

also allowing him to become a “citizen of the world” and gain access to an Atlantic world. In one interesting example, Fithian, after returning from Princeton, perceived Cohansey as a place that fit the pastoral ideal. We have a particularly rich account of his courtship of Elizabeth Beatty, his eventual bride, which illuminates the larger conflict of passion and reason within Fithian; he was hemmed in by his neighbor’s criticisms and his own self-reflection. Fea emphasizes how Fithian repeatedly balanced those centripetal forces of friends and family while attempting to achieve reason and universality. In this quest, he was aided by his circle of rural philosophes, the Bridge-Town Admonishing Society.

Fea explains how he came to his conceptualization of Fithian’s rural Enlightenment after teaching the Enlightenment to undergraduates. His focus is locating ideas about a better self through the writing of a biography in a contextual manner. He is successful in that effort. The author also does an excellent job of demonstrating how Fithian’s synthesis of Christianity and Enlightenment was achieved, how the two were adapted in this global movement, and how Fithian was being cosmopolitan by being local; he does not see that duality as a contradiction.

The Way of Improvement is a richly documented and imaginative biography. While, at times, a reader might wonder if Fithian’s intellectual balancing act and the author’s biographical story are as seamless as they appear, *The Way of Improvement* successfully mixes the particular with the universal, just like the story of Philip Vickers Fithian.

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DAVID JAFFEE

The Drillmaster of Valley Forge: The Baron de Steuben and the Making of the American Army. By PAUL LOCKHART. (New York: HarperCollins, 2008. 377 pp. Illustrations, notes, index. \$27.95.)

A new look at Baron Friedrich von Steuben is long overdue. The last serious biography appeared in 1937. In Paul Lockhart, the Baron has found an ideal chronicler. Lockhart’s background in European history—a subject he teaches at Wright State University in Dayton, Ohio—enables him to sketch Steuben’s German years and dismiss several myths. Steuben did not “invent” his noble birth or his title; he was eminently entitled to a “von” or “de” before his name. “Baron” was a legitimate term for those elevated to the Order of Fidelity, a version of knighthood which enabled Steuben to wear a spectacular eight-pointed star on his dress uniform.

But Steuben came to America professing to have been a lieutenant general in

the Prussian army—when, in reality, he never advanced beyond the rank of captain. The fiction was the creation of the diplomats, Benjamin Franklin and Silas Deane, who hired him in Paris. They decided that only an extravagant lie would overcome Congress's disillusion with foreign volunteers. By 1778, when Steuben arrived in Valley Forge, too many of these gentlemen had acquired high rank and accomplished next to nothing.

With wry wit and engaging humor, Lockhart tells how Steuben brought off his improbable deception. The Continental army needed his experience as an organizer and drillmaster, and George Washington recognized this dolorous fact. Unable to speak a word of English, Steuben found French-speaking aides who translated his orders to a model company. The mere fact that this ex-lieutenant general was their drillmaster created a sensation. The Americans had been imitating the British army, where sergeants did the drilling. Steuben, imbued with the traditions of the Prussian army, soon changed minds—and hearts. He not only taught the Americans how to turn civilians into professional soldiers and maneuver them on a battlefield, but he insisted that an officer was responsible for the health and morale of his men—an idea that remains the core of the American army's training to this day.

Lockhart's portrait of Steuben is refreshingly realistic. He describes his faults—his irritability, his occasional pomposity, and his hunger for too much authority. Few modern readers realize how often Steuben angered the army's American-born generals. Along with these warts, Lockhart also emphasizes Steuben's good humor and innate generosity, which won him the loyalty and admiration of numerous friends. Even more important, the book takes us beyond Valley Forge, where Steuben won his fame, and reveals how often his gifts as a thinking soldier served the American cause in the last three years of the war. His efforts as an organizer and recruiter in Virginia had much to do with the survival—and ultimate success—of the American southern army in 1780–81. It was no coincidence that the last letter General Washington wrote before he resigned his commission was to General Steuben, thanking him for his “faithful and meritorious services.”

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TOM FLEMING

If By Sea: The Forging of the American Navy—From the Revolution to the War of 1812. By GEORGE C. DAUGHAN. (New York: Basic Books, 2008. 536 pp. Illustrations, maps, glossary, source notes, bibliography, index. \$30.)

If By Sea is thought-provoking reading for specialists in the naval history of the early American republic and a good introduction to the subject for the uninitiated. The first half of the book is a thesis-driven analysis of the contributions,