony and his paternalistic attitude, he could not serve simply as an executive performing the will of his Quaker constituency.[41] Shepherd held a high opinion of James Logan, who wisely restrained Penn in the face of David Lloyd's provocations. Later, in a sympathetic rendering of the plight of Penn's sons, Shepherd concluded: "To govern in harmony with the assembly, meant complete subjection to its control."[42]

Shepherd was not, however, simply advocating the Proprietor's cause, though he was consistently critical of Benjamin Franklin's misrepresentation of it.[43] He saw the need to alter the first frame of

[40] Shepherd, *History*, 84. Shepherd noted further: "Upon this subject the imagination of Benjamin Franklin ran riot when he gave the authority of his name to the document, which as it appears in the appendix to his 'Historical Review of the Constitution and Government of Pennsylvania' purports to be based on Thomas Penn's estimate of the value of the proprietary estates."

[41] *Ibid.*, 174–175, 178–182.

[42] *Ibid*, 210.

[43] On Franklin, see especially pages 248n, 303, 380n, *ibid.*

government because "the rights of the assembly in legislation were too limited."[44] Indeed, the shortcoming of Shepherd's history is not partisanship but lack of continuity. By separating the strands of government into separate considerations of issues (such as oath-taking, paper money, taxation of proprietary estates), institutions (the charters, the Council, the courts, powers of the governor), or formal relationships (with the lower counties, with the home government), Shepherd obscured the political development of the government.[45] This same stricture applied to the evolution of political parties.[46] Finally, the pre-Revolutionary period was virtually ignored. Nevertheless, his book was a mine of information and remains useful.

Narrative histories of Pennsylvania continued to be produced in the twentieth century, but none of them provided the freshness of view that would merit special attention.[47] An accentuation of two tendencies seen in earlier works did lead, however, in new directions. One of these was an emphasis on the Quaker character of the colony, while the other was a stress on political conflict during a limited period of time. In both cases, the ultimate results were provocative and original pieces of work.

The relationship between Quakerism and politics was a topic of absorbing interest to Isaac Sharpless, for thirty years (1887–1917) President of Haverford College and founder of the Friends Historical

[44] *Ibid.*, 245.

[45] In less than a paragraph he skipped from Governor Evans through Gookin and Keith to Gordon. *Ibid.*, 307–308.

[46] Shepherd defined the two parties in the early eighteenth century as the proprietary, composed of Scotch-Irish Presbyterians on the frontier and Episcopalians in Philadelphia, and the anti-proprietary, made up of Quakers in the city and surrounding counties. Ignoring the shifts which took place in the 1750's, Shepherd began talking of "the anti-proprietary party headed by Franklin and Joseph Galloway." *Ibid.*, 546–549, 557.

[47] Albert S. Bolles, *Pennsylvania, Province and State: A History, 1699–1790* (Philadelphia, 1899); Howard M. Jenkins, ed., *Pennsylvania, Colonial and Federal: A History, 1603–1903* (Philadelphia, 1903); Charles P. Keith, *Chronicles of Pennsylvania from the English Revolution to the Peace of Aix-la-Chapelle, 1688–1748* (Philadelphia, 1917); George P. Donehoo, ed., *Pennsylvania: A History* (New York, 1926); Wayland F. Dunaway, *A History of Pennsylvania* (New York, 1948); Paul A. W. Wallace, *Pennsylvania: Seed of a Nation* (New York, 1962); Sylvester K. Stevens, *Pennsylvania, Birthplace of a Nation* (New York, 1964). Stevens, long-time state historian, has written a succinct but inclusive essay on the colonial period, supplemented by unusually good illustrations and a useful bibliography.

Society.[48] His claim to an understanding of "the contemporary Quaker view" was based on "a careful examination of Meeting Records and private letters of the times, and a fairly intimate personal acquaintanceship with many who probably represent, in this generation, in their mental and moral characteristics, the 'Quaker Governing Class' of the first century of the Province." Although this perspective did not incline Sharpless to a critical view of the Friends, it did lend him insight into the Quaker dilemma. Lauding the Pennsylvania experiment as the first instance in which democracy, religious liberty, justice to the aborigines, pacifism and nonjuring were combined, he added that the experiment would have been more conclusive without English control.[49] In a book on the colony's political leaders, he observed:

> The principles which have been the keynote of Quaker morality and those which define the average morality of the politician even of the better sort are widely apart. The one is idealistic, the other utilitarian.[50]

The history of the colony, and the lives of its leaders as well, could be told in terms of the tension between theory (in this case Quaker ideals) and reality.

Although the theme was recognizable in most of Sharpless' work, it was not brought clearly into focus until the publication of Frederick B. Tolles' *Meeting House and Counting House. The Quaker Merchants of Colonial Philadelphia, 1682–1763*.[51] Tolles, currently Professor of History and Director of Friends Library at Swarthmore College, stated:

> The social history of Philadelphia Quakerism in the colonial period is thus a record of two plantations—the inward and the outward; and their inter-

[48] A biography of Sharpless appears in *PMHB*, XLIV (1920), 264–269.

[49] *A Quaker Experiment in Government* (Philadelphia, 1898), preface and Chapter I. This was the first volume of *A History of Quaker Government in America*, the second being titled *The Quakers in the Revolution* (Philadelphia, 1899). See also his *Two Centuries of Pennsylvania History* (Philadelphia, 1900); *Quakerism and Politics* (Philadelphia, 1905); "The Quakers in Pennsylvania," in Rufus Jones, *The Quakers in the American Colonies* (London, 1911). Jones was general editor of the six-volume Quaker History Series (or "Rowntree Series"), authoring four of the volumes himself, which appeared between 1911 and 1921.

[50] *Political Leaders of Pennsylvania* (New York, 1919), 4–5. Unfortunately, this theme was not followed throughout the book.

[51] Published in Chapel Hill, 1948.

relationship provides a basis for evaluating the results of the "holy experiment."[52]

The inward plantation was mightily cultivated by seventeenth-century English Quakers, where the ideals sown by George Fox germinated and took firm root. But in America, where subduing the wilderness, then building and governing a society offered new opportunities with unforeseen temptations, Friends found themselves tilling two estates. Finally, of course, compromises being made in the fields of business and politics became too glaring to be overlooked, at which point Quakers renounced the world and turned inward again, an act of major significance to the governing of Pennsylvania.[53]

The significance was noted by inference only, since Tolles relegated politics to a subordinate position by stressing the social history of the colony's governing class. Whereas most earlier histories had pointed to the conflict between proprietary governor and popular Assembly, Tolles fastened on the tension between Quaker ideals, such as pacifism, and accepted practices of Anglo-American culture, such as war. By narrowing the traditional scope of study, Tolles brought obscure issues clearly into focus. But he neglected the lower classes, not to mention non-Quakers, and he concluded his narrative in 1756, when Quakers began to desert the Assembly for more spiritual pursuits.

On both counts Sydney V. James' *A People Among Peoples. Quaker Benevolence in Eighteenth-Century America* has served as a complement to *Meeting House and Counting House*.[54] In tracing the evolution of Quaker thought and practice from an emphasis on in-group charity typical of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries to the universal humanitarianism which has characterized Friends ever since, James dealt with the whole Society as it worked

52 *Ibid.*, 4.

53 Daniel J. Boorstin, in *The Americans: The Colonial Experience* (New York, 1958), pursuing the argument that Americans have always been distinguished by their pragmatism, turned Tolles on his head by accusing the Quakers of rigidity and inability to adapt to the wilderness. Aside from the common assumption of both men that the mid-eighteenth-century Quaker revival of piety was virtually inevitable, Boorstin seems to be repudiating his ideological past while Tolles appears to be rueing the schismatic nature of contemporary Quakerism.

54 Published in Cambridge, Mass., 1963.

toward a consensus on social reform. The revival of piety in mid-eighteenth-century America and even Enlightenment thought contributed to the emergence of general benevolence, as did the unfortunate Quaker experiences involving the Assembly crisis of the 1750's and the doubt cast on the patriotism of Friends during the Revolutionary War. Humanitarianism was a means of vindicating the Society, and it served as a substitute for political activity. By not withdrawing from society, Friends "responded creatively to the most serious emergency in the history of American Quakerdom."[55]

Even greater than the interest manifest in the Society of Friends in Pennsylvania has been the attention recently paid to the province's politics. It was in the opening years of the twentieth century that the pre-Revolutionary crisis in Pennsylvania finally received its due in C. H. Lincoln's *The Revolutionary Movement in Pennsylvania, 1760–1776*.[56] Eight years before Carl Becker proclaimed that "the democratization of American politics and society" (rather than "the contest for home-rule and independence") was the fundamental issue of the Revolution, Lincoln had observed: "The leaders of the revolution in the Quaker colony were more eager to obtain independence within their own State than to throw off the British connection."[57]

The Assembly was "the supreme power in the colony" in 1760, but it was not truly representative. Controlled by the Quaker party of Benjamin Franklin and Joseph Galloway, it aroused antagonisms which were primarily sectional. The trouble came not from the Germans, who were passive allies of the eastern Quaker party, but the Scotch Irish, who "organized a revolution in Pennsylvania against the oligarchy which had controlled the colony for a generation." Differences that were racial and religious, as well as issues that were political and economic, separated East and West. However, during the struggle "the Philadelphia populace became a valuable ally of the interior counties in their struggle against the dominant conservatism of the province." The question of parliamentary

[55] *Ibid.*, 333.

[56] Published in Philadelphia, 1901.

[57] *Ibid.*, 3–4; Carl Becker, *The History of Political Parties in the Province of New York, 1760–1776* (Madison, 1909), 5. Isaac Sharpless' *The Quakers in the Revolution*, though useful, was not a thorough treatment of politics in pre-Revolutionary Pennsylvania due to its emphasis.

taxation intensified the conflict: "to the differences between aristocracy and democracy was added the difficulty between Pennsylvania and Great Britain which was to bring the other contentions to a climax."[58]

The Stamp Act crisis illustrated this point, for the gentry defended "propositions concerning government which undermined their own position in the colony and were to be used in later years against their own dominance within the State." Furthermore, "the power of illegal gatherings of the people" was proved. (Lincoln also pointed out that the example of Maryland influenced the direction of political affairs in Pennsylvania.)[59]

After a lull of almost a decade, news of the Tea Act reached Philadelphia when the legislature was not in session. Almost by habit the people convened in town meeting, where the moderating influence of John Dickinson, a leader of the anti-Quaker or popular party, was overridden by more radical sentiment. From this point forward to 1776 extra-legal committees and conventions, expressing increasing egalitarianism and basking in the confidence of leaders in the Continental Congresses, elbowed the conservative Assembly aside and finally reduced it to impotence. Although moderate Whigs, such as Dickinson and Franklin, tried to control the Revolutionary movement, their counsel was rejected. (Franklin, as usual, moved successfully with the tide and emerged as a radical leader.) As sentiment for independence waxed, so-called Quaker government in the Assembly, unwilling to bend, was broken. Concurrently, the West received more proportionate representation and the city dissidents benefited from the broadening of the franchise. The constitution of 1776 was "the most democratic . . . yet seen in America."[60]

This document was the subject of J. Paul Selsam's *The Pennsylvania Constitution of 1776: A Study in Revolutionary Democracy*.[61] Like Lincoln, Selsam viewed the framing of the constitution as "the culmination of class rivalry and sectional strife; the development of

[58] Lincoln, *Revolutionary Movement*, 23, 39, 77, 129.

[59] *Ibid.*, 135.

[60] *Ibid.*, 277. Lincoln did not celebrate this triumph, criticizing the moderates for opening "the door to radicalism and bigotry, a condition worse than the oligarchy of early years" (p. 206), for resisting independence and constitution-making until it was "too late to save the state from a period of anarchy" (p. 276).

[61] Published in Philadelphia, 1936.

the spirit of democracy."[62] But aside from a more detailed treatment of political affairs in 1776, Selsam's only contribution to the story lay in his observation that the democratic movement, by splitting the revolutionaries and producing a constitution which required vigilant defense, detracted from Pennsylvania's contribution to the War for Independence.

Lincoln's interpretation of the pre-Revolutionary decades was challenged, however, by Theodore Thayer in *Pennsylvania Politics and the Growth of Democracy, 1740–1775*.[63] Thayer found the source of political conflict in the "opposing interests of the Proprietors and the people. It was principally from this cause that two political parties emerged in the very early days of the colony and continued until broken by the upheavals of the Revolution." Sectional conflict played little part in this contest between liberty and tyranny, nor were the aspirations of Philadelphia's disfranchised important enough to be explicitly noted.[64]

The Proprietor, Thomas Penn, and his party chief, William Allen, perceived in Benjamin Franklin "a natural leader of the democratic masses in the province, who, if not checked, would trample underfoot well-nigh every vestige of proprietary authority." In 1755 he emerged as leader of the popular or Quaker party. Believing that "Proprietary government had undermined or destroyed in Pennsylvania the essential rights of freeborn Englishmen," Franklin determined to replace it with royal control. Unfortunately, his departure for England in 1764 left both parties bereft of leadership "progressive enough or possessed with sufficient wisdom to capitalize on the political desires of the people." Because Franklin was making an appeal to the Crown, the proprietary or Presbyterian party benefited from the imperial crisis, although it was not until 1770 that the Philadelphia mechanics deserted the Quaker party for its opponent.[65]

Thayer was unable, however, to fit this two-party explanation to the internal revolution of the mid 1770's. His sudden introduction

62 *Ibid.*, 1.

63 Published in Harrisburg, 1953.

64 *Ibid.*, 7. Thayer argued that the economic interests of East and West were more common than different, and that the Assembly did not discriminate against the frontier except on the military issue (p. 127).

65 *Ibid.*, 2, 89, 151.

of Radicals, Moderates and Conservatives—later superseded by equally ill-defined Whigs and Tories—was implausible; they appeared from nowhere, without an explanation of why the popular party was inadequate to the situation.

Thayer's book, so reminiscent of Jackson's *An Historical Review*, was one of the last gasps of the Progressive historians, as Lincoln's had been one of the first. Only a decade later, William S. Hanna claimed:

> An examination of politics in Pennsylvania and of Franklin's part in provincial affairs will show, I believe, that a whiggish interpretation—progressive versus backward forces, a sustained democratic impulse, and Franklinian liberalism in politics—cannot be maintained.[66]

Instead, Hanna found the colony to have been in the control of the upper class "whose power and policies were maintained in a political structure that had changed little since 1701." Neither the proprietary executive nor the Assembly was truly representative of the people, though political groupings ranged around these two positions. The political rulers, "often linked together by marriage, business and religious ties," perpetuated minority rule by "encouraging intra-group conflicts" in this heterogeneous society, which meant avoiding consideration of any basic social issues. Furthermore, there was an imbalance in the political structure due to the unique power of the Assembly and its control by the Quakers, "a religious and social minority representing one section of the colony."[67]

Franklin entered this situation as an independent, a member of the Assembly (1751) who found no difficulty in working with the proprietary leaders. But in 1755 he quarreled with Thomas Penn, after which he "turned to direct the Assembly's most masterful assault upon proprietary power."[68] He was able to move into a position of leadership in the Quaker party and therefore in the Assembly because of the split over the issue of pacifism (a division

66 Hanna, ix.

67 *Ibid.*, 3–4, 8.

68 *Ibid.*, 90. Hanna's estimate of Thomas Penn was higher than Thayer's; see page 16. His interpretation has recently been challenged by James Hutson, who argued that "Franklin's split with Penn in the summer of 1755 was the result of a proprietary challenge to his convictions and not of a personal quarrel between the two men." See "Benjamin Franklin and Pennsylvania Politics, 1751–1755: A Reappraisal," *PMHB*, XCIII (1969), 303–371.

fostered, ironically enough, by the Proprietor). This did not represent the triumph of democracy, however, since Franklin aimed not at leveling but at a more effective operation of deferential politics. Nor was he a particularly astute politician.

The political crises between 1764 and 1766 "taught Pennsylvania's leaders the hard lesson that they would risk a great deal if they continued to fight each other as they had in the past." From that point forward the two parties made concessions to one another in order to thwart agitation of basic issues. The Quaker or "Old Party" controlled the Assembly, allowing a few opponents such as John Dickinson a privileged minority status. The effect of the imperial crisis on this situation was minimal, for the Assembly did contain some radical representation. (Outside Philadelphia, the crisis had even less effect on local politics.) As to Franklin, his influence on provincial politics "declined sharply" after 1766. When he returned to the colony in 1775 and joined the already-formed radical group, he was not its leader. Many still regarded him as a member of the old order which he had done nothing to reform. "Yet it was Franklin's luck, his courage, his vision that ultimately redeemed this disastrous part of his political career."[69]

Hanna devoted little attention to the emergence of this radical group which was intent on the internal revolution that the regular parties were trying to suppress. But its rise and success was traced in David Hawke's *In the Midst of a Revolution*.[70] Both Hawke and Hanna viewed politics as a power struggle virtually devoid of principle. Hanna ignored sectional issues; Hawke explicitly denied their existence.[71] In his description of the conflict between radicals and moderates in the spring and summer of 1776, Hawke argued that the two forces combined for the cause of independence. But the radicals, in collusion with John and Sam Adams and through such techniques as mass meetings, propaganda and deception, moved on to stage an internal revolution. The resultant Pennsylvania constitution represented the victory of a minority. In other words, in contradiction to both Lincoln and Thayer, Hawke denied that this document was the outcome of forces long at work in the province.

69 Hanna, 188, 197, 204.
70 Published in Philadelphia, 1961.
71 *Ibid.*, 62n.

The most significant reinterpretation of Pennsylvania politics, which included a new look at the Quakers as well, concerned not the pre-Revolutionary period but the first decade of the colony's existence. As recently as 1962, in *William Penn's "Holy Experiment." The Founding of Pennsylvania, 1681–1701*, Edwin B. Bronner presented what was essentially an administration-by-administration political history.[72] Six years later, Gary B. Nash published *Quakers and Politics. Pennsylvania, 1681–1726*, a novel, provocative and, ultimately, quite convincing study of these early years.[73]

Prodigious research, especially on economic matters, combined with an imaginative use of social and behavioral sciences, enabled Nash to present political history in its broadest and best sense: public life seen as a reflection of private interests and personal hopes. By identifying the "connection between the structure of society and the nature of politics, between behavioral tendencies of the Quakers and their social outlook, between environment and political aspirations," Nash expected that his study would "contribute to an understanding of the political dynamics of the American colonies in general in the early stages of development."[74]

According to Nash, William Penn realized the importance of financial strength to the success of the "holy experiment" and therefore offered real estate bonuses and political leadership to a small circle of English merchants in return for their economic support, even going so far as to draw the first frame of government to their conservative specifications. Few of them migrated to Pennsylvania, however, leaving the colony bereft of an upper class. The consequent competition among social equals (artisans, yeomen, indentured servants) fostered economic growth but placed "severe strains . . . on traditional concepts of political organization," a problem exacerbated by such irritating issues as the proprietary land policy.[75]

The political turbulence which characterized the very first years of Pennsylvania's existence increased with Penn's departure, as

72 Published in New York. Bronner's study was thorough and reliable, and it will remain useful in spite of the fact that it broke little new ground.

73 Published in Princeton, 1968.

74 *Ibid.*, vii, viii.

75 *Ibid.*, 56.

antiproprietary feeling grew among an emerging elite of city merchants and prospering landowners who ruled the colony from the Council. But with Penn's appointment of John Blackwell as deputy governor in 1688, this elite group had to go to the Assembly and even the public for political support, thus underwriting the privileges of the former and "radicalizing the very nature of politics" by appealing to the latter. In opposition to the growing power of the elite, men fell in line behind the religious schismatic George Keith (an incident similar to the one involving Anne Hutchinson in Massachusetts).[76]

The ameliorative effect of Penn's return in 1699 was only temporary. Though he rallied the allegiance of merchants who realized the gravity of the imperial challenge, by so doing he forced Assembly leader David Lloyd to find a constituency among the very sort of people who had followed Keith. Indeed, Lloyd dipped so deeply into the social order that he inadvertently democratized Pennsylvania politics and created an atmosphere fraught with hyperbolic rhetoric and universal distrust. It was not until the second decade of the eighteenth century that moderates intervened to stabilize the situation, while simultaneously increased immigration (bringing large numbers of lower-class settlers and some aristocrats) and peacetime prosperity worked to restructure society and return control of the government "to a relatively narrow group of merchants and prosperous landowners." Thereafter, the masses remained passive, save for the rare occasion when an issue galvanized public sentiment.[77]

From Franklin's focus on the violation of British liberties through Gordon's emphasis on flourishing democracy and Shepherd's interest in the evolution of institutions to the works of present-day historians, it can be seen that writings on Pennsylvania have been an index to contemporaneous political or academic developments (not to mention personal predilections). This was clearly the case with Gary Nash, who drew liberally upon the social and behavioral sciences while implicitly demonstrating his interest in foreign and

[76] *Ibid.*, 123.

[77] *Ibid.*, 327. Nash labeled the stabilization of politics, which reflected the emergence of a class structure, the "maturing of Pennsylvania." New Left critics may object to this value judgment, which suggests that radical politics are immature. However, given the New Left's fascination with youth, the term seems well chosen.

domestic affairs by treating Pennsylvania as an emergent nation and stressing the radicalization of politics.

However, the writing of Pennsylvania history should not be viewed from a relativistic viewpoint only. There have been real differences of opinion among historians concerning such topics as the merits and nature of popular and proprietary aims and parties (if, indeed, the word "party" is even appropriate), the meaning of Quakerism for the political and social life of the colony, the effect of section and class on the coming of the Revolution. Nor has there been unanimity on the qualities of Pennsylvania's two colonial heroes, William Penn and Benjamin Franklin. And although there has been a continuing interest in provincial politics, the chronological scope of these studies has narrowed, while simultaneously the construction of the word "politics" has broadened. What is currently needed is a history of Pennsylvania which synthesizes these recent studies.

San Francisco State College JOSEPH E. ILLICK