

John Barry: An American Hero in the Age of Sail. By TIM MCGRATH. (Yardley, PA: Westholme Publishing, 2010. xvi, 662 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$35.)

Tim McGrath makes a strong argument that John Barry is a true, but forgotten, hero of this nation. Barry's list of accomplishments is impressively long: a contender for the title "Father of the American Navy"; the commander who fought both the first and last successful engagements of the Continental navy; the skipper who logged the greatest distance in a twenty-four-hour period during the eighteenth century; George Washington's favorite sailor, who served with the Continental army at the battle of Princeton; the individual who extralegally brought about Pennsylvania's ratification of the Constitution; a merchant captain who helped establish American trade with China; and commander of one of two U.S. Navy squadrons who "won" the 1798 Quasi-War with France.

Despite this impressive resume, Barry is barely remembered today and John Paul Jones is the American naval officer most associated with valor and accomplishment during the Revolutionary War. McGrath explains Barry's obscurity by the fact that he was humble, laconic, and, in marked contrast to Jones, unwilling to promote himself or his achievements.

To remedy the paucity of materials by and—at least for his early years—about Barry, McGrath writes a life-and-times biography. While Barry is very much at the center of the book and McGrath has done exhaustive research in Barry's papers, he goes beyond the subject of his biography to explore topics only indirectly related. For example, in his coverage of the opening of the Revolution, McGrath discusses Lord Dunmore and his activities in Virginia, the first Continental navy expedition to the Bahamas, and British naval activities in the Chesapeake and Delaware bays. Barry was an actor in none of these. McGrath's treatment is akin to a sprawling Hollywood epic in which the main character disappears from the scene while the director gives you a feast of sights and sounds depicting the times. The result provides the reader with a vivid portrait of revolutionary-era Philadelphia, a guide to eighteenth-century sailing, and a primer on the naval history of the American Revolution.

McGrath is a compelling and lucid writer. He brings Barry to life, makes battles understandable, and provides the clearest description of Barry's 1778 capture of the British transport ships *Mermaid* and *Kitty* that this reviewer has seen.

The problem with his approach is that McGrath often relies on older, more popular sources for background and presents issues and trends in a simplistic, black-and-white fashion. His explanations of Irish-English relations or American-English pre-Revolution interaction, for example, lack nuance and ignore important modern scholarship. McGrath is also guilty of minor errors, for example, misspelling the names of Nathanael Greene, Hoysted Hacker, and John Peck Rathbun and asserting that Florida was a Spanish territory in 1778.

This is an entertaining and informative biography that will acquaint readers with John Barry and the world in which he lived, worked, and fought. While specialists may have problems with parts of his work, McGrath should be commended for compellingly reintroducing a hero of the early United States who has undeservedly fallen into obscurity.

Naval History and Heritage Command

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William Bartram, The Search for Nature's Design: Selected Art, Letters, and Unpublished Writings. Edited by THOMAS HALLOCK and NANCY E. HOFFMAN. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2010. 520 pp. Illustrations, maps, appendices, works cited, index. \$49.95.)

This is a beautiful book, lovingly produced for readers who adore William Bartram (1739–1823) as an artist, Romantic, naturalist, and gardener and painstakingly assembled by scholars who approach him from a variety of perspectives. It provides clear capsule introductions to primary texts otherwise unavailable to most readers. Calling it “the first full selection of Bartram’s manuscripts” (1) is a fair description of a book that both selects and abridges. It includes the range of unpublished sources—letters, manuscripts, and illustrations—whereas other collections have focused more and/or included less. It does not include the published *Travels* (1791), Bartram’s only book; the long “Report” that he wrote for his patron, Dr. John Fothergill; or his “Observations” on the Creek and Cherokee Indians. These are appropriate omissions, since all three are available in a number of editions, including Francis Harper’s annotated versions.

The contributors are well chosen for their range of expertise—on Indians, natural history, garden design, archaeology, art history, literature, and philosophy. Rarely, their introductions overstretch to make an academic point or to claim interpretive novelty. For example, biographers have not, as one contributor suggests, “generally portrayed him as a shy and reclusive figure who lived in relative isolation” (xv), and it is unclear how letters could provide evidence either for or against Bartram’s shyness. It is well known that Bartram ran something of a salon later in his life and received countless pilgrims who sought out his wisdom, asked gardening advice, or simply wanted to meet the Romantic naturalist and artist.

The collection of letters is probably the key contribution of the book, as many of Bartram’s illustrations have been published already, most notably by Joseph Ewan in an ill-fated American Philosophical Society edition, most copies of which were destroyed in a basement flood. Scholars will still have to return to the originals for textual analysis that looks back from published versions to manuscript drafts since, as the editors explain, “not every text merits full publication here, and in cases where documents require technical knowledge, the critical