

effort that expands our understanding of the complicated ways in which the American Revolution touched the lives of individuals throughout the British world.

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*A Portrait of Elizabeth Willing Powel, 1743–1830.* By DAVID W. MAXEY. (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 2006. xii, 91 pp. Illustrations, notes, index. \$24.)

In the zeitgeist of early American memory, Elizabeth Willing Powel is recalled for moments she shared with two of the nation's founding fathers. First, she stood at the front of the crowd facing the Constitutional Convention delegates as they left Independence Hall on the last day of the convention and—after asking Benjamin Franklin what the fate of the nation's government would be—garnered the reply “You have a republic, if you can keep it.” And she wrote George Washington the famous 1792 letter rebuking him for thinking of retiring from the presidency, guilting the first chief executive into agreeing to a second term. Both stories appear and reappear in popular histories and textbooks. Most often, they still seem to hold a smirking “women-say-the-darnedest-thing” tone. Thus, this well-written, thoroughly researched, beautifully produced volume on Elizabeth Willing Powel's life is especially welcome.

Willing Powel was one of the most famous women in colonial and early national Philadelphia. Known for her intelligence, wit, style, and occasionally sharp tongue, she played hostess to the country's founding fathers and mothers, presided over a home that has survived as one of the most impressive architectural treasures of the late colonial period, and, as David W. Maxey has revealed, sat for a series of portraits that offer revealing clues into the life of one woman, and indeed the lives of many women, in that critical era.

Maxey takes an intriguing approach to his book on Willing Powel. A woman who was so famous in her own day perhaps shows the fleeting nature of the spoken word and brilliant conversation: while many contemporaries—including Thomas Jefferson, Abigail Adams, the Marquis of Chastellux, George and Martha Washington—wrote about her, she left no revealing diary like Elizabeth Sandwith Drinker or Hannah Callender. The lack of a paper trail on her life connects to one of the ironies of her legacy. The house that she occupied from just after her marriage in 1769 until her widowhood in the 1790s was the first successful preservation in Philadelphia's Society Hill section. The realities of her life and thoughts have often been obscured by the interpretation of that house, just as that interpretation has led to some recollections of her. Maxey has built upon this story to unpack a complicated life as reflected in both surviving docu-

ments and intriguing images.

David W. Maxey is an attorney by training, but this is not to say that his foray into history and art history in this work is by any means amateurish. Rather, one can at times feel the lawyer's training in crafting briefs reflected in the way he researches and writes this monograph. While some aspects of Elizabeth Powel's story are commonly known—her birth into the family of Charles and Anne Shippen Willing, her marriage to future “Patriot Mayor” Samuel Powel, her role as the prominent hostess in the colonial and early national city—Maxey doggedly tracks down aspects of the lives of Powel and her contemporaries that leave even those readers who think they know her story well marveling at some long-overlooked documents that he has discovered and explicated. The result is a story that offers new insights into women's life course, family bonds, friendships, social class, parenthood, and mourning in eighteenth-century America.

The “portrait” in the title is a double entendre. Maxey crafts a biographical portrait while also using material culture methodology to create the first thorough study of Elizabeth Powel's most famous portrait, which he convincingly attributes to Matthew Pratt. Maxey explores both the varied attributions that have been attached over the last century to the image of Eliza Powel in yellow gown, décolletage exposed, with a large urn at her left shoulder. Disclosing a tenacity of research that would, one imagines, make any young lawyer the pride of his firm, Maxey discovers the painting's fascinating provenance prior to its acquisition by the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts as he explores its meaning to both the childless Powels and to early national Philadelphia.

The result of this research is a book that is both biography and art history, material culture study and handbook for house museums whose walls are adorned with works whose stories, if painstakingly researched, could expand and enrich the narratives told therein. *A Portrait of Elizabeth Willing Powel* is a must-read for anyone interested in the history of women and families in Philadelphia during the revolutionary and early republic periods, and an essential addition to the staff reading lists of any museum that hopes to go beyond the superficial into a true understanding of how objects can inform us about the past.

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GEORGE W. BOUDREAU

*The Whiskey Rebellion: George Washington, Alexander Hamilton, and the Frontier Rebels Who Challenged America's Newfound Sovereignty.* By WILLIAM HOGELAND. (New York: Scribner, 2006. 302 pp. Maps, notes, sources, index. \$26.95.)

It is hard to believe that over the last century, with the development of professional, historical writing, only two books have considered the role of the